

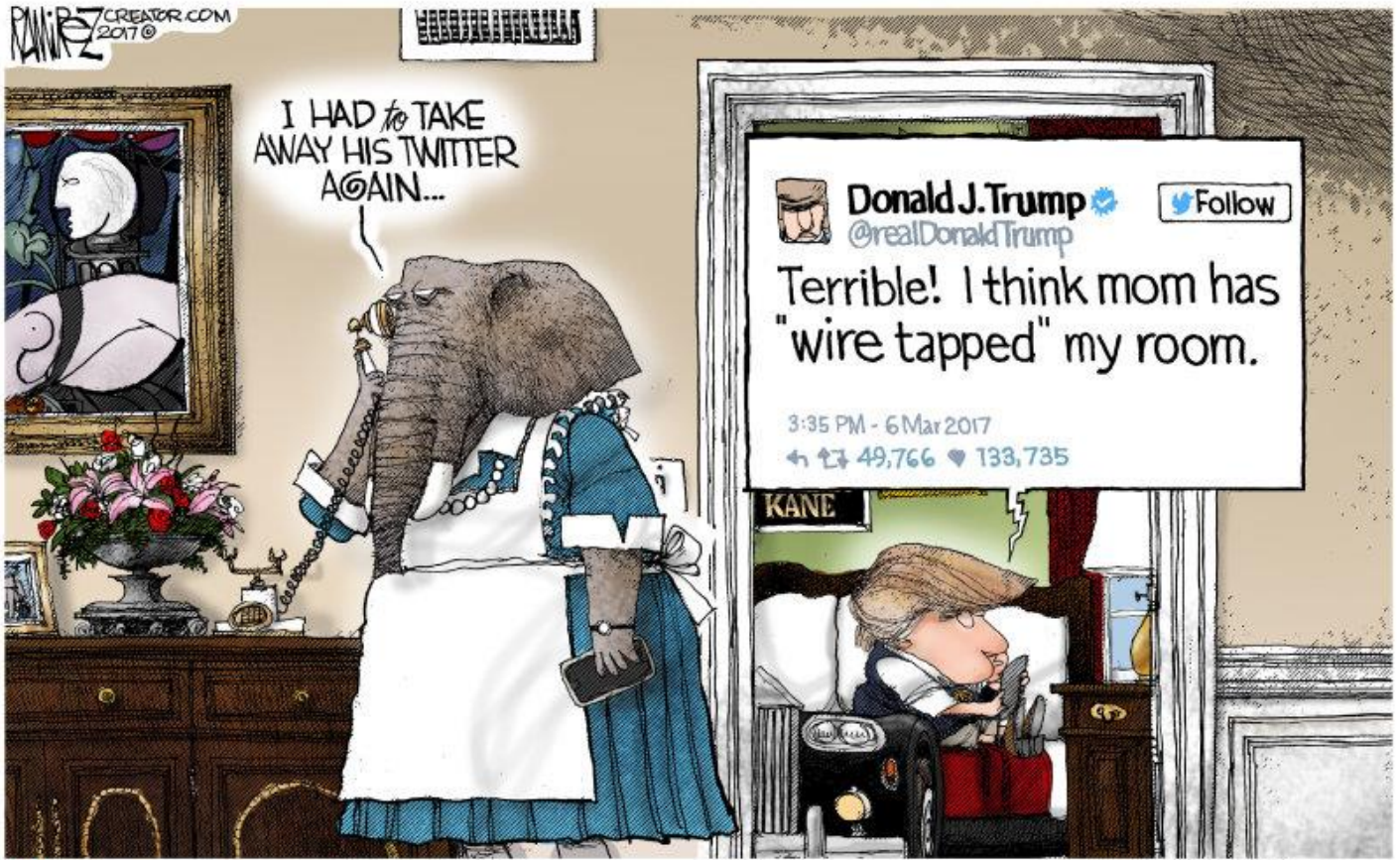
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FRANCE – EUROPE3

- NPR : French Newcomer Seen In Tight Race With Far Right's Le Pen For Presidency3
- Ex-Paris mayor backing Macron in French presidential race.....3
- Poll: Majority of French Voters Mistrust Le Pen's National Front3
- Breitbart : Six Ways Fillon’s Woes Have Shaken up France’s Election4

- French Insurgents Thrust Establishment Aside in Crucial Vote4
- The European Union Was Once a Racist, Far-Right Project5
- Kauffmann : France Braces for the Now-Possible Impossible (online).....6
- NPR : Poachers Break Into French Zoo, Kill White Rhino And Steal His Horn7
- Poachers just killed a beloved white rhino — inside a French zoo (online)7

| | | | |
|--|-----------|---|----|
| National Geographic : Poachers Kill Rhino in Brazen Attack at French Zoo | 8 | G.O.P. Health Bill Faces Revolt From Conservative Forces | 27 |
| Skier dies in avalanche at French resort | 8 | House GOP proposal to replace Obamacare sparks broad backlash..... | 27 |
| ESPN : France exposes U.S. women's national team's back line in 3-0 rout..... | 9 | Trump tries to quash conservative uproar over health care bill..... | 29 |
| France dominates Americans, 3-0, to win SheBelieves Cup; U.S. finishes last (online)..... | 10 | Can House's Obamacare replacement survive a divided GOP?..... | 29 |
| CNBC : Germany alone cannot keep the European Union together, it needs France, says finance minister. Before Elections, Dutch Fear Russian Meddling, but Also U.S. Cash..... | 11 | Editorial: An Obamacare repeal that's both heartless and reckless..... | 30 |
| Hungary Lawmakers Approve Tough Anti-Migrant Measure..... | 12 | Editorial : What's the rush on Health care?..... | 31 |
| EU's Top Court Says It's Up to National Governments to Grant Refugee Visas | 12 | Editorial : A Historic Health-Care Moment..... | 31 |
| Galston : Populism Need Not Be Undemocratic | 13 | Editorial : The GOP isn't replacing all of Obamacare — just the parts that work..... | 32 |
| As Eurozone Economy Strengthens, Divisions Within ECB Re-Emerge | 13 | Editorial : A Disappointing Start..... | 32 |
| <i>INTERNATIONAL.....</i> | 14 | Editorial : No Wonder the Republicans Hid the Health Bill..... | 33 |
| In Syria, Patchwork of Forces Control Regime-Held Areas | 14 | Paul Ryan : Our health care plan for America | 33 |
| Top U.S. General Discusses Syria With Counterparts From Russia and Turkey | 15 | Milbank : The Republican health-care plan's top critics? Republicans. | 34 |
| Iraqi Forces Enter Western Mosul, in Fierce Battle Against ISIS | 16 | Slavitt : The House Republicans' health-care bill is a thicket of bad incentives..... | 34 |
| Iraqis Advance Deep Into Western Mosul..... | 16 | Jenkins Jr. : ObamaCare 2.0..... | 35 |
| Iraqi forces capture west Mosul's main government buildings in pre-dawn raid | 17 | Emanuel, Glickman and Gudbranson : How Republicans Plan to Ration Health Care | 36 |
| Islamic State Plotted to Attack Saudi Royals During Malaysia Visit | 17 | WikiLeaks Dumps Trove of Purported CIA Hacking Tools..... | 36 |
| Turkey shuts down a U.S. aid group that helped Syrians | 18 | WikiLeaks says it has obtained trove of CIA hacking tools..... | 37 |
| Editorial : Mr. Erdogan's Jaw-Dropping Hypocrisy..... | 18 | WikiLeaks Releases Trove of Alleged C.I.A. Hacking Documents | 38 |
| New Israel Law Bars Foreign Critics From Entering the Country | 19 | Editorial : WikiLeaks's New Damage | 39 |
| For Trump and Netanyahu, a Budding Symbiotic Relationship | 19 | Justice Nominee Won't Commit to a Russia Special Prosecutor..... | 40 |
| Are U.S., China Headed for 'Hot War' on Trade? | 20 | President Trump Considers Two Candidates for Navy Secretary..... | 41 |
| Editorial : China's source of creative growth | 21 | Trump Aides Address His Wiretap Claims: 'That's Above My Pay Grade' | 41 |
| North Korea Tensions Pose Early, and Perilous, Test for Trump..... | 21 | Editorial : Republicans: Don't enable Trump's absurd Obama wiretapping accusation | 42 |
| Editorial : Rising Tensions With North Korea..... | 22 | Editorial : Trump-Obama Wiretap Controversy: Whom to Believe?..... | 43 |
| China's anger over U.S. antimissile system poses challenge to Trump | 23 | Ignatius : A look inside the country's real-life spy thriller..... | 43 |
| South Korea Receives First Components of Thaad Missile-Defense System | 24 | To fund border wall, Trump administration weighs cuts to Coast Guard, airport security..... | 44 |
| Fyhenakis and Zweibel : A Shiny Border Wall That Pays for Itself..... | 25 | U.S. Officials See Terror Intervention as Possible Future Model..... | 45 |
| Editorial : Trump's attacks on the media are a gift to tyrants everywhere..... | 25 | U.S. Posts Biggest Monthly Trade Deficit in Nearly Five Years | 45 |
| <i>ETATS-UNIS</i> | 25 | Bolton : Trump, Trade and American Sovereignty..... | 46 |
| GOP's Health Plan Draws Skepticism on Capitol Hill..... | 25 | Chougule : The Democratic Party's Hypocrisy on Secret Ballots | 47 |
| | | Editorial : Stop the grandstanding on Planned Parenthood | 47 |

FRANCE – EUROPE

NPR : French Newcomer Seen In Tight Race With Far Right's Le Pen For Presidency

Bill Chappell Twitter

French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron, an independent who started the "En Marche!" (On the Move) movement, is neck and neck with National Front candidate Marine le Pen. Macron is seen here in Paris today.

Eric Feferberg/AFP/Getty Images

With France's presidential election less than two months away, the race is coming down to two options, as political newcomer Emmanuel Macron, who is running as an independent, is neck and neck with far right candidate Marine Le Pen in polls released Wednesday.

Macron, 39, is a former investment banker who was President Francois Hollande's economy minister for two years; he has never won a political campaign. But polls predict he could win the presidency, in France's system that puts the top two vote-getters from the first round of voting into a second round that's slated for May 7.

From Paris, NPR's Eleanor Beardsley reports for our Newscast unit:

"Mainstream conservative candidate Francois Fillon is in third place with 19 percent. Fillon was once the front runner, but a fake jobs scandal has damaged him.

"Macron is drawing support from influential political figures — this morning, the former mayor of Paris announced he will abandon the Socialist Party to endorse Macron."

Other Socialists, including Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and Sports Minister Patrick Kanner, are also expected to support Macron, according to [French radio network RFI](#).

Seen as a centrist, Macron says he wants to "make France daring again," [as Eleanor has reported](#). While he doesn't have a party, his movement's slogan is "En Marche!" — often translated as either "On the Move!" or simply, "Working!"

In addition to benefiting from a scandal involving Fillon, Macron has also gained momentum over concerns about National Front candidate le Pen — including a recent decision by the European Parliament to strip le Pen of her immunity from prosecution, "citing tweets she shared that contained graphic images of violence by the Islamic State," as [NPR's Rebecca Hersher reported](#) last week.

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Ex-Paris mayor backing Macron in French presidential race

ABC News

Emmanuel Macron has found an important ally in his bid to become the next French president.

The centrist independent candidate got the backing of former Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë, a prominent Socialist figure who won't support the party's official nominee, Benoit Hamon.

Speaking on France Inter radio on Wednesday, Delanoë said supporting Macron is the best way to ensure the far-right won't win the

election.

Opinion [polls](#) suggest that far-right leader Marine Le Pen and Macron will come out on top in the first-round vote on April 23. The top two go on to compete in the May 7 presidential runoff.

"Maybe in two months the ideology and methods of the far right will rule France. It's haunting me," Delanoë said. "I think we must all ask ourselves the question of our vote in the first round to avoid a disaster in the second round."

Delanoë praised measures in favor of "[social justice](#)" in Macron's platform, and said Hamon is struggling to unite the left with his radical proposals. If elected, Hamon has pledged to introduce a universal income to all citizens, a measure that has been criticized by many as too expensive for taxpayers and unrealistic.

"I think that his platform is dangerous because it does not bring the left together," Delanoë said, insisting that he remains on good terms with Hamon. "Also because,

from a philosophical standpoint, in its approach to work, it is unable to produce real social progress."

Several other Socialist politicians, including lawmakers and mayors, have publicly announced that they will back Macron.

A telegenic 39-year-old former investment banker, Macron resigned as economy minister last summer, breaking away from unpopular Socialist president [Francois Hollande](#), who declined to seek a second term.



Poll: Majority of French Voters Mistrust Le Pen's National Front

PARIS —

A growing majority of French voters see Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front as a threat to democracy even though a third approve of its ideas, a Kantar Sofres-Onepoint poll showed on Tuesday.

Le Pen, who most polls see coming on top in the first round of France's presidential election, has sought to make the anti-EU, anti-immigrant National Front less of a fringe party

since she took its reins from her father in 2011.

However, 58 percent of those surveyed in the poll for *Le Monde* and franceinfo radio said the party was a threat to democracy. After shrinking for a decade, that number has been rising since 2013, when it stood at 47 percent.

Only 19 percent of those surveyed said they wanted Le Pen to win the May 7 presidential runoff. Most polls put her ahead of other candidates in

the April 23 first round but those same surveys consistently see her losing the runoff.

A third said they totally agreed with the National Front's ideas, a proportion that has changed little since Le Pen took over the party's leadership.

The Kantar poll found key planks of Le Pen's platform gaining little traction with voters.

Only 22 percent of those polled were in favor of dropping the euro as France's currency, down from 34 percent in 2011 when pollsters started asking the question.

Likewise, only 21 percent were in favor of giving employment priority to French citizens over foreigners residing legally in France, a level that has changed little in recent years.

Breitbart : Six Ways Fillon's Woes Have Shaken up France's Election

PARIS (AFP) – Rightwing presidential candidate Francois Fillon appears to have won his battle to stay in France's election, but his fake job scandal will have a lasting impact on the vote and beyond.

Fillon, 63, won unanimous backing from leaders of his Republicans party on Monday night giving him hope he has finally silenced those who have consistently called on him to step aside over the last six weeks.

The conservative ex-premier has been in torment since January 24 when revelations first emerged that he had paid his wife and children hundreds of thousands of euros from public funds — with little evidence of their work.

1) Fillon prospects dimmed

At the end of January, before the scandal broke, the conservative ex-prime minister was the clear favourite to win the two-stage election on April 23 and May 7.

Shortly afterwards, according to a tracker of polls compiled by AFP, he fell behind the centrist Emmanuel Macron and only one voter survey out of more than 20 since has shown him ahead of the 39-year-old.

A poll at the weekend of 1,027 voters showed only 29 percent of voters wanted the veteran politician with a nearly 40-year career to remain in the race.

"He's got some breathing space, but he needs to ask himself if he can

still win the election," one sceptical MP from his party told AFP on Monday, asking not to be named.

2) The Republicans split

The party's divisions have exploded again after a bitter bout of infighting in 2012 sparked by the defeat of ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy who unsuccessfully sought re-election.

Fillon has been hit by a blizzard of criticism from lawmakers close to Sarkozy and ex-premier Alain Juppe, as well as ex-prime minister Dominique de Villepin who warned him about taking the party into an "abyss".

On the ground, Republican activists and lawmakers say they have found it difficult to go out campaigning to face often hostile voters.

"To say it's been easy would be lying," an MP from the eastern city of Lyon, Dominique Nachury, told AFP last month as she and fellow activists handed out leaflets in the centre of the city.

3) The outsiders gain

The disarray appears to have benefited centrist, pro-business candidate Macron in particular, as well as right wing leader Marine Le Pen, polls and interviews with voters suggest.

Macron only founded his party "En Marche" ("On the Move") last April but events have reinforced his message of the need to overthrow the "same men and the same ideas."

Recent polls show Macron now closing in on Le Pen in the first round of the vote on April 23, with around 25 percent of the vote.

They would both progress to the run-off on May 7 — breaking the post-war monopoly of France's traditional parties — with Macron seen as the most likely winner.

The Fillon spectacle has led some voters to give up hope on the political class, favouring Le Pen and her National Front (FN) party's anti-elite message — or choosing to abstain.

"I'm tempted to vote National Front even though I don't share a lot of their ideas," unemployed worker Michel Travigne, 51, told AFP in a bar in a village near Fillon's home region of Sarthe last week.

"It's just to get rid of everyone," he explained.

4) Institutions under attack

Fillon and his wife Penelope are set to be charged for suspected embezzlement of public funds later this month.

In press conferences and speeches, he has repeatedly denounced a politically motivated investigation, suggesting it was ordered by the government and abetted by a biased media.

His attacks have shocked some observers.

"The way that (US President Donald) Trump has defied the justice system and attacked the

media, calling them 'fake news', I think in a way it's encouraging Fillon and Marine Le Pen to copy," Herve Le Bras, a veteran political watcher and demographer, told AFP last week.

5) Everyone else drowned out

"It has dominated all the space. There's a feeling of frustration to put it mildly," Jerome Guedj, a spokesman for Socialist party candidate Benoit Hamon, told AFP.

Senior Socialist figure Jean-Christophe Cambadellis worries that "the winner will be elected by default without there being the possibility to ever really subject their programme to scrutiny."

Candidates such as the hard-left Jean-Luc Melenchon have continued campaigning but largely out of the public eye.

6) Morbid fascination

Though polls show growing distrust for both politicians and the media, television viewing figures and newspaper sales have surged as voters tune in to an extraordinary election campaign.

Little has gone to script so far in the campaign in which France's future as well as the European Union's is in play.

"Viewers are passionate about this election. The news is unprecedented, audience figures are too," said Alain Weill, head of SFR Media which owns rolling-news channel BFMTV.



French Insurgents Thrust Establishment Aside in Crucial Vote

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Gregory Viscusi

by

8 mars 2017 à 00:00 UTC-5 8 mars 2017 à 05:53 UTC-5

- Socialists, center-right could both miss out on second round
- Traditional parties hurt by poor records, constant infighting

The old order is fading in France.

Every election since Charles de Gaulle founded the Fifth Republic more than half a century ago has seen at least one of the major parties in the presidential runoff and most have featured both. With Republicans and Socialists consumed by infighting and voters

thoroughly fed up, polls suggest that neither will make it this year.

For the past month, survey after survey has projected a decider between Emmanuel Macron, a 39-year-old rookie who doesn't even have a party behind him, and Marine Le Pen, who's been ostracized throughout her career because of her party's history of racism.

"We've gone as far as we can go with a certain way of doing politics," said Brice Teinturier, head of the Ipsos polling company and author of a book on voters' disillusionment. "Everyone feels the system is blocked."

Claude Bartolone, the Socialist president of the National Assembly, said in an interview with Le Monde Tuesday he may back Macron because he doesn't "identify" with the more extreme platform put forward by his party's candidate

Benoit Hamon. De Gaulle's latest standard-bearer Francois Fillon has spent the past week facing down rebellions in his party triggered by a criminal probe of his finances.

Former Prime Minister Manuel Valls hasn't campaigned for Hamon since losing to him in the primary and Socialist President Francois Hollande hasn't even endorsed his party's candidate either. Instead, senior figures from the Socialist camp are endorsing Macron, with former Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoe the latest to offer his backing on Wednesday.

"There's a breakdown of parties in France," Francois Bayrou, a two-time centrist candidate who is now backing Macron, said Tuesday on RMC Radio. "There are hostile battles between factions within each party, which has ruined the parties and ruined the image of politics."

Years of Frustration

With Le Pen promising a rupture with the European Union and Macron seeking to renew the Franco-German partnership and reinvigorate the bloc, the decision voters reach will shape the future of the continent.

The French elite is facing a wave of frustration built up over more than a decade of financial crisis, economic stagnation and political drift as successive governments failed to find a way forward for the country and the insurgents have tapped in to that anger.

Macron refuses to say if he's from the left or the right, while picking up ideas -- and support -- from both sides. Le Pen says there's no difference between the two traditional parties anyway. Both are capitalizing on trends that stretch far beyond France.

Center-left parties from the U.K. to Greece are struggling to bridge the gap between their core supporters' views and the demands of a modern economy and, as a result, are either blamed for the failings of capitalism or marginalized by voters. Often both in succession.

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Fillon, like counterparts in the U.K. and Germany, faces an anti-immigration rival to his right and has fallen victim to the changing attitudes to elite privilege like many officials in Spain's People's Party. Fillon admitted voters are no longer willing to accept that politicians hiring their relatives on public salaries as he tried to limit the damage from a criminal



The European Union Was Once a Racist, Far-Right Project

And it could soon be again.

On the eve of the French presidential election, the future of France not only hangs in the balance but also that of Europe. Or, at least, a certain idea of Europe — namely, one based on the institutions and laws of the European Union. Marine Le Pen, the candidate for the extreme right-wing National Front party, has centered her campaign on the recentering of France as a sovereign nation. At a press conference last month devoted to her foreign policy, Le Pen [announced](#) to no one's surprise: "It's time we finished with the European Union."

But does this mean Le Pen is finished with, well, other ideas for a unified Europe? The blueprints for one alternative Europe can be found in her party's ideological basement. Were she to venture there, Le Pen would discover — or rediscover — the writings of thinkers associated with France's so-called Nouvelle Droite, or "New Right." While these thinkers never held — or, at least, held for very long — prominent positions within the National Front, they were there at the party's beginnings and have left their imprint on its evolution. Scorning the universal values of the Enlightenment that underpin the EU, these thinkers instead propose a united Europe bound together by what, in their eyes, are the irrefutable and irresistible claims of race and ethnicity.

Among the many individuals who have circled around the dark sun of ethno-nationalism, few have followed a more bizarre orbit than Jean Thiriart. As a young self-described leftist in Nazi-occupied Belgium, Thiriart joined Les Amis du

investigation into his wife's allegedly fictitious post as a parliamentary aide. He said what he did was legal, but now unacceptable.

Tuesday's daily OpinionWay poll showed Fillon five percentage points short of making the May 7 runoff at 20 percent, with the Socialist Hamon even further back at 16 percent. Le Pen and Macron were at 26 percent and 25 percent, respectively, with Macron projected to beat Le Pen in the second round by 20 points.

Broad Appeal

Macron has emerged as the surprise front-runner by pulling in voters of all stripes. According to Ifop, 39 percent of those who normally support the Socialists, 59 percent of those who consider themselves centrists, and 14 percent of people who consider

Grand Reich Allemand, a collaborationist organization that, as its name suggests, thrilled to the prospect of a unified Europe under Nazi control. Imprisoned after the war for collaborationism, Thiriart kept mostly quiet until the early 1960s, when he co-founded Jeune Europe, a movement that initially found common ground with members of the Organisation Armée Secrète, the French paramilitary and terrorist group opposed to Algeria's independence from France.

After the publication in 1964 of his political testament, *Un empire de 400 millions d'hommes: L'Europe*, Thiriart militated for a centralized continental-wide party, working toward the unification of Europe. Claiming the existence of a single and Caucasian "community from Narvik to Cape Town, from Brest to Bucharest," Thiriart's group glommed onto a position found in nearly every organization falling under the umbrella of the New Right: The clear and present danger to Europe was not communist Russia but capitalist America. Through the several iterations of Thiriart's groups — a chameleon-like trait common to organizations at both extremes of the political spectrum — they were all aimed, in Thiriart's words, at forming a "global front against U.S. imperialism."

The political scientists Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, who retrace this idiosyncratic life in their indispensable account *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, note that Thiriart eventually reached out to Arab countries in his quest for a global front against America. Having begun his career in the company of white supremacists, Thiriart ended it in the company of Arab nationalists. His hope was to form international brigades that would carry on the

struggle not just against the United States but also its partner in global crime, Israel. When he died in 1992, he apparently left behind several unfinished manuscripts arguing, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, that the battle against the United States was even more imperative.

Alice Parmentier, a former manager at a nuclear engineering company, was waiting to see Macron at Paris's annual farm fair last week. "He's young, dynamic, and is taking France into the 21st century," she said. "We need a new generation, and I say that as a 72-year-old," she said, adding that she used to vote for the Republicans.

The newcomers though will face challenges in governing if they win office from outside the political mainstream, since they'll be unlikely to secure control of the parliament in June's legislative elections. Drilling down into the polling numbers also suggests their lead may not be as solid as the headline numbers would indicate.

While Thiriart's place in the far-right solar system resembles an exoplanet, not so for the rather Jovian Alain de Benoist, the founder of GRECE, a French ethno-nationalist think tank. With GRECE's creation in 1968, so too was born the term "New Right." Just as the latter term is a catchall for a great variety of movements, the work of the think tank also tends to be eclectic. Benoist would be the first to reject comparisons between GRECE and, say, the American Heritage Foundation. The traditional division between left and right, he argues, is obsolete. By the "right," Benoist announced in his book *Vu de droite* ("The Right View"), he means "the attitude that considers the diversity of the world, and as a consequence the related inequalities necessarily produced by it, to be a good, and the gradual homogenization of the world, advocated and realized by the 2,000-year-old discourse of egalitarian ideology, to be an evil."

With this claim, Benoist challenged the entire spectrum of traditional political parties in France. Conservatives no less than progressives, Gaullists no less than Socialists, found little common ground with the territory staked out by Benoist. A small number of political figures tied to GRECE, most notably Alain Madelin, who served as a minister in the Jacques Chirac era, eventually slipped into mainstream conservatism. Tellingly,

many others drifted in the 1980s and 1990s toward the National Front, most importantly men like Jean-Yves Le Gallou, Pierre Vial, and Yann Blot.

A Kantar Sofres survey for Le Monde released Tuesday said that 58 percent of the French see the National Front as a "danger to democracy," up from 47 percent during the last presidential election in 2012.

And despite the excitement at his rallies across the country, only 49 percent of those saying they will vote Macron are sure of their choice, the lowest of any of the candidates, according to an Ifop poll March 7.

"Macron has benefited from the collapse of the others but he doesn't have much momentum of his own," Dominique Reynie, a professor at Sciences Po institute said on LCI television Monday.

Argument

Not surprisingly, given his institution's acronym, Benoist locates the proper European heritage in ancient (and pagan) Greece. While he portrays this as a cultural legacy, racism is never far from the surface. As the scholar Anne-Marie Durantont-Crabol [observes](#), GRECE (if not ancient Greece) tends to "exalt racial values, which presuppose racial differences." Like a Gallic Charles Murray, Benoist plays with words as he plays with fire, skillfully fudging the line between race and culture, value and difference. His scholarship gives a gleam of respectability to what his critics insist, quite simply, is a racist ideology.

While Benoist avoids such blunt language, this is not the case with those like Jean-Marie Le Pen who turn to him as an intellectual guarantor of their racist worldview. In a sulfurous interview he gave two years ago to the extreme right-wing paper *Rivarol*, Le Pen [declared](#) that France had to collaborate with Russia "in order to save boreal [northern] Europe and the white world." By invoking the toxic claim that Europeans descend from an "arctic" or Aryan race, the elder Le Pen, and indeed Benoist, is not alone. Writers like Jean Raspail (one of Steve Bannon's favorite authors), Eric Zemmour, and Renaud Camus all warn against what Renaud has described as "*le grand remplacement*" — namely, the threat that immigration and globalization pose to the racial character of Europe.

Like Murray's reputation, Benoist's public status is, to say the least, controversial. In 2015, the best-selling leftist French intellectual Michel Onfray declared that he preferred to read a "valid analysis" written by Benoist than an "invalid analysis" written by, say, fellow celebrity philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy. Then-Prime Minister Manuel Valls quickly [accused](#) Onfray of legitimizing not just Benoist's ideas but by extension those of the National Front. In response, Onfray [declared](#) that only a "cretin" would judge a claim on the politics of its author and not the merits of its argument.

While Onfray's reply was just, Valls's provocation was not entirely unjust. Onfray, who places himself on the far-left, and Benoist, who is placed, despite his protests, on the far-right, share a common ideological ground. Both thinkers are appalled by the rise of religious extremism and are attracted to a

post-religious, or pagan, basis for society; both thinkers identify American capitalism and popular culture as two of Europe's principal foes. Benoist declares that the "*idéologie du même*," or "ideology of the same," flows from America, leveling everything in its path. For Onfray, consumerism is the rot at the heart of the West. In his just published book, *Decadence*, he asks: "Today, who would give his life for the gadgets of consumerism that have become cult objects in the religion of capitalism? No one."

At the end of the day, according to Benoist and Onfray, the West is [lurching](#) toward the end of its day. Benoist's [prognosis](#) is grim: "The world seems to have entered an implosive, in fact terminal, stage."

In their survey, Camus and Lebourg cite Onfray's positions as a measure of Benoist's success. They emphasize the New Right's key role in the "irruption in intellectual debate of ideas" in France — ideas that

careen from the critique of anti-monothéisme (especially in regard to Islam) and embrace of communitarianism, the lambasting of consumerism and the normalization "of discussions about the respective share of the innate and acquired in individual aptitudes." While not all of their concerns overlap, GRECE and the National Front continue to share deep affinities.

Though these individuals did not stay, the same cannot be said for their ideas. From her embrace of French "sovereignism" to her admiration of Vladimir Putin's Russia, from her emphasis on "national preference" to her attachment to a strong central state, Marine Le Pen has made GRECE's ideas her own. While she rejects the European Union, Le Pen praises a free union of European nations. Though she would never use the term employed by her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who repeatedly called

for the union of "boreal peoples," Le Pen nevertheless shares the same apocalyptic vision of the conflict between East and West found in the writings of Benoist (as well as those of the essayist Eric Zemmour and novelist Michel Houellebecq.) And it's on the basis of this vision of an unavoidable civilizational conflict that Le Pen's party believes Europe should be united, the formal degree to which is still to be determined.

What had begun as an apparently quixotic effort in the 1960s to influence the ideas of political and cultural leaders on the subject of Europe is now, a half-century later, an increasingly widespread and toxic worldview. It is an image of today's united Europe cast in a dark mirror of apocalyptic and racist thinking. In the case of France, voters will decide in less than two months whether or not those ideas will move from intellectual discourse to state policy.

The New York Times

Kauffmann : France Braces for the Now-Possible Impossible (online)

Sylvie Kauffmann

But rational calculations do not fool anybody anymore. These are not rational times. As weeks and months go by, Ms. Le Pen's verdict on Mr. Trump's victory keeps haunting some of us: "What seemed impossible," she said on Nov. 9, "is now possible."

We are now bracing ourselves for the possible impossible. "The threat is real," President François Hollande acknowledged publicly for the first time last weekend, when I asked in an interview whether a Le Pen victory would kill the European project. "But France will not give in."

Will the dam hold? This is a French campaign like no other. All the political patterns established since 1958, when the present Constitution was adopted, have come apart. The National Front has been a fixture of national politics for 40 years, but never before has its presidential candidate been a consistent front-runner. Today, none of Ms. Le Pen's opponents doubt that she will get to the second round; in fact, they are not even fighting her. They are fighting among themselves to win second place on April 23, to have a chance to beat her in the runoff.

Never before has a sitting French president decided not to run for a second term, as Mr. Hollande did in December, acknowledging his historically low popularity. Never before have all the established figures of French political life been thrown out so brutally in primary elections as in the ones that sent Nicolas Sarkozy into retirement and

crushed Manuel Valls's longstanding ambitions. A new word has been created for this unforgiving trend: "le dégagisme" ("dégagez" means "get out of here"). Having taken stock of the thirst of the voters for renewal, an astonishing number of legislators — roughly a quarter of the present National Assembly — will not run for re-election to the Parliament in June.

While Ms. Le Pen confidently blazes ahead, staying on script and making progress among women, farmers and disillusioned middle-class voters, the mainstream party on the right offers the most disconcerting spectacle that any election has witnessed. Faced with charges that he gave his wife and children fake jobs to the tune of nearly a million dollars on Parliament's payroll François Fillon, a conservative former prime minister who is now the Republican candidate, has stopped campaigning. All his energy is spent fighting those allegations and vowing again and again to fight on. Back-room negotiations involving party barons have failed to produce an alternative candidate, nor to persuade Mr. Fillon to quit. Senior aides and allied politicians have deserted him. Increasingly desperate, he has taken on the judges investigating his case, accusing them and the press of carrying out "a political assassination" and trying to "kill the presidential election." France, he claims, is in a state of "quasi civil war."

So Marine Le Pen can stay put: Mr. Fillon does the job for her. She has

judicial worries of her own over fake jobs for National Front aides at the European Parliament, but who cares when so much attention is focused on her rival?

The party of the traditional right used to be Mr. Sarkozy's well-oiled, ruthless political machine. It now looks like a ruin in a war zone. As Mr. Trump would put it: This is a mess. He would love it.

As for the left, reflecting the crisis of social democratic parties in Europe, it is so divided and weak that it may not reach the second round. The environmentalists have disappeared as a political force. If polls are to be believed, the candidate most likely to face Ms. Le Pen in the second round is Emmanuel Macron, 39, who represents no political party and has never held elective office. This charismatic former economic minister and onetime Rothschild investment banker surfs on a neither-left-nor-right "progressive" wave that is attracting pro-European Union, pro-globalization voters disenchanted with the mainstream parties but firmly opposed to the rise of populism and nationalism. His reformist, adamantly pro-Europe, "radically transformative" agenda, as he describes it, emphasizes individual responsibility while helping workers adjust to a globalized economy. In this chaotic 2017 French political landscape, a nationalist-internationalist divide seems to be overtaking the traditional contest between left and right.

This is the great political battle for the heart and soul of Europe. With

the approach on March 25 of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the founding document of European unity, France's partners in the European Union are anxiously watching every step of this campaign. In Berlin, the anxiety borders on panic: Never have the stakes been higher for the future of the European project. Despised by the American president, attacked by Russia, abandoned by Britain, and the European Union, with France and Germany as its pillars, needs to regroup for a new start. The election in France of a far-right, Europhobic president vowing to leave the eurozone would kill that dream. Luxembourg's foreign minister, Jean Asselborn, told Der Tagesspiegel last week that a Le Pen victory would bring "the E.U. to the edge of the abyss."

Will France stop the wave of populism? This is what this election is about. Some experts are already speculating that if the National Front leader is elected, she will not be able to muster a majority in Parliament in the June election. The most likely result would then be a "cohabitation," in which a President Le Pen would have to work with a center-right or center-left prime minister and government. In that case, the two blocs would have to negotiate a compromise on some crucial issues; the first would be saving the euro.

This is where we are. As the saying goes, let's hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.

NPR : Poachers Break Into French Zoo, Kill White Rhino And Steal His Horn

Merrit Kennedy Instagram Twitter

White rhinoceros Gracie (left) and Bruno — seen in their enclosure at Thoiry Zoo in France on Tuesday — are safe. Poachers broke into the zoo overnight and killed a 4-year-old male white rhino named Vince.

Christian Hartmann/Reuters

Poachers forced their way into a French zoo and killed a southern white rhinoceros named Vince, sawing off one of his horns before fleeing into the night.

[The Thoiry Zoo said police](#) are investigating the killing of the 4-year-old animal. The poachers remain at large.

"It is extremely shocking what just happened," zoo director Thierry Duguet [told France's 20 Minutes newspaper](#). "An act of such violence, never before seen in Europe."

**The
Washington
Post**

Poachers just killed a beloved white rhino — inside a French zoo (online)

<https://www.facebook.com/peter.holl.ey.923>

Poachers broke into the Thoiry Zoological Park in France overnight and killed their beloved white rhino Vince. He was found on March 7, with his horn cut off. (Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

Poachers broke into the Thoiry Zoological Park in France overnight and killed their beloved white rhino Vince. He was found on March 7, with his horn cut off. Poachers broke into the Thoiry Zoological Park in France overnight and killed their beloved white rhino Vince. He was found on March 7, with his horn cut off. (Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

For the past decade, poachers have killed rhinoceroses in the wild and in protected reserves around the world at alarming rates, threatening the survival of four of the world's five rhino species.

The poaching is driven by a demand for rhino horns in southeast Asia that has grown nearly insatiable; so much so, experts say, that any living rhino — anywhere in the world — is now at risk of being killed.

Perhaps no rhino death illustrates that threat more forcefully than the killing of Vince, a 4-year-old male white rhino who was slaughtered this week inside his enclosure at a zoo outside Paris. The rhino — discovered by his keeper at the Thoiry Zoological Park on Tuesday

Duguet told The Associated Press that Vince was shot three times in the head. The poachers likely used a chainsaw to cut off one of the horns, according to a statement from the zoo, which is nearly 40 miles west of Paris. It added that "his second horn was only partially cut, which suggests that the criminals were disturbed or that their equipment proved defective."

A police spokesman [told The Guardian](#) that "it's possible the thieves didn't have time to take the others."

The zoo confirmed that its two other white rhinos — 37-year-old Gracie and 5-year-old Bruno — "escaped the massacre and are safe and sound."

"Vince was found this morning by his caretaker, who, being very attached to the animals she cares for, is deeply affected," the zoo wrote. "This odious act was

perpetrated despite the presence of five members of the zoo staff living on site and surveillance cameras."

Despite bans [by international convention](#) and French law, the illegal sale of rhino horns persists because of demand for use in traditional Asian medicine. A kilogram of rhino horn sold on the black market for nearly \$54,000 in 2015, according to the zoo.

Southern white rhinos like Vince were nearly extinct in the late 19th century, [according to the WWF](#). Protection efforts were largely successful, with some 20,000 animals in protected areas and private game reserves — in fact, they're the "only rhinos that are not endangered."

But there's been a major uptick in poaching. "Hundreds of white rhinos have been killed annually in recent years," the WWF says. "They are particularly vulnerable to hunting,

because they are relatively unaggressive."

Vince was born at a zoo in the Netherlands, and had been living at Thoiry Zoo since 2015. In the aftermath of the attack, Thoiry is warning other European zoos.

"Animal parks throughout Europe have been put on alert to look out ... to get into these places they have to climb 3.5 metre fences, go through padlocked doors," said Paul de La Panouse, the former director of the zoo's African enclosure, according to *The Guardian*.

He added: "It's not easy to kill a rhino weighing several tonnes just like that. It's a job for professionals."

When major news happens, stay on top of the latest developments, delivered to your inbox.

— now holds the ominous distinction of likely being the first rhino to be killed by poachers inside a zoo, experts said.

"This is the first time we've heard of it," said Crawford Allan, senior director of TRAFFIC North America, a regional office of the [World Wildlife Fund](#) (WWF). "It's certainly the first time it's happened in Europe."

"It's an incredibly shocking and distressing occurrence," he added. "It's also a game-changer for zoos. They've woken up today and realized their world has changed if they have live rhinos in their collection."

[In a statement posted on Facebook](#), the Thoiry Zoological Park, which is 30 miles west of Paris, said its "entire staff is extremely shocked" by Vince's killing. The animal was born in a zoo in the Netherlands in 2012 and [arrived at Thoiry in March 2015](#), the zoo said.

The zoo pinned the killing on criminals who forced open an outer gate outside the rhinoceros building overnight. The intruders then forced open a second metal door and broke open "an intermediate inner door" that allowed them access to the animal lodges, the zoo said.

Police [told Reuters](#) that Vince was shot three times in the head. One of the animal's horns was removed, probably with a chain saw, the zoo said.

"His second horn was only partially cut, which suggests that the criminals were disturbed or that their equipment proved defective," the zoo said. "The other two white rhinoceros living in Thoiry, Gracie aged 37 and Bruno aged 5 years, escaped the massacre and are safe."

"Vince was found this morning by [his] caretaker, who is very attached to the animals she cares for, and is deeply affected," the zoo added. "This odious act was perpetrated despite the presence of five members of the zoological staff living on the spot and surveillance cameras."

Dan Ashe, president and chief executive of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums released a statement expressing outrage over Vince's killing.

"What occurred overnight at the Thoiry Zoo is an unspeakable crime of animal cruelty and a barbarous act that AZA and its members condemn at the highest levels," the statement said. "Our thoughts are with the staff at the Thoiry Zoo, and it is our sincere hope the poacher or poachers are brought to swift justice for their horrible crime."

Just over a decade ago, a rhino horn was just a rhino horn — an innocuous piece of animal body armor made of keratin, the same type of protein that makes up human hair and fingernails. Now a rhino horn is something else entirely for a

new generation of wealthy buyers in China and Vietnam: a highly-coveted status symbol and a cancer-curing miracle drug and aphrodisiac whose legend is rooted in pseudoscience.

Depending on the species and the market, experts said, rhino horns are worth more than their weight in gold. Protected wildlife is the fourth largest form of criminal traffic in the world behind drugs, counterfeiting and human trafficking, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

Global trade in rhino horn is banned by a U.N. convention, and its sale is illegal in France, [according to Reuters](#), but as little as a kilo of rhino horn was worth about \$54,000 on the black market in 2015.

By the early 1990s, the southern white rhino population plummeted to a few as 50 animals left in the wild, [according to the conservation group Save the Rhino](#). The group said the animals' numbers have increased to about 20,000 after conservation efforts, but those numbers are once again falling due to a new wave of poaching since 2008.

[According to new data published by the government of South Africa](#), 1,054 rhinos were poached in 2016. That number is down from a year earlier, when 1,175 rhinos were poached, a 10.3 percent decline. There have been more than 1,000 rhinos poached in South Africa for four consecutive years, the WWF notes.

"For 2016 there were a staggering 2,883 instances of poaching-related activities (such as poaching camps, contacts, crossings, sightings, tracks and shots fired) in the park, compared to 2,466 recorded in the same period in 2015," the South African government reported. "This is an increase of 16.9 percent. These criminal gangs are armed to the teeth, well-funded and part of transnational syndicates [that] will stop at nothing to get their hands on rhino horn."

Experts said the skyrocketing value of the horns led wildlife conservationists to begin warning several years ago about the likelihood of captive rhinos being targeted by poachers. The warning signs, they said, came in the form of a spate of rhino horn thefts from private collections and exhibitions.

With rhino killings increasing dramatically and private collections under threat, many experts decided it was "only a matter of time" before a killing inside a zoo occurred.

On Tuesday, the warnings became all too real.

"I wish I was surprised, but these animals are so brutally targeted," said Cece Sieffert, deputy director at the [International Rhino Foundation](#), which supports rhino conservation in African and Asia. "Wildlife crime is run by organized crime syndicates with very complex networks of middlemen moving rhino horns from Africa and India to networks in Southeast Asia. With the poaching crisis at such an alarming rate, it was sadly only a matter of time before these animals in zoos and other protected areas were targeted."

"It's absolutely heartbreaking for the keepers who devote their lives to taking care of these incredible animals," she added.

While the idea of killing a rhino inside a zoo may sound more daunting than selling heroin, Allan said that's not necessarily the way criminal gangs see things.

"It's really a no-brainer for these criminal groups," he said. "It's a low-risk, high-profit enterprise for them, and they can make as much money robbing a bank as they can killing a rhino with far, far less security."

The attack in France comes two weeks after two armed men stormed a rhino orphanage in South Africa, [according to the Dodo](#). The men assaulted members of the staff before holding the group hostage and killing two baby rhinos for their horns, [according to a statement](#)

[posted on Facebook by the Thula Thula Rhino Orphanage](#).

Susie Ellis, executive director of International Rhino Foundation, said the boldness of the latest attacks — which follows museums and private collections being targeted — is a sign that "zoological facilities need to take serious measures to keep their rhinos safe."

Allan said zoos need to do risk assessments as soon as possible. He also recommended upgrading security equipment to include thermal imaging cameras that can automatically identify humans, as well as hiring more security guards.

"The people who targeted the zoo in France have probably already checked out other zoos that they can target," he said. "Unfortunately, it sometimes takes a horrific wake-up call for things to change."

National Geographic : Poachers Kill Rhino in Brazen Attack at French Zoo

By Jani Actman PUBLISHED March 7, 2017

WATCH: Vince arrives at France's Thoiry Zoo.

Poachers broke into a zoo in France and shot and killed one of its rhinos before fleeing the scene.

On Tuesday morning keepers at [Thoiry Zoo](#), in the suburbs west of Paris, found the body of Vince, a four-year-old white rhino, in his enclosure with wounds to his head and one of his horns hacked off by a chainsaw, the zoo said in a [statement](#) on its Facebook page. His second horn was partially cut off, suggesting that the culprits may have been interrupted or were using defective equipment after they killed the rare animal on Monday night.

The act was carried out "despite the presence of five members of the zoological staff living on site and surveillance cameras," the zoo said. "The entire staff is extremely shocked."

The zoo has two other white rhinos who weren't harmed. One of them, five-year-old Bruce, came to the zoo

with Vince in 2015 as part of a breeding program involving about 250 rhinos in European zoos, [reported](#) the BBC. A video, shown above, captures Vince's arrival at the facility.

Thieves have [stolen rhino horns](#) from European museums in the past, but it's believed that this is the first time a rhino has been killed at a zoo in Europe. In recent years planned attacks on zoos in general have increased, said Katherine Johnston, spokesperson for London-based Save the Rhino International, in an email.

These two white rhinos escaped harm at France's Thoiry Zoo, where poachers killed another rhino.

"It's very sobering to think that armed criminals are willing to break into European zoos to kill our rhinos," she said. "This incident also shows how security is increasingly important for zoos in Europe, as well as for conservationists working in rhino range states."

What just happened in Thoiry Zoo, she said, is "a new development in the poaching crisis which has

escalated since 2008, and we need strong law enforcement to tackle this problem quickly."

Tuesday's gruesome event follows an [attack on rhinos at an orphanage](#) in South Africa, home to 70 percent of the remaining 21,000 white rhinos. Armed poachers broke into the Findimvelo Thula Thula Rhino Orphanage on February 22 and removed the horns of two 18-month-old rhinos, Impu and Gugu, after tying up staff members. One rhino was killed, and the other was later euthanized.

"If you work in this game and work in a facility like this, it's a constant concern," Karen Trender, who runs the orphanage, told local media at the time. "It's something that's on everybody's mind at all times."

White rhinos have been a conservation success story, coming back from the brink of extinction in the late 19th century. Now they're [severely threatened again](#) owing to an increase in demand for their horns in Vietnam and China. In those countries the horns are made into valuable carvings and

erroneously used as a cure-all in traditional medicine. Roughly a quarter of South Africa's white rhinos—by far the most abundant rhino subspecies—have been killed between 2008 and 2016.

It's illegal to kill rhinos, and selling their horns between countries has been banned since 1977 by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), the 183-government body that regulates the global wildlife trade.

Last year France [banned the sale](#) of rhino horn and elephant ivory within its borders. China and Vietnam also prohibit the rhino horn trade, yet conservationists would like to see stronger enforcement, especially in Vietnam. As of September, Vietnam [hadn't yet launched](#) a single successful high-level prosecution against illegal rhino horn traders.

As for the killing of Vince, an investigation was launched this morning.



Skier dies in avalanche at French resort

By Stephanie Halasz and [Laura Smith-Spark](#), CNN

Updated 7:33 AM ET, Wed March 8, 2017

A file image from 2016 shows the entrance to the ski resort of Valfrejus, in the French Alps.

Story highlights

- Three Dutch nationals were skiing off-piste when they got lost, a tourism officer said
- Snowy conditions and the risk of more avalanches have hampered rescue efforts

(CNN)One person has died and two others are missing after an avalanche in the French resort of

Valfrejus hit the area where they were skiing, a tourism officer said Wednesday.

The three skiers, all Dutch nationals, went off-piste Tuesday afternoon, but sent a text message to a friend's cell phone saying they were lost, said Yan Chaboissier, director of the Valfrejus tourism office.

That friend only notified the rescue services a few hours later, for

reasons unknown, Chaboissier told CNN.

A rescue effort was launched for the "Le Seuil" zone of the skiing area soon after, but the snowy conditions and danger of more avalanches made it very difficult and dangerous, Chaboissier said.

Rescuers were trying to reach the area again on Wednesday morning

but the previous day's avalanche had restricted access, he added.

Valfrejus is an Alpine skiing resort in the Savoie region of southeastern France.

Posts on the resort's Twitter feed said there was a snow storm on Monday.

A separate avalanche [occurred Tuesday](#) near the French resort of Tignes, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) away. There were no casualties there.

It was the second avalanche in a month for Tignes, where [four skiers died in February](#).

The Savoie authorities warned in a press release Wednesday of a high risk of avalanches across the area and said "extreme prudence" must be exercised in all mountain activities. It advised against all off-piste skiing and snowboarding.

The avalanche risk warning is currently at four out of five, where five is the greatest, it said. This means there is high instability on many slopes.

ESPN : France exposes U.S. women's national team's back line in 3-0 rout

By Graham Hays | Mar 7, 2017espnW.com

France were utterly dominant over the U.S. in the final match of the SheBelieves Cup, winning 3-0 comfortably.

WASHINGTON -- It would be wise for all involved, from fans to those on the field for the United States, to take a deep breath and remember that the 2019 Women's World Cup is still a long ways off.

Yet it is also inescapably true that, as the host, France will be part of that tournament.

That means that after Tuesday night at RFK Stadium and a shocking 3-0 loss for the United States against France in the SheBelieves Cup, the Americans have a measure of how far they have to go. It's one they won't soon forget.

"We were trying out the new system against world-class players, so we knew we were going to be tested," U.S. defender Casey Short said. "We knew questions were going to be asked. So we learned some things, and we move on, right?"

It's difficult to think of any other option. This was the worst loss on American soil since the United States was eliminated from the 2003 World Cup by the same score against Germany. A win would have meant the title, albeit a relatively meaningless one. The scope of Tuesday's defeat meant that the U.S. women finished last.

Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

In the 2015 World Cup, Becky Sauerbrunn and the U.S. defense, which played four defenders on the back line, held opponents scoreless for 513 minutes. The U.S. gave up two goals in 10 minutes Tuesday.

The French, for all their style and talent, had scored just two goals in five games in this event over two years. They scored two before this game was 10 minutes old, then added a third for good measure. They earned every bit of it.

Along with a loss against England on Saturday, this marked the first back-to-back losses for the U.S. women since setbacks against Sweden and Denmark in the 2014

Algarve Cup in Portugal. Those cost the coach at the time his job (or at least sealed Tom Sermanni's fate). That won't be the case now, even if U.S. Soccer president Sunil Gulati looked as glum as anyone postgame.

Winning a World Cup that re-established the national team as not just the world's best but also one that can draw more than 20,000 people to decrepit RFK Stadium on a rainy weekday night earns a coach some capital. Ellis will have all the space she wants to reshape the roster and style of play. She will be judged not on results in 2017 but on those in 2019 and, in all likelihood, 2020.

That is why unlike with their European counterparts preparing for this summer's Euros, the Americans' results in the tournament mattered a little less than the experience. That is why a loss on a late goal against England on a frigid night in New Jersey was less cause for concern than that result hinted. It was part of the process. But Tuesday's loss was the product of the process -- and nowhere more glaringly than in how France picked apart the back line of three defenders that Ellis has utilized since the end of last year.

"It was obviously the most pressure we've had to deal with, in terms of pace of pressure and how fast it was coming," Ellis said. "They basically matched three up on our three, in terms of us trying to play out."

The United States nearly played itself into trouble within the first minute. The Americans played the ball backward through Morgan Brian and Allie Long off the whistle. But Brian was dispossessed. A moment of hesitation from Long soon thereafter, with the ball she tried to shield rolling too slowly to get over the end line, left France sniffing around the goal.

Calamity was avoided -- but only briefly. Minutes later, after Brian was knocked off the ball on what was ruled a fair play, goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher was left with little choice but to come out aggressively and challenge France's Eugenie Le Sommer. The whistle blew, Naeher saw a yellow card, and Camille Abily converted from the penalty spot.

Barely a minute later, as the United States tried to push forward in response, French defender Wendie Renard launched a one-pass counter that left Le Sommer in a foot race with Long, who had little covering support. One of the world's best forwards, Le Sommer gathered the ball, avoided a sliding and slipping Sauerbrunn and beat Naeher at a tight angle to make it 2-0.

Any hopes of a rally -- the U.S. women created some chances -- ended when Abily scored in the 63rd minute. Ahead of Long and Sauerbrunn by several yards, Short couldn't recover in time when France's Eve Perisset slipped behind her and delivered a well-placed cross to Abily.

In three different ways, France exposed the high-risk part of what is inherently a high-risk, high-reward style. Removing a player from the traditional four-defender back line allows the United States numbers to hopefully control possession moving forward. But the penalties for failure are stiff.

"We kind of knew this was going to be the true test, if we decided to go with the three-back in this tournament, because we're playing the top teams in the world," Sauerbrunn said the day before the game against France. "I thought we did a really good job in both [of the first two] matches. Obviously, England scored on us on a set piece. I think during the run of play we've shown the new formation, the three-back, can hold strong. And I think it's due to everyone on the field putting in a really good shift defensively. That helps us out so much."

To that end, the breakdown Tuesday wasn't solely about the three players at the back of the U.S. formation. A turnover in front of them put them in peril on the sequence that led to the first goal. Short wouldn't have needed to make a last-ditch scramble if the players ahead of her on the field had won the ball back before it was played to Perisset.

"Our responsibility to get back, win second balls, becomes a lot more important," said Sam Mewis, the holding midfielder who enjoyed a

generally impressive tournament in three starts. "It's a fun formation to play. I've said that before. But there is a lot of pressure defensively, and I think my defensive role needs to improve if I want to play in there. Instead of letting the ball get back to where it's most dangerous, I should be winning more tackles in the middle."

For France, the win is significant beyond the fact that beating the United States on its home turf is always a big deal. The reaction at the final whistle was muted, but this was the first tournament title of any kind for the French senior team. Abily and Amandine Henry downplayed the feat afterward, noting that it was only a friendly tournament, but it was a good step toward the Euros.

Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

Tuesday's goals can't rest solely on defenders such as Casey Short, right, Becky Sauerbrunn and Allie Long. Turnovers in front of them often put the defenders in difficult situations.

If not a clear step backward for the U.S. women, it was evidence of the steps that remain. That goes well beyond the number of defenders on the field, but the formation embodied the evolution underway for the Americans.

"I think it's got its definite benefits," Sauerbrunn said of the three-back formation after the loss. "It's still a work in progress. I'm not sure what Jill's plan is, but I wouldn't be surprised if we continue to work on it. I'm excited to keep working on it. I think when we finally really get it down, I think it could be a really good formation for this team."

As Ellis is fond of pointing out, the important part is not so much the specifics of formation or alignment as how the team plays -- and how it wants to play. She wants her team to play like it is the best in the world, to control possession and dictate terms.

"That was a big theme for us going through this tournament: the confidence to play, to deal with pressure, to want to try and play out," Ellis said. "Because the way our game is headed is, yeah, who

has the ball stands a better chance of winning. We've tried to work on that specific thing in terms of this tournament, confidence on the ball."

That there is still work to do and perhaps players to bring in is not cause for panic because there is still time to do those things.

But time is not infinite. The 2019 World Cup awaits -- and France with it.

**The
Washington
Post**

France dominates Americans, 3-0, to win SheBelieves Cup; U.S. finishes last (online)

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

In the grand scheme of women's soccer, the SheBelieves Cup does not carry the weight of the World Cup or the aura of the Olympics. So the fact that the top-ranked U.S. women's soccer team did not retain the title shouldn't linger long.

What the Americans will have a tough time shaking is the manner of their failures. France was just plain better, displaying superior speed and technical ability, scoring twice in the first 10 minutes and breezing to a 3-0 victory before 21,638 at rain-coated RFK Stadium.

It was the worst U.S. home defeat since the same score line against Germany in the 2003 World Cup semifinals.

[\[No Hope \(Solo\), and the U.S. women are moving ahead\]](#)

The difference between the teams was striking: France (seven points) moved the ball with grace and purpose in setting the terms and winning the championship of a week-long tournament featuring four of the top five teams in the FIFA rankings.

Camille Abily scored twice and Eugenie Le Sommer glided through the U.S. team's three-back formation to help defeat the reigning world champions for only the second time in 21 meetings (2-17-2).

The setback was the second in four days for the Americans, leaving them last in the field. In perhaps

their final appearance at RFK before a new soccer stadium opens in 2018, they lost in the nation's capital after nine consecutive victories.

"It's disappointing," captain Carli Lloyd said. "We came in fourth place. We scored one goal. ... Long gone are the days of always winning, and it's not going to be easy — 2019 [World Cup], 2020 [Olympics], it's going to be really hard."

[\[One goal is enough for U.S. against Germany in SheBelieves Cup opener\]](#)

The 1-2-0, three-point performance came seven months after the U.S. team's earliest elimination in a major tournament (Olympic quarterfinals).

Coach Jill Ellis used the tournament to experiment with formations and test young players against world-class opponents. In that sense, she said she was satisfied with the week-long exercise. The results, though, did not sit well with anyone.

"We're obviously very, very disappointed but not deterred in terms of what we're trying to achieve," she said. "It was all about getting answers. There was a lot of questions asked today."

Asked if the France defeat, coupled with a 1-0 loss to England on Saturday at Red Bull Arena, was a step backward, she said: "In terms of results, of course."

Germany's 1-0 victory over England in the first match of the day left the United States and France with the

only pathway to the trophy. With a one-point lead on the Americans, the French needed only a draw to lift the trophy. From the start, though, they were committed to the attack.

The Americans were fortunate to dodge danger in the first minute. Soon, they were plucking the ball out of the back of the net in quick succession.

In the eighth minute, Abily converted a penalty kick after goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher took down Le Sommer. A U.S. giveaway 40 yards from the target had led to a fast, fluid foray, and Le Sommer slipped behind center defender Allie Long.

A minute later, Le Sommer revved her engines and accelerated past Long to collect Wendie Renard's long ball. Long tried to slow her by yanking her arm and shoulder. Le Sommer brushed it off.

When Becky Sauerbrunn closed in, Le Sommer cut inside, sending the U.S. defender tumbling. Calm and composed, she slipped a low shot past Naeher for her 53rd international goal in just 119 appearances.

The Americans responded with a fury but not a goal. Tobin Heath's free kick bounded past goalkeeper Meline Gerard before being cleared off the goal line by Laura Georges. Heath ended an electric run by snapping a 19-yard bid a fraction wide.

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Three minutes after intermission, Gerard made a reflex block on substitute Crystal Dunn's redirection of Lloyd's cross. She then pushed out substitute Mallory Pugh's effort to the top upper corner.

The outcome was settled in the 63rd minute. Tight, one-touch passing sprung Eve Perisset overlapping on the right side. Abily exploited a channel between Long and Sauerbrunn, and met Perisset's cross for a simple finish.

"We're climbing a mountain here; we're 2 ½ years out from a big event," midfielder Morgan Brian said. "Sometimes a challenge is the best thing for us. Tonight we had a challenge. We learned a lot about ourselves, and that is important going forward in the process."

In the first match, Anja Mittag capped a well-constructed buildup in the 44th minute, curling in a 10-yard shot to record her 50th international goal for the second-ranked Olympic gold medalists (four points). Fifth-ranked England (three points) exerted pressure in the second half but lacked the final pass or finishing touch.

The Americans will regroup the first week of April for friendlies against Russia in Frisco, Tex., and Houston.

CNBC : Germany alone cannot keep the European Union together, it needs France, says finance minister

Annette Weisbach, Silvia Amaro

Axel Schmidt | Reuters

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble

The Franco-German relationship has been fundamental to develop the European Union over its 60 years of existence. Breaking that relationship would mean the dismantling of the European Union, the German finance minister said.

Wolfgang Schauble, the German finance minister, has also quashed comments made by the U.S. administration that Germany has

manipulated the euro for its economic benefit.

"We need a strong France, Germany alone cannot hold Europe together," Wolfgang Schauble, the German finance minister, told a news conference on Tuesday.

France, the second-largest euro economy, has seen a rise in anti-EU sentiment as the country comes closer to a presidential election in late April.

The far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, who has pledged to take France out of the euro, is currently placing first in projections for the first round. However, polls indicate that

she is likely to lose the second round of the vote to the centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron. But Macron himself, a relatively new face in French politics, is often seen as an alternative to the establishment.

"I am closely watching what happens in France. I am convinced that France and the French people will make a responsible decision at the elections," Schauble told journalists. He added: "I have deep respect for the cleverness of the French voter which has been backed by the outcome of their regional elections." In December, the Front National did not manage to

build on first-round leads in the French local elections.

Schauble also denied during the press conference that his country manipulated the euro to gain a trade advantage against countries like the U.S.

"We have not manipulated anything, it is the competitiveness of the German economy," Schauble told CNBC.

According to the outspoken minister, Europe is in a "very difficult" situation and all efforts are needed to ensure its stability.

Adding to the uncertainty, Germans go to the polls to choose a new chancellor in September. Polls suggest that the powerful Angela

Merkel could be overtaken at the ballot by her socialist rival.

Merkel has been in power for more than 11 years, however, Schaeuble

doesn't believe that the German chancellor is "tired at all."

"I am convinced that she is the best leader for a strong Germany and for a strong Europe also the next four

years in a new government," he added.

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**The
New York
Times**

Before Elections, Dutch Fear Russian Meddling, but Also U.S. Cash

Danny Hakim and Christopher F. Schuetze

AMSTERDAM — The parochial world of Dutch elections is not often seen as a hotbed of foreign intrigue. But in recent months, an unexpected worry has emerged: the influence of American money.

The country's fast-rising [far-right leader, Geert Wilders](#), is getting help from American conservatives attracted to his anti-[European Union](#) and anti-Islam views. David Horowitz, an American right-wing activist, has contributed roughly \$150,000 to Mr. Wilders's Party for Freedom over two years — of which nearly \$120,000 came in 2015, making it the largest individual contribution in the Dutch political system that year, according to recently released records.

By American standards, the amount is a pittance. But to some Dutch, who are already fearful of possible Russian meddling in the election, the American involvement is an assault on national sovereignty.

"It's foreign interference in our democracy," said Ronald van Raak, a senior member of Parliament in the opposition Socialist party, who has co-sponsored legislation to ban foreign donations. "We would not have thought that people from other countries would have been interested in our politics," he said. "Maybe we underestimated ourselves."

The Dutch parliamentary elections on March 15 are the kickoff for a pivotal political year in Europe. Other elections loom in [France](#), Germany and possibly [Italy](#). With the viability of the European Union at stake, anxieties are rising about foreign interference, with [European intelligence agencies warning that Russia is working](#) to help far-right parties through hacking and disinformation campaigns.

But sympathy for Europe's far right is also coming from Americans who share similar views and are willing to contribute money to help the cause. Measuring this outside support is difficult, though, because many European countries have leaky, opaque accountability systems on campaign finance.

France, Germany and the [Netherlands](#) have only published campaign finance data from as recently as 2014 or 2015. And only

the Netherlands will update that information with more disclosures before Election Day. New campaign finance data is expected to be released on Wednesday.

Though Europe is generally known for its public financing of elections, parties are increasingly seeking outside donations, especially since regulatory loopholes abound. In Germany, the far-right Alternative for Germany [sold gold](#) bars and coins in a strategy to inflate its revenue and, through a quirk of the rules, increase its access to public funds, until the practice was [banned by Parliament](#). German parties have also sought to divert public funds provided to parliamentary caucuses.

"It's illegal but basically done everywhere" in Germany, said Christoph Möllers, a professor of public law and legal philosophy at Humboldt University of Berlin.

While France bars contributions from businesses, loans are allowed. A Russian bank made headlines in recent years after lending millions of euros to the far-right National Front party of Marine Le Pen. After that bank failed last year, the party complained that it had been shunned by French banks and declared itself in the market for a new lender.

If nothing else, European far-right parties are gaining newly emboldened allies.

"I expect the Trump administration to be more open to these parties than Obama, certainly," said Representative Steve King, an Iowa Republican who is an ally both of President Trump and the European far right, having met with various party leaders during a recent European trip.

The State Department, in a statement, declined "to comment on political parties in foreign elections."

Mr. Horowitz, who has long [sounded alarms](#) on Muslim immigration, first rallied to Mr. Wilders's side after the Dutch politician was [put on trial](#) in 2010 for inciting hatred against Muslims with a film he made that attacked the Quran; he was [acquitted](#) the next year. Mr. Wilders was more recently [found guilty](#) of incitement after leading an anti-Moroccan chant at a rally, though he avoided a fine.

"I think he's the Paul Revere of Europe," Mr. Horowitz said in an

interview. "[Geert Wilders](#) is a hero, and I think he's a hero of the most important battle of our times, the battle to defend free speech," he added, calling the situation in Europe a "nightmare."

David Horowitz, an American right-wing activist, contributed roughly \$150,000 to Mr. Wilders's Party for Freedom over two years, which is big money in Dutch politics. Phelan M. Ebenhack/Associated Press

Though Mr. Horowitz's donations adhere to Dutch standards, there was some question of whether they comply with American law.

Organized as a 501(c)(3) under American tax law, Mr. Horowitz's foundation is barred from making donations to political organizations. The donations went to the Friends of PVV, according to Dutch records, a foundation covered by political disclosure rules.

Michael Finch, the president of Mr. Horowitz's foundation, said in an email that "the funds that were sent to Geert Wilders were to help him in his legal cases" and "were not political donations."

But donations to foreign political entities are problematic, tax experts said.

"The I.R.S. views foreign political organizations as the same as domestic political organizations — not appropriate for a charity to support," said Marcus S. Owens, a partner at Loeb & Loeb, and former director of the Exempt Organizations Division of the Internal Revenue Service, in an email. He added, "The I.R.S. also views a charity that is controlled by a political organization as transgressing federal tax rules."

Mr. Horowitz said he was not certain if the foundation had given additional funds to Mr. Wilders's party this year or last year.

Mr. Wilders's backing of Israel, where he once lived, has set him apart from other far-right groups, and he has courted American Jews. Daniel Pipes, another conservative American activist and a Harvard-educated historian known for his controversial statements on Islam, said in an email exchange that he hoped "the rise of the insurgent parties leads not to their forming governments but their sending a strong message to the legacy parties to wake up and deal with the

imperative issues they have so long ignored."

Mr. Pipes said his foundation, the Middle East Forum, provided money in the "six figures" to help pay legal bills in Mr. Wilders's trial over the film, but specifically to a legal fund, and has not provided political support. Mr. Pipes has called Mr. Wilders "the most important European alive today," but has [differed with him](#) on his view of Islam, though he himself has expressed inflammatory views on the [subject](#).

Dutch records [also show](#) that two American foundations paid for Mr. Wilders's flights and hotels on trips to the United States last year. One, the Gatestone Institute, lists John R. Bolton, a combative former United Nations ambassador under George W. Bush, [as its chairman](#). Another, the International Freedom Alliance Foundation, is backed by [Robert J. Shillman](#), a wealthy Trump supporter who paid for a digital ad in Times Square last year [depicting Mr. Trump as Superman](#). The travel payments were previously [reported by Foreign Policy](#) magazine.

Lawmakers and academics say the European public has seen little need for tight campaign finance regulations because political campaigning in Europe has historically been far more restrained than in the United States.

"The campaigns don't seem to be that relevant," Mr. Mollers said. "You see campaign finance is spent for posters, and no one believes that changes the game."

Now, however, European political campaigns could become more expensive as parties turn to data-driven persuasion efforts similar to those used in the United States, even if they are limited by European data-protection laws. The Dutch Green Party, for instance, has licensed software from Blue State Digital, a prominent American data consultancy.

Guillaume Liegey, co-founder and chief executive of Liegey Muller Pons, a data consulting firm, was an adviser to President François Hollande's 2012 campaign in France, [one of the first](#) in Europe to use data-driven techniques.

"The idea of using data and technology has since then become more of a standard in today's European campaigns," he said in an

email. He now consults for the campaign of Emmanuel Macron, a left-leaning politician who is one of the front-runners in the French presidential race, which takes place in two stages in April and May.

Few dispute the stakes. Mr. Wilders and Ms. Le Pen, the French far-right leader, are

**THE WALL
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Updated March 7, 2017 2:45 p.m. ET

WARSAW, Poland—Hungary's parliament approved a plan to detain migrants in refurbished shipping containers until their asylum applications are decided, as the government stepped up efforts to close off one of the main corridors for migrants trying to reach Western Europe.

Under the new rules, authorities will be allowed to confine any asylum seeker and accompanying child who enter the country to the area of the renovated shipping containers, which are arrayed along Hungary's border with Serbia.

Previously, people registering at the border as refugees didn't usually face detention, and most kept traveling on to other countries like Germany. Now, they stand to be detained pending a process that often takes months, and in rare cases, more than a year.

The legislation approved on Tuesday is the latest move by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to make his landlocked country of 10 million people a showpiece for tough border controls. For decades, refugees and migrants have crossed Hungary on their way to the more prosperous European nations to the west.

Mr. Orbán has sought to change that. A 153-mile razor-wire fence fortified with thermal cameras, drones and dogs has been built along Hungary's border with Serbia. A second parallel fence is scheduled to be completed in weeks.

The government says it must take extraordinary measures to protect the social fabric of Hungary from foreigners it argues have different religious and cultural values. It also contends that most of the people crossing into Hungary aren't at risk on the other side of the border.

Next year, Mr. Orbán's Fidesz party faces elections. While his main rival,

running strong in polls, though both are considered long shots to win control of their governments. If either did win, it could be a devastating blow to the euro currency union, as well as the European Union itself, an outcome that many analysts regard as a foreign policy disaster.

Mr. Horowitz disagrees, and portrays the European Union as the disaster.

"To have this Parliament that represents nobody in Brussels making laws for everybody, it's very anti-democratic," said Mr. Horowitz. "I always thought it was a bad idea."

Correction: March 7, 2017

An earlier version of this article misstated the group to which David Horowitz was referring in a speech. He used the phrase "sick death cult" in reference to Hamas, not Islam.

Hungary Lawmakers Approve Tough Anti-Migrant Measure

Drew Hinshaw

the right-wing party Jobbik, shares his hard stance against refugees, it has tried to focus on other issues, such as alleged corruption and Hungary's tepid economic growth.

"I think the government has assessed, probably realistically, that its success next year depends on how much it can keep the public afraid of refugees," said Gábor Györi, senior analyst at the Budapest-based political consultancy Policy Solutions. "They're going to push this issue as far as they can until the election."

As lawmakers voted on Tuesday, Mr. Orbán swore in a group of elite border guards known locally as border hunters, telling reporters: "The people that come to us don't want to live according to our culture and customs but according to their own."

Human-rights groups criticized Tuesday's vote, saying the detention of refugees, especially children, violates international humanitarian law. Aid groups are worried about consequences of keeping people and families in tight quarters for lengthy periods.

One aid group, Doctors Without Borders, said the new law would increase the backlog of migrants who are either waiting in frigid tent camps to enter the European Union, or are finding new, increasingly dangerous ways to slip across borders.

Dimitris Avramopoulos, the migration commissioner for the European Commission, the bloc's executive, last week said countries should prolong their maximum detention time and set up closed centers for migrants who are declined asylum and due to be sent back.

He said that under EU law, migrants can be detained for a maximum of six months and in special cases up to 18 months.

The Hungarian legislation reverberated in Germany, where the

issue of asylum seekers has grown even more sensitive since an illegal Tunisian immigrant rammed a truck into a Christmas market in central Berlin on Dec. 19, leaving 12 people dead and dozens more injured.

German authorities had rejected an asylum request by the immigrant, Anis Amri, in June 2016, but he had continued to reside in the country. Since then, a proposal to set up migrant camps near the German border to limit the flow of asylum seekers into the country has been even more hotly debated.

"This isn't our way of dealing with people in need," Germany's development minister, Gerd Müller, told the newspaper *Neue Osnabruecker Zeitung*.

The anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party, however, cheered the measure.

"Hungary is taking the only right step in the current situation," said Frauke Petry, co-leader of the party known by its German acronym AfD.

"As long as European states can't agree on a joint solution with transit camps in crisis regions, individual countries must assure order on their own—at least on their territory," Ms. Petry said.

The Christian Social Union, a conservative member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling coalition, has long called for setting up so-called transit zones near German borders where some asylum seekers could be detained for a limited amount of time if there were doubts about their identity.

Ms. Merkel's Christian Democratic Union supports the idea but the junior coalition partner, the Social Democratic Party, opposes it, preventing its adoption by the government.

There was no immediate reaction from Italian officials, who have scolded Hungary and other Eastern European countries for their harsh

treatment of migrants, including border closures.

In October, Paolo Gentiloni, then Italy's foreign minister and currently prime minister, sharply rebuked Hungary after a member of Mr. Orbán's government accused Italy of breaking European rules on migration.

"Hungary has always sought to violate European rules on migration," Mr. Gentiloni said in a tweet. "Stop lecturing Italy."

The migrant buildup on Hungary's frontier includes about 700 people camped outside the border fence. Immigration officers used to let 30 migrants enter the country each day, saying they weren't equipped to screen anymore. Since January, that number has shrunk to 50 a week.

The legislation approved by Hungarian lawmakers would allow children under the age of 14 and traveling alone to continue westward. But Andrea Contenta, an adviser to Doctors Without Borders, called the step "very alarming and very inhuman."

"Children will get detained—children of all ages—which is definitely not in their best interest. Children don't belong behind bars, ever," he said.

Since at least the start of 2016, nearly all asylum requests have been rejected on the grounds that the migrants entering the country are arriving from nations that aren't at war.

Last year, authorities granted refugee status to only about 500 out of more than 29,000 people who applied, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

—Ruth Bender in Berlin and Deborah Ball in Rome contributed to this article.

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

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Valentina Pop

EU's Top Court Says It's Up to National Governments to Grant Refugee Visas

March 7, 2017 10:12 a.m. ET

BRUSSELS—The European Union's top court on Tuesday ruled that it is up to national governments, not the EU, to decide whether to grant visas to refugees allowing them to come to Europe.

European countries are bound by international law to grant asylum to people fleeing war and persecution, but only if they are already on European soil. In its Tuesday ruling, the European Court of Justice said that countries are entitled to issue so-called humanitarian visas to refugees in war-torn regions, but that the EU law has no say over such decisions.

In a rare move, the ECJ judges ruled against an earlier nonbinding opinion of the court's top

lawyer, who argued that EU law does apply and should oblige countries to issue humanitarian visas. In most cases, the court follows the top lawyer's opinion.

The case was brought by a family of Syrian Christians from Aleppo, who in October 2016 applied for a humanitarian visa at the Belgian embassy in Lebanon and then returned to Syria to await a decision.

The family of five, including three children, claimed they had been abducted by an armed terrorist group, beaten and tortured, before being released only after they paid a ransom. Belgian authorities rejected their application on the grounds that they would clearly overstay a 90-day visa because they would seek asylum in the country.

Aid groups over the past few years have urged EU governments to issue more humanitarian visas and to step up efforts to resettle refugees through the United Nations. The [public mood in Europe](#) has become [less welcoming](#) to refugees after more than one million migrants arrived on the continent in 2015.

Migrants and refugees continue [to risk their lives trying to reach Europe](#). Over 5,000 migrants died last year when crossing the Mediterranean in overcrowded dinghies and since the beginning of this year, 521 more Europe-bound migrants have been found dead at sea, according to the International Organization for Migration.

"In no way should this ruling be interpreted as letting countries off the hook in establishing legal avenues for refugees," said Gauri Van Gulik, Amnesty International's deputy director for Europe.

Belgian migration minister Theo Francken, from the anti-immigration nationalist New Flemish Alliance, wrote on his official Twitter page that nongovernmental organizations "wanted to push the EU borders to embassies, but the European Court whistled them back. Good thing."

Write to Valentina Pop at valentina.pop@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Galston : Populism Need Not Be Undemocratic

William A. Galston

March 7, 2017 6:59 p.m. ET

The populist surge throughout the West has fueled fears that liberal democracy is threatened, and it is not hard to see why. A trail-blazing populist leader, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, unabashedly advocates what he calls "illiberal democracy"—majoritarian government without checks and balances. Populism and nativism often go together, threatening the security of minority groups.

But we should not be too quick to see populism as the enemy of liberal democracy. Britain's vote to leave the European Union raised constitutional issues that the country's highest court has resolved, and Prime Minister Theresa May's government has accepted its judgment. Many rank-and-file voters justified their support for Brexit, plausibly enough, as an effort to reclaim democratic self-government from distant, unresponsive bureaucracies. Many supporters of the EU acknowledge that it suffers from a "democracy deficit."

Populism often rises when an elite consensus excludes large groups of ordinary citizens. In the United States, Andrew Jackson's presidency followed the "Era of Good Feeling," in which party competition had virtually ceased.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

As Eurozone Economy Strengthens, Divisions Within ECB Re-Emerge

Tom Fairless

March 7, 2017 4:42 a.m. ET

FRANKFURT—Europe's [economy is accelerating](#), sparking optimism during a year of contentious politics

After the elections of 1888 and 1892, which pitted a conservative Democrat (Grover Cleveland) against a Republican (Benjamin Harrison), William Jennings Bryan's agrarian populism broke the duopoly and sparked a realignment of the American party system.

We see the same process today across the Atlantic. The Brexit vote succeeded against the declared opposition of both major political parties in the U.K. Throughout Europe, populist national movements are pitted against established center-left and center-right parties that back the EU, globalization and social liberalism.

Some manifestations of populism, in short, represent an expansion of democratic voices and choices, not a challenge to the regime. This forces us to distinguish more carefully between policy disputes within democracy and broader disagreements about democracy.

Donald Trump's candidacy represented, in part, a frontal assault on pro-immigration, pro-trade, pro-globalization policies long advocated by elites in both parties, in the name of regions and economic sectors whose members Mr. Trump labeled, with some justice, the "forgotten Americans." His challenge raises legitimate policy issues, as does his pledge to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. So does his critique of regulatory proliferation as an

impediment to faster economic growth. All these issues are well within the democratic pale.

More troubling are Mr. Trump's repeated assaults on the legitimacy of basic liberal democratic institutions, including the judiciary, the bureaucracy and the press. Still, there is considerable daylight between this criticism and the use of government power to suppress checks on the executive branch.

Although the president vehemently disagreed with the Ninth Circuit on his initial immigration and refugee executive order, he did not disregard the court's ruling but chose instead to draft a new order. The rule of law remains intact, and so does the independence of the judiciary. If Mr. Trump were to use the Internal Revenue Service or the Federal Communications Commission to suppress media organizations whose views he dislikes, we would face a threat to democracy. This has not happened, and there is little evidence that it will.

The threat to liberal democracy becomes real when large numbers of citizens cease to believe in it. There is some evidence that Americans' attachment to liberal democracy is weakening, especially among young adults. There is overwhelming evidence that Americans' confidence in institutions of all kinds has plummeted in recent decades.

[fraught elections](#) looming in the Netherlands, France and Germany. In the other is German Bundesbank President Jens Weidmann, [an ardent critic](#) of the ECB's easy-money policies, who is concerned

Still, a Pew Research Center [survey](#) released at the beginning of this month suggests that support for the building blocks of liberal democracy remains strong. According to the Pew survey, 89% of Americans regard open and fair national elections as "very important" to maintaining a strong democracy. Eighty-three percent see our system of checks and balances in this light.

Support for the importance of the right to nonviolent protest stands at 79%; for protecting individuals with unpopular views, 74%; for press freedom to criticize political leaders, 64%. Only 17% believe that we would deal with our problems more effectively if presidents didn't have to worry so much about Congress or the courts; 77% said concentrating more power in the president's hands would be too risky.

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, of course. Now and in the future, Americans of all persuasions should police the boundary between legitimate if unwelcome sentiments—from the president, the press or anyone else—and the use of public power to suppress them. We should unite to defend basic democratic norms of civil discourse and respect for evidence. But we should not confuse policy disputes, however heated, with real threats to liberal democracy.

the dosage of stimulus is too strong for a healing economy.

The two sides closed ranks last year when the bloc flirted with deflation and the ECB came under attack from senior German politicians. But

divisions are re-emerging as the bloc's €10 trillion economy strengthens.

In a rare turn, the eurozone is currently the fastest-growing major advanced economy, according to financial-data firm [IHS Markit](#), and [its inflation rate has rebounded to 2%](#), slightly above the ECB's target rate.

The ECB's 25-member governing council, which will hold a policy meeting in Frankfurt on Wednesday and Thursday, needs to chart a course between its opposing poles without jeopardizing the region's economic fortunes.

The mixed messages reflect the difficulties of crafting a single monetary policy for 19 nations with 15 different languages and widely diverging expectations for what a central bank should do. Whereas a French audience might be concerned about the euro exchange rate, Germans are more worried about inflation.

Former ECB president Jean-Claude Trichet "would tell me that if he took a walk in Frankfurt, people would often ask him, 'When are you finally going to raise interest rates?'" Mr. Draghi said in a 2014 speech. "But if he took a walk in another major city just a few days later, people would ask him, 'When are you going to lower interest rates?'"

All but one of the bank's top 25 officials handles monetary policy in a second language: English. An in-house English-editing team parses official communications. At meetings, officials must wrestle over the meaning of words.

All that is a headache for investors, who are struggling to gauge when the ECB might start winding down, or tapering, its €2.3 trillion bond-purchase program. From the outside, economists say, it is difficult to judge how much of the debate within the ECB hinges on the economy's strength and how much is politically driven.

"It is a semantic discussion that could have one big loser: the ECB's reputation," said Carsten Brzeski, an economist with ING-DiBa in Frankfurt.

The struggle comes as communication becomes a key policy tool for central banks in the developed world, which have rolled out new measures to explain their actions and guide investor expectations ever further into the future.

Measures over the past few years to increase transparency include publishing minutes of policy meetings, publishing diaries of ECB board members, and forward guidance that states how the ECB will act in coming years.

Federal Reserve officials, unlike their ECB peers, [have recently sent a fairly consistent message](#) that they might raise interest rates later this month.

"The ECB is a unifying institution for national voices whereas the Fed has the authority to act as central bank for a union with a central government," said Lena Komileva, chief economist at G+ Economics in London.

ECB officials once adhered to a "single voice principle," presenting a unified message to the outside world, according to Niels Bünnemann, a former ECB press officer who now works as a consultant. National central banks were tasked with explaining that message to domestic audiences.

But that unity evaporated when the ECB shifted from interest-rate moves to untested policy measures, such as large-scale bond-purchase programs, said Mr. Bünnemann, who left the ECB in mid-2014 after 15 years.

The Bundesbank in particular has become much more assertive in addressing an international audience, including by translating its website into English and French, he said.

The war of words over arcane financial tools like quantitative-easing programs shows how anti-European Union forces roiling the bloc are influencing every debate, even within one of the EU's cornerstone institutions.

With the ECB, "there is a perception that policy decisions are borne out of political opportunity rather than tied to economic data," Ms. Komileva said.

Nowhere has the eurozone's recovery caused more tension than in booming Germany, Europe's economic powerhouse, where a historic aversion to inflation and debt has made Mr. Draghi a favorite target.

In a sign of the tensions, Sabine Lautenschlaeger, the German

member of the ECB's executive board, [came under attack](#) in the German press last month for welcoming a rise in inflation toward the ECB's target.

Each side presents itself as the defender of sound monetary policy that could reflate the economy. Complicating the tussle is the Bundesbank's status as the ECB's most powerful member.

In a widely-praised feat of linguistic contortion, Mr. Draghi argued in December that a decision to slow the central bank's massive bond-purchase program from April didn't amount to tapering. "The word [tapering] has several meanings depending on who is using it," Mr. Draghi told reporters.

Mr. Weidmann is equally agile. He told reporters recently that he agrees with the "orientation" of ECB policy, but not with the policy itself.

Mr. Draghi is expected to leave his message essentially unchanged at a news conference on Thursday. Policy makers have indicated they want to continue QE at least through December to ensure that the recovery has taken root. But some time this year, perhaps over the summer, policy makers are expected to signal a change of course.

In one crucial respect, Messrs. Draghi and Weidmann are on the same side: In an atmosphere of mounting euro skepticism, both in their way are trying to keep Europe's citizens on board.

Write to Tom Fairless at tom.fairless@wsj.com

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In Syria, Patchwork of Forces Control Regime-Held Areas

Raja Abdulrahim
March 7, 2017

5:30 a.m. ET

Syria's elite Fourth Army Division fought fierce battles to drive rebels from some Damascus suburbs. But on a typical recent morning it had a different mission: Escort a 26-year-old student through government-held territory to take his law-school exams without getting arrested by other regime security forces.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime relies on a patchwork of state security forces and dozens of domestic and foreign militias that have transformed government-held territory into a complex web of fiefs that vie for power and threaten stability.

Rebels in the student's [suburb of Moadhamiya](#) surrendered to the regime in late 2016. But state authority in the area has become fragmented among various branches of government, security services and local militias—not all of which recognize that surrender deal.

Without the protection of the Fourth Division—an elite unit headed by Mr. Assad's brother, Maher—residents risk arrest when they cross checkpoints controlled by one of the many other factions loyal to the regime.

"The regime is no longer like it was before. Every branch is independent and acts on its own," said Khalid, the student. "Every branch is like its own state."

Last month, in the coastal province of Latakia, regime security forces arrested the brother of two senior militia commanders, according to the U.K.-based opposition monitoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The man was detained after his convoy was blocked by another convoy, likely belonging to Mr. Assad, and he became belligerent, the Observatory said.

The security forces also ordered 900 fighters from one of the militias commanded by one of the man's brothers to join the army, according to the Observatory.

The incident mirrored [the rebel infighting that has long plagued the Syrian opposition](#), which has repeatedly failed to form cohesive

coalitions, weakening its hold on territory.

Syrian officials didn't respond to repeated requests for comment. In recent interviews, Mr. Assad has portrayed numerous surrender deals with rebels, such as the one in Moadhamiya, as bringing these areas back under the control of the government.

The jockeying for control in government-controlled areas suggests that even if a political settlement is reached to end Syria's war with rebels, stability will remain elusive.

"The regime is still there in terms of employing people in various sectors and paying salaries and providing benefits," said Aymenn al-Tamimi, a

Syria researcher at the Washington-based think tank Middle East Forum. "But what the militias do when they get monopolies over security does present a big issue."

The deterioration of the regime's authority has fostered a degree of lawlessness. Police are now powerless to clamp down on rising crime, including thefts and kidnappings, according to multiple residents in government areas.

Inside Damascus, control is divided among security branches including the air force, intelligence, military intelligence and state security. Each branch controls its own neighborhoods manned by numerous checkpoints, leaving other branches and the police impotent.

When a well-known merchant was kidnapped in Damascus in late 2015, relatives went to the police but were told that law enforcement could do nothing, according to

people close to the family. They said the family was advised to reach out to the specific security branch in control of the area where he was taken.

Armed gangs are believed to operate under the protection or even in conjunction with some security branches, according to residents who have reported thefts or paid ransoms to free kidnapped relatives.

"In terms of looting and generating its own income and how to defend an area, [the regime] leaves a lot of that decision making to these militias," said Yezid Sayigh, a fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center think tank.

Foreign allies also have some autonomy and, at times, differing agendas. The regime's mounting victories against rebels are largely attributable to allies such as Russia, Iran and the Lebanese militia Hezbollah.

In December, a deal brokered by Russia and rebel ally Turkey to allow rebels [to leave their last enclave in the northern city of Aleppo was nearly derailed by Iranian-backed Shiite militias](#) who refused to allow the convoys to exit from the city until their own demands were met.

Since the city's return to complete regime control, [a Russian-backed Chechen police unit has brought some order](#) as it has kept the feared Shiite militias in check, said former residents and antigovernment activist groups.

The piecemeal control is also thwarting deliveries of humanitarian aid.

In late February, a United Nations aid convoy was denied access to a besieged rebel-held neighborhood in the central city of Homs. On its way back to Damascus, an armed group diverted several trucks in the convoy to a regime-controlled area,

said Jens Laerke, spokesman for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs which oversees aid distribution throughout Syria.

Fighters from the unknown group beat drivers, then released them after several hours but kept the aid, he said.

"There is a very vast patchwork of various armed groups whose loyalties and chain of commands are not always clear and are also shifting," Mr. Laerke said. "Who do we go to if this commander at this checkpoint says no? This is a...complicating factor."

—A special correspondent and Noam Raydan contributed to this article.

Write to Raja Abdulrahim at raja.abdulrahim@wsj.com

The New York Times Top U.S. General Discusses Syria With Counterparts From Russia and Turkey

Michael R. Gordon

A convoy of United States armored vehicles in Manbij, northern Syria. A Pentagon spokesman said Monday that the deployment was intended as a "visible sign of deterrence and reassurance" to dissuade Turkish-backed militias and other groups from attacking the area. Delil Souleiman/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

WASHINGTON — The top American military officer met Tuesday with his Russian and Turkish counterparts to discuss how to avoid an unintended confrontation as forces from all three nations operate on an increasingly crowded battlefield in northern [Syria](#).

The unusual three-way meeting was held in Antalya, [Turkey](#). It brought together Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Gen. Valery V. Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian general staff; and their Turkish counterpart, Gen. Hulusi Akar.

The major purpose of the session was to discuss "the fight against all terrorist organizations in Syria" and "the importance of additional measures for de-conflicting operations," a spokesman for General Dunford said in a statement.

The situation in northern Syria has become increasingly tense in recent days. Supported by American and

Russian airstrikes, Turkish forces and Syrian militias supported by Turkey recently succeeded in taking the town Al Bab from the Islamic State, also known as [ISIS](#) or ISIL.

From right: Gen. Valery V. Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian general staff; Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, Hulusi Akar; and Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during a meeting in Antalya, Turkey, on Tuesday. Turkish Armed Forces General Staff Press Office

But Turkey's main worry is not ISIS but ensuring that Syrian Kurds do not establish a ministate in northern Syria. That has spurred fears that Turkish troops and their allies in the Syria opposition might move to seize Manbij, a town in northern Syria that was taken from ISIS by Syrian Arab and Kurdish militias backed by the United States.

The fighters defending Manbij do not believe that the Turkish posture is mere saber-rattling. Abu Amjed, the head of the Manbij Military Council, said in an interview last week that his fighters were being shot at by Turkish troops and that he considered Turkey to be more of a threat than ISIS.

As the situation escalated, the Manbij Military Council has tried to pre-empt any Turkish offensive by striking a deal with [Russia](#) to turn nearby villages under its control over to Syrian government forces

loyal to President Bashar al-Assad. As part of that deal, a Syrian government convoy with humanitarian aid began to make its way to Manbij, escorted by Russian armored vehicles, which halted just short of the town.

At the same time, American troops in Stryker fighting vehicles and armored Humvees flying large American flags began to appear in and around Manbij to dissuade Turkish-backed militias and other groups from attacking the area. The American troops include a unit of Army Rangers, who appear to have been sent to northern Syria from the base American forces use in Erbil, Iraq. It was an unusually public role for Army Rangers, who often prefer to operate in the shadows.

Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said Monday that the American deployment was intended as a "visible sign of deterrence and reassurance."

"We are concerned about anybody who views Manbij as needing to be liberated," he added.

One American official described the situation around Manbij as a potential tinderbox. There have already been a couple of friendly fire incidents, including a Russian airstrike last week that hit Syrian Arab fighters trained by the Americans. The worry is that a small incident could rapidly escalate and undermine the American-backed push to capture Raqqa, the

capital of the Islamic State's self-styled caliphate.

"There is a need for an effective coordination in the efforts to clear Syria of all terror groups because so many countries are involved there," Binali Yildirim, the Turkish prime minister, said of the generals meeting. "That's the real aim of the meeting."

The challenge facing the United States and Turkey, however, goes well beyond drawing clear battle lines.

American Special Operations Forces regard the Y.P.G. — the Syrian Kurdish militia that is officially known as the People's Protection Units — as an effective battlefield ally whose participation is vital to roll back the Islamic State in Syria.

While President Trump has yet to decide the matter, American commanders have also argued for equipping the Y.P.G. with armored vehicles, heavy machine guns and anti-tank missiles so they could join the operation to seize Raqqa.

Turkey, which has cast the Kurdish militias as terrorists, has vociferously objected to such a move. The American military has tried to develop ways to reassure Turkey, including by increasing the number of Syrian Arabs that would be used to take Raqqa.

Iraqi Forces Enter Western Mosul, in Fierce Battle Against ISIS

Omar Al-Jawshy and

Sewell Chan

Iraqi forces fighting Islamic State militants in western Mosul on Tuesday. Aris Messinis/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

BAGHDAD — Iraqi forces trying to reclaim Mosul penetrated the western part of the city on Tuesday, retaking a bridge and several public buildings during heavy clashes with the Islamic State militants, officials said.

Civilians reported that the bombardment and gunfire were the heaviest since Feb. 19, the beginning of the operation to retake the western part of the city — the country's second-largest, where roughly a million people are [trapped and living in desperate conditions](#).

Soldiers recaptured a branch of the central bank, an archaeological museum that jihadists ransacked after taking the city in 2014, and the Hurriya Bridge, which crosses the Tigris River in the center of the city, Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, a military spokesman, said by phone.

Residents of Mosul fled on Tuesday as government forces fought militants. Suhaib Salem/Reuters

"We will never stop until we liberate Mosul entirely," he said.

Lt. Gen. Raed Shakir Jawdat, the chief of the federal police, said that security forces had also retaken a government compound. A statement from the American-led coalition forces assisting the Iraqis

gave a similar account of their progress.

The museum was a focus of worldwide attention after it was seized by Islamic State militants, who [used sledgehammers and drills](#) to smash artifacts in its collection. The destruction [horrified scholars around the world](#).

Lt. Gen. Abdul Amir al-Muhammadawi, a spokesman for an elite unit of Interior Ministry troops, said that the buildings retaken from the Islamic State included a courthouse where militants had carried out whippings, stonings and beheadings, as well as a building where militants had thrown people to their deaths.

"The liberation of the government compound is a step forward for our forces, a vital motivating position for us," General Muhammadawi said in an interview. "The international coalition's airstrikes and drones have played a major role in accelerating the liberation of the city."

It was not yet clear how lasting the gains would be. Although soldiers raised the Iraqi flag over the government compound, in the Dawasa neighborhood, they were later forced to retreat under heavy fire from Islamic State militants, The Associated Press reported.

The museum remained within the range of Islamic State snipers, making it vulnerable to a counterattack.

Social media accounts associated with the Islamic State reported that

militants had set off three suicide bombs during the offensive.

Though the military advances were tenuous, government forces said that Tuesday represented a critical moment in their [weekslong offensive to retake western Mosul](#).

Civilians reported that the bombardment and gunfire were the heaviest since Feb. 19, the beginning of the operation to retake western Mosul. Zohra Bensemra/Reuters

The fighting, which included [recapturing most of the city's airport](#), has not been easy. It took Iraqi forces more than three months to gain control over eastern Mosul, and casualties there were heavy.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and the chief of staff of the country's armed forces toured the headquarters of the operations command responsible for the offensive, just outside Mosul, on Tuesday to "review the progress of security forces," according to a statement.

The Hurriya, or Freedom, Bridge is the second of five bridges to be retaken by government forces. American-led airstrikes damaged all five bridges last year in a bid to isolate the militants in Mosul.

Mosul fell to the Islamic State in June 2014, along with large parts of the country's north and west. It is the largest Iraqi population center still wholly or partly in the militant group's control.

Destruction from an airstrike in Mosul. Roughly a million people are trapped and living in desperate conditions there. Aris Messinis/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported on Tuesday that about 46,000 people had been displaced from their homes in Mosul since Feb. 19 — including 13,350 on Friday alone — in [the highest continuous displacement of civilians](#) since October.

"All people displaced from western Mosul have been accommodated either with family members or in camps or emergency sites, where they receive a tented plot, basic household supplies, hygiene kits and 30-day food rations," the United Nations office said. Camp construction and the installation of water and sanitation services are underway south of Mosul, the office added.

Since Feb. 19, the office said, more than 500 people have been treated for conflict-related wounds, including 15 people who were hospitalized in Erbil, a Kurdish-held city east of Mosul, for treatment after an apparent chemical-weapon attack.

Many in eastern Mosul lack drinking water, officials have warned, and many in the southern and western parts of the city are drinking untreated water, which could lead to the spread of diseases.

Iraqis Advance Deep Into Western Mosul

Tamer El-Ghobashy in

Erbil, Iraq, and Ghassan Adnan in Baghdad

March 7, 2017 1:42 p.m. ET

Iraqi forces on Tuesday seized major landmarks in western Mosul including the main government complex Islamic State had used as a command center, signaling that the militant group's sturdiest lines of defense in the city are crumbling, Iraqi military commanders said.

The commanders said the gains, which included a main bridge connecting both sides of the city and an archaeological museum containing venerated ancient artifacts, had brought about half of western Mosul under government control. [Iraqi troops reclaimed control of eastern Mosul](#) earlier this year.

The compound of recaptured administrative buildings—which includes police facilities and a branch of Iraq's central bank—marks the deepest incursion Iraqi troops have made into the heart of Mosul since the October launch of an offensive to drive Islamic State from the city. The western part of the city contains Mosul's most recognizable landmarks and its old city, while the eastern part is mostly residential.

Federal police secured the second of five damaged bridges over the Tigris River that connect western Mosul with the city's east. The river bisects Mosul, Iraq's second largest city and the last major urban area held in the country by Islamic State.

The militant group ransacked the archaeological museum in 2015, a move that prompted Iraqi officials to

call for urgent international intervention.

Militants once boasted about [taking sledgehammers to its ancient Assyrian sculptures and artifacts](#), calling them relics of idolatry. Those destructive acts—coupled with the bulldozing of parts of the historic Nimrud district, near Mosul—were labeled war crimes by the United Nations and alarmed Iraqis who said Islamic State was seeking to erase centuries of cultural identity.

The [offensive to oust Islamic State from western Mosul began last month](#). Police and counterterrorism forces have since pushed into the city center from the south. Fierce street-to-street battles have been marked by [waves of tens of thousands of fleeing civilians](#), often under fire from [militants who had been using them as human shields](#).

Islamic State resistance is expected to remain stiff as the fight enters older parts of the city, Iraqi commanders said, with narrower streets and densely-packed neighborhoods making it difficult to use armored vehicles.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, a spokesman for the coalition of Iraqi forces leading the battle, said troops had in recent days succeeded in punching holes in Islamic State's main defenses. These defenses have included strategically placed snipers backed by waves of suicide car bombs that the group has used to devastating effect throughout the campaign. Brig. Gen. Rasool said the car bombs have decreased as militants exhaust their resources. This allowed the rapid advance to the center of the city, he added.

Controlling the central Hurriya Bridge will be particularly important,

he said, as it will allow Iraqi forces to set up pontoon bridges and start assaulting remaining Islamic State strongholds from Mosul's eastern banks.

All five bridges were partially collapsed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes weeks before the Mosul

operation launched, a bid to stop the flow of militants and their supplies between the two sides of the city.

"This is of big value for our forces since it would provide them with more freedom in transportation from

one side to another," Brig. Gen. Rasool said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Tuesday visited Mosul airport, which was recaptured by his forces two weeks ago, wearing military fatigues as he met with commanders of the operation.

Promising fair trials, he urged Islamic State militants to surrender or be killed.

"There are no other options," he said.

Write to Tamer El-Ghobashy at tamer.el-ghobashy@wsj.com

The
Washington
Post

Iraqi forces capture west Mosul's main government buildings in pre-dawn raid

<https://www.facebook.com/lovedaymorris?fref=ts>

IRBIL, Iraq — Iraqi forces claimed to have recaptured Mosul's main government compound from the Islamic State on Tuesday, marking a strategic and symbolic advance into the northern city at the heart of the militant group's self-proclaimed caliphate.

In a surprise pre-dawn raid, elite police units seized the government buildings in the Bab al-Tob neighborhood of western Mosul, including a central square where the militants carried out public executions. Commanders said that they faced limited resistance and that the group's grip on the city is crumbling, although there were reports of intense counterattacks.

Mosul, home to more than a million people, is the last major city that the Islamic State controls in Iraq and the biggest population center it seized during a large-scale land grab in 2014. Tens of thousands of Iraqi forces have waged a bitter campaign since mid-October to retake the city, suffering heavy casualties as the militants have launched car bombings and other attacks.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

Updated March 7, 2017 8:25 p.m. ET

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia— Suspected militants linked to Islamic State were stopped just short of attacking Saudi royals during King Salman's recent trip here, Malaysian police said, dealing with a second high-profile plot after a hit squad allegedly led by North Koreans recently staged a brazen killing at the main airport.

"We got them in the nick of time," Inspector General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar said. Three teams of militants had planned attacks on the Saudis, he said, but he declined to

Please provide a valid email address.

The pace of the Iraqi advance has picked up in recent weeks after police forces led a push into the city's western side, but the human toll also is mounting as the fighting moves through densely populated neighborhoods. The government estimates that about 10,000 people are fleeing each day.

Airwars, a Britain-based organization that tracks allegations of civilian deaths in the fight against the Islamic State, said Tuesday that such casualties appear to have escalated this month, with hundreds reported killed in what it described as a "bloody harbinger."

And despite the gains for Iraqi forces, the battle is far from over. Around half of the western side of the city is still held by the militants, said Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, a spokesman for Iraq's joint operations command. That includes the packed and narrow streets of the old city. The [eastern half of Mosul](#) was recaptured earlier this year. The city is split into two by the Tigris River.

"Reaching here is a message to the people of Mosul that the enemy that used to suffocate them is officially finished," said Brig. Gen. Abbas al-Jubory, chief of staff of the Iraqi

police's emergency response division, which led the attack toward Bab al-Tob. He denied there had been any counterattack, but the Associated Press reported that troops had become cut off inside the compound after an initial rapid advance.

He compared retaking the square there, the backdrop to many Islamic State execution videos, to the Americans reaching Firdos Square during their 2003 invasion of Iraq, when a [towering statue of Saddam Hussein](#) was pulled down.

[\[ISIS dumped bodies in a sinkhole. It may be years before we know how many.\]](#)

Col. John L. Dorrian, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition in Baghdad, which has been closely supporting the fight with airstrikes and expertise, said retaking the Mosul government buildings provides Iraqi forces with a staging area to launch an assault on the old city. "Some of the streets are too narrow for vehicle traffic," he said. "That sets them up for a tough fight."

Islamic State militants have been blocking side streets with booby-trapped cars to "channel" the Iraqi advance in the direction of their choosing, Dorrian said. However, suicide car bombings have been

less ferocious than earlier in the offensive, he said. "They don't have many of the 'Mad Max'-style up-armored vehicles," he said.

Jamming equipment also has helped eliminate the threat of grenade-dropping drones, he said.

Although individual drone attacks had limited impact, the sheer number of them was waylaying forces. There were 73 Islamic State drone attacks on the first day of the offensive targeting the western side of the city, according to Lt. Gen. Sami al-Aridhi, a commander with Iraq's counterterrorism forces.

The government estimated that about 750,000 civilians remained in the western half of the city when the offensive began, with the militants preventing many from leaving their homes. Around 50,000 people have fled in the past two weeks, according to the United Nations, which says it is ill-equipped to support them.

People are arriving in camps with only the clothes they were wearing, said Wolfgang Gressmann, country director in Iraq for the Norwegian Refugee Council. "They are cold, exhausted and hungry — crying from either exhaustion or trauma or both," he said. "We fear what will happen as the wave continues."

Islamic State Plotted to Attack Saudi Royals During Malaysia Visit

Ben Otto and Yantoultra Ngui

give details of their alleged plans. One group comprised four Yemenis, another an Indonesian and a Malaysian, and a third a lone man from an unspecified East Asian nation.

Malaysia, without specifying the targets, said the plotters were arrested between Feb. 21 and 26. Police said two of the men were directed by Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi, a Malaysian who joined Islamic State in Syria in 2015, in preparing a car bomb. The Indonesian arrested had previously been deported to Turkey after trying to enter Syria, police said.

Police said the East Asian suspect, believed to have been living in

Malaysia on a student visa since 2011, had suspected links to a regional terrorist group that uses Malaysia as a transit point and safe haven.

The Saudi king has been leading an entourage of up to 1,500 people on a monthlong tour of Asia to strengthen ties with a region the kingdom sees as an increasingly valuable economic partner and as a hedge against an unpredictable U.S. government.

Malaysia was the first stop. The monarch traveled on to Indonesia and now is on a weeklong holiday on the resort island of Bali before heading to Japan, China and elsewhere.

A spokesman for Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs didn't respond to a request for comment on Tuesday.

The foiled plot against the delegation underscores Islamic State's ongoing campaign against the Saudi kingdom. The group has called for the downfall of the Saudi monarchy and, since the militant group's rise in 2014, its loyalists have carried out a score of small-scale attacks in the kingdom.

Islamic State sees Saudi royals as heretics and enemies in part because of their longstanding alliance with the U.S. and the West. The Sunni Muslim terror group has also sought to challenge the Saudi

monarch's role as guardian of Islam's holiest sites in Mecca and Medina.

In July, a suicide bomber killed four security guards near the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, an attack that bore the hallmarks of Islamic State. It was [one of three bombings](#) that struck the kingdom within hours of each other on the eve of the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

Saudi Arabia has confronted the threat of Islamic extremism before. Al Qaeda turned its wrath against the kingdom in the prior decade, a campaign that was effectively suppressed by Prince Mohammad bin Nayef, the current crown prince.

Prince Mohammed in 2009 narrowly escaped an

assassination attempt by an al Qaeda suicide bomber who was posing as a reformed jihadist. The prince was slightly injured.

The alleged plot revealed Tuesday added to a long list of terror plots with connections to Malaysia, a fast-developing Southeast Asian hub for business and transit that has tried to shake a reputation as a haven for terrorists and illicit activity.

In January 2000, Kuala Lumpur was site of an infamous planning meeting for the Sept. 11 attacks of 2001, with the Federal Bureau of Investigation later calling Malaysia "a primary operational launchpad."

Counterterrorism forces have feared that Islamic State will take root in the region, particularly among the

Muslim populations in Indonesia, Malaysia and the southern Philippines. In January 2016, four Indonesian militants with links to Islamic State [killed four people](#) in downtown Jakarta. It was the group's first attack in Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Muslim population.

Malaysia recently was the scene of terrorism of a different sort. On Feb. 13, a hit team killed Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half brother of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, by smearing his face with a lethal VX nerve agent while he was waited in a crowded airport departures hall. Police believe four North Korean suspects in the murder plot escaped to Pyongyang, while three others

are said to be in hiding at the North Korean Embassy.

Malaysia has since revoked visa-free travel for North Koreans and the two countries have expelled each other's ambassadors. Pyongyang is now preventing its Malaysian visitors from leaving North Korea, and Malaysia has imposed the same restrictions on its North Korean tourists.

—Margherita Stancati in Dubai contributed to this article.

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The
Washington
Post

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ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey has ordered Oregon-based Mercy Corps, one of the largest humanitarian organizations delivering aid to Syria, to immediately shut down its Turkish operations, ending a program that provides regular assistance to hundreds of thousands of besieged Syrian civilians and refugees.

"Our hearts are broken by this turn of events, which comes after five years of cooperation with the government of Turkey and other partners," spokeswoman Christine Bragale said in a statement early Wednesday morning Turkish time.

It was unclear whether other aid organizations have been similarly affected, and Turkish government officials could not immediately be reached for comment. Bragale said that no specific reason had been given and that "we continue to seek a dialogue with Turkish authorities" and "remain hopeful that the government of Turkey will allow us to return to serve those in critical need."

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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Turkey has admitted more than [3 million refugees](#) fleeing violence in Syria, and towns and cities along

its southern border have been a hub for sending humanitarian supplies into the war-torn country.

Mark Toner, acting State Department spokesman, said it was aware of the situation with [Mercy Corps](#), which he called a "valuable partner" in delivering humanitarian assistance to needy Syrian refugees. "We have informed the government of Turkey of our concerns regarding Mercy Corps' closure and the impact it will have on their ability to provide critical humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations," he said.

Mercy Corps' expulsion is likely to increase growing tension along Syria's northwest border, where the myriad military forces involved in a civil war and the separate fight against the Islamic State have converged in pursuit of conflicting objectives.

[\[U.S. military aid is fueling big ambitions for Syria's leftist Kurdish militia\]](#)

Turkish forces, along with Syrian rebel allies, crossed the border last fall to clear part of the area of Islamic State fighters. The larger Turkish goal has been to prevent [U.S.-backed Syrian Kurds](#), whom Turkey considers terrorists, from expanding their control over the border region.

Turkey has said it wants to create a safe zone inside Syria along the border, 60 miles long and about 28 miles deep. But that area would include the town of Manbij, taken from the Islamic State last summer,

with U.S. assistance, by the joint Kurdish and Arab Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF.

The U.S. military hopes to use the SDF, bolstered with recruits, to capture the city of Raqqa, the [Islamic State's Syrian capital](#), in an offensive planned for this year. Turkey has objected, and its force is headed toward Manbij. To head them off, Russian and Syrian government troops have moved into villages west of the town, and U.S. Special Forces [arrived in Manbij](#) last weekend.

The growing controversy brought together the top military officials from Turkey, the United States and Russia on Tuesday in the Turkish city of Antalya, a new step in exploring how military operations by the three countries will occur in increasingly tight quarters in Syria.

The meeting between Marine Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Russian Gen. Valery Gerasimov; and Turkish Gen. Hulusi Akar was at Turkey's invitation.

It marked the second meeting in a month between Dunford and Gerasimov, as senior U.S. military officials have called for increased talks to "deconflict" operations in Syria and make sure there are no collisions between U.S. and Russian aircraft.

[\[Pentagon plan to seize Raqqa calls for significant increase in U.S. participation\]](#)

Under a framework established in 2015, a U.S. colonel in Qatar and a

Russian counterpart in Syria discuss the locations of operations their countries are carrying out in Syria without sharing intelligence. Russia has pushed to expand collaboration in Syria, something that President Trump has said he would favor in the fight against the Islamic State.

Even as they vie for Turkey's support, both the United States and Russia have [cooperated with](#) the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units, or YPG. Turkey has labeled the YPG an affiliate of the separatist Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party, which Washington and Moscow have designated a terrorist group.

In a statement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said the three generals gathered to discuss "regional security matters in Syria and Iraq, specifically the current situation of the fight against all terrorist organizations in Syria, with an effort to wage a more effective fight against all terrorist organizations in the future and the importance of additional measures for de-conflicting operations."

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim told a news conference that more coordination among the three is needed.

Carol Morello in Washington and Liz Sly in Beirut contributed to this report.

The
New York
Times

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Editorial : Mr. Erdogan's Jaw-Dropping Hypocrisy

The Editorial

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey speaking in Istanbul on Sunday. Ozan Kose/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Turkey's president, [Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#), has gall. He has jailed tens of thousands of people, shuttered more than 150 media

companies and called a referendum in April to enlarge his powers. Yet when local authorities in [Germany](#), for security reasons, barred two

Turkish ministers from campaigning on his behalf among Turks living in Germany, Mr. Erdogan exploded, accusing Germany of Nazi practices and knowing nothing about democracy. If he himself was barred from speaking in the country, [he warned](#), he'd "set the world on fire."

This is all the more galling knowing that among the scores of journalists jailed in Turkey is a reporter for Die Welt, with German and Turkish citizenship, whom Mr. Erdogan has accused of being a German spy and a "representative" of an outlawed Kurdish rebel group. Some furious German politicians have urged Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) to tell Mr. Erdogan that he

is not welcome in Germany. Properly, and wisely, she has not. Appearances by leading Turkish politicians, [she said](#), "remain possible within the laws applicable here." Permits for demonstrations are handled locally, though, and Ms. Merkel said she has no say in them.

Ms. Merkel does have security reasons for her restraint: Germany uses a NATO base in Turkey for reconnaissance aircraft in the fight against the Islamic State, and Ms. Merkel was the key force behind a [European Union](#) deal with Ankara by which Turkey helps stem the flow of refugees into Europe. But more important, Germany does not want to stoop to Mr. Erdogan's level.

Though Germany is arguably among the most law-abiding and tolerant of the European democracies, the Germans must regularly contend with reminders of their Nazi past, especially by countries like Greece, Poland or Hungary that find themselves on the receiving end of European Union admonishment or censure. For the leader of a major nation and NATO ally to hurl such insults, however, especially when Mr. Erdogan himself has done so much to subvert freedom of speech and the rule of law in Turkey, is outrageous.

The estimated 1.5 million Turks in Germany eligible to vote in the Turkish referendum are obviously of

major interest to Mr. Erdogan. The fact that Germany provides so many Turks with a livelihood argues against Mr. Erdogan's accusations, while barring his surrogates from campaigning among them, as local authorities did, only gives him fodder.

The better response is to continuously remind Mr. Erdogan, his surrogates and his people that the freedoms so many Turks find in Germany are being systematically and shamelessly destroyed in Turkey.

**The
New York
Times**

New Israel Law Bars Foreign Critics From Entering the Country

Laurie Goodstein

A banner calling for the boycott, divestment and sanctioning of Israel hanging from the Manhattan Bridge in New York during a protest against Israel's military campaign in Gaza in 2014. Michael Appleton for The New York Times

[Israel's](#) Parliament has struck back at the international boycott movement against the country and its settlements in the West Bank by passing a law barring entry to foreigners who have publicly supported the movement.

The measure, passed on Monday night, received little notice in [Israel](#), but by Tuesday it set off alarms in the United States, where Israel's critics and some of its most loyal Jewish supporters alike warned that it would further isolate the country.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest Jewish movement in North America, said in a telephone interview from Jerusalem: "It's going to be a giant sign up by the door of the Jewish state: 'Don't come unless you agree with everything we're doing here.' I don't know what kind of democracy makes that statement."

The vote came as the Israeli government's right flank has been emboldened by the election of President Trump and his [warm welcome](#) in Washington last month of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The bill passed the

Parliament, or Knesset, 46 to 28, with proponents calling it a common-sense measure to exclude "haters," and opponents warning that it would backfire and encourage further boycotts.

With hopes for a two-state solution between Israel and the [Palestinians](#) vastly diminished, Palestinians and their supporters have been advocating a strategy called [B.D.S.](#): boycott, divestment and sanctions. The movement has been most active in Europe and the United States, and supporters have compared it to the campaign against apartheid in South Africa — an analogy fiercely disputed by defenders of Israel.

Academic groups, artists, churches and companies from many countries are boycotting or divesting from Israel, or from the occupied territories in the West Bank. The Israeli government and other critics say the boycott movement is anti-Semitic and aims to undermine Israel's right to exist.

Bezalel Smotrich, a member of the Knesset who is a co-sponsor of the bill to bar entry to boycott supporters, said: "We will now stop turning the other cheek. Preventing B.D.S. supporters who come here to hurt us from the inside is the very least we should be doing against haters of Israel."

Dov Hanin, who voted against the legislation, said that at a time when boycotts against settlements are being promoted around the world,

the law "is really a law to boycott the world."

"A country that boycotts the world is basically isolating and boycotting itself," he continued.

Israel has already turned away some travelers for political reasons. Last December, Isabel Phiri, a theologian and an assistant general secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, was [refused entry](#) after landing in Tel Aviv with a tourist visa. Last July, [five Americans on a fact-finding trip](#) were detained, questioned and deported, with Israeli officials citing security reasons.

And in February, an American executive with the New Israel Fund, a liberal group, was [detained and interrogated](#) at the Tel Aviv airport by an interviewer holding a document that said "BDS." The fund does not support the movement.

The new law says it applies to any foreigner "who knowingly issues a public call for boycotting Israel" and is aware that this "has a reasonable possibility of leading to the imposition of a boycott."

Eytan Fuld, a spokesman for Mr. Smotrich, said there was no "blacklist" of individuals. He said the law would apply to "known organizations" and their "main activists."

Some American Jewish leaders were alarmed that the new law makes no distinction between groups that support boycotts of

Israel proper and those that support boycotting products made in the settlements in the occupied West Bank.

"It's redefining as an enemy of Israel anyone who does not agree that the settlements are now and forever will be part of Israel," said Lara Friedman, the director of policy and government relations for Americans for Peace Now. "That's going to be problematic for a lot of American Jews who care about Israel. It's just heartbreaking."

Rabbi Jacobs said the law would deter the kinds of people he often brings to Israel, those who have questions about its policies and should see the country for themselves.

The Reform Jewish movement opposes the expansion of settlements, but is strongly opposed to the B.D.S. movement, and has [tried to dissuade several American church groups](#) from passing divestment resolutions.

"If it's perceived that Israel doesn't want to engage in serious debates with diaspora Jews," he said, "I think that really is a weakening of our relationship."

But Naftali Bennett, the leader of the right-wing Jewish Home party and Israel's education minister, said the new law was "logical and expected" and will allow Israel to defend itself against those "who wish it harm."

**The
New York
Times**

For Trump and Netanyahu, a Budding Symbiotic Relationship

Mark Landler

WASHINGTON — Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) of [Israel](#) was sitting in his residence in Jerusalem on Monday, being questioned by the police in a murky bribery and fraud investigation that could put an

end to his political career, when the telephone rang.

On the line was President Trump, who wanted to talk to Mr. Netanyahu about Iran and a few other matters.

The prime minister excused himself for several minutes to take the call, and later issued a statement in which he thanked Mr. Trump "for his warm hospitality during his recent visit to Washington and expressed his appreciation for the president's

strong statement against anti-Semitism during the president's speech before Congress."

It was the latest example of what has become a budding political symbiosis between the two men. The Israeli leader's praise for Mr.

Trump's stand against anti-Semitism helped inoculate the president from charges that he had not responded swiftly enough to a skein of threats against Jewish community centers and the vandalism of Jewish cemeteries.

And Mr. Trump's conveniently timed call was a not-so-subtle reminder to Israel's attorney general that indicting Mr. Netanyahu — a step that would precipitate his resignation as a prime minister — could harm Israel's national security at a dangerous time.

Mr. Netanyahu has survived past inquiries into his personal trips and home expenses without charges, and he has steadfastly denied wrongdoing in this case. But political analysts say this is the most serious legal challenge he has faced in his long political career — one that comes just as he has made a powerful new friend in the White House.

"It appears that President Trump is prepared to go a long way to help Prime Minister Netanyahu with his domestic difficulties and that Netanyahu, in return, is willing to provide a kosher seal of approval for a president who was slow to condemn anti-Semitism," said Martin S. Indyk, who served as a special envoy to the Middle East in the Obama administration.

American and Israeli officials insist they did not coordinate Mr. Trump's call for political effect. White House officials said Mr. Trump told aides on Monday

morning he wanted to speak to Mr. Netanyahu; the two sides spent a few hours setting up the call, which just happened to occur during the interrogation.

But the president helped Mr. Netanyahu in another way a few weeks earlier. On the eve of their first visit, the White House told reporters that the president would be open to a peace accord between the Israelis and the [Palestinians](#) that did not involve the creation of a Palestinian state.

That statement, which broke with decades of American policy in favor of a "two-state solution," was a political gift to Mr. Netanyahu. He was under intense pressure from right-wing members of his coalition not to utter the phrase "two-state solution" during his trip to Washington, nor to have the new president formally embrace the policy.

When Mr. Trump was asked during a news conference with Mr. Netanyahu whether he favored a one-state or two-state solution, he replied: "I like the one that both parties like. I'm very happy with the one that both parties like. I can live with either one."

When Mr. Netanyahu was asked his opinion, he referred approvingly to the briefing by the White House before he arrived.

"I read yesterday that an American official said that if you ask five people what two states would look like, you'd get eight different

answers," he said. "Mr. President, if you ask five Israelis, you'd get 12 different answers. But rather than deal with labels, I want to deal with substance."

The next day, speaking at the United Nations, the American ambassador, Nikki R. Haley, said that, in fact, the United States still "absolutely" supported the two-state solution. For Mr. Netanyahu, that hardly mattered; back home, his trip was widely hailed as a success.

Experts on the Israeli-American relationship said the choreography bore the imprint of Israel's ambassador to the United States, Ron Dermer, and Mr. Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who is taking a leading role in Middle East policy for the administration. The two speak regularly and were instrumental in setting up the visit.

American and Israeli leaders have played in each other's politics for a long time. In 1996, President Bill Clinton gave Prime Minister Shimon Peres a ride on [Air Force One](#) during Israel's closely fought election campaign. A week before the election, Mr. Clinton urged Israelis to vote for peace — that is, for Mr. Peres. His opponent in that election was Mr. Netanyahu.

In 2012, Mr. Netanyahu welcomed Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential nominee, to Israel — all but endorsing him in his campaign against former President Barack Obama. Mr. Netanyahu's relationship with Mr. Obama had been toxic for years because of

disputes over the Iran nuclear deal and the Israeli government's settlement building in the West Bank.

It is that relationship to which Mr. Trump and Mr. Netanyahu are eager to draw a contrast. There is no question the two are closer on key issues, not least the nuclear deal, which they both stridently condemn, although it is not clear either wants to rip it up immediately.

In its statement, Mr. Netanyahu's office said, "The two leaders spoke at length about the dangers posed by the nuclear deal with Iran and by Iran's malevolent behavior in the region and about the need to work together to counter those dangers." The White House said only that the two leaders had "discussed the need to counter continuing threats and challenges facing the Middle East region," though it took note of Mr. Netanyahu's gratitude for Mr. Trump's statements against anti-Semitic acts.

So far, experts said, Mr. Netanyahu had benefited more from the relationship than Mr. Trump.

"Solving today's problems probably helps Bibi more than Trump in the short term," said Daniel C. Kurtzer, a former American ambassador to Israel and Egypt, using Mr. Netanyahu's nickname. "But in the larger picture of how Israel is viewed in Washington, it probably helps Trump as well."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Are U.S., China Headed for 'Hot War' on Trade?

Andrew Browne

Updated March 7, 2017 9:22 a.m. ET

SHANGHAI—China's stunning advance as an industrial power has no historical precedent: Its share of global manufacturing rocketed from 3% in 1990 to around one-quarter today. The disruptive shock helped deliver Donald Trump to the Oval Office on a barrage of protectionism rhetoric.

The question now is whether it will splinter the U.S.-led global trading system.

Mr. Trump's threatened tariffs have failed to materialize. Nor has he declared China a currency manipulator, another campaign pledge.

Still, global markets may be underestimating both the antitrade forces gathering in the White House, and the hardening of Chinese mercantilism.

On Sunday, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang warned in his annual "work report" to the National People's Congress that "the deglobalization trend and protectionism are growing." Yet, he offered little new thinking from Beijing on a way forward.

Market reforms are on hold ahead of a key Communist party gathering at the end of the year that President Xi Jinping hopes will crown his power. To serve that purpose, state aggrandizement remains the overarching goal of economic policy-making.

That means growth is China's priority. Beijing is doubling down on a zero-sum strategy that has flooded global markets with surplus steel, aluminum, cargo ships, paper and glass.

The stage is set for a titanic tug of war over trade that clouds the future of the World Trade Organization itself.

The trade hawks in Mr. Trump's administration are seized with a common conviction: that China's 2001 entry into the global trading body was a catastrophe for the U.S. economy.

In their telling of the story, China cheated its way into U.S. markets under WTO cover, laying waste to American jobs and prosperity as its bilateral trade surplus exploded by 300%.

Peter Navarro, the White House industry guru and a former economics professor, has called this "one of the great obscenities in global economic history." In a speech on Monday he raised the specter of a "cold war" and even a "hot war" against an unnamed power buying up "our companies, our technologies, our farmland and our food supply chain, and ultimately controlling much of our defense-industrial base."

Mr. Navarro and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross claimed in a paper last year that eliminating the

\$500 billion U.S. trade deficit—the bulk of it with China—would add to growth, create millions of jobs and generate trillions of dollars in revenue to pay for tax cuts. A dollar saved on trade is a dollar gained in GDP, they argued.

Many orthodox economists deride this theory. Larry Summers, the former U.S. Treasury secretary, called it "voodoo economics." There is no consensus on whether trade deficits are good or bad (they tend to swell when the U.S. economy is doing well, and shrink when it's ailing). And the theory glosses over other challenges to U.S. factory jobs, like the self-inflicted financial crisis of 2008 and the march of automation.

Besides, U.S. manufacturing output is at, or close to, record levels.

Yet China has brought on this fight. Its wholesale theft of intellectual property, requirements forcing foreign investors to disgorge their technology, and a digital "Great Firewall" that blocks most of the

world's top internet sites, have provided ample ammunition to White House trade warriors. The latest survey by the American Chamber of Commerce in China showed that more than 80% of its members felt less welcome in the country.

Meanwhile, armed with a half-trillion-dollar war chest, China is shopping for U.S. and European tech companies to build advanced manufacturing capabilities that it will foster in its own protected markets—and then unleash on open economies in the West.

China is rightly worried about a U.S. response. "I'm seriously preparing for a trade war,"

a former commerce minister, Chen Deming, told reporters in Beijing this week, according to a Bloomberg report.

Last week, the Trump administration opened hostilities in a policy paper that threatened to bypass the WTO in handling disputes, a dramatic departure that, if implemented, would risk triggering a global free-for-all and undermining much of the organization's raison d'être.

Trade has traditionally supplied the ballast to U.S.-China ties, now at their lowest point in decades. Without a comprehensive settlement, the relationship could run aground. That would strike at

both Mr. Xi's "China Dream" of national rejuvenation and Mr. Trump's campaign to "Make America Great Again." Nobody wins in a trade war.

To the dismay of Asian governments fearful of conflict between the world's two largest economies, Mr. Trump has ditched the most promising framework for a grand bargain—the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which covers some of the touchiest areas of U.S.-China trade such as the role of state enterprises, intellectual property and labor standards.

China was never included in that arrangement, although it didn't rule out membership. Beijing is now

rushing to fill the vacuum by promoting its own, lower-quality trade agreement with its neighbors.

Charlene Barshefsky, the former U.S. trade representative who negotiated China's entry into the WTO, argued at recent public forum that TPP "should be fixed, not jettisoned."

She added: "Miscalculation is too costly for both sides—and the world."

Write to Andrew Browne at andrew.browne@wsj.com



The Christian Science Monitor

Editorial : China's source of creative growth

March 7, 2017 —China's premier, Li Keqiang, offered a simple solution this week for his country's biggest problem, which is that the world's second-largest economy is growing at its lowest rate in a quarter century. The solution, said Mr. Li, is to boost innovation among its large pool of scientists and engineers.

"Having reached the current stage of development, China can now advance only through reform and innovation," he told the National People's Congress on Sunday. He compared the economy to a butterfly trying to break out of a cocoon. And indeed, China is experiencing its lowest growth in

funding of research and development since 1998.

Yet despite the premier's call for scientific breakthroughs to stimulate Chinese industries, it is not clear if the government has much faith in the creativity of the country's researchers. An official plan called "Made in China 2025" sets out an industrial strategy that appears to call for attaining even more technology from advanced economies. Last year, for example, Chinese firms invested heavily in European companies, up by 77 percent from the year before and more than four times the flow of investments by European companies in China.

Despite the economic slowdown, China remains the world's largest manufacturer. Yet it faces more competition from countries with lower wages. In 2015, India surpassed China for the first time in foreign investment. And foreign firms have grown cautious about investing in China because of widespread theft of intellectual property.

The ruling Communist Party feels pressure to create jobs, which may explain why its leaders are impatient toward a quick boost in Chinese export industries, preferring to continue the practice of buying up foreign firms and technology. Yet there is an alternative, as the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China

states in a recent report: "Ultimately, perfecting the market would do far more to ensure that China reaches its full potential for economic development and innovation than more old-school, expensive industrial planning ever could."

China needs to allow more freedom of thought for researchers to come up with new ideas for industries. Creativity "is not a stock of things that can be depleted or worn out, but an infinitely renewable resource that can be constantly improved," notes a report called the Global Creativity Index by a group of international scholars.

The simplest solution to China's slowdown is to have more faith in the innovation of its people.



David E. Sanger, Choe Sang-Hun, Chris Buckley and Michael R. Gordon

North Korea Tensions Pose Early, and Perilous, Test for Trump

When the United States began deploying a [missile defense system](#) in [South Korea](#) this week, it was to protect an ally long threatened by North Korean provocations. But it was instantly met by angry Chinese warnings that the United States is setting off a new arms race in a region already on edge over the North's drive to build a nuclear arsenal.

[China](#) condemned the new antimissile system as a dangerous opening move in what it called America's grand strategy to set up similar defenses across Asia, threatening to tilt the balance of power there against Beijing.

The tensions are testing the new Trump administration and its uneasy allies South Korea and Japan, which have complained for years that China has simultaneously

chastised and coddled the North, refusing to enact stiff enough measures to force it to abandon its nuclear and missile programs.

But with the beginning of work to install the antimissile system, the delicate international cooperation against [North Korea](#) is splintering: Beijing is expressing more concern about American intentions in the region than about the dangers of the North's latest surge in nuclear and missile testing.

The dual approach seemed evident on Wednesday when China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, said, "The two sides are like two accelerating trains coming toward each other, and neither side is willing to give way."

"Our priority now is to flash the red light and apply brakes," Mr. Wang said at a news conference in Beijing. He said that North Korea should suspend its nuclear and missile activities and that in exchange, South Korea and the

United States should suspend large-scale joint military exercises, laying the way to new negotiations with North Korea.

President Trump got personally engaged in the problem on Monday night, after North Korea [launched four ballistic missiles](#), aimed toward Japan, that the North Koreans later described as practice for hitting American bases there.

Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, said he spoke with Mr. Trump for 25 minutes, adding, "I appreciate that the United States is showing that all the options are on the table," usually code words for raising the possibility of a military response.

To conservatives in South Korea's crisis-racked government, the antimissile system is exactly the kind of strong action needed to counter the North's belligerence and demonstrate unity with Mr. Trump, who had suggested during the campaign that Asian nations

needed to do far more to defend themselves.

But South Korea remains deeply divided about the one response already underway: the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System, or Thaad. It is designed to intercept short- and medium-range missiles, but not the kind of intercontinental missiles that the North says it is developing to reach the United States.

Many South Koreans oppose it and worry about China's moves to block South Korean imports because of Beijing's continued insistence that Thaad is aimed at containing Chinese power, not the missile capabilities of Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader.

Japan is urging stronger American action, but remains uncertain about how much it wants to commit when a conflict with the North — deliberate or accidental — once again looks like a real possibility.

The combination of military and diplomatic tensions suddenly unleashed in Asia comes before Mr. Trump's full national security team is in place, and before it has a well-thought-out strategy.

Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, who will travel to the region next week — stopping in Tokyo; Seoul, South Korea; and Beijing — has never dealt with a proliferation problem like this one. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has [already been to Seoul](#) on one visit, but was there mostly to reassure the country that, despite Mr. Trump's statements last year, the United States remains committed to its defense.

The new national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, has focused more on counterinsurgency than dealing with the peculiar problem of a nuclear-armed failing state.

In three meetings at the White House — more than on any other foreign policy problem — the National Security Council deputies have considered a range of options, and have already come to the predictable conclusion that a dramatic show of force, like attacks on the North's missile and nuclear sites, would probably start a war.

[The New York Times reported this weekend](#) that the Obama administration had created a cyber- and electronic-warfare program to slow the North's missile tests, but that it was unclear how effective it had been, particularly in recent months.

The North Koreans have made the most of this period of uncertainty and transition. Their sped-up testing seems intended to send a message that they can overwhelm antimissile defenses, deploying missiles faster than the United States and its allies can put countermeasures in place.

And they hold an ace card: an ability to destroy Seoul with artillery buried in the mountains just north of the Demilitarized Zone, a remnant of the Korean War.

Equipment for a missile defense system arriving at an air base in South Korea on Monday. U.S. Forces Korea, via Associated Press

In the North's view, the American rush to put missile defenses around it only splits the global community, pushing China and Russia closer to Pyongyang, as American officials acknowledge when speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Mr. Tillerson is focused on ways to pressure China, while trying to set up a first meeting between President Xi Jinping and Mr. Trump. But the two nations' leaders are conducting a balancing act. Mr. Xi's is the hardest, trying to weigh his opposition to North Korea's nuclear program against his conviction that a North Korean collapse would be far worse.

The Trump administration is measuring how hard it can press Beijing. It is mulling negotiations to "freeze" the North's nuclear arsenal, but that would also acknowledge it as a fact.

"You may not want to acknowledge that North Korea has 12 or 20 weapons," said Robert Litwak of the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, the author of the new study ["Preventing North Korea's Nuclear Breakout,"](#) "but wouldn't a freeze be better than looking at 100 weapons a few years from now?"

That is exactly the debate taking place in the White House, as Mr. Trump's aides try to figure out their alternatives, including changing the security landscape with a major military buildup or, if needed, an open conflict with North Korea.

The current, slow-burning crisis arose not from one episode, but from Mr. Kim's broader strategy over the past year: to accelerate the pace of nuclear and missile tests so his arsenal becomes a fait accompli, something the United States cannot hope to reverse.

When North Korea launched four Scud-ER ballistic missiles on Monday, it tried to demonstrate an ability to simultaneously launch

multiple missiles at American bases in Japan and at American aircraft carriers around the Korean Peninsula, South Korean military officials said Tuesday.

The ability to launch a barrage of missiles increases the chances of breaching an antimissile shield. But the types of midrange missiles North Korea has launched in recent months — including the Scud-ERs, with a 620-mile range — pose another problem for South Korea. Some of the missiles have been launched at a steep angle to achieve a higher altitude and return to earth at high speed, techniques that appear intended to complicate intercepting them.

American military officials said the recent tests were a particular concern because they illustrated Pyongyang's ability to carry out a salvo of launches and on very short notice.

"What we saw this weekend was demonstration of a near-term simultaneous launch," said Vice Adm. James D. Syring, the director of the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency. "That is something beyond what we have seen in the past."

For Washington and Seoul, the rush to field Thaad is as much about politics as missile interception. American officials have repeatedly warned China that its failure to rein in North Korea's nuclear and missile programs would force the United States to deploy missile defenses in the region.

Seoul's interim government wants to deploy the antimissile system before a progressive leader, skeptical of the deployment, can take power in a coming presidential election.

But progressives have held deep reservations about the Thaad deployment, seeing it as part of the United States' effort to wrap the South into an anti-China coalition and arms race. They have already mounted a case against it.

On Tuesday, Woo Sang-ho, the floor leader of the main opposition Democratic Party, warned, "Our

business are dying; our people residing in China are being threatened."

Hong Ik-pyo, a senior policy maker in the opposition, said the Thaad deployment would do more harm than good for South Korea, whose economy depends on exports for growth and reaps a huge annual trade surplus with China.

"They say this is only to defend us from North Korea, but everyone knows this is part of the American missile defense plan," Mr. Hong said. "China sees the Thaad deployment in South Korea the way the Americans saw the [Cuban missile crisis](#) in the 1960s."

The Chinese government said Tuesday that it continued to oppose the deployment of Thaad.

Chinese leaders have struggled to grapple with the unpredictable styles of Mr. Kim and Mr. Trump. Now there are fears that the North might take advantage of the political discord to move ahead with its [nuclear weapons](#) program.

"They have seized this opportunity, knowing that U.S. and China are clashing," said Cheng Xiaohu, an associate professor of international studies at Renmin University in Beijing.

In recent weeks, China has [shown signs of toughening its stance](#) on North Korea, including [banning imports of coal](#) from the North. Criticism of the North has also sharpened. On Tuesday, a state-run newspaper warned that North Korea should give up its weapons or "face long-lasting isolation and pressure."

Yet policy makers in Beijing failed to grasp how Washington and its allies regarded North Korea's nuclear program as getting closer to a dangerous threshold of being able to place a warhead on an intercontinental ballistic missile, said Paul Haenle, the director of the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

"That's a game-changer," he added.



Editorial : Rising Tensions With North Korea

The Editorial Board

AJ Dungo

The world has been wondering where President Trump will face his first national security crisis. This week it has looked as if [North Korea](#) might be the first hot spot. A series of ballistic missile tests and other provocative actions by North Korea, a nuclear-capable country, have heightened regional anxieties and

stirred speculation about America's reaction.

The [most recent tests](#) involved the simultaneous launch on Monday of four missiles, which landed off Japan's coast. The North Koreans have described the tests as drills for striking American bases in Japan, but the ultimate goal is assumed to be a strike on the United States. Some experts expect Pyongyang to

have that capability within four years.

This use of multiple missiles raised concerns that the North was trying out a new attack strategy that could overwhelm Japan's limited defenses, analysts said. The tests almost certainly were a reaction to annual United States-South Korea [military exercises](#), which began last week and which the North considers a threat. It is just three weeks since

the North crossed another milestone by launching a solid-rocket missile, which is more efficient than the liquid-fueled missiles it had previously relied on; there were also tests in August and September.

North Korea now possesses the fissile material for perhaps 21 [nuclear weapons](#) and is steadily improving its ability to deliver them with missiles. The country also has

chemical weapons, which may have been used when the half brother of North Korea's dictator, [Kim Jong-un](#), was assassinated in Malaysia last month. Malaysia has accused several North Korean citizens of using VX nerve agent to kill him, which seems plausible and underscores the lengths to which Mr. Kim is willing to go to eliminate perceived rivals.

Adding to the tension is a decision to install an American-made [antimissile system](#) in South Korea. Although the system has been under discussion for some time, the two countries have expedited its

deployment, which began on Monday and is expected to take two months.

The move angered North Korea and [China](#), the North's main food and fuel supplier, which said it could lead to a break in relations with South Korea and force an arms race.

The Obama administration had long warned China that the United States and South Korea would have no choice but to deploy the antimissile system if China didn't pressure North Korea to end its nuclear program. Beijing seemed not to take the warning seriously, although it

[recently restricted](#) imports of North Korean coal.

How Mr. Trump intends to handle this brewing crisis is unclear, but he has shown an inclination to respond aggressively. On Monday, the White House [denounced the missile tests](#) and warned of "very dire consequences."

One possibility is intensifying the cyber and electronic warfare effort against North Korea undertaken by the Obama administration and first [reported by The Times](#) on Sunday. Other options include some kind of military action, presumably against missile launch sites, and continuing

to press China to cut off support. The Trump administration has also discussed reintroducing [nuclear weapons](#) into South Korea, an extremely dangerous idea.

Granted, negotiating with the North Koreans has long proved frustrating. But the Obama and Bush administrations got nowhere by further isolating the already-reclusive nation. At this point, only a new round of engagement aimed at getting North Korea to freeze its nuclear and missile programs, and tougher sanctions to back that up, holds any reasonable promise of working.



China's anger over U.S. antimissile system poses challenge to Trump

<https://www.facebook.com/emilyrahulaha?fref=ts>

Korea into the Sea of Japan. Watch: THAAD system arrives in South Korea (Youtube/Osan AirBase)

(Youtube/Osan AirBase)

"All consequences entailed from this will be borne by the U.S. and the Republic of Korea."

Geng did not provide details on what "consequences" are in store for either country, although South Korean officials said they expected retaliatory moves against companies doing business in China.

The stepped-up tensions in East Asia create a potentially difficult and multipronged problem for the United States, involving: South Korea, in the midst of internal political turmoil; North Korea, often unpredictable; Japan, a steadfast U.S. ally with a weak economy and an ambition to expand its military footprint; and China, far and away the most powerful country in the region, both a U.S. rival and a key trading partner.

At the same time, a diplomatic battle between North Korea and Malaysia after the assassination of Kim Jong Un's half brother in Kuala Lumpur [escalated sharply](#) Tuesday as Pyongyang banned all Malaysians from leaving its territory, prompting the Malaysian government to accuse it of hostage taking.

Malaysia retaliated by banning all North Koreans from exiting its borders and warning the Kim regime that it was inviting further international opprobrium. China was angered by the Feb. 13 murder, which the Malaysians say employed VX nerve agent, and some analysts suggest the North Korean missile launch was secondarily designed to provoke Beijing.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Mark Toner reiterated U.S. criticism of North Korea and the missile launches. "They're

increasingly becoming a pariah through this kind of behavior," he said. "We're pursuing tougher and tougher sanctions, but we're also looking at other means to make that message clear to them."

China's Foreign Ministry did not specify any actions against the United States on Tuesday, but Beijing's displeasure over the antimissile system marked an abrupt change in tone after a generally cautious approach until now toward the new American president.

Although some Chinese initially welcomed the idea of Donald Trump's presidency, convinced a seasoned businessman would take a practical approach to politics, Trump's early moves on Taiwan [spooked Beijing](#).

Since the inauguration, Chinese officials have taken a careful approach, playing up the positive and playing down areas of disagreement, including Trump administration comments on the South China Sea. That is, until Geng's statement on Tuesday.

Plans to deploy the THAAD system, which predates the Trump presidency, have long been a source of tension between Seoul and Beijing.

In the run-up to the deployment, China has taken aim at South Korean businesses in China. Beginning on Friday, it has been warning would-be Chinese tourists against booking trips to South Korea.

[\[U.S. military deploys advanced defensive missile system to South Korea\]](#)

Although some travel agencies have already stopped selling tickets and tours to South Korea, China's National Tourism Administration has officially ordered travel agencies to stop all tour groups and cruise ships

by March 15, the South Korean official said.

The new measures would also shut down duty-free shops run by Lotte, the South Korean conglomerate that helped Seoul secure land for THAAD, according to the South Korean official.

A representative of China's Tourism Administration said by phone that the agency has indeed advised travel agencies not to sell South Korea tours or tickets.

The South Korean official and the Chinese tourism representative spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to give information to the news media.

Three large Chinese travel agencies confirmed the order from the Tourism Administration. Two said they have already stopped selling packages; the other said it would stop selling by March 15.

After Lotte helped the South Korean government secure land for THAAD, it was denounced and threatened in China's Communist Party-controlled press. Nearly two dozen of the company's retail outlets were subsequently shut down by Chinese authorities for alleged safety violations.

[\[North Korea says it was practicing to hit U.S. military bases in Japan with missiles\]](#)

China recently rejected applications by Korean airlines to add charter flights on popular tourists routes, a move interpreted in South Korea as a [warning](#) on the missile system.

There have also been scattered efforts to implement a pop-culture blockade, with South Korean television programs pulled from Chinese websites, calls for boycotts of South Korean cosmetics and canceled K-Pop (Korean pop) shows.

BEIJING — China warned Tuesday of "consequences" for South Korea and the United States over the deployment of a U.S. antimissile system, further raising regional tension and posing a challenge to the Trump administration.

The stern words came a day after North Korea launched four missiles that landed off the Japanese coast — an exercise, the North Korean government said, designed to practice for [an attack on U.S. military bases](#) in Japan.

American and South Korean officials say the continuing missile launches by the North Koreans demonstrate why the new antimissile system is necessary as a defense against Kim Jong Un's regime. The U.S. military began [deploying](#) the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to South Korea on Monday.

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But Beijing [sees the system](#) as a threat to the Chinese military and evidence of U.S. "meddling" in East Asian affairs.

"I want to emphasize that we firmly oppose the deployment of THAAD," Geng Shuang, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, said Tuesday at a daily news briefing in Beijing. "We will resolutely take necessary measures to defend our security interests.

A U.S. military video shows the arrival of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense units to South Korea on Mar. 6. The units are designed to shoot down ballistic missiles like the ones recently launched by North

Politically motivated attacks on foreign business are strikingly at odds with China's recent calls to protect globalization and free trade, most notably President Xi Jinping's [keynote speech](#) at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

On Monday, South Korea said it was considering filing a World Trade Organization case against

China, according to the [local news media](#).

Joo Hyung-hwan, South Korea's trade minister, said Seoul would "seek international action against possible violations of the World Trade Organization and the Seoul-Beijing free trade agreement."

He also pledged to help South Korean companies deal with any "discrimination" they face.

The South Korean official called China's moves "regrettable," noting that curbing business will hurt Chinese vendors, too.

North Korea's missile launch on Monday further complicates the tensions. The state-run Korean Central News Agency said the four missiles were intended as practice for an attack on "the bases of the U.S. imperialist aggressor forces in

Japan." After a flight of about 600 miles, they all fell into the Sea of Japan; three of them came down inside Japan's exclusive economic zone.

The United States has about 54,000 military personnel in Japan.

Anna Fifield in Tokyo, and Congcong Zhang and Jin Xin in Beijing contributed to this report.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

South Korea Receives First Components of Thaad Missile-Defense System

Jonathan Cheng

Updated March 7, 2017 4:54 p.m. ET

SEOUL—The arrival of the first components of [a controversial missile-defense system](#) in South Korea drew a rebuke from China, escalating tensions in a region that has been rocked by North Korea's recent missile launches and its diplomatic standoff with Malaysia.

The deployment by the U.S. of parts of the antimissile system, called Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or Thaad, on Tuesday came a day after [North Korea launched four ballistic missiles](#) in what it described as a practice drill "to strike the bases of the U.S. imperialist aggressor forces in Japan."

The Thaad battery has [become a hot-button issue](#) across the region. North Korea, China and Russia have strongly opposed the missile-shield system, calling it a threat to national security.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will travel to the region next week on a trip that will include stops in Japan, South Korea and China. State Department officials said the threat posed by North Korea will be high on Mr. Tillerson's agenda in meetings with counterparts, though not necessarily the deployment of the Thaad system.

"I think a central focus of Secretary Tillerson's trip to the region should not be on the deployment of THAAD, which is frankly a response to the threat. It's the threat itself—the threat that North Korea continues to pose and frankly, only augmented in the past year to six months," State Department spokesman Mark Toner said.

The Thaad system, he said, "is not a threat to them or any other power of the region."

Thaad would allow South Korea and the U.S. [to shoot down short- and mid-range missiles](#) while they are on the downward part of the

trajectory but still relatively far from the intended target, increasing the likelihood of success. It isn't designed to counter intercontinental ballistic missiles, and its missiles don't carry warheads.

Missile-defense systems seem benign but have been viewed by some analysts as potentially destabilizing. They can give their owners more confidence to press their advantage, and give opponents an incentive to strike first while they still can. In North Korea's case, it could hasten their pursuit of an ICBM, to counter Thaad's capabilities. While China's long-range missiles wouldn't be at direct risk from Thaad, Beijing is concerned about the ability of Thaad's radars to scan for activity in its northeast.

The deployment sparked anger in Beijing. At a regular news conference on Tuesday, Geng Shuang, a spokesman for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said China would take necessary measures to defend its security interests and warned that "all consequences from this will be borne by the U.S. and South Korea."

Mr. Geng didn't elaborate on what those measures might include, but added: "We strongly urge parties to stop the deployment and not travel down that wrong path."

China's official Xinhua News Agency, in an English-language commentary, lashed out at Seoul, saying that "South Korea, in a reckless manner, [has bet all chips on the United States](#)."

The commentary, attributed to Xinhua writer Zhu Dongyang, criticized South Korea for deploying Thaad and for conducting joint military drills with the U.S. North Korea has complained that the annual exercises are a precursor to invasion, a claim Washington and Seoul dispute.

In recent weeks, Beijing has squeezed South Korea on Thaad by speaking out against the missile-

defense system and—many in South Korea believe—clamping down on South Korean companies doing business in China. The countries had previously enjoyed close ties.

Underscoring the mistrust between Beijing and Seoul, South Korea's Ministry of National Defense said it hadn't given China advance warning of the arrival of the Thaad components.

South Korea's Lotte conglomerate, whose golf course will serve as the site for the deployment of the Thaad system, has been [a particular focus of China's ire](#), with many of its stores and construction projects in China closed or held up by regulatory issues.

On Tuesday, South Korean television replayed cellphone-camera footage of Chinese consumers destroying Lotte products in anger.

Meanwhile, South Korean Vice Trade Minister Woo Tae-hee told a group of Korean businessmen that the government was studying whether China was punishing South Korean companies and "violating international norms," though he didn't mention the possibility of filing a complaint with the World Trade Organization, as some South Korean businessmen have urged.

"What is clear is that this does not conform to the basic purpose of the South Korea-China Free Trade Agreement," Mr. Woo said.

Thaad has also become a central issue in South Korea's coming presidential election, which could be called as soon as this week. The leading candidate, Moon Jae-in, favors closer ties with China and North Korea, and has argued that a decision on Thaad should only be made after the public is given a full consultation.

Despite the controversy, Jeffrey Robertson, a professor who specializes in South Korean diplomacy at Yonsei University in Seoul, said the timing of the Thaad

deployment was optimal, coming as international exasperation with North Korea was cresting.

"It's better to do this now while you've got this strong justification," Mr. Robertson said, pointing to Monday's missile launch and the fallout from the killing last month of Kim Jong Nam, the half brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, in Malaysia.

Malaysia, which has sought the arrest of several North Korean nationals in its investigation into the killing, [banned North Korean citizens](#) from leaving the country on Tuesday, as Pyongyang blocked Malaysians from exiting its borders.

Despite Chinese objections, the U.S. and South Korean governments portrayed the arrival of the Thaad battery as a necessary measure, citing North Korea's progress on nuclear and missile development.

"Continued provocative actions by North Korea, [including] yesterday's launch of multiple missiles, only confirm the prudence of our alliance decision last year to deploy Thaad to South Korea," said Adm. Harry Harris Jr., commander of the U.S. Pacific Command.

U.S. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, called Hwang Kyo-ahn, South Korea's acting president, on Tuesday morning in Seoul. Mr. Trump said the U.S. would support South Korea in its dealings with North Korea, Mr. Hwang's office said.

Washington and Seoul plan to have the Thaad battery operational in South Korea this year, and a spokesman for U.S. Forces Korea said the arrival of the Thaad parts at the U.S. Air Force base in Osan, South Korea, didn't change that timeline. He added that the plan was to have the battery up and running "as soon as possible."

—Felicia Schwartz in Washington contributed to this article.

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THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

Fyhenakis and Zweibel : A Shiny Border Wall That Pays for Itself

Vasilis Fthenakis
and Ken Zweibel

March 7, 2017 6:57 p.m. ET

Resolving the political impasse between Mexico and the U.S. over a border wall requires innovative thinking. How about this: Presidents Donald Trump and Enrique Peña Nieto should work together to construct a "solar wall"—a massive string of photovoltaic panels—on the Mexican side of the border. Building on our [previous research](#), Homero Aridjis and James Ramey [proposed](#) the idea late last year. After studying the concept, we have concluded that the idea is not only technically and economically feasible, it might even be more practical than a traditional wall.

Why build in Mexico? Lower costs south of the border would greatly reduce the overall price tag. We estimate that building a roughly 2,000-mile-long single-row solar wall would cost less than \$1 billion, plus site preparation costs such as fencing and road

construction. Compare that with Mr. Trump's wall, which could cost tens of billions of dollars.

Mexico's solar-power potential also ranks among the highest on the planet. As Messrs. Aridjis and Ramey point out, its high central plateau deserts have a "dry, unclouded, low-latitude and relatively cool climate" that is perfect for photovoltaics. We calculate that one string of solar panels would have a power capacity of 0.8 gigawatts and could produce about 2,000 gigawatt-hours of electricity a year. Add three rows in parallel, and that would cost \$3 billion while producing some 8,000 gigawatt-hours annually.

That's enough energy to power about half a million homes in the U.S.—or far more in Mexico. Some of these costs could be offset by private investors, who would have a strong incentive to partake in what would be a wildly profitable venture. Property owners along the border could also see new streams of income.

The project would present some difficulties for engineers. Normally solar fields are built in multi-row arrays, which form a rectangle. This would require long, skinny arrays that would be less efficient. But such technical challenges aren't insurmountable.

Could such a wall secure the border? People can bypass any kind of border, whether it is constructed of concrete or solar panels, and this would not be a fortress-like barrier to illegal entry. Yet a solar wall would place more people, surveillance and physical infrastructure at what is now a largely deserted, lawless and dangerous part of North America. And unlike the monolithic wall Mr. Trump is proposing, it would be a beautiful structure. The burden of protecting the solar wall could be split between federal security forces and private power companies.

Regarding politics: Even without buy-in from Mr. Trump, the Mexican president could pursue this wall on his own territory, with financing from

private investors. This would put a positive spin on Mr. Trump's idea of a structure to divide the two countries. Mr. Peña Nieto could invite his northern neighbors to take part in the initiative, or Mexico could simply reap the financial and environmental benefits for itself.

No doubt it would be better if Presidents Trump and Peña Nieto came together and embraced this creative governance idea. In taking advantage of the fact that America and Mexico share one planet and one sun, they could use this opportunity to create a wall that unites rather than divides.

Mr. Fthenakis is director of the Center for Life Cycle Analysis at Columbia University, where he is also a professor. Mr. Zweibel was director of the Solar Institute at George Washington University.

The
Washington
Post

Editorial : Trump's attacks on the media are a gift to tyrants everywhere

Opinion A
column or article

in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

March 7 at 7:39 PM

WHEN PRESIDENT TRUMP called the U.S. news media "[the enemy of the American People](#)" and brandished the moniker "fake news" at reports he didn't like, tyrants everywhere perked up. They heard the president say exactly what they have been saying about nettlesome journalists who expose human rights abuses, corruption and rigged elections. Mr. Trump's remarks have a ripple effect overseas, signaling that the United States will no longer champion freedom of the press and expression. This will inevitably lead to more repression.

Cambodia, which [last year sentenced a man to 18 months in](#)

[prison for a Facebook post](#), was one of the first to seize upon Mr. Trump's approach. A government spokesman, noting how the White House had barred several U.S. outlets from a briefing, warned Radio Free Asia and Voice of America about their news coverage, which is quite straightforward and therefore threatening to the government of Prime Minister Hun Sen. [The spokesman declared](#), "Freedom of expression is subject to law and must respect the state's power."

Respect of state power and the ruling Communist Party is also what China demands in no uncertain terms from its news media, insisting they "[have the party as their family name](#)." China's propagandists have started to mimic Mr. Trump's methods in news articles. The party's leading newspaper, People's

Daily, denounced Western news coverage of a Chinese lawyer and human rights advocate who said he had been tortured by splashing [a photograph with the words "FAKE NEWS"](#). The paper said it was "[fabricated to tarnish China's image](#)."

In Russia, where press freedom has been corralled into a small space under President Vladimir Putin and the dark arts of propaganda and disinformation are well practiced, the Foreign Ministry has set up [a new section of its website](#) for "fake news," with a big red stamp of "FAKE" for reports that it does not like. Among those so branded was a New York Times article describing the new practice.

Mr. Trump has a personally contradictory relationship with the news media. He has long hungered for favorable coverage. But he

appears to see the news media in strictly promotional terms, not as a mechanism of democracy to probe and criticize.

His behavior has global consequences. The press would not be free in Cambodia, China or Russia if a different U.S. president had been elected. But the United States has a long tradition of speaking out against crackdowns on the news media, and sometimes those interventions make a difference. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson [says](#) that "American foreign policy must promote our core values of freedom, democracy and stability." Does the president agree?

ETATS-UNIS

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

GOP's Health Plan Draws Skepticism on Capitol Hill

Louise Radnofsky,
Kristina Peterson and Siobhan Hughes

March 7, 2017 12:16 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—An array of conservative lawmakers and activist groups on Tuesday attacked a

[proposal by House GOP](#) leaders to overturn the 2010 health law, posing the first major test to President Donald Trump's White

House of its ability to broker deals among Republicans in Congress.

Members of two conservative House caucuses, at least three

right-leaning GOP senators and a set of allied groups outside Congress signaled their dissatisfaction with the health plan published Monday by House Republican leaders and crafted with White House support.

As the size of the challenge facing GOP leaders came into view, Mr. Trump endorsed the legislation but left open the question of whether he would lobby personally and forcefully for it. Mr. Trump met with House lawmakers responsible for gathering votes for the bill and urged them to move swiftly. But he signaled that the task, at least for now, fell to congressional leaders.

"We're going to get it done, and you are the leaders that will really get it done for us and the American people," he told the lawmakers.

Conservatives said the legislation, aimed at repealing much of the Affordable Care Act and enacting new health-insurance rules, looks too much like the law it was meant to replace. Their objections focused on a new program of tax credits, replacing the existing health law's subsidies, which GOP leaders say would help a wider set of people buy insurance if they don't get it at work.

Rep. Justin Amash (R., Mich.) labeled the new plan "Obamacare 2.0." FreedomWorks, a conservative group, called it "Obamacare Lite," saying that the tax credits would amount to a "new entitlement." Other conservative groups announcing their opposition included Freedom Partners, Americans for Prosperity and Heritage Action, the political arm of the Heritage Foundation.

Late Tuesday, AARP, an advocacy group for older adults, announced that it also opposed the plan. The group said the bill would raise costs "for those who can least afford higher insurance premiums."

As conservative opposition escalated rapidly Tuesday, Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, a leading member of the House Freedom Caucus, which has at least 30 members, said he would introduce rival legislation Wednesday to void more of the existing health law than does the leadership's bill.

Under the plan unveiled by two House committees Monday, Republicans would repeal much of the 2010 health law and replace it with a system centered on refundable tax credits tied to an individual's age and income, aimed at helping Americans buy insurance if they don't get coverage at work.

The House GOP plan would also immediately end the requirement that most Americans [have health coverage or pay a penalty](#), as well as a mandate that larger employers provide health insurance to workers. It would repeal most of the health law's taxes starting in 2018 and freeze funding in 2020 for the 31 states that expanded Medicaid under the law.

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) said the bill fulfilled the conservative goals of using market mechanisms, rather than government programs, to boost insurance coverage.

"Let me just give you a list of what's in here that conservatives should be excited about," he said at a news conference, listing the elimination of the mandate that most people buy insurance and that larger businesses offer it.

"We made a promise to repeal and replace Obamacare with conservative solutions and reforms. That is exactly what this bill does," Mr. Ryan said.

One blow for insurers would be the immediate cancellation of the 2010 law's penalties for Americans who go without health coverage, a mandate aimed at pulling healthy enrollees into the individual insurance market to dilute the cost of covering sick customers.

Meantime, the Republican blueprint's pullback on Medicaid coverage could curb one of the law's primary benefits for hospitals, as expanded Medicaid enrollment under the existing law reduced the amount they had to write off from uninsured patients with unpaid bills.

Opposition from conservative lawmakers and activist groups could derail the party's highly prized bid to replace the Affordable Care Act. That could challenge Mr. Trump to decide whether to enter the fray explicitly and become the negotiator-in-chief he had styled himself as on the campaign trail, and if so, when to deploy himself in that capacity.

White House officials said they were unfazed by the blowback, and that negotiations could resolve lingering objections from lawmakers they assume are ultimately unwilling to torpedo their chance to repeal the law.

Mr. Trump, in a closed-door meeting with the House Republican whip team, which is responsible for counting votes, signaled that he was willing to play a role in passing the legislation, one lawmaker said. At the meeting, Rep. Patrick

McHenry (R., N.C.) told Mr. Trump that they would need his help in building Republican support, said Rep. Dennis Ross (R., Fla.).

"We need to meet regularly," Mr. Trump responded, according to Mr. Ross. He said Mr. Trump offered to bring lawmakers to the White House to talk about the legislation.

"We all left with a great deal of confidence that we've got a strong leader in getting this across the finish line," Mr. Ross said.

One Republican in the room said Mr. Trump signaled he knew which lawmakers were supporting or straying from the legislation, and that he knew the margins by which he had won their districts. The impression, the Republican said, was that Mr. Trump was aware that he could have sway over some lawmakers who might not currently back the bill.

In another sign that the president was starting to think about the lobbying role he could play, Mr. Trump tweeted Tuesday night that he was "sure that my friend @RandPaul will come along with the new and great health care program because he knows Obamacare is a disaster!"

Mr. Paul had signaled concerns with the bill Tuesday.

Still, senior White House officials have said they see Congress as holding the primary responsibility for undoing the health law but that they are willing to work publicly and privately to help.

"You start at a starting point, people engage and they get involved the process," said Dr. Tom Price, the secretary of Health and Human Services. "We'll work through it."

At the heart of the challenge for Republican leaders is congressional math that demands near-perfect party unity. They can't lose more than two GOP votes in the Senate and 22 in the House, assuming no Democrats support the efforts to rework the health law championed by their party under former President Barack Obama.

White House officials see the razor-thin margins as an asset, counting on individual Republicans' unwillingness to bear blame for killing the repeal effort and remaining confident they can resolve objections through negotiation. Skeptics see that as a high-risk strategy that could yet demand explicit browbeating by the president.

Inside the White House, other members of the president's team privately expressed surprise that Republican leaders needed Mr. Trump to spend political capital to deliver votes from the conservative Freedom Caucus. "Nobody over here ever felt that it was going to be incumbent on the president to put it upon his shoulders," one senior White House aide said.

Still, Mick Mulvaney, the White House budget director, attended a Tuesday night meeting of the House Freedom Caucus.

"He let us know that they're still open to negotiations," said Rep. Mark Meadows (R., N.C.), who leads the group.

As caucus's members trailed out following the nearly two-hour-long meeting, those who spoke to reporters said that they had little doubt that the plan endorsed by House Republican leaders couldn't clear the chamber.

"Right now, the speaker of the House does not have the votes to pass this bill unless it's got substantial Democrat support," said Rep. Mo Brooks (R., Ala.).

The delicate balancing act required by GOP leaders up and down Pennsylvania Avenue isn't restricted to ameliorating conservatives. The party's centrists, who are also sufficiently numerous to undo the repeal bid, largely held back on Tuesday.

If the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the office that assesses the cost and impact of legislation, finds that the bill would prompt a large number of people to lose insurance coverage, centrist Republicans, particularly in the Senate, would likely demand changes.

It remains unclear whether the plan will be fully paid for by the taxes and revenues currently included. GOP leaders backed away from an unpopular provision aimed at raising money that would have curbed tax perks for employer-sponsored insurance, the means by which about 175 million Americans get their coverage.

—Rebecca Ballhaus, Michael C. Bender and Stephanie Armour contributed to this article.

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G.O.P. Health Bill Faces Revolt From Conservative Forces

Jennifer
Steinhauer

WASHINGTON — After seven years of waiting longingly to annul President Barack Obama's signature [health care law](#), Republican leaders on Tuesday faced a sudden revolt from the right that threatened their proposal to remake the American health care system.

The much-anticipated [House plan to repeal](#) the Affordable Care Act also drew skepticism from some of the party's more moderate members, whose constituents have benefited from expanded coverage in recent years.

The criticism came even before lawmakers knew the cost of the replacement plan and how many people might lose their health care if it were enacted.

House Republicans were rushing the legislation through two powerful committees — Ways and Means, and Energy and Commerce — with the hope of a full House vote next week, an extraordinarily compressed time frame considering that the legislation affects many parts of the United States economy and could alter the health care of millions of Americans.

But the swift opposition from fellow Republicans signaled that they might have to drastically reconsider their approach, and the White House portrayed the bill as a work in progress. If more than a dozen House Republicans defect, the bill will be in jeopardy, with Democrats almost certainly united as a bloc.

"Doing big things is never easy," Speaker Paul D. Ryan conceded at a news conference on Tuesday after absorbing broad-based criticism of the bill. Still, he guaranteed he would drum up the 218 votes needed for passage, saying, "The nightmare of Obamacare is about to end."

The Republican bill would eliminate the mandate for most Americans in favor of a new system of tax credits to induce people to buy insurance on the open market. It would also eventually roll back the expansion of [Medicaid](#) that has provided coverage to more than 10 million people in 31 states.

Vice President Mike Pence met Tuesday with conservative members of the House to assure them that their feedback was still

being considered, and President Trump entertained a group of House Republicans charged with persuading their colleagues to vote for the measure.

"We're going to do something that's great, and I am proud to support the replacement plan released by the House of Representatives," Mr. Trump said. "This will be a plan where you can choose your doctor, and this will be a plan where you can choose your plan. And you know what the plan is. This is the plan. It's a complicated process, but actually it's very simple, it's called good health care."

House Speaker Paul D. Ryan held a news conference defending the health bill. "The nightmare of Obamacare is about to end," he said. Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times

Some White House officials insist that Mr. Trump will be directly engaged in persuading lawmakers to back the bill.

But many of the factions that provided financial and political support to back Republicans who vowed to wipe out the Affordable Care Act are nowhere near satisfied with the option rolled out on Monday.

"This is not the Obamacare repeal bill we've been waiting for," said Senator Mike Lee, Republican of Utah, who was joined by a constellation of conservative groups, including the [Club for Growth](#), [Heritage Action for America](#) and Charles G. and David H. Koch's [Americans for Prosperity](#). "It is a missed opportunity and a step in the wrong direction. We promised the American people we would drain the swamp and end business as usual in Washington. This bill does not do that."

The Republican bill would scrap the mandated coverage in the Affordable Care Act in favor of tax incentives to coax people to purchase health care. But the legislation maintains many of the act's mandates and basic benefits, including prohibiting insurers from denying policies for pre-existing conditions or capping benefits in a year or a lifetime.

Some conservatives have labeled the House plan "Obamacare lite," saying it is nearly as intrusive in the insurance market as the law it would replace. In particular, they dislike the delay in getting rid of the

law's [Medicaid](#) expansion. They also dislike the tax credits in the Republican plan, which can exceed the amount a consumer actually owes in federal income taxes, meaning that the Internal Revenue Service would be issuing checks to cover insurance premiums. The House plan also maintains many of the demands on insurers that the Affordable Care Act has, including a defined suite of "essential benefits" that all insurers must offer.

President Trump met on Tuesday at the White House with Representative Steve Scalise of Louisiana, center, the House majority whip, and other lawmakers. Doug Mills/The New York Times

Representative Jim Jordan, Republican of Ohio, said that he would introduce a "clean repeal" bill and that Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, would offer a companion bill.

Republicans have been counting on Mr. Trump to use his influence to persuade wavering members to support the plan. But despite his characterization of the bill as "tremendous" on Tuesday, others in his administration seemed to concede that changes, perhaps major ones, were likely.

Speaking to reporters after meeting with Senate Republicans at the Capitol, Mr. Pence offered the White House's imprimatur, calling the bill the "framework for reform." He added that the administration was "certainly open to improvements," making clear that the wrangling had just begun. Tom Price, the secretary of health and human services, said twice at a briefing with reporters at the White House that the bill was "a work in progress."

He also suggested that some provisions Mr. Trump is seeking, like the ability to buy insurance across state lines and the lowering of drug prices, might be addressed through regulation.

Representative Mark Meadows, Republican of North Carolina, said Mr. Pence had portrayed the bill as a work in progress that would no doubt be amended, perhaps significantly. "The bill that was introduced last night is still open for negotiation and certainly for modification," Mr. Meadows said. "And we took that as very encouraging news."

Even with substantial changes, passage of the bill is in no way assured. House Republicans accomplished too little in shrinking the size of the government's role in the health sector to pull the most conservative members their way, yet they may not have done enough to allay the concerns of some Republican senators who are skeptical of elements like rolling back the [Medicaid](#) expansion and defunding Planned Parenthood.

In [an interview](#) with a radio station on Tuesday, Senator Roy Blunt, Republican of Missouri, said, "What I don't like is it may not be a plan that gets a majority of votes and lets us move on, because I think we can't stay where we are with the plan we've got now."

The response from insurers was largely muted on Tuesday. They have praised the initial steps taken by the administration to stabilize the individual market, and they said they were encouraged by the desire to provide a smooth transition in the next two years. But several questioned the adequacy of the tax credits.

"It is important that the tax credit for 2020 creates a marketplace that enables people to get the coverage they need at a price they can afford," Alissa Fox, a senior vice president at the BlueCross BlueShield Association, said in a statement. "We look forward to working with Congress to create a stable and affordable private market."

By proceeding so swiftly, and largely in secret, Republicans have opened themselves to the same criticisms that they leveled at Democrats in 2010. If the bill is passed by the full House as early as next week, Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, has promised to bring it immediately to the Senate floor without a single hearing.

"After years of howling at the moon about Democrats rushing through the Affordable Care Act — the mantra they said over and over and over again on the floor here and in the House, 'read the bill' — Republicans are having committee votes two days after the bill is released," Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader, said on the Senate floor. "No wonder they don't want anyone to know what's in the bill."

House GOP proposal to replace Obamacare sparks broad backlash

<https://www.facebook.com/davewei gel?ref=ts>

Republican efforts to revise the Affordable Care Act met with widespread resistance Tuesday from conservatives in and out of Congress, moderates in the Senate and key industry stakeholders, casting doubt on the plan's chances just one day after House GOP leaders released it.

The most imminent and serious threat to the plan crafted by House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) was the growing backlash from conservative lawmakers and powerful outside groups who argue that the draft is nothing more than "Obamacare Lite," a disparaging reference to the former president's signature 2010 domestic achievement.

The lawmakers do not represent a majority of Republicans in either chamber of Congress, but there could be enough of them to scuttle any health-care bill they oppose — and several said Tuesday they intend to use that leverage to force major changes to the measures. Their efforts could begin Wednesday morning at markups of the legislation before the House Ways and Means, and Energy and Commerce panels.

But President Trump said at a meeting with House Republicans on Tuesday afternoon that he would work with them to secure passage of their plan.

According to several attendees, Trump made clear that he wants the House bill to be approved and land on his desk largely intact. He pledged to become personally involved in persuading skeptical lawmakers and warned that failing to pass the legislation would result in trouble at the ballot box for Republicans who pledged to repeal and replace Obamacare.

How the House Republicans' proposed Obamacare replacement compares

"The president said very clearly . . . this is the bill he wants on his desk, and he wants to get this done quickly," said Rep. Patrick T. McHenry (R-N.C.), the House GOP chief deputy whip, who attended the meeting. "The president is paying attention to what people are saying and doing, where they're saying it and doing it. He is highly aware and has a highly attuned ear to what is happening in the press and has a real understanding of the challenges in order to get this bill on his desk."

As if to prove it, Trump targeted Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) — who has emerged as the bill's chief skeptic — with [a tweet Tuesday evening](#). "I

feel sure that my friend @RandPaul will come along with the new and great health care program because he knows Obamacare is a disaster!"

The margin of error is slim for House and Senate GOP leaders — in the House, Ryan can afford to lose only 21 GOP lawmakers. In the Senate — which is using an unusual parliamentary procedure that requires only a simple majority for legislation to be approved — Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) must persuade all but two Republicans to support the plan. Republicans have 52 seats in the Senate, and no Democrats are expected to back the overhaul in either chamber.

Following late-afternoon votes Tuesday, several Republican senators privately grouched that they felt rushed by their GOP colleagues in the House and by Trump, who they said does not fully grasp the Senate's slower pace or its concerns.

The senators also expressed skepticism that key White House officials with deep ties to Congress's conservative wing would eventually be able to lock up the votes for the current plan. Instead, they said there is confusion over who is managing the process and which administration figures, if any, have power to sway Trump on the issue.

One Republican senator, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because negotiations are ongoing, said several senators are asking their leadership to "take it easy" in terms of the timeline, allowing space to debate and analyze the proposal with a "clear understanding of the costs involved." "If that takes months or a year, so be it," the senator said.

A second GOP senator said the party was making a "mistake" in its rollout by taking "too much ownership" of health care after years in which Democrats were identified with Obamacare.

(Alice Li, Jayne Orenstein/The Washington Post)

In interviews with The Washington Post, March 7, Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) criticized the plan put forward by House Republicans to alter the Affordable Care Act. Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) criticized the plan put forward by House Republicans to alter the Affordable Care Act. (Alice Li, Jayne Orenstein/The Washington Post)

The long-anticipated debut of the House GOP plan — after seven years in which Republicans vowed to repeal Obamacare — was far

from seamless. Less than 24 hours after its introduction, Ryan and his chief lieutenants were beating back fierce criticism from their right flank about the proposal's chief elements: income and age-based tax subsidies as well as a redesign of the way that states that expanded their Medicaid coverage under the ACA receive payments. Part of the blowback came from the fact that no cost estimates have yet been provided by the Congressional Budget Office.

"Doing big things is never easy, but we have made a promise, and we're going to keep that promise," Ryan said in a late afternoon news conference.

The speaker vowed to pass the legislation, pushing back on the idea that it was crafted behind closed doors without input from fellow Republicans. "We'll have 218 votes when this thing comes to the floor, I can guarantee you that."

To do so, Ryan will have to appease conservatives inside and outside of Congress, who made themselves heard loudly Tuesday.

Ryan outlined three phases in which health-care reform would be achieved: first, via the special budget procedure known as reconciliation, of which the current measures are a part; then, through regulations at the Department of Health and Human Services; and finally, the passage of other bills that will need bigger backing and could include the ability to buy insurance across state lines.

Republicans belonging to the roughly 30-member hard-line House Freedom Caucus attacked the bill outside the Capitol on Tuesday. Several said they saw the measure as a starting point for negotiations, even as they demanded that leaders take up the 2015 legislation that passed the Republican-led Congress and that ultimately was vetoed by President Barack Obama. Nonpartisan congressional budget analysts estimated that bill would cause millions of Americans to lose their health insurance coverage almost immediately.

"What we have now is an opening bid," said Rep. Mark Sanford (R-S.C.), a Freedom Caucus member who has offered an alternative health plan that would offer less-generous aid for individuals to buy insurance.

Lawmakers may also be persuaded by outside groups such as Heritage Action for America, the Club for Growth and FreedomWorks, which came out strongly against the leadership proposal Tuesday, dubbing the plan "["Obamacare Lite,"](#)" "["RyanCare"](#)" or "["RINOCare,"](#)" the

latter a reference to "Republican in name only," a popular conservative epithet for establishment politicians. Those groups are adept at riling up the GOP base against Republican leaders and could cause significant headaches for Ryan.

"The House Republican proposal released last night not only accepts the flawed progressive premises of Obamacare but expands upon them," Michael Needham, the head of Heritage Action for America, said in a statement Tuesday. "Congressional Republicans should fully repeal the failed law and begin a genuine effort to deliver on longstanding campaign promises that create a free market health care system."

FreedomWorks and the Club for Growth both decried the plan as a betrayal of Republican campaign promises.

"If this warmed-over substitute for government-run health care remains unchanged, the Club for Growth will key vote against it," said the group's president, David McIntosh, referring to a process in which lawmakers are graded on their votes, the better to use them as ammunition on the campaign trail.

Furthermore, at least one of the country's biggest health-care groups weighed in with caution on the proposal. The American Hospital Association, representing 5,000 hospitals and other health-care groups, argued that the process [should not advance](#) until the CBO provides a cost estimate.

There were some signs of hope for the House leadership's approach. Besides Trump's backing, Vice President Pence attended a Senate Republican policy luncheon and, in a break with normal practice, joined McConnell and other GOP leaders at a news conference afterward to defend the House plan as "the framework for reform." McConnell also said he planned to put the House bill on the floor once it reaches the Senate.

"We are certainly open to improvements and recommendations in the legislative process, but this is the bill, and the president supports the American Health Care Act," he said.

Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee that would consider health-care legislation, said Pence so far has been an able salesman for Trump, working on the front lines of Congress and understanding how to build consensus behind closed doors from his days in the House.

"He keeps coming to lunch after lunch. He's always around, and his style is low-key," Alexander said. "He doesn't overstate his case."

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In another sign of the administration's support, Health and

Human Services Secretary Tom Price sent a letter Tuesday to key lawmakers calling the measure a "necessary and important first step toward fulfilling our promises to the American people."

The Senate also poses a problem for Republican leaders, with Sens. Paul, Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) and Mike Lee (R-Utah) opposing the House draft. Paul and Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) said Tuesday that they would reintroduce the 2015 legislation.

The dilemma Republican congressional leaders face is that if they change the legislation to appease hard-line conservatives, they are likely to alienate more-moderate members who are wary of disrupting insurance markets and taking away coverage from those who gained it under the ACA.

Four Senate Republicans have expressed worries about the plan's possible impact on lower-income people who received Medicaid

coverage through the ACA's expansion of that program. The four senators are split on what proposals would meet their standards, but none is likely to support the course of action favored by many conservatives.

"What we need is not really from the White House — it's the CBO on the cost estimates. That'd be most helpful," said Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine).

POLITICO Trump tries to quash conservative uproar over health care bill

By Rachael Bade and Kyle Cheney

President Donald Trump assured Republicans Tuesday he'll use all his powers to get the GOP alternative over the finish line. | AP Photo

The president is already using his bully pulpit to try to pressure Republicans uneasy about the Obamacare repeal-and-replace plan.

President Donald Trump is moving to quiet conservative opposition to the House GOP Obamacare replacement, drawing on his newfound bully pulpit to pressure but also coax rebellious lawmakers.

Trump on Tuesday night turned his massive Twitter following on one of the most vocal opponents of the repeal bill: conservative firebrand Sen. Rand Paul. The Kentucky Republican had blasted Speaker Paul Ryan's Obamacare alternative as Obamacare-lite. But Trump tweeted, "I feel sure that my friend @RandPaul will come along with the new and great health care program because he knows Obamacare is a disaster!"

Story Continued Below

Trump also told a group of 20 House GOP whips that he would use all the powers in his Oval Office arsenal to get the GOP alternative over the finish line, and he vowed to summon to the White House opponents of the bill.

"This meeting was a confirmation from the president that he will do what's necessary and will have our

backs," said Rep. Dennis Ross (R-Fla.), one whip in the meeting. "He basically said whatever we need him to do ... he'll do that, because it's really, as Mike Pence said, is a binary choice: you vote keep Obamacare or you vote to repeal it."

But Trump's whip-in-chief operation isn't all stick. The White House dispatched budget director Mick Mulvaney to a closed-door meeting of House conservatives Tuesday night to reassure the health plan's harshest critics that the details aren't set in stone. Mulvaney, a former House Freedom Caucus member himself, told the HFC that the White House is open to changes and encouraged them to try to amend the bill to their liking in committee and on the floor.

"I think the message has been consistent throughout the day is that White House is willing to negotiate," said Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), leader of the Freedom Caucus, after the meeting.

Trump's move to save the repeal effort couldn't come at a better time for House GOP leaders. Conservatives groups from Club for Growth to the Heritage Foundation joined House and Senate conservatives Tuesday blasting the bill as Obamacare by a different form.

At the crux of the president's involvement is a frustration that the bill hasn't moved yet amid GOP infighting. He told the House GOP whips that "we've been promising for years to repeal Obamacare and now we have the chance to get it done," according to Rep. Luke

Messer (R-Ind.), one whip in the room.

"He used the phrase several times, 'No more excuses; it's time to get it passed,'" Messer said. "He gave every indication he will be very active in the effort to pass this bill."

Trump's involvement is a welcome development for House GOP leadership, who have been crossing their fingers that Trump will use his massive microphone to help them get the bill "across the finish-line," as one leadership source said.

They left their meeting at the White House Tuesday afternoon feeling satisfied that he'd do just that. During the powwow — which included Trump's top advisers from Steve Bannon to Kellyanne Conway to Reince Priebus — Republicans made a point of telling Trump that the conservatives threatening to tank the proposal are big Trump supporters. They encouraged him to reach out, suggesting a little face-time would go a long way.

Trump said he'd do that.

"My sense is he's willing to engage members of the House and Senate on meaningful conversations," said Rep. Mike Conaway (R-Texas) another whip in the room. "He can tweet, he can bring folks over, he can engage in whatever way he wants to — and I suspect he will. ... He wants this done."

One Republican in the room put it more bluntly: "Some of these [HFC] guys are used to punching leadership in the nose and being praised for it back home. Are you

going to punch Trump in the nose? I don't think so."

At the same time, Trump isn't putting his foot down in demanding that GOP leadership stick to the current bill. Trump instructed the deputy whips "several times" that "if someone has constructive suggestions that make the bill better, let them have at it," summarized one source in the room.

Rep. Dave Schweikert, the lone member of the Freedom Caucus on the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, said Mulvaney made the same pitch when he showed up unannounced at the HFC meeting Tuesday night.

"If you have other creative things, the White House will look at that too," he summarized, adding that Mulvaney conveyed that the choice wouldn't be "binary" between the leadership bill and the current system.

Conservatives plan to take him up on that offer. Rep. Mo Brooks (R-Ala.) said "right now, the speaker of the House does not have the votes to pass this bill unless it's got substantial Democrat support."

They insist, however, they haven't eased their positions: they still support a full repeal of Obamacare, followed by a separate vote to replace it. And they're vowing, as before, not to back down — at least not tonight.

Asked if Mulvaney praised the House bill or urged the HFC to support it, Meadows seemed almost gleeful to say no, he hadn't.



Can House's Obamacare replacement survive a divided GOP?

The Christian Science Monitor

March 7, 2017 Washington—After seven years of promising to repeal the Affordable Care Act, Republicans are finally at the point of reckoning — unveiling a replacement plan on Monday that upends Obamacare, but will also

greatly test President Trump's ability to unify Republicans behind it.

The plan, put forward by House Republicans, generally follows GOP principles. It effectively repeals much-maligned individual and employer insurance mandates, which Republicans see as

interference in personal health-care choices and markets. Instead, it provides tax credits for individuals to purchase their own policies.

It also overhauls Medicaid — federally supported health care for the poor — which many Republicans see as too costly as the federal debt approaches \$20 trillion.

But independent analysts say the repeal-and-replace plan, called the [American Health Care Act](#), shows just how difficult it is to have "insurance for everybody" and health-care benefits that "beautifully" cover people, as Mr. Trump puts it, all while reducing costs.

"This is going to be a difficult lift, and I don't see Trump having much sway in this trek to repeal and replace," says G. William Hoagland, senior vice president of the Bipartisan Policy Center, in an email. He estimates that 8 million to 12 million fewer people would be covered under the GOP plan. The ACA added coverage for more than 20 million people.

The independent Congressional Budget Office has yet to report on the plan's costs or its effect on the number of insured, though other independent analysts contacted by the Monitor agree with Mr. Hoagland that fewer people would be covered.

"The House bill is caught in a nasty crossfire" between conservative and moderate Republicans, including GOP governors, writes Lawrence Jacobs, a political science professor and health-care policy expert at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, in an email.

A new entitlement?

Conservatives view the plan's tax credits, which would replace Obamacare's subsidies, as simply a new "entitlement" program. Moderates, on the other hand, say the tax credits are too meager to help low-income Americans, Professor Jacobs says.

He adds that many of the 16 Republican governors as well as their Democratic colleagues who expanded Medicaid's reach under Obamacare are also sure to object to reduced outlays under the House

plan. Thirty-one states plus the District of Columbia have expanded Medicaid coverage to include more than 11 million people.

The plan would:

- Effectively drop the individual and employer mandates by repealing their penalties immediately – and retroactively to 2016. It would encourage continuous insurance coverage by having insurers impose a 30 percent boost on premiums if consumers let their coverage lapse.

- Replace subsidies that help low-income Americans buy private insurance plans on federal insurance market exchanges with tax credits that could be applied to private plans. The credits, based on age, range from a yearly total of \$2,000 to \$4,000 for individuals and up to \$14,000 for families.

The credits would be applied monthly and are fully refundable, which means they would be paid even if a consumer does not owe taxes (this is why conservatives consider this a new entitlement). The amount of money that patients can save in tax-free Health Savings Accounts would double.

- Fund expansion under Medicaid fully, but only through 2019, after which the funding would decline. In a radical change, all states would get a set amount of money for Medicaid each year based on the size of their state's Medicaid population. A \$100 billion "stability fund" would be available to all states to use however they want to lower health costs.

- Continue the popular parts of Obamacare – allowing young adults to stay on their parents' health insurance until age 26 and prohibiting denial of coverage for a preexisting condition.

The plan will "drive down costs, encourage competition and give every American access to quality, affordable health insurance," said House Speaker Paul Ryan (R) of Wisconsin in a statement Monday night.

But Democrats strenuously disagree, even as premiums have dramatically risen and choices declined in many Obamacare insurance markets.

No smooth sailing

So Republicans will have to muscle through the plan on their own, using a budget process known as "reconciliation" that requires only a majority vote for passage in both houses of Congress.

Even that low threshold, however, seems elusive given Republican division over the plan.

"It still looks like Obamacare-lite to me," budget hawk Sen. Rand Paul (R) of Kentucky told reporters Monday evening. "It's going to have to be better." Two other Senate conservatives have voiced similar objections, as well as House conservatives.

But on Monday, four GOP senators from states that expanded Medicaid went in the other direction. They wrote a letter to Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell expressing

concern over the House's Medicaid reform. Given their slim majority, Senate Republicans could afford to lose only two Republicans on repeal-and-replace.

A Republican health-care expert who helped draft part of the ACA says the concerns over changes to Medicaid are well founded.

"This is a *dramatic* change to the funding of Medicaid" that goes "way beyond" repealing Obamacare, writes Daniel Derksen, director of the Center for Rural Health at the University of Arizona in Tucson, in an email.

The capping and then cutting of Medicaid eligibility and funding over several years shifts the costs and risks from the federal government to states, rural hospitals, physicians, and individuals and their families, writes Dr. Derksen, a physician.

That will make it "much more difficult" for Medicaid enrollees to remain enrolled and receive the care they need, and it will increase the number of charity cases at hospitals, he says.

Passing health-care reform took more than a century, as Presidents Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, and Bill Clinton witnessed, points out Jacobs. It required a filibuster-proof effort of 60 votes in the Senate for President Obama to get there.

"The House bill starts the process," he writes. "The question is whether it has a future."



Editorial: An Obamacare repeal that's both heartless and reckless

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions

section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

March 7 at 7:39 PM

THE AMERICAN Health Care Act, which House Republicans [unveiled Monday](#) night with White House support, is repeal and replace, kind of. It has some suspicious similarities to Obamacare. But it marks a sharp departure in at least one crucial respect: fiscal responsibility.

[The bill](#) would repeal a vast array of the Affordable Care Act's pay-fors — [taxes on upper-income people](#) and on health-care-related entities including drugs, insurance and medical devices. To finance the spending it still envisions, the bill would replace those by cutting Medicaid and other assistance to poor and near-poor people. This is not only heartless, it is reckless. Within a few years, governors will

be pressing Congress to protect Medicaid. At that point, it is a decent bet lawmakers will simply choose their default option when faced with a politically tough situation: make poor people suffer, *and* add to the debt.

Republicans may insist that they will hold the line, but their recent behavior offers little assurance. In an earlier draft of their Obamacare replacement bill, House leaders envisioned limiting the preferential tax treatment of employer-sponsored health benefits. This rational reform would have helped curb unsustainable increases in health-care costs, but it is not popular with anyone other than economists. So Republicans ditched it. Their bill also would delay Obamacare's principal cost-containment mechanism, the equally unpopular "[Cadillac tax](#)." This would represent the second time that tax will have been delayed, creating the precedent

lawmakers will need to push it off in perpetuity.

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Adding to this irresponsible picture, Republicans are poised to mark up their bill [without a full analysis from the Congressional Budget Office](#) of its budgetary impact or — crucially — of how many people the proposal would (or would not) cover.

On the latter question, there is ample reason for concern. The bill would substantially [reduce the amount of assistance that low-income people get](#) to buy coverage on the individual insurance market, it would ramp up how much more insurers can charge older people relative to younger people, and it would remove Obamacare's crucial link between actual insurance costs

and the federal assistance people get. Combined, these changes would push many needy people out of the individual insurance market. Republicans claim that Americans would have more flexibility in the sorts of insurance plans on offer, including cheaper "catastrophic-only" health-care policies, but that sort of coverage, with its high deductibles and limited benefits, is hardly useful to people barely scraping by now under Obamacare's much more generous system.

Passing the GOP's latest health-care reform proposal would enable a few members of Congress to boast that they rewrote Obamacare. It also would allow House Republican leaders to flex their legislative muscles in the face of their intransigent right wing. But a lot of poor people would pay a substantial price to give them that satisfaction. Chances are, so would the federal deficit.



Editorial : What's the rush on Health care?

What to know about the GOP

healthcare bill

House Republicans have unveiled their replacement plan for the Affordable Care Act. The plan differs from Obamacare in various ways. Time

House Speaker Paul Ryan on March 7, 2017. (Photo: Chip Somodevilla, Getty Images)

The plan to replace Obamacare offered by House Republicans stretches to more than a hundred pages. It deals with an impossibly complex subject, with myriad unintended consequences. It has not been "scored" by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) for its price tag and impact on those who have insurance.

So what are Republicans planning to do? Rush it through.

Consideration of the measure is set to begin Wednesday in two House committees. If Republican leaders don't pull the bill in the face of considerable internal opposition, the full House could vote on it within the next few weeks.

In contrast, Obamacare was the subject of lengthy public hearings and private negotiations during the winter, spring and summer of 2009. The [first House committee action](#) came that July, after the CBO came out with its estimates of the cost and the number of people who'd gain insurance.

The Senate Finance Committee [did not pass Obamacare until](#) that October. This slow progress was dictated by the complexity of the subject and the bipartisan negotiations behind the scenes. In the end, Obamacare passed on a straight party vote, but not until [March of President Obama's second year](#), after lengthy debate and analysis.

Republicans, on the other hand, have visions of getting a repeal measure to President Trump's desk by late April or May.

Good luck with that. Hard-line House Republicans already began balking Tuesday as they read the plan's details. They favor repealing Obamacare outright with little or nothing to replace it. Centrist lawmakers, and some who

represent rural or low-income districts, have different problems. They know that even a partial repeal could be devastating to their constituents who don't get health coverage at work or from the government.

What little can be gleaned from the [Republicans' replacement measure](#) is not particularly encouraging.

It is premised on the notion that Obamacare's central feature — a guaranteed right to buy health insurance, paired with a requirement that people buy it — can be replaced with guaranteed access to insurance, paired with tax credits.

This overlooks the fact that Obamacare's tax credits and subsidies are more generous than what Republicans are proposing. Obamacare also imposes penalties for people who do not enroll in insurance. And even with all that, it is having a hard time getting young and healthy people to sign up in some states.

The Republican plan would prompt those young, healthy people to bail

out of insurance in droves. They would no longer be required to buy it and would get less financial support to do so.

None of these things has been adequately considered — and won't if Republicans keep trying to ram their measure through without knowing how much it would cost and how many people it would cover.

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Editorial : A Historic Health-Care Moment

Updated March 7, 2017 7:48 p.m.

ET 243 COMMENTS

The do-or-die moment for the Trump Administration and the GOP Congress arrived on Monday, as House Republicans rolled out their ObamaCare repeal-and-replace bill. The question now is whether they can deliver on their reform promises and govern to improve the lives of American voters.

The American Health Care Act would be the most consequential GOP social-policy reform since the welfare overhaul of 1996. Not only does the bill repair the failures of the Affordable Care Act, it starts to correct many of the government-created dysfunctions that have bedeviled U.S. health care for decades.

Opening this critical legislative campaign is a test of how well Republicans can manage political and economic reality. The House bill is a center-right compromise that works off a status quo that has accumulated for years, and its architects know they can't design a health-care system de novo. The bill has flaws that come from accommodating what the votes in Congress will allow. Still, if this passes, it will be a major achievement, and real progress.

Though the individual insurance market dominates the debate, the House's Medicaid reform might be more important. This safety-net program originally meant for poor women, children and the disabled has morphed into general insurance for working-age, able-bodied adults above the poverty level, despite its low-quality care and price controls.

The House would convert Medicaid's funding formula from an open-ended entitlement into block grants to states. The amount would be determined by per capita enrollment and grow with medical inflation. States would thus have a reason to set priorities and retarget Medicaid on the truly needy.

The GOP envisions giving Governors more regulatory power to run their own programs, and this flexibility would be accompanied by a new \$100 billion "stability fund" for use in the post-ObamaCare transition. We'll have a fuller treatment of the Medicaid overhaul in the coming days, but this is the most meaningful modernization of the program since it was created in 1965.

The House transition lasts three years, until 2020, which underscores one of the downsides

of using the budget "reconciliation" process. This procedure allows legislation to pass with merely 51 Senate votes but it comes with arcane rules and limitations such as reducing the deficit. Delaying some reforms is one side effect, and the GOP Governors who could take the most advantage of more flexibility might not be around in 2020.

Another unfortunate artifact of reconciliation is delaying the repeal of ObamaCare's tax hikes until 2018. The bill gets rid of nearly all of them, from the medical device tax to the health insurance tax to the 3.8-percentage point Medicare payroll tax on "unearned income." But better to backdate the action through this year. That would avoid capital lock-in and boost growth in 2017, because investors will otherwise await lower rates.

In the individual market, the bill discards ObamaCare's web of mandates and regulations in favor of incentives to buy health insurance on a deregulated market. ObamaCare's subsidies are as much about income redistribution as access to care. For people who lack employer-sponsored insurance and aren't eligible for Medicaid or Medicare, the House substitutes flat, age-adjusted tax credits that

float from \$2,000 to \$14,000 a year as people get older.

A tax deduction is better economic policy but would offer less help to those with lower incomes. The House credits are also "refundable," meaning they become a straight cash payment to those with no income tax liability. This is costly, but then only about 7% of the population is eligible.

The tax credits are also means-tested, phasing out after \$75,000 for individuals and \$150,000 for couples, or for roughly the top 10% of earners. Increasing inframarginal tax rates with benefit cliffs is a problem, but the income caps are set high enough that effects on incentives to work won't be especially strong.

Far from a "Republican entitlement" or "ObamaCare Lite," the new tax credits start to fix a core bias of U.S. health care, which is that individuals buying insurance for themselves don't receive the same tax subsidy that flow to workers at businesses. A draft bill would have partially equalized the tax treatment of health insurance by capping this employer exclusion but the provision got left on the editing floor amid GOP and business opposition.

This is a bad policy blunder. The final bill retains ObamaCare's "Cadillac" tax on high-cost health plans but delays it until 2025. Maybe one day Congress will muster the political courage to take on the business lobby and limit this inefficient and regressive tax preference.

Confusion abounds over the bill's handling of pre-existing conditions. ObamaCare limits how far premiums can vary among people with different health risks. The House would allow premiums to differ closer to the true cost of care while repealing the individual mandate to buy coverage or else pay a penalty. To encourage continuous coverage, insurers could assess a 30% penalty for those who wait to sign up.

Los Angeles Times

Editorial : The GOP isn't replacing all of Obamacare — just the parts that work

The Times Editorial Board

The Times Editorial Board

The House [GOP](#) leadership's proposal for repealing and replacing [Obamacare](#) would actually leave much of the 2010 Affordable Care Act intact — except for the parts that make it work.

Instead of fixing the problems Republicans have been complaining about, it would make them worse. And rather than making insurance affordable to more people, it would raise costs for lower-income Americans and cut them for everyone else.

The bills' authors don't seem to be trying to improve the healthcare system; they just seem to be trapped by a promise they made to voters without regard to the damage it might do. In short, it's a baffling plan with no clear objective that's deservedly getting blasted from all sides, with [conservatives](#), [liberals](#) and [libertarians](#) all trashing it.

The Affordable Care Act has

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Editorial : A Disappointing Start

We believe that Obamacare should be repealed and replaced with policies that enable Americans to make their own decisions about what sort of health insurance to buy, and that their options should include low-premium coverage that protects them against the risk of major financial setbacks resulting from health care. The legislation released last night by House Republicans is, even on the most charitable

Critics claim this change will tank the insurance markets, but the GOP bet is that if insurers are allowed to sell lower-cost products that people want to buy, people will buy them without a mandate. By loosening rules that standardize coverage and extending financial help to consumers, the goal is to stand up a more vibrant market with more choices than ObamaCare permits.

President Trump said Tuesday he is "proud" to support the House bill and hopes it passes quickly. His leadership will be critical, especially as strife grows on the right about the allegedly insufficient conservative purity of the House plan.

These critics say they want outright repeal first, and then maybe

dramatically slashed the number of uninsured Americans, and in some states (such as California), its reforms have given those not covered by large employer plans a much more consumer-friendly way to buy policies. Other states have implemented the act poorly, however, as opposition from state lawmakers and a hands-off approach toward insurers have led to large premium increases and fewer choices for coverage. In a few regions, in fact, large losses threaten to drive insurers out of the individual market completely.

Rather than fixing those problems by following the successful states' lead, the House bills would strike off in a new direction. Insurers would be allowed to sell policies that cover a smaller percentage of the average customer's medical costs. They also could charge older customers even more than the ACA allowed, and younger ones less. Insurers would almost certainly respond by churning out more low-premium, high-out-of-pocket-cost plans that are designed to appeal to people who don't really need health

reading, only a first step toward that goal.

It does not repeal all of Obamacare, leaving many of its regulations in place. The apparent rationale for this omission is that eliminating the regulations would subject the legislation to a fatal Senate filibuster. We have recommended that Republicans defang the regulations by replacing Obamacare's subsidies with a simple new tax credit that people

Congress can pass a replacement someday. But Mr. Trump ran on "repeal and replace" and House Republicans united around the "Better Way" plan. They promised real solutions to ObamaCare's problems.

Repeal-only can't pass the Senate in any case, because Senate Republicans—with good reason—don't want to accelerate ObamaCare's collapse or throw millions off the Medicaid rolls. Voters tend to punish parties that disrupt their insurance. Just ask Democrats.

In other words, the House bill is the only health-care show in town. If conservatives join Democrats to defeat the measure, the result will be to preserve ObamaCare as is—and probably torpedo the rest of the

insurance. Meanwhile, those who do need care — for example, parents with asthmatic children or diabetics — would be saddled with ever-more expensive plans.

But it gets worse. The House leaders' plan would drop the ACA's individual mandate, which required adult Americans to carry insurance or pay an increasingly hefty tax penalty. Instead, it would allow insurers to raise premiums 30% for one year for anyone who'd gone without coverage. That's a considerably smaller penalty, increasing the incentive for young and healthy people to skip insurance until they really need treatment, especially if they're not covered through their employer. As a consequence, insurers will be left covering a sicker, more expensive pool of customers not covered by large group plans, driving premiums up and increasingly out of reach for those with modest incomes. There are roughly 20 million people in that market today.

The most baffling aspect of the plan is the tax credits for low- and

could use to buy insurance governed by a new, lighter regulatory regime. That way Obamacare's regulations would stay on the books but no longer hinder consumer choice. But Republicans shrank from this option, too.

We disagree with this tactical decision, which places Senate parliamentary rules — or, rather, places guesses about how those rules would operate — ahead of

GOP agenda including tax reform. Good luck running for re-election in 2018 with a record of failure.

The House proposal can be improved with amendments—and more work will be necessary in future years to make medicine more affordable, promote innovation, protect the most vulnerable and give patients more control of their health-care dollars. But the bill is a major down payment on a brighter health-care future. Republicans have a limited window for repeal and replace, and this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. Democrats understand this, even if some conservatives don't.

moderate-income households. Unlike the ACA's subsidies, which are tied to the cost of a policy covering 70% of one's healthcare costs, the new credits would be tied to a person's age and would be too small to pay for anything but a bare-bones plan in many parts of the country. [One new analysis](#) estimates that once the bill went into effect in 2020, costs would go up for the average customer by more than \$2,400 per year — and by more than \$4,000 for low-income Americans.

Of course, the tax credit can only be so generous, given that the bills would repeal almost all of the tax increases that helped pay for Obamacare. The result would be a \$310-billion windfall over 10 years for the wealthiest American taxpayers — and unaffordably high healthcare costs for millions of other, less fortunate citizens. If the Republicans' goal is to drive more people off insurance and into hospital emergency rooms, these bills are just the ticket.

good health policy and making good on longstanding party promises. It also seems to us that Republicans would be better off rallying behind a bill in which they really believe, even if Democrats kill it with a filibuster, than trying and failing to enact a bill that they support only tepidly. That second outcome may now take place.

Moreover, the legislation has some serious flaws even as a first step toward full repeal and replacement.

It eliminates Obamacare's fines on people who go without insurance, but in their place creates a new surcharge for people who let their insurance lapse and then try to purchase a new policy. The goal is to keep healthy people from leaving the insurance rolls and thus destabilizing insurance markets.

The surcharge is a heavy-handed instrument: Insurers would be obligated to

impose it regardless of their preferences. Yet the surcharge might not achieve its goal. A lot of healthy people might well decide to go without insurance and run the risk of paying a surcharge if they get sick later. The surcharge even undermines its own goal, since it would discourage healthy people who had already left the insurance rolls from getting back on them.

The bill has its good points. If the surcharge works, the deregulation in the bill would lower premiums. Many of Obamacare's taxes would be repealed. Obamacare's tax credits create high effective marginal tax rates for people in the lower middle class; the bill's replacement tax credits would avoid this problem. Permissible contributions to and limits on health savings accounts would be

loosened. Federal contributions to Medicaid would be capped, ending the perverse incentives that have for decades enabled the growth of the program.

All in all, though, the bill is a disappointment. And it is not too late to get a second opinion.

Editors' note: *This article has been revised since its initial publication.*



Editorial : No Wonder the Republicans Hid the Health Bill

The Editorial Board

Republican House leaders have spent months dodging questions about how they would replace the Affordable Care Act with a better law, and went so far as to hide the draft of their plan from other lawmakers. No wonder. The bill they [released on Monday](#) would kick millions of people off the coverage they currently have. So much for President Trump's big [campaign promise](#): "We're going to have insurance for everybody" — with coverage that would be "much less expensive and much better."

More than 20 million Americans gained health care coverage under the A.C.A., or Obamacare. [Health experts](#) say most would lose that coverage under the proposal.

Let's start with Medicaid. Obamacare expanded the program to cover [11 million more](#) poor Americans in 31 states and the District of Columbia. The Republican bill would end the expansion in 2020. Although people who sign up before 2020 under the expanded Medicaid program, which covers people with incomes up to [138 percent of the federal poverty level](#) (about \$33,900 for a family of four), would be allowed to stay on,

many would be kicked off over time. The working poor tend to drop in and out of Medicaid because their incomes fluctuate, and the Republican plan would bar people who left the expanded program from going back in.

Tom Price, secretary of health and human services, discussing the Republican bill to replace the Affordable Care Act. Doug Mills/The New York Times

The bill would also, for the first time ever, apply a per-person limit on how much the federal government spends on Medicaid. This change could shift about [\\$370 billion in health care costs](#) over 10 years to state governments, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Many state governments, faced with limited budgets, would be forced to cut benefits or cover fewer people.

For people who buy insurance on federal or state-run health exchanges, the G.O.P. plan would greatly reduce the A.C.A.'s subsidies, which come in the form of tax credits. For example, a 40-year-old living in Raleigh, N.C., who earns \$30,000 a year would receive \$3,000 from the government to buy insurance, 32 percent less than under current law, [according to the](#)

[Kaiser Family Foundation](#). The bill would provide older people more generous subsidies — those over 60 get a subsidy of \$4,000, or [twice as much as 20-somethings](#) — but insurers would be allowed to charge older people five times as much as younger people.

The plan would do away with the current mandate that requires nearly everybody to obtain insurance or pay a penalty. (Instead, insurers would be allowed to charge people who don't maintain their insurance continuously 30 percent more for coverage.) But because the legislation would still require insurers to cover pre-existing conditions, people would have a strong financial incentive to buy insurance only when they got sick — a sure way to destroy the insurance market.

House Speaker Paul Ryan and Tom Price, the secretary of health and human services, have railed against high premiums and deductibles for plans sold on the health exchanges, but that problem would only worsen under their proposal because insurers would almost certainly raise their prices as the pool of the insured shrank. Republican lawmakers seem to think that people who can't afford insurance are simply irresponsible.

Representative Jason Chaffetz of Utah, for instance, [told CNN](#) that people should invest in their health care, "rather than getting that new iPhone." Word to Mr. Chaffetz: Health insurance costs [more than \\$18,000](#) a year for an average family; an iPhone costs a few hundred dollars.

While working people lose health care, the rich would come out winners. The bill would eliminate the [taxes on businesses and individuals](#) (people making more than \$200,000 a year) who fund Obamacare. The tax cuts would total about [\\$600 billion over 10 years](#), according to the Joint Committee on Taxation.

House committees will start considering the bill on Wednesday. Even if it passes the House, some Republican senators object to the Medicaid cuts and the Tea Party wing hates the idea of retaining any subsidies.

Republicans have been vowing to repeal the Affordable Care Act even before it became law in 2010. But they still haven't come up with a workable replacement. Instead, the G.O.P.'s various factions are now haggling over just how many millions of Americans they are willing to harm.



Paul Ryan : Our health care plan for America

Over the strong objections of key conservatives and Democrats, House Republican leaders are forging ahead with a health care plan that scraps major parts of the Obama-era overhaul. (March 7) AP

House Speaker Paul Ryan(Photo: J. Scott Applewhite, AP)

When I took the speaker's gavel, I told my colleagues that it's no longer good enough to just say what we're against. We had to show what we're for. That's why last year we released a [complete policy agenda](#) — tracking closely with ideas from our presidential nominee, Donald Trump — to tackle all of the big challenges facing this country. The truth is, we have solutions to all of

the many problems that Barack Obama left behind.

And there is no more urgent problem than Obamacare.

The collapsing law is driving up health care costs and driving out choices for American families. This year alone, premiums have gone up by [double digits in 31 states](#). Choices have dwindled to the point that one out of every three counties in America has just [one insurer to choose from](#).

Not too long ago, Bill Clinton called Obamacare "the [craziest thing](#) in the world." He is on to something there.

That's why we must end this law — repealing it once and for all. But

rather than going back to the way things were, we must move to a better system that embraces competition and choice and actually lowers costs for patients and taxpayers.

Introduced this week, the American Health Care Act keeps our promise to repeal and replace Obamacare. I hope you will read the bill online at [readthebill.gop](#).

Our goal is to give every American access to quality, affordable health care. For families, that means lower costs, more choices and greater control. Let me walk you through how our plan will help get us there.

For starters, our bill repeals Obamacare. We cannot rebuild the American health care system on

such a flawed foundation, and that's why we eliminate Obamacare's taxes, mandates and spending.

Next, and this is important, our plan ensures there will be a stable transition. As we move from a Washington-driven system to a more vibrant market, we will make sure no one has the rug pulled out from under them. This also means we will ensure vital protections for patients with pre-existing conditions and allow young adults to stay on their parents' plan.

We will also give states more funding and flexibility to support high-risk pools and reinsurance programs. Where Obamacare was built on mandates and coercion that make coverage more expensive,

our plan takes care of those in need without driving up costs for everyone else.

Next, while Obamacare just added people to a broken Medicaid system, we will strengthen Medicaid so that states have the tools they need to take care of their poor and most vulnerable populations at a lower cost. Our plan represents the most significant entitlement reform in more than 50 years.

Republicans have long said that we have to empower patients as consumers to spur competition and bring down costs. That's why we will also nearly [double the amount of money](#) you can contribute to health

savings accounts to pay for out-of-pocket expenses. This will end Obamacare's limits on how you save and spend your health care dollars.

Ultimately, we need a real marketplace for health insurance. Currently, the tax code discriminates against those who don't get coverage through their employer. To level the playing field, our plan offers an advanceable, refundable [tax credit](#) to those who don't get insurance from work or a government program. Instead of mandates forcing you to buy what the government wants, you will have real choices. Available to those

under a certain income level, this tax credit will be age-based and portable so that you can take it with you from job to job.

And to help more people buy the kind of plan that fits their needs, we will get rid of costly insurance mandates and regulations.

In the weeks ahead, the House will consider this plan through an open and transparent process, including legislation to allow people to purchase health care across state lines. As we do, I encourage you to read the bill so you can see the changes we are proposing.

Here is the choice we face: Do we stay with Obamacare and the unsustainable status quo, or do we repeal it and replace it with something better?

The American Health Care Act offers a better way. It keeps our promise, begins to clean up the mess Obamacare has made, and builds a better system for all Americans. Now we must deliver.

Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., is speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Washington Post **Milbank : The Republican health-care plan's top critics? Republicans.**

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

President Trump, long at the forefront of intellectual discovery, last week came up with a major finding: Health-care reform is hard. "[Unbelievably complex](#)," in fact.

"Nobody knew that health care could be so complicated," the president said.

Actually, we all knew. That's why Republicans' successor plan to Obamacare, "repeal and replace," became repeal and delay. That's why House Republicans kept their draft legislation under guard in a [secret, GOP-only](#) "reading room" in the Capitol, so copies wouldn't leak. That's why they decided to push the legislation through committees this week only a couple of days after introducing it — and before waiting for the Congressional Budget Office to say how much the legislation would cost taxpayers and how many people would lose health insurance.

Today's Headlines newsletter

The day's most important stories.

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Apparently they have to pass the bill so we can find out what's in it.

And now that Republican leaders in the House have finally revealed their plan, the magic formula turns out to be ... a cheap knockoff of Obamacare: covering fewer people, charging them more and giving a tax cut to the rich.

Democrats, predictably, panned it because it's a cheap knockoff of Obamacare, and they prefer the original over imitators. The bigger problem for GOP leaders is that conservatives also panned it because, well, it's a cheap knockoff of Obamacare.

Outside the Capitol Tuesday afternoon, conservative legislators lined up to denounce the bill.

"A step in the wrong direction," said [Sen. Mike Lee](#) (R-Utah).

Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Texas) likened the "flawed bill" to "[horse excrement](#)."

"Let's not lower the bar on what we believe simply because a Republican is in the White House," said Rep. Mark Sanford (R-S.C.).

Rep. Thomas Garrett (R-Va.) complained that the bill was drafted "in a cloak of secrecy" and blessed a "new entitlement."

"Obviously," deduced Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), "we have some serious concerns."

The sales effort so far has been wanting. Rep. [Jason Chaffetz](#) (R-Utah), defending the legislation on CNN on Tuesday, suggested that Americans, "rather than getting that new iPhone that they just love and they want to spend hundreds of dollars on that, maybe they should invest in their own health care."

The authors of the legislation, Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R-Tex.) and Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Greg Walden (R-Ore.), didn't do much better. They paraded

their 123-page bill before the cameras Tuesday morning with a sign pasted on it: "Read the Bill."

They came armed with a letter from Trump's health and human services secretary, Tom Price, backing the legislation (Trump himself calls it "[wonderful](#)"), but they had no direct answers for how much the bill would cost, how many fewer would be covered and what sort of tax break the wealthy would see.

CBS's Nancy Cordes pointed out that Republicans complained for years about Democrats ramming through Obamacare. "So aren't you doing the exact same thing?"

"No, not at all," replied Walden — who [then admitted](#) he was indeed following the procedure the Democrats did when, in passing Obamacare, "they didn't have a CBO score before it went up to the Budget Committee."

The Republican legislation also includes many of the "gimmicks" they decried in Obamacare: delaying implementation of costly provisions to out years to make the bill appear cheaper than it is. The bill, which Rep. Justin Amash (R-Mich.) called "[Obamacare 2.0](#)," uses the structure of Obamacare, sustains Obamacare's Medicaid expansion at least through 2020 and keeps the "Cadillac tax" on generous health-care plans.

Democrats say the GOP plan would cause at least 11 million to lose health coverage, cause premium, co-pay and deductible increases, deplete the Medicare trust fund, and amount to a huge transfer of wealth to the richest. They are getting a bit

of support from a [group of four](#) relatively moderate Senate Republicans who have already demanded protections for those covered by Obamacare's Medicaid expansion.

This leaves little if any wiggle room for Republican leaders to placate restive conservatives, even though Vice President Pence assures them he's "open to improvements."

[Powerful conservative groups](#) such as Heritage Action, FreedomWorks and Club for Growth have all denounced the GOP legislation. Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) called the bill "[Obamacare lite](#)," and he and Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) said they would reintroduce legislation calling for an outright repeal of Obamacare.

Brady, one of the authors of Obamacare lite, warned Republicans: "We can act now or we can keep fiddling around and squander this opportunity to repeal Obamacare."

Apparently, that argument hasn't prevailed. As Brady and Walden finished their news conference, an email from House Speaker Paul D. Ryan's (R-Wis.) office arrived announcing a do-over: Brady and Walden would have another health-care news conference later in the day, this time joined by Ryan.

Who knew it would be so hard?

Twitter: @Milbank

Read more from [Dana Milbank's archive](#), [follow him on Twitter](#) or [subscribe to his updates on Facebook](#).

The Washington Post **Slavitt : The House Republicans' health-care bill is a thicket of bad incentives**

By Andy Slavitt

By Andy Slavitt March 7 at 7:30 PM

Andy Slavitt was acting administrator of the Centers for

Medicare and Medicaid Services from 2015 to 2017. His Twitter handle is @aslavitt.

After 2,500 days, [the American Health Care Act](#) is born. Congressional Republicans' much-anticipated health-care bill may have a similar name to the Affordable Care Act it's intended to replace, but it would have a dramatically different impact. Despite President Trump's stated goals of covering at least as many people as the ACA, with more affordable policies, the plan put forward by the House on Monday would cut coverage for millions and make it more expensive for millions more.

But it's not these obvious changes that are most concerning. There is a great deal about the bill that's not apparent at first glance. None of it will be missed by the impartial Congressional Budget Office.

First, the tax-credit structure in the bill would not only make health care less affordable for millions, particularly those over 55, it would also destabilize the insurance markets. The ACA pegs tax credits to income levels and, when premiums rise, those tax credits rise along with them, protecting consumers against regional differences and sudden increases in medical costs. This is better for the insurance risk pools, because more people stay in when premiums stay affordable for more people. But take those protections away, as the new bill would, and something perverse but entirely predictable happens:

Sicker people keep paying (if they can), healthy people do not, and costs go up. That's not partisanship but simple math.

Second, the bill drops the individual mandate. About as unpopular as vegetables are with my kids, the mandate for individuals to buy insurance nevertheless keeps premiums lower for everyone. Adding a surcharge of 30 percent for those who decide to sign up for coverage after a gap may hurt more than it would help, as it would disproportionately attract sicker people. If that's not enough, the bill would directly increase deductibles and co-payments for millions by eliminating the ACA's cost-sharing reductions for lower-income earners. As someone who ran a large health-care organization in the private sector and then oversaw the ACA exchanges these past several years, I know how inexorably this all would push premiums higher and lead insurers to exit, as healthier people took their chances without insurance.

But the most lasting effects of this bill would be the significant steps it took toward forcing permanent changes to Medicaid and Medicare. The Medicaid changes are more obvious and dangerous. First, the bill would effectively end the popular and largely bipartisan Medicaid expansion created by the ACA, which extended care to millions of working Americans. Dropping the federal funding contribution for new enrollees after 2020 — and violating a promise the federal government

made to the states — would rapidly end the expansion. In today's world, taking away funding for such a program is the same as killing it; it's just a different weapon.

More draconian is a permanent capping of the Medicaid program. In my time overseeing the government agency that runs the program, we dealt with many unexpected shocks — Zika, high-cost drugs and the national opioid epidemic, to name a few. Under the changes sought by Republicans, states would no longer have the resources to manage these crises, with devastating results for our communities. Medicaid pays for nearly half the births and [half the long-term care](#) in this country, to say nothing of the millions of Americans with disabilities who rely on it. If the federal government retreats on its commitment to Medicaid, the repercussions will be felt quickly — by our neighbors and by our care providers and hospitals.

Medicare doesn't escape unscathed either. The bill would cut several years from the life of the Medicare trust fund, but that's clearly no accident: The program would wind up right where "entitlement hawks" such as House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) want it — in crisis. If this bill became law, the speaker would finally be positioned to change Medicare to a voucher program.

Because the bill would reduce coverage and make insurance less affordable, the only way for Republicans to sell it has been to

feign a collapse or implosion of the ACA. This is simply false, as independent analysts such as [Standard & Poor's have reported](#). After one-time rate increases, the exchanges were stable going into the high-stakes game the administration has played by casting uncertainty on the market. One sign of this is the way the bill would hurt the risk pools: If there were a fire here, the Republicans would be adding water, not gasoline.

But all this serves the real objective — using the "rescue" of the individual market to make permanent draconian changes to Medicare and Medicaid while pushing forward a major tax cut for high-income earners, insurers, tanning salons and pharmaceutical companies. Some may view this as a good idea. Having overseen these programs, I do not. But no one should argue that we don't deserve a real national debate, with public hearings, proper CBO analysis and the time necessary to consider the likely generational effects for millions of Americans.

Fortunately, our elected representatives still have an opportunity to listen to ordinary Americans and independent experts before acting. And once we dispense with this bill, its harmful effects and bad incentives, we may be able to finally have the bipartisan dialogue on how to improve our health-care system that Americans deserve.



Jenkins Jr. : ObamaCare 2.0

Holman W.
Jenkins, Jr.

March 7, 2017 6:58 p.m. ET

House Republicans have finally rolled out their new health-care proposal, and it's receiving heated criticism from both left and right—and not because it's so good. Yet it does represent a better dog's breakfast than the incoherent Obama scheme it would replace.

Let's start from the top. "Repeal" is a meaningless political gesture: New laws supersede or amend existing laws, so if Republicans have a health-care plan, they could just enact it.

In doing so, the GOP will inevitably keep certain ObamaCare elements. A feature they apparently intend to preserve is the provision that lets children up to age 26 stay on their parents' plans. Never mind that this is a typically illusory mandated "benefit." In effect, it's a benefit customers no longer can opt not to pay for.

The individual mandate is philosophically in disrepute among the GOP and has to go, but the real problem was how ObamaCare twisted its purpose. Instead of requiring grown-ups to shoulder their own health risks, it forced certain customers to buy overpriced policies so other customers could receive underpriced ones. The GOP says it will maintain a requirement that insurers accept patients with pre-existing conditions, but now would subsidize these customers directly—in other words, more honestly.

One of ObamaCare's best features was that it reserved its visible subsidies for the needy, unlike, say, Medicare or the [regressive](#) tax benefit for employer-provided insurance.

The GOP plan maintains this principle but will revert to refundable tax credits scaled to age and income. These credits presumably won't be—and won't need to be—as generous as the subsidies required

to induce people to buy grossly overpriced ObamaCare policies. Still, look for liberals to hunt up many a sad example of an existing ObamaCare customer who would rationally choose to go uninsured under GOP care.

That's because many *hidden* subsidies are also programmed into ObamaCare. The young subsidize the old, singles subsidize families, men subsidize women, those who go to the doctor only when sick subsidize those who consume lots of elective or preventive care.

We can do President Obama the service of stating his position more fairly than he did his opponents'. He favors a vision of health insurance which is not insurance, i.e., not pooling against major risk. Insurance should cover routine care, preventive care, even elective care—a woman's birth control should be covered. Anything less, he said, is "house insurance"—it covers you only against extreme

costs that might force you to mortgage your house.

You are aware of the gaping irony. To pay for all these subsidies, ObamaCare policies incorporate deductibles and copays so high that, for routine illness or injury, having ObamaCare is the equivalent of being uninsured—except your teenage daughter gets her birth control for "free."

This is why practically the only people who buy ObamaCare policies nowadays are those poor enough to qualify for hefty subsidies and/or sick enough that ObamaCare is still a bargain in relation to all the health care they plan to consume.

Some of these people, when their pet coverage mandate is withdrawn, will find the decision re-tilted in the direction of going uninsured again. Can the GOP withstand the withering press on their behalf? We'll see.

It's important to note something else. Even if we grant sincerity to Mr. Obama's dream of an egalitarian health-care system, ObamaCare is a fair representation of what political reality would deliver: a system in which elected politicians constantly try to woo specific voter blocs by shifting their costs to other health-care payers or to the general taxpayer.

Happily, paring back coverage mandates and

**The
New York
Times**

Emanuel, Glickman and Gudbranson : How Republicans Plan to Ration Health Care

Ezekiel J. Emanuel, Aaron Glickman and Emily Gudbranson

Then Republicans want to go further, by changing how all of Medicaid is funded: They would replace federal Medicaid payments, which guarantee coverage to anyone who qualifies, with so-called per-person allotments, or per-capita caps. These give states a fixed amount of money for each person on Medicaid, adjusted based on whether the person is blind, disabled, a child, an adult or elderly. The states then decide how to budget the money.

The problem is that the amount given to the states will not keep up with projected health care costs. Changes in the allotment will be tied to changes in the medical part of the Consumer Price Index, which, for various reasons, is unlikely to increase as quickly as the cost of health care. This shortfall in federal funding will force more states to make the kinds of rationing choices Arizona and Indiana made.

A second hidden kicker is that the grants will not increase in response to changing needs. Currently, federal funding is tied to actual

the implicit subsidies they generate is easy enough to do in principle. Though Mr. Trump has rightly discovered that health-care politics is complicated, health-care reform isn't. The problem can be solved in a couple of tweets.

1) The only people who should receive subsidies are the poor and those whose chronic or congenital conditions make them uninsurable.

Medicaid costs. So if a state has a natural disaster or an epidemic that unexpectedly increases spending, federal funding automatically increases, too. But the Republicans' allotments will not respond to real-world changes. Again, this will force states to make more difficult choices — cutting lifesaving treatments or nursing home care for the elderly or support for disabled children.

The Republicans say they want to give states more flexibility. But that flexibility most likely means they could use the money for non-health-care programs, or to close state budget gaps. When given budgetary flexibility with large sums of money, this is a common state tactic.

In 1998, as part of a major settlement with tobacco companies, in which the companies agreed to pay Medicaid costs related to lung cancer, emphysema and other smoking-related illnesses, states got a windfall of a minimum of \$206 billion over 25 years. What did they do with the money? A 2001 Government Accountability Office report found that 26 percent was being spent on non-health programs, including infrastructure

2) This incentive should not be constructed so as to encourage people to remain uninsured until they're sick. If I choose to remain uninsured and then throw myself on the taxpayer, my assets and earnings should be at risk. Period.

But try unraveling today's tangle of direct and indirect subsidies, even when the net result would be a huge improvement in welfare from a less distorted, less inflation-prone health-care system. Even under a

GOP plan, health care will remain a heavily subsidized industry in relation to everything else Americans might rationally prefer to spend their money on.

A highly reliable prediction: The failure of ObamaCare is a crisis, but it would take many, many more crises to move the U.S. toward something resembling a rational, efficient health-care system.

and budget shortfalls. A mere 7 percent was spent on programs related to getting people to stop smoking.

State flexibility has led to other coldhearted decisions. Before the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid was a categorical program, meaning that Americans were eligible only if they were low-income and had another qualifying condition, such as being a child or pregnant or disabled. States could determine those eligibility requirements. And financial pressures made many pretty callous.

In many states, non-disabled working adults were denied any Medicaid benefits. In Wyoming, a working family of three with an income over \$9,480 was not eligible for Medicaid. In Alabama, that family had to make just \$4,392 — 24 percent of the poverty line — to be denied coverage. These people were not lazy or, in Mitt Romney's words, "takers." About 67 percent of uninsured Americans were in families with at least one full-time worker, and more than 10 percent worked two jobs. The uninsured just happened to work for companies

that did not or could not provide health insurance.

State flexibility is a ruse. Per-person allotments are an elaborate cost-shifting mechanism — a fancy way to reduce federal funding and transfer financial responsibility for the health care of low-income Americans to states. A 2014 assessment by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities of Representative Paul Ryan's plan, which contained elements similar to those in the current proposal, estimated that this accounting trick would increase Medicaid costs for state budgets by \$169 billion by 2026. So, under the banner of flexibility, the current Republican plan would force states to make a series of Hobson's choices.

This would be even worse than going back to the days before the Affordable Care Act. It would force states to ration care and deny some Americans lifesaving treatments or nursing home care. Cruel only begins to describe the Republican plan.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

WikiLeaks Dumps Trove of Purported CIA Hacking Tools

Shane Harris and Paul Sonne

Updated March 7, 2017 9:12 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—WikiLeaks released a massive trove of documents and files Tuesday that it says exposes how the Central Intelligence Agency hacks smartphones, computer operating systems, message applications and internet-connected televisions, in what would be one of the biggest breaches in the spy agency's history.

The group, which was [behind the leak of emails stolen from the Democratic National Committee](#) during last year's presidential

campaign, said the release consists of 8,761 documents and files from the CIA's Center for Cyber Intelligence. It called the unauthorized disclosure, which it dubbed Vault 7, the "largest ever publication of confidential documents on the agency," laying bare some of the CIA's most sensitive secrets.

An agency spokesman declined to comment "on the authenticity or content of purported intelligence documents." A spokesman for the White House also declined to comment.

The revelations are certain to fuel a continuing debate over whether intelligence agencies that discover security flaws in popular technology

should disclose them, so that the users can defend themselves from hackers, or to keep that information secret for use in intelligence operations.

If the leak is deemed authentic, as several experts said it initially appeared to be, it also will pose questions over the extent to which U.S. national security may have been compromised, given the exposure of the CIA's toolbox for conducting cyberespionage.

Typically, U.S. investigators begin a leak probe by focusing on individuals who would have had access to the stolen information. The CIA can conduct its own internal investigation, just as the National Security Agency did

[following leaks by former contractor Edward Snowden in 2013](#). The Federal Bureau of Investigation would be responsible for conducting any criminal investigation.

Rep. Devin Nunes (R., Calif.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said the U.S. was "early on" in an investigation into the matter and described the leaks as "very, very serious."

"We are extremely concerned," Mr. Nunes said.

One intelligence source said some of the information WikiLeaks released pertains to tools that the CIA uses to hack computers and other devices. This person said disclosing the information would

jeopardize ongoing intelligence-gathering operations.

The revelations were considered by many experts to be potentially more significant than the leaks by Mr. Snowden.

Mr. Snowden's leaks revealed names of programs, companies that assist the NSA in surveillance and in some cases the targets of American spying. But the recent leak purports to contain highly technical details about how surveillance is carried out. That would make them far more revealing and useful to an adversary, one person said.

In one sense, Mr. Snowden provided a briefing book on U.S. surveillance, but the CIA leaks could provide the blueprints.

WikiLeaks said in its statement that it wasn't publishing such information as computer source code that could be used to replicate the tools it claims to have exposed. But the group left open the possibility of publishing those crucial details if "a consensus emerges on the technical and political nature of the CIA's program and how such 'weapons' should [sic] analyzed, disarmed and published."

[Mr. Snowden said in a tweet Tuesday](#), "Still working through the publication, but what @Wikileaks has here is genuinely a big deal. Looks authentic."



akashimapost/

A vast portion of the CIA's computer hacking arsenal appeared to have been exposed Tuesday by the anti-secrecy organization WikiLeaks, which posted thousands of files revealing secret cyber-tools used by the agency to convert cellphones, televisions and other ordinary devices into implements of espionage.

The trove appeared to lay bare the design and capabilities of some of the U.S. intelligence community's most closely guarded cyberweapons, a breach that is likely to cause immediate damage to the CIA's efforts to gather intelligence overseas and place new strain on the U.S. government's relationship with Silicon Valley giants including Apple and Google.

WikiLeaks, which claimed to have gotten the files from a current or former CIA contractor, touted the trove as comparable in scale and significance to the collection of National Security Agency documents exposed by former U.S.

WikiLeaks said the CIA had "lost control of the majority of its hacking arsenal" and characterized the archive as "an extraordinary collection" of more than several hundred million lines of code.

The exposure, if genuine, is likely to disrupt or halt many ongoing intelligence operations, said a former intelligence officer who has worked on cyberespionage, and could implicate the CIA in past operations, including some that might be under investigation in foreign countries where the agency was spying.

One CIA group revealed in the documents, known as Umbrage, maintains a library of malicious software components taken from commercial and foreign sources found "in-the-wild." So far, security experts have found evidence in this trove that the CIA collected malware components believed to have been used by foreign countries.

This library appears to give the CIA the ability to deploy hacking tools and techniques that have been known to work in operations by other countries overseas, said one former Western intelligence official.

The Umbrage library would also provide a useful reference for identifying foreign hackers trying to penetrate U.S. systems, said a former U.S. intelligence officer. And it could also be used to mask a U.S. operation and make it appear that it

was carried out by another country, the former officer said. That could be accomplished by inserting malware components from, say, a known Chinese, Russian or Iranian hacking operation into a U.S. one.

"When they get caught, nobody thinks it's the U.S.," said Stuart McClure, CEO and co-founder of the cybersecurity company Cylance.

Among other documents posted on WikiLeaks, one gives instructions for employees going on temporary assignments to a facility at the U.S. consulate in Frankfurt that appears in the leaked material to be a base for cyberespionage operations.

Perhaps the biggest unanswered question Tuesday was how detailed information on such sensitive CIA tools made its way into the public domain.

Most of the documents appear to come from an internal local network that agency coders use for testing and development, raising questions about whether a mole leaked the information or someone penetrated the network from outside.

WikiLeaks said the archive appeared to have been circulating among former U.S. government hackers and contractors, one of whom the site said provided WikiLeaks with portions of the material.

The CIA likely will turn immediately to the question of how the

information was stolen and by whom. "I think it would have to be a disgruntled employee or a contractor," the former intelligence officer said, suggesting a foreign country would have been more likely to keep the information for its own use than release it publicly.

WikiLeaks posted on its website Tuesday what it called the first installment in a series of planned leaks, calling it "Year Zero." The first installment "introduces the scope and direction of the CIA's global covert hacking program, its malware arsenal and dozens of 'zero day' weaponized exploits against a wide range of U.S. and European company products," WikiLeaks said.

WikiLeaks said the information on CIA hacking came from an unidentified source who believes the spy agency's hacking authorities "urgently need to be debated in public, including whether the CIA's hacking capabilities exceed its mandated powers and the problem of public oversight of the agency."

—Rob Barry and Christopher S. Stewart contributed to this article.

Write to Shane Harris at shane.harris@wsj.com and Paul Sonne at paul.sonne@wsj.com

WikiLeaks says it has obtained trove of CIA hacking tools

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

intelligence contractor [Edward Snowden](#).

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But while the Snowden files revealed massive surveillance programs that gathered data on millions of Americans, the CIA documents posted so far by WikiLeaks appear mainly to unmask hacking methods that many experts already assumed the agency had developed.

U.S. intelligence officials and experts said details contained in the newly released documents suggest that they are legitimate, although that could not be independently verified, raising new worries about the U.S. government's ability to safeguard its secrets in an era of cascading leaks of classified data.

(Reuters)

Anti-secrecy group Wikileaks on Tuesday said it had obtained a top-

secret trove of hacking tools used by the CIA to break into phones, communication apps and other electronic devices, and published confidential documents on those programs. Anti-secrecy group Wikileaks on Tuesday said it had obtained a top-secret trove of hacking tools used by the CIA to break into phones, communication apps and other electronic devices, and published confidential documents on those programs. Justin Mitchell reports. (Reuters)

The files mention pieces of malware with names like "Assassin" and "Medusa" that seem drawn from a spy film, describing tools that the CIA uses to steal data from iPhones, seize control of Microsoft-powered computers or even make Internet-connected Samsung television sets secretly function as microphones.

The release of so many sensitive files appeared to catch the CIA, the White House and other government entities off-guard. A CIA spokesman would say only that "we do not comment on the authenticity of purported intelligence documents."

In a statement, WikiLeaks indicated that the initial stockpile it put online was part of a broader collection of nearly 9,000 files that would be posted over time describing code developed in secret by the CIA to steal data from a range of targets. WikiLeaks said it redacted lists of CIA surveillance targets, though it said they included targets and machines in Latin America, Europe and the United States.

The release was described as a huge loss to the CIA by security experts and former U.S. intelligence officials. "It looks like really the backbone of their network exploitation kit," said a former hacker who worked for the National Security Agency and, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing the sensitivity of the subject.

The breach could undermine the CIA's ability to carry out key parts of its mission, from targeting the Islamic State and other terrorist networks to penetrating the computer defenses of sophisticated cyber-adversaries including Russia,

China and Iran, former officials and tech specialists said.

"Any exposure of these tools is going to cause grave if not irreparable damage to the ability of our intelligence agencies to conduct our mission," a former senior U.S. intelligence official said.

If legitimate, the release represents the latest major breach of sensitive U.S. government data to be put on global display in humiliating fashion by WikiLeaks, which came to prominence in 2010 with the exposure of thousands of classified U.S. diplomatic cables and military files. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has engaged in an escalating feud with the United States while taking refuge at the Ecuadoran Embassy in London from Swedish sexual assault allegations.

WikiLeaks' latest assault on U.S. secrets may pose an early, potentially awkward security issue for President Trump, who has repeatedly praised WikiLeaks and disparaged the CIA.

Trump declared "I love WikiLeaks" last October during a campaign rally when he read from a trove of stolen emails about his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, that had been posted to the organization's website.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer declined to comment when asked about the CIA breach during a news briefing Tuesday.

[\[Why the CIA is using your TVs, smartphones and cars for spying\]](#)

WikiLeaks indicated that it obtained the files from a current or former CIA contractor, saying that "the archive appears to have been circulated among former U.S. government hackers and contractors in an unauthorized manner, one of whom has provided WikiLeaks with portions of the archive."

But the counterintelligence investigation underway at the CIA is also likely to search for clues to whether Russia had any role in the theft of the agency's digital arsenal. U.S. intelligence officials allege that WikiLeaks has ties to Russian intelligence services. The website posted thousands of emails stolen from Democratic Party computer networks during the 2016 presidential campaign, files that U.S. intelligence agencies concluded were obtained and turned over to WikiLeaks as part of a cyber-campaign orchestrated by the Kremlin.

Experts and former intelligence officials said the latest files appear to be authentic in part because they refer to code names and capabilities known to have been developed by the CIA's cyber-branch.

"At first glance," the data release "is probably legitimate or contains a lot of legitimate stuff, which means somebody managed to extract a lot of data from a classified CIA system and is willing to let the world know that," said Nicholas Weaver, a computer security researcher at the University of California at Berkeley.

Faking a large quantity of data is difficult but not impossible, he noted. Weaver said he knows of one case of WikiLeaks deliberately neglecting to include a document in a data release and one case of WikiLeaks deliberately mislabeling stolen data, "but no cases yet of deliberately fraudulent information."

[\[WikiLeaks releases thousands of documents about Clinton and internal deliberations\]](#)

WikiLeaks said the trove comprised tools — including malware, viruses, trojans and weaponized "zero day" exploits — developed by a CIA entity known as the Engineering Development Group, part of a sprawling cyber-directorate created in recent years as the agency shifted resources and attention to online espionage.

WikiLeaks labeled the trove "Vault 7" and said that it contains several hundred million lines of code, many of which are designed to exploit vulnerabilities in everyday consumer devices.

In a statement, WikiLeaks said the files enable the agency to bypass popular encryption-enabled applications — including [WhatsApp](#), Signal and Telegram — used by millions of people to safeguard their communications.

But experts said that rather than defeating the encryption of those applications, the CIA's methods rely on exploiting vulnerabilities in the devices on which they are installed, a method referred to as "hacking the endpoint."

[\[Why understanding cyberspace is key to defending against digital attacks\]](#)

WikiLeaks said that the files were created between 2013 and 2016 and that it would publish only a portion of the archive — redacting some sensitive samples of code — "until a consensus emerges on the technical and political nature of the CIA's program."

The organization did not clarify what achieving such a consensus would entail, but for now it appeared to be withholding fully formed pieces of ready-made code that could be used by other intelligence services or even novice hackers.

Still, the data release alarmed cybersecurity experts, who said the files contain snippets of code that could enable adversaries to replicate CIA capabilities or identify and root out CIA "implants" currently in place.

"This is explosive," said Jake Williams, founder of Rendition InfoSec, a cybersecurity firm. The material highlights specific anti-virus products that can be defeated, going further than a release of NSA hacking tools last year, he said. The CIA hackers, according to

WikiLeaks, even "discussed what the NSA's ... hackers did wrong and how the CIA's malware makers could avoid similar exposure."

Hackers who worked at the NSA's Tailored Access Operations unit said the CIA's library of tools looked comparable. The implants — software that enables hackers to remotely control a compromised device — are "very, very complex" and "at least on par with the NSA," said one former TAO hacker.

Beyond hacking weapons, the files also purportedly reveal information about the organization of the CIA's cyber-directorate and indicate that the agency uses the U.S. Consulate in Frankfurt, Germany, as a hacking hub for operations in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Though primarily thought of as an agency that recruits spies, the CIA has taken on a larger role in electronic espionage over the past decade. In 2015 the agency created the Directorate of Digital Innovation, a division that puts cyber-work on equal footing with long-standing directorates devoted to conventional spying and analysis.

The CIA's focus is more narrow and targeted than that of the NSA, which is responsible for sweeping up electronic communications on a large scale around the globe. By contrast, CIA efforts mainly focus on "close in" operations in which the agency at times relies on individuals carrying thumb drives or other devices to implant code on computer systems not connected to the Internet.

One of the most intriguing tools described in the files, called "Weeping Angel," can apparently be used to put certain television sets into a fake "off" mode while activating a microphone that enables the CIA to capture any conversations in the surrounding space.

Ashkan Soltani and Julie Tate contributed to this report.



WikiLeaks Releases Trove of Alleged C.I.A. Hacking Documents

Scott Shane, Matthew Rosenberg and Andrew W. Lehren

WASHINGTON — In what appears to be the largest leak of C.I.A. documents in history, [WikiLeaks released](#) on Tuesday thousands of pages describing sophisticated software tools and techniques used by the agency to break into smartphones, computers and even Internet-connected televisions.

The documents amount to a detailed, highly technical catalog of tools. They include instructions for

compromising a wide range of common computer tools for use in spying: the online calling service Skype; Wi-Fi networks; documents in PDF format; and even commercial antivirus programs of the kind used by millions of people to protect their computers.

A program called Wrecking Crew explains how to crash a targeted computer, and another tells how to steal passwords using the autocomplete function on Internet Explorer. Other programs were called CrunchyLimeSkies,

ElderPiggy, AngerQuake and McNugget.

The document dump was the latest coup for the antisecrecy organization and a serious blow to the [C.I.A.](#), which uses its hacking abilities to carry out espionage against foreign targets.

The initial release, which WikiLeaks said was only the first installment in a larger collection of secret C.I.A. material, included 7,818 web pages with 943 attachments, many of them partly redacted by WikiLeaks editors to avoid disclosing the actual code

for cyberweapons. The entire archive of C.I.A. material consists of several hundred million lines of computer code, the group claimed.

In one revelation that may especially trouble the tech world if confirmed, WikiLeaks said that the C.I.A. and allied intelligence services have managed to compromise both Apple and Android smartphones, allowing their officers to bypass the encryption on popular services such as Signal, WhatsApp and Telegram. According to WikiLeaks, government hackers

can penetrate smartphones and collect “audio and message traffic before encryption is applied.”

Unlike the National Security Agency documents [Edward J. Snowden gave to journalists in 2013](#), they do not include examples of how the tools have been used against actual foreign targets. That could limit the damage of the leak to national security. But the breach was highly embarrassing for an agency that depends on secrecy.

Robert M. Chesney, a specialist in national security law at the University of Texas at Austin, likened the C.I.A. trove to National Security Agency hacking tools [disclosed last year](#) by a group calling itself the Shadow Brokers.

“If this is true, it says that N.S.A. isn’t the only one with an advanced, persistent problem with operational security for these tools,” Mr. Chesney said. “We’re getting bit time and again.”

There was no public confirmation of the authenticity of the documents, which were produced by the C.I.A.’s Center for Cyber Intelligence and are mostly dated from 2013 to 2016. But one government official said the documents were real, and a former intelligence officer said some of the code names for C.I.A. programs, an organization chart and the description of a C.I.A. hacking base appeared to be genuine.

The agency appeared to be taken by surprise by the document dump on Tuesday morning. A C.I.A. spokesman, Dean Boyd, said, “We do not comment on the authenticity or content of purported intelligence documents.”

In some regard, the C.I.A. documents confirmed and filled in the details on abilities that have long been suspected in technical circles.

“The people who know a lot about security and hacking assumed that the C.I.A. was at least investing in these capabilities, and if they weren’t, then somebody else was — China, Iran, Russia, as well as a lot of other private actors,” said Beau Woods, the deputy director of the Cyber Statecraft Initiative at the Atlantic Council in Washington. He said the disclosures may raise concerns in the United States and abroad about “the trustworthiness of technology where cybersecurity can impact human life and public safety.”

There is no evidence that the C.I.A. hacking tools have been used

against Americans. But Ben Wizner, the director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, said the documents suggest that the government has deliberately allowed vulnerabilities in phones and other devices to persist to make spying easier.

“Those vulnerabilities will be exploited not just by our security agencies, but by hackers and governments around the world,” Mr. Wizner said. “Patching security holes immediately, not stockpiling them, is the best way to make everyone’s digital life safer.”

WikiLeaks did not identify the source of the documents, which it called Vault 7, but said they had been “circulated among former U.S. government hackers and contractors in an unauthorized manner, one of whom has provided WikiLeaks with portions of the archive.”

WikiLeaks said the source, in a statement, set out policy questions that “urgently need to be debated in public, including whether the C.I.A.’s hacking capabilities exceed its mandated powers and the problem of public oversight of the agency.” The source, the group said, “wishes to initiate a public debate about the security, creation, use, proliferation and democratic control of cyberweapons.”

But James Lewis, an expert on cybersecurity at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, raised another possibility: that a foreign state, most likely Russia, stole the documents by hacking or other means and delivered them to WikiLeaks, which may not know how they were obtained. Mr. Lewis noted that, according to American intelligence agencies, Russia hacked Democratic targets during the presidential campaign and gave thousands of emails to WikiLeaks for publication.

“I think a foreign power is much more likely the source of these documents than a conscience-stricken C.I.A. whistle-blower,” Mr. Lewis said.

At a time of increasing concern about the privacy of calls and messages, the revelations did not suggest that the C.I.A. can actually break the encryption used by popular messaging apps. Instead, by penetrating the user’s phone, the agency can make the encryption irrelevant by intercepting messages and calls before their content is

encrypted, or, on the other end, after messages are decrypted.

WikiLeaks, which has sometimes been accused of recklessly leaking information that could do harm, said it had redacted names and other identifying information from the collection. It said it was not releasing the computer code for actual, usable weapons “until a consensus emerges on the technical and political nature of the C.I.A.’s program and how such ‘weapons’ should be analyzed, disarmed and published.”

The codes names used for projects revealed in the WikiLeaks documents appear to reflect the likely demographic of the cyberexperts employed by the C.I.A. — that is, young and male. There are numerous references to “[Harry Potter](#),” Pokémon and Adderall, the drug used to treat hyperactivity.

A number of projects were named after whiskey brands. Some were high-end single malt scotches, such as Laphroaig and Ardbeg. Others were from more pedestrian labels, such as Wild Turkey, which was described by its programmers, in mock dictionary style, as “(n.) A animal of the avian variety that has not been domesticated. Also a type of alcohol with a high proof (151).”

Some of the details of the C.I.A. programs might have come from the plot of a spy novel for the cyberage, revealing numerous highly classified — and, in some cases, exotic — hacking programs. One program, code-named Weeping Angel, uses Samsung “smart” televisions as covert listening devices. According to the WikiLeaks news release, even when it appears to be turned off, the television “operates as a bug, recording conversations in the room and sending them over the internet to a covert C.I.A. server.”

The release said the program was developed in cooperation with British intelligence.

If C.I.A. agents did manage to hack the smart TVs, they would not be the only ones. Since their release, internet-connected televisions have been a focus for hackers and cybersecurity experts, many of whom see the sets’ ability to record and transmit conversations as a potentially dangerous vulnerability.

In early 2015, Samsung started to include in the fine print terms of service for its smart TVs a warning that the television sets could capture background conversations.

“Please be aware that if your spoken words include personal or other sensitive information, that information will be among the data captured and transmitted to a third party through your use of Voice Recognition,” the warning said.

Another program described in the documents, named Umbrage, is a voluminous library of cyberattack techniques that the C.I.A. has collected from malware produced by other countries, including Russia. According to the WikiLeaks release, the large number of techniques allows the C.I.A. to mask the origin of some of its attacks and confuse forensic investigators.

The WikiLeaks material includes lists of software tools that the C.I.A. uses to create exploits and malware to carrying out hacking. Many of the tools are those used by developers around the world: coding languages, such as Python, and tools like Sublime Text, a program used to write code, and Git, a tool that helps developers collaborate.

But the agency also appears to rely on software designed specifically for spies, such as Ghidra, which in one of the documents is described as “a reverse engineering environment created by the N.S.A.”

The Vault 7 release marks the latest in a series of huge leaks that have changed the landscape for government and corporate secrecy.

In scale, the Vault 7 archive appears to fall into the same category as the biggest leaks of classified information in recent years, including the quarter-million diplomatic cables taken by Chelsea Manning, the former Army intelligence analyst, and [given to WikiLeaks in 2010](#), and the hundreds of thousands of National Security Agency documents taken by Mr. Snowden in 2013.

In the business world, the so-called Panama Papers and several other large-volume leaks have laid bare the details of secret offshore companies used by wealthy and corrupt people to hide their assets.

Both government and corporate leaks have been made possible by the ease of downloading, storing and transferring millions of documents in seconds or minutes, a sea change from the use of slow photocopying for some earlier leaks, including the Pentagon Papers in 1971.

Updated March 7, 2017 7:49 p.m.
ET 99 COMMENTS

Tuesday's WikiLeaks dump of a major chunk of what it claims is the CIA's "hacking arsenal" ought to be an eye-opener for anyone still laboring under the delusion that WikiLeaks's Julian Assange or former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden are not out to weaken the United States. This leak of CIA documents appears to disclose for America's enemies a key advantage against the asymmetric threats of this new century: better technology that provides better intelligence.

WikiLeaks says the 8,761 documents and files were ripped off "from an isolated, high-security network situated inside the CIA's Center for Cyber Intelligence" in Virginia. It further

says these documents were "circulated among former U.S. government hackers and contractors"—and that one of them shared the info with WikiLeaks. So far former government officials quoted in news reports say the leaked information looks genuine, and the WikiLeaks press release promised more to come.

Much of this WikiLeaks dump deals with ways the CIA has found to get into electronic devices such as iPhones and Android phones. These methods include—as Edward Snowden clarified in a tweet—end runs around the encryption of such popular apps as Signal or WhatsApp without having to crack the apps themselves.

The leaks also expose other areas of CIA interest such as an agency effort to hack into the control panels

of cars and trucks. Another tool exposed by the leaks turned [Samsung](#) Smart TVs into microphones that could then relay conversations back to the CIA even when the owner believed the set was off.

The losses from this exposure are incalculable. These tools represent millions of dollars of investment and man-hours. Many will now be rendered moot as terrorists or foreign agents abandon traceable habits. Merely because America's enemies are barbaric—think al Qaeda or Islamic State—does not mean they are stupid. One reason it took so long to hunt down Osama bin Laden is because he took pains to establish a sophisticated communications system to evade U.S. intelligence tracking.

The costs will also include the time and effort U.S. intelligence agencies will now have to expend investigating how the information was lost. This includes retracing any missed computer hacks and trying to find out who stole and released the secrets.

Some on the political left and right want to treat Messrs. Snowden and Assange as heroes of transparency and privacy. But there is no evidence that U.S. spooks are engaging in illegal spying on Americans. The CIA's spying tools are for targeting suspected terrorists and foreign agents. As for WikiLeaks, note how it never seems to disclose Chinese or Russian secrets. The country they loathe and want to bring low is America.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Nicole Hong

Justice Nominee Won't Commit to a Russia Special Prosecutor

Aruna Viswanatha and Nicole Hong

Updated March 7, 2017 5:14 p.m.
ET

President Donald Trump's nominee to be deputy attorney general on Tuesday wouldn't commit to appointing a special prosecutor to investigate any Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, saying he wasn't in the job yet and didn't know all the facts needed to make a decision.

If confirmed, Rod Rosenstein, currently the U.S. attorney in Maryland, [would decide the course of any Russian probe](#) because Attorney General Jeff Sessions last week recused himself from an investigation into the matter. That move followed a disclosure that Mr. Sessions [had had contact with a Russian official](#) during the Trump presidential campaign, which appeared at odds with his Senate testimony during his January confirmation hearing.

That drama dominated Tuesday's hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, leading at one point to a tense exchange between Sens. Al Franken (D., Minn.) and Chuck Grassley (R., Iowa), the committee chairman, over the question from Mr. Franken that had initially led to Mr. Sessions's problematic response.

Throughout the hearing, Democrats pushed Mr. Rosenstein to commit to appointing a special prosecutor, with at least one saying he was unlikely to support him without such a commitment. Still, Democrats don't have the votes to block Mr. Rosenstein's nomination, and the prosecutor otherwise has broad

support, including from his home-state Democratic senators, and is likely to be confirmed.

At his hearing, Mr. Rosenstein, [whom Mr. Trump nominated in January](#), said he trusted career prosecutors and investigators to reach appropriate conclusions on the Russia matter.

"It's my job to make sure that all investigations are conducted independently," said Mr. Rosenstein, a longtime federal prosecutor who has worked for and generated support from both parties. He said the Justice Department has "devoted public servants who conduct independent investigations 365 days a year."

He also said part of his reluctance to commit to naming a special prosecutor was because it could hurt the nomination process for future deputy attorneys general who might be asked to make similar promises.

"I view it as an issue of principle that as a nominee for deputy attorney general, I should not be promising to take action on a particular case," he said.

Mr. Rosenstein said his only knowledge to date about any investigations into Russia has come from media reports. The current acting deputy attorney general, Dana Boente, who served as a U.S. attorney in Virginia during the Obama administration, could appoint a special prosecutor now if he thought it was appropriate, Mr. Rosenstein said.

Mr. Rosenstein has had no communication with the White House or with Mr. Sessions about

whether he would appoint a special counsel, he testified.

Lawmakers on the Senate Judiciary Committee used the hearing to argue about the need for a special prosecutor to investigate Russian interference and any potential ties between Russia and the Trump campaign. That dispute overshadowed the hearings for Mr. Rosenstein and for Rachel Brand, who would be the No. 3 official at the Justice Department.

Ms. Brand, a former Justice Department official in the Bush administration, faced some questions about her work as a lawyer for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's litigation center. But the spotlight shone largely on questions related to Russia and Mr. Rosenstein.

After Mr. Franken chastised Mr. Rosenstein for not having read a report from the U.S. intelligence community about Russian meddling in the 2016 election, Mr. Grassley complained about Mr. Franken's treatment of witnesses and said the question Mr. Franken had initially asked Mr. Sessions about Russia, based on a breaking news report, had been unfair.

"I consider what Sen. Franken asked Sessions at that late moment that that story just come out as a gotcha question," Mr. Grassley said, raising his voice at the hearing. "It was not a gotcha question, sir," Mr. Franken replied, later returning to the topic to re-read his exchange with Mr. Sessions and defend himself. "I couldn't have been nicer," Mr. Franken said.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, the committee's top Democrat, opened with a call to appoint a

special prosecutor, a request echoed by the other Democrats on the committee. "I believe we need an independent criminal investigation into Russian influence...I do not say this because I question the integrity or the ability of Mr. Rosenstein. But this is about more than just one individual."

Democrats argued that, given the involvement of Messrs. Trump and Sessions, the case required a special prosecutor from outside the Justice Department. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D., Conn.) said Tuesday that he couldn't support Mr. Rosenstein's confirmation if he didn't commit to naming one.

Republicans rejected that call, describing any talk of appointing a special counsel as premature.

Mr. Grassley said Mr. Rosenstein was a logical choice to run such an investigation. "Any insinuation that Mr. Rosenstein lacks the impartiality or professionalism necessary to handle these matters is out of line," Mr. Grassley said, citing Mr. Rosenstein's work under the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. "His independence is beyond reproach."

In 2012, then-Attorney General Eric Holder tapped Mr. Rosenstein and another U.S. attorney to investigate leaks about a secret U.S. government hacking program [directed at Iran's nuclear program](#). As a result of the investigation, retired four-star [Gen. James Cartwright pleaded guilty](#) to lying to investigators, though he was pardoned by Mr. Obama before sentencing.

In the mid-1990s, Mr. Rosenstein also served as associate independent counsel for the Clinton-

era Whitewater investigation that lead to multiple prosecutions.

When asked whether a president has the authority to unilaterally order wiretaps, a reference to [tweets by Mr. Trump on Saturday](#) claiming he had been wiretapped by Mr. Obama, Mr. Rosenstein

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

President Trump Considers Two Candidates for Navy Secretary

Gordon Lubold

WASHINGTON—Two front-runners have emerged to be President Donald Trump's next Navy secretary after the previous nominee, a private-equity investor, [pulled out due to investment conflicts](#), according to U.S. officials.

The White House is considering Richard V. Spencer, an investment banker with extensive business experience and ties to the Pentagon, and Randy Forbes, a former Virginia congressman and onetime chairman of an important naval subcommittee, to head the Navy, the officials said.

The Navy secretary's post will be a prominent job under Mr. Trump, [who has called to expand the U.S. fleet among his military buildup initiatives](#). Mr. Trump, who has favored people with business acumen, is expected to give a nod to one of the two men in the coming days.

Once chosen, the candidate would replace Philip Bilden, who was nominated to be Navy secretary but bowed out after grappling with the intricacies of divesting his assets to comply with ethics guidelines. His withdrawal followed that of Vincent Viola, another businessman, who had been nominated to be Army secretary but pulled out for similar reasons, according to the Pentagon.

The New York Times

Trump Aides Address His Wiretap Claims: 'That's Above My Pay Grade'

Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman

WASHINGTON — President Trump has no regrets. His staff has no defense.

After weeks of assailing reporters and critics in diligent defense of their boss, Mr. Trump's team has been uncharacteristically muted this week when pressed about his explosive — and so far proof-free — Twitter posts on Saturday [accusing President Barack Obama of tapping phones](#) in Trump Tower during the 2016 campaign.

responded, "I don't know the details and I'm reluctant as a lawyer to comment on that. In a criminal investigation, the answer would certainly be no."

Asked about Mr. Trump's wiretapping tweets, Mr. Rosenstein declined to offer an opinion. "If the

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and other senior officials at the Pentagon favor Mr. Spencer, a former Marine aviator with extensive investment and business experience. Vice President Mike Pence backs Mr. Forbes, a Virginia Republican who lost a primary bid for his re-election campaign last year.

Mr. Spencer, who also serves on the Chief of Naval Operations' Executive Panel, an advisory board, has done stints at a number of investment and other financial firms. Mr. Spencer has served on the Pentagon's Defense Business Board, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Mr. Spencer has a "CEO's constitution," said Michael Bayer, who chairs the Pentagon's Defense Business Board and has known Mr. Spencer for about eight years.

"If you look at his business experience, you see a guy who was able to take whatever he has and turn it into a much bigger enterprise," Mr. Bayer said. "He has the energy, the focus and the discipline to transform any organization he was part of."

Mr. Spencer also serves on the boards of the Center for a New American Security and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, two Washington, D.C.-based think tanks. He serves as a managing partner of Fall Creek

The accusation — and the [F.B.I.](#) director, James B. Comey, and the former national intelligence director, James R. Clapper Jr., emphatically deny that any such wiretap was requested or issued — constitutes [one of the most consequential accusations](#) made by one president against another in American history.

So for Mr. Trump's allies inside the West Wing and beyond, the tweetstorm spawned the mother of all messaging migraines. Over the past few days, they have executed what amounts to a strategic political retreat — trying to publicly validate Mr. Trump's suspicions without overtly endorsing a claim some of

president is exercising his First Amendment rights, that's not my issue," he said.

Sen. Richard Durbin (D., Ill.) pressed Mr. Rosenstein on whether he would inform Americans if the Justice Department chose to close any investigation into Russian

Management, described as an investment and advisory firm in Wyoming.

When Mr. Forbes served in Congress, he chaired the House Appropriations Committee's Seapower and Projection Forces subpanel and is considered intimately familiar with the issues the Navy confronts. Mr. Mattis met with Mr. Forbes on Monday.

With respect to Navy issues, Mr. Forbes is considered one of the most important lawmakers in several decades, according to one U.S. official who supports his candidacy.

The next top civilian would lead a Navy that has been plagued with the acquisition of some ships, like the littoral combat ship, that has seen long delays and deep cost overruns, and is expected to oversee the expansion of the Navy fleet under Mr. Trump.

The Navy secretary position requires Senate confirmation.

Other than Mr. Mattis, no senior jobs at the Pentagon have been filled since Mr. Trump took office, though more than 30 junior appointments have been made, according to defense officials. There are 14 appointees in the Pentagon who are holdovers from the Obama administration, including Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work, according to defense officials.

interference with the presidential election. Mr. Rosenstein said he would "if it's appropriate to release it."

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Mr. Mattis at one point recently discussed the possibility of naming former Pentagon official Michele Flournoy to the No. 2 job, though Ms. Flournoy was known to be in line to become secretary of defense had Hillary Clinton won the 2016 election. Ms. Flournoy said in December that she had no plans to return to the Pentagon.

Mr. Mattis is pushing to get Anne Patterson, a career U.S. diplomat, as his top policy chief at the Pentagon, the U.S. officials said. Ms. Patterson was U.S. ambassador to Egypt before returning to Washington as the assistant secretary of state for near eastern affairs until this year. She is also being considered for other jobs inside the administration, according to the U.S. officials.

Ms. Patterson is thought to be well liked by Republicans and Democrats as a "warfighter ambassador" and for her deep experience in Asia, including in Pakistan, as well as Colombia.

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Corrections & Amplifications

The Navy secretary position requires Senate confirmation. An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that it doesn't require Senate confirmation. (March 8, 2017)

them believe might have been generated by Breitbart News and other far-right outlets.

"No, that's above my pay grade," said Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary and a feisty Trump loyalist, when asked on Tuesday at an on-camera briefing if he had seen any evidence to back up Mr. Trump's accusation. The reporters kept at him, but Mr. Spicer pointedly and repeatedly refused to offer personal assurances that the president's statements were true.

"No comment," Attorney General Jeff Sessions said earlier in the day. Last week, [Mr. Sessions recused](#)

[himself](#) from any investigations involving the Trump campaign's contacts with Russia.

"I don't know anything about it," John F. Kelly, the homeland security secretary, said on CNN on Monday. Mr. Kelly shrugged and added that "if the president of the United States said that, he's got his reasons to say it."

Representative Devin Nunes, Republican of California and the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, and Senator Richard M. Burr, Republican of North Carolina and the chairman of the Senate intelligence panel, have said they

will add Mr. Trump's request to pre-existing inquiries into intelligence community leaks.

But Mr. Nunes and Mr. Burr said they had not seen specific evidence backing up Mr. Trump's claim.

Other Hill Republicans have responded with similar verbal shrugs. Senator John Cornyn of Texas, a member of the Intelligence Committee, said on Tuesday that he "didn't know what the basis" of Mr. Trump's statement was.

Mr. Trump's Twitter posts, viewed with amazement outside the West Wing bubble, often create crises on the inside. That was never truer than when Mr. Trump began posting from his weekend retreat at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida shortly after sunrise on Saturday.

His groggy staff realized quickly that this was no typical Trump broadside, but an allegation with potentially far-reaching implications that threatened to derail a coming week that included the rollout of [his redrafted travel ban](#) and the unveiling of [the Republican plan to replace the Affordable Care Act](#).

It began at 6:35 a.m. with a Twitter [post](#) reading: "Terrible! Just found out that Obama had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower just before

the victory. Nothing found. This is McCarthyism!"

Three other posts quickly followed, capped by [a 7:02 rocket](#) that read: "How low has [President Obama](#) gone to tapp my phones during the very sacred election process. This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!"

That led to a succession of frantic staff conference calls, including one consultation with the White House counsel, Donald F. McGahn II, as staff members grasped the reality that the president had opened an attack on his predecessor.

Mr. Trump, advisers said, was in high spirits after he fired off the posts. But by midafternoon, after returning from golf, he appeared to realize he had gone too far, although he still believed Mr. Obama had wiretapped him, according to two people in Mr. Trump's orbit.

He sounded defiant in conversations at Mar-a-Lago with his friend Christopher Ruddy, the chief executive of Newsmax Media, Mr. Ruddy said. In other conversations that afternoon, the president sounded uncertain of the procedure for obtaining a warrant

for secret wiretaps on an American citizen.

Mr. Trump also canvassed some aides and associates about whether an investigator, even one outside the government, could substantiate his charge.

People close to Mr. Trump had seen the pattern before. The episode echoed repeated instances in the 2016 presidential campaign.

During the primary contests, Mr. Trump seized on a false National Enquirer article that raised a connection between the father of Senator Ted Cruz of Texas and John F. Kennedy's assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. Later, Mr. Trump justified it to skeptical campaign aides by saying, "Even if it isn't totally true, there's something there," according to a former campaign official.

Over the weekend, aides to Mr. Trump decided the only real solution to the presidential Twitter posts was to kick the allegations to Congress. On Sunday, Mr. Spicer issued a statement saying that the matter was effectively closed and that the president would not address it again until the intelligence committees had

released their findings — which could be many months away.

But that has not quieted the uproar. [Mr. Comey was incensed by Mr. Trump's accusation](#) because it implied that the F.B.I. had broken the law, and he pressed the Justice Department, unsuccessfully, to deny it.

On Tuesday, even as Mr. Spicer was telling reporters that the matter was above his pay grade, he said the president had "absolutely" no intention of taking back his accusations.

Mr. Trump has not spoken to Mr. Comey about the matter, Mr. Spicer said, offering a muted response when asked if the F.B.I. director retained the president's confidence. "I have no reason to believe he doesn't," Mr. Spicer said, adding that Mr. Trump "has not suggested that to me."

Mr. Spicer bristled when pressed by a reporter to weigh in on the veracity of the president's wiretapping allegation.

"I get that that's a cute question to ask," he said. "I think we've tried to play this game before. I'm not here to speak for myself. I'm here to speak for the president of the United States and our government."



Editorial : Republicans: Don't enable Trump's absurd Obama wiretapping accusation

The Times Editorial Board

The Times Editorial Board

[Donald Trump's](#) absurd accusation that [Barack Obama](#) wiretapped his telephones "during the very sacred election process" is a depressing reminder that a president who has access to the resources of the nation's intelligence agencies prefers to believe conspiracy theories.

Even more depressing than Trump's weekend tweetstorm was what followed: his staff trying to justify his outburst, and some [Republicans](#) — including House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes (R-Tulare) — indulging the president in his attempt to shift public attention away from persistent questions about his campaign's ties to Russia and onto a supposed plot against him by the Obama administration and the intelligence bureaucracy. That could introduce even more friction into congressional investigations of Russian interference in last year's presidential election, which already have been strained by partisanship.

Nunes said that his panel's investigation would also include "inquiries into whether the government was conducting surveillance activities on any political party's campaign officials or surrogates." That sounds as if the allegation is based on serious reports of illegal politically motivated surveillance of a political campaign, which would be a scandal comparable to Watergate. But where is the evidence of such abuse?

Trump's sensational assertion that Obama ordered the tapping of telephones at Trump Tower "just before the victory" has been denied by Obama and former Director of National Intelligence James R. [Clapper](#). Multiple news organizations have reported that FBI Director James B. Comey asked the Department of Justice to publicly repudiate Trump's claim. Finally, there is the inconvenient fact that presidents don't order wiretaps.

So where did Trump get the idea that Obama wiretapped him? The best explanation seems to be that he was inspired by a report in Breitbart News, which itself cited a commentary by radio host Marc

Levin in which he urged Congress to investigate Obama's "silent coup" against Trump.

The Breitbart story also linked to stories in other publications about an order supposedly issued by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court for inspection of a computer server at Trump Tower in connection with an investigation of Russian banks. But even the author of the original report about the supposed court order says that she never wrote that it included authorization for a wiretap. (The Washington Post's fact-checker has [cast doubt on these reports](#), and gave Trump the dreaded "Four Pinocchios" rating for his wiretapping claim.)

Trump's reckless accusation is inseparable from his longstanding view that concerns about Russian meddling in the election are raised in an effort to delegitimize his presidency. In fact, one can denounce Russian interference and still acknowledge Trump as the winner of the election — provided, of course, that his campaign wasn't involved in Russian efforts to sabotage Clinton's prospects. And so far there is no evidence of that. Clapper said over the weekend that

he had no knowledge of evidence that Trump's campaign colluded with the Russians.

But it is in the president's interest, as well as the nation's, to put rest suspicions about any such collusion if they are untrue. That is why it is imperative that the Senate and House intelligence committees expedite their investigation of possible contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian intelligence, perhaps coordinating their investigations to avoid duplication. Other aspects of the investigation can wait until this matter is resolved.

For the congressional investigation to be credible, it must be bipartisan. That means Democrats must be willing to refrain from using it to score extraneous points against a president who is deeply unpopular with their base, and Republicans must be willing not to endorse or acquiesce in outrageous allegations such as the wiretapping charge.

Meanwhile, if the president expects to be treated fairly he will stop the baseless attacks on others — including his predecessor.

Editorial : Trump-Obama Wiretap Controversy: Whom to Believe?

Over the weekend, President Trump leveled a bombshell accusation: that his predecessor in the Oval Office ordered that the phones at Trump Tower be "tapped" shortly before the general election. If true, as President Trump himself tweeted, it would be an abuse of executive power on a level with Richard Nixon's.

The first thing to say about this episode is that every indication is that Trump gives every indication of having tweeted without having the foggiest idea if his specific allegation had any factual basis. This is reckless even by the standards of Trump's shoot-first, aim-later Twitter feed. It has created a sense of crisis within his own government and forced his aides to scramble for some justification after the fact.

They are pointing to press reports of surveillance requests by the Obama Justice Department prior to the election. These reports are from outlets of varying levels of credibility. But if they are taken at face value, the story they tell is this: In June of last year, the Obama Justice

Department filed a request with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court to permit surveillance of some of Trump's associates, and perhaps Trump himself, on the grounds that they were possibly engaging in espionage on behalf of the Russian government. Trump himself was "named" in the application, although it is unclear if he was the target of the surveillance. In any event, the FISA court — which is famously generous when it comes to government requests — denied the petition.

In October, the Obama Justice Department submitted a second, tailored request to the FISA court. This request did not name Donald Trump, and it was granted. In mid January, the *New York Times* revealed that the FBI was conducting a "counter-intelligence" investigation focusing on three Trump associates: former campaign aides Paul Manafort, Carter Page, and Roger Stone. The *Times* conceded, however, that it was unclear whether the surveillance had anything to do with Donald Trump or the presidential campaign. (None of those individuals was formally employed by the Trump campaign in October 2016.) It's

unclear, too, if that surveillance is ongoing.

None of these reports in the press has been independently confirmed. Barack Obama, through a spokesman, has denied any wrongdoing, as have several high-ranking Obama White House officials, including Ben Rhodes and former director of national intelligence James Clapper. But these are hardly reliable sources. Rhodes openly bragged about lying to reporters to sell the Obama administration's Iran deal, and Clapper lied under oath during 2013 testimony to Congress. And their denials in this instance have notable escape hatches. President Obama denied that his IRS ever targeted conservative nonprofit groups, even when the evidence that they had done so was beyond doubt. The people who likely know what actually happened are either unreliable or not talking.

Needless to say, this situation is unsustainable. If there were legitimate fears that associates of the now-president were foreign agents, the president and the public deserve to know. Likewise, if that was simply a pretext for surveillance of Barack Obama's political

opponents, the president and the public deserve to know. However this turns out, the situation is extraordinary, and transparency is in order.

If there were legitimate fears that associates of the now-president were foreign agents, the president and the public deserve to know.

There is a simple way to achieve it: The president should demand the relevant FISA applications, if any, that the Obama Justice Department submitted. The president can declassify any documents at will. Contrary to the outcry at the possibility, such presidential intervention would not constitute political interference in an ongoing investigation, because FISA surveillance is not a law-enforcement matter (as our own Andrew C. McCarthy has explained at length). President Trump should then make as much of this material as possible public.

The public deserves to know the facts. The administration should pursue them with more diligence and sobriety than the president showed in setting off this firestorm.

The
Washington
Post

Ignatius : A look inside the country's real-life spy thriller

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

If you were writing a pitch for a Hollywood series about the roiling investigation of the Trump campaign's possible dealings with Russian operatives, you might describe it as "[Billions](#)" meets "[The Americans](#)."

This plot has already had some weird twists and turns, and we aren't even at the end of Season One. It's must-see television, for sure, but disheartening, like the O.J. Simpson trial. You know it's not going to end happily for most of the characters (or, indeed, for the country), but you can't stop watching.

Let's look at the two protagonists in our presidential potboiler. First, our billionaire president. He'd be lucky to have as much hair (or money) as Damian Lewis, who stars as the fictional hedge-fund trader Bobby Axelrod in Showtime's "Billions." But President Trump has a similar scorched-earth approach to dealing with his adversaries, which is part of why he's in growing difficulty in the Russia investigation.

The Daily 202 newsletter

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Trump's behavior over the past year, as allegations deepened of Russian covert action to help his campaign, has been comparable to his business life. As chief executive of the Trump Organization, he bargained hard. When he was sued, he often countersued, creating a costly jumble of litigation that intimidated many adversaries. And he disliked settling cases, on the theory that such compromise only invited more attacks.

This hyper-adversarial style has been on display with the Russia story. Trump has denied having business contacts with Russian oligarchs ([he tweeted](#): "NOTHING TO DO WITH RUSSIA"), a claim that's contradicted by the public record. When the allegations continued, he counterattacked — first [accusing](#) the intelligence agencies of leaking information in the style of "Nazi Germany" and then alleging that President Barack Obama had [wiretapped](#) his offices at Trump Tower. Both charges were false, but useful distractions.

Trump from the beginning has refused any hint of compromise on the Russia issue. It would have been easy, early on, to have affirmed the easily documented facts, said he favored a better relationship with Moscow because it was good policy, and ordered his associates to explain their past dealings. But he didn't do that.

Trump's defiance has put his presidency on a collision course with Congress and the FBI. Some supporters claim he's facing a secret coup from an intelligence and foreign policy establishment that constitutes a despotic "deep state." But really, Trump is confronting the orderly process we call the "rule of law."

Why is Trump so resistant to compromise? Does he fear the revelations that might eventually emerge? Or is this simply his perennial negotiating style — never bend, lest you diminish the tough-guy, always-a-winner image? We don't know, but Trump is taking us to a dark place where we may find out.

Now, what about the Russian players in our drama? First, they are masters of the intelligence game. The characters in the FX series

"The Americans" offer a hint of the subtle and implacable tradecraft the Russians have brought to espionage since the czar's time. They are a relentless adversary. But that doesn't mean they're perfect, or that we are doomed to perpetual Cold War.

As Trump's associates are learning, Russian diplomats and top business leaders often perform an intelligence function, too. So a discussion with an ambassador, say, or a prominent oligarch is likely to be monitored by U.S. intelligence. And when these Kremlin insiders brag among themselves about their access to the Trump entourage (hypothetically speaking), these conversations may well be intercepted, too. And sometimes leaked to the press.

But we should remember, when we read stories about Russian intelligence contacts with the Trump team (or anyone else), this is raw information — and often unreliable. Russian diplomats, intelligence operatives and business executives routinely boast about their contacts — inflating their access and information.

State Department officials have been unfairly tarred by such

surveillance, as when the FBI pursued false claims that a U.S. diplomat in Pakistan had been recruited as a spy. We need to understand the possibility that Trump and his associates could be unfairly maligned by raw intelligence, too — gossip that's

**The
Washington
Post**

To fund border wall, Trump administration weighs cuts to Coast Guard, airport security

<https://www.facebook.com/lisa.rein.18?fref=ts>

The Trump administration, searching for money to build the president's planned multibillion-dollar border wall and crack down on illegal immigration, is weighing significant cuts to the Coast Guard, the Transportation Security Administration and other agencies focused on national security threats, according to a draft plan.

The proposal, drawn up by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), also would slash the budget of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which provides disaster relief after hurricanes, tornadoes and other natural disasters. The Coast Guard's \$9.1 billion budget in 2017 would be cut 14 percent to about \$7.8 billion, while the TSA and FEMA budgets would be reduced about 11 percent each to \$4.5 billion and \$3.6 billion, respectively.

The cuts are proposed even as the planned budget for the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees all of them, grows 6.4 percent to \$43.8 billion, according to the plan, which was obtained by The Washington Post. Some \$2.9 billion of that would go to building the wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, with \$1.9 billion funding "immigration detention beds" and other Immigration and Customs Enforcement expenses and \$285 million set aside to hire 500 more Border Patrol agents and 1,000 more ICE agents and support staffers.

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

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The plan puts the administration in the unusual position of trading spending on security programs for other security priorities at the southern border, raising questions among Republican lawmakers and homeland-security experts.

"The Budget prioritizes DHS law enforcement operations, proposes critical investments in front line border security and funds continued

dressed up as "top secret." That's why we need quiet, careful investigations to establish the truth.

Russians aren't 10 feet tall, as an earlier generation of CIA officers sometimes imagined. They aren't monsters who are America's permanent enemies. They spy on

development of robust cybersecurity defenses," the draft said. "The Budget aggressively implements the President's commitment to construct a physical wall along the southern border."

Overall, funding for ICE would grow about 36 percent to \$7.9 billion, while the budget for Customs and Border Protection would increase 27 percent to \$14.2 billion.

Michael Short, a White House spokesman, cautioned Tuesday that the Trump administration is still early in the process of working on the budget, which the administration will send to Congress later this month. He and a DHS spokesman, David Lapan, referred other questions to the OMB, which did not respond to requests for comment.

"Trying to draw conclusions this early would be extremely premature," Short said.

Rep. Duncan D. Hunter (R-Calif.), who supported Donald Trump's run for president and oversees the House Transportation subcommittee on the Coast Guard and maritime transportation, questioned whether OMB officials are on the same page as President Trump, citing the sea service's roles in stopping illegal immigration and the flow of drugs into the United States from South America.

"OMB has always treated the Coast Guard like a little piggy bank that they can go after whenever they need money for anything else," Hunter said. "If the president is serious about getting after the cartels and getting after drug networks, this makes no sense."

The Coast Guard cuts include deactivating Maritime Security Response Teams, which carry out counterterrorism patrols in ports and sensitive waterways, and canceling a contract with Huntington Ingalls Industries to build a ninth national security cutter, with a potential savings of \$500 million.

Rick "Ozzie" Nelson, a former Navy helicopter pilot and national security expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that the decisions would effectively

us, as we spy on them. But they are very good at it, as our real-life espionage blockbuster has demonstrated over the past few months.

This one is going to Season Two. Spoiler alert: The Russians have already won.

sideline the service in missions in which it could be the most effective.

"If they're not there to do it, who is there to do it?" Nelson said of port security. "We're not going to put destroyers and frigates off the coast to protect those ports. That's a Coast Guard mission and capability."

At the TSA, the proposed budget cuts, [first detailed by Politico](#), would eliminate four programs that cost the agency \$187 million. The programs have been considered a vital piece of airport security and for preventing a repetition of the Sept. 11, 2001, hijackings after planes are aloft.

Training for what is known as the "armed pilot" program, begun after 9/11, would be eliminated at a savings of \$20 million. The training was intended to prepare pilots and crews for an attempted armed takeover of an aircraft.

"If you were on one of the four hijacked planes on 9/11, you'd sure say it was important," said former TSA administrator John S. Pistole. "To me, it's a relatively small investment for the potential for the risk-mitigation value. It's all about how much risk do you want to take on. I would advocate for a reduction in that program but not elimination."

An additional \$57 million would be saved by cutting a program that sends armed teams of highly trained, uniformed agents to sweep airports, train stations and bus terminals. Commonly known as the VIPR teams (for Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response), they were deployed to Reagan National Airport, Washington Dulles International Airport, Baltimore-Washington International Marshall Airport, Amtrak's Union Station and D.C.-area subway stations to guard against terrorist attacks during Trump's inauguration.

The \$45 million in grants that local law enforcement uses to patrol in and around airports also would be eliminated.

The fourth program slated for elimination uses specially trained TSA agents to watch passenger behavior in airports, and particularly

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as fliers approach checkpoints, to single out those who appear to behave oddly.

The budget proposal said \$65 million also could be saved by eliminating that Behavior Detection Officer program. The value of the program was questioned by the Government Accountability Office in a 2013 report, but Pistole, who then headed the TSA, responded that it provided a "crucial layer of security" that brought 2,116 passengers to the attention of law enforcement in 2012, resulting in 30 boarding denials and 183 arrests.

At FEMA, a corner of the federal government whose budgets were beefed up after the 2001 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina, the proposed cuts would slash some programs whose effectiveness has long come under criticism. Research into bio-surveillance threats and other research and development work that gets tens of millions of dollars in federal funding a year would take a 28 percent hit, examples of programs the budget proposal describes as "having failed to show meaningful results."

But the spending plan — which could cut \$361 million from FEMA's \$3.5 billion budget — also eliminates or reduces the federal commitment to helping states and local governments prepare for natural disasters through training, salaries and benefits for staff, coordination and state-of-the-art equipment. These grants help communities prepare for emergencies so that local and state governments can coordinate and respond quickly.

Other programs would require localities and states to contribute a greater share than they do now.

Emergency management officials noted that FEMA has for years promoted and refined a national response system that requires local communities to follow the same emergency response strategies. The cuts would undermine that progress, they said, and result in a less sophisticated response to emergencies.

"When you propose not just cuts but draconian cuts, your ability to

respond to a disaster can cause lives to be lost and property to be damaged," said Nick Crossley, emergency-management director in Hamilton County, Ohio, and first vice president of the International Association of Emergency Managers, which represents 4,000 local officials

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**
Updated March
7, 2017 10:40
a.m. ET

Early last year, agents with the Federal Bureau of Investigation showed up at Nepheta Brown's home in Brooklyn's East New York neighborhood with some alarming news.

They said her son, now 15 years old, was tweeting about Islamic State's violent ideologies. He may be on his way to jail, they told her.

But instead of arresting her son, FBI agents decided to try a novel approach. [They asked him to undergo an intervention](#) with an Islamic State defector named Mo.

Mo's intervention with T.—the first initial of the teenager's name—has proved successful, for now.

In New York, the FBI monitors hundreds of potential terror suspects every day, and some pro-Islamic State posts online have been traced to kids as young as elementary-school age, one official said. Officials are wrestling with how to deal with minors like T. who support Islamic State on social media but haven't yet committed any violence or crimes.

The intervention involving Mo and T. is being lauded by officials as a potential future model for dealing with young terror suspects who don't warrant prosecution. Some officials have called the intervention unprecedented, and it represents an important test case as law-enforcement officials in Brooklyn embark on a new counterterrorism program aimed at intervening earlier

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Updated March 7, 2017 3:12 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The U.S. posted its biggest monthly trade deficit in nearly five years in January, a potential short-term drag on growth that highlights broader economic forces working against the Trump administration's plans to reshape the country's international economic agenda.

across the country.

He said pouring the money saved from FEMA into border security would be "catastrophic."

"Defense and security at the border are important," he said. "But you're damaging the national system that

with terrorism suspects.

When the FBI agents showed up at Ms. Brown's house, the 36-year-old electrical apprentice was shocked. Ms. Brown, who is Christian, knew her son had begun converting to Islam in middle school, but she hadn't found anything unusual when she monitored his online activities.

According to Ms. Brown, the FBI told her that for several months, using aliases, T. had been tweeting about Islamic State, saying he wanted to "take part in an act" and "help the cause."

"I guess I wasn't looking for the right thing or in the right place," Ms. Brown said. "I was disappointed with myself because it happened right in my house."

She told the FBI that her son's online persona didn't reflect who he really was. Her son had been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome and depression, she said. He had few friends, and the online following he gained by tweeting about Islamic State may have given him a sense of acceptance, she said.

During the first visit, the FBI spent three hours interrogating Ms. Brown and her son. After hearing about T.'s psychological issues and seeing his family situation, the FBI decided not to arrest him. Agents still visit his home every few months.

An FBI agent coordinated the intervention between T. and Mo, partly because the agent thought the two had similar backgrounds. Mo, who also grew up in Brooklyn, joined Islamic State in Syria in 2014 but escaped a few months later. He

makes us the strongest country when it comes to being prepared for disasters."

Homeowners in flood-prone areas of the country also would be levied a surcharge on their flood insurance, according to the document, although the OMB has

has since returned to the U.S. and is cooperating with the government.

The intervention happened last July in a bright, windowless conference room at the Brooklyn U.S. attorney's office.

T. showed up with only his mother. As everyone in the room ate pizza, Mo tried to bond with T. "You know that crazy guy who comes on the 2 train and nobody makes eye contact with him?" Mo said, according to people at the intervention. "Everyone in ISIS is far worse than that guy."

Initially, T. sat quietly. But he opened up when Mo asked him to name his favorite propaganda video. T. said he liked a video in which Islamic State soldiers are shown picking up garbage and helping women and children in Syria. Mo replied that he saw for himself how the propaganda videos were all lies.

T. began to pepper Mo with questions. For over an hour, Mo picked apart his assumptions about Islamic State, describing the harsh reality of living in Syria.

As the meeting ended, Ms. Brown cried and hugged the agents, who asked T. to write an essay describing what he took away from the intervention.

Since then, T. hasn't taken any steps toward violence, but he is still on a bumpy path. A few weeks after the intervention, T. regained access to his cellphone, which had been confiscated by his mother. He immediately started tweeting again about Islamic State and hasn't been able to use a phone ever since. T.'s only access to a computer is at his

been asked to come up with a plan to limit the extra payment for homeowners with "lower-value" homes.

high school in Brooklyn, where he is in 10th grade.

"This effort requires constant vigilance," said Brooklyn U.S. Attorney Robert Capers, referring to T.'s case. "We are ready to take law enforcement action if the subject makes a wrong turn."

There are signs of progress, too. He has a 78% grade point average, joined the filmmaking club at school and wants to go to college, according to Ms. Brown. Weekly therapy sessions have helped him become more outgoing and less emotional, she said.

It isn't clear how long FBI agents will continue to monitor T. They check in with his progress at school and have taken him to a [Dave & Buster's](#) restaurant, Ms. Brown said. She said she feels the agents have become part of her family.

During this period, Ms. Brown also separated from her husband and was raising two other sons below the age of 6. Ms. Brown said the family turmoil was one reason T. felt ignored and turned to the internet for attention.

Ms. Brown says she sometimes still worries about T. running away from home. In her mind, the teen will be risk-free when she no longer has concerns about him being near a computer.

"I take it a day at a time," she said. "It's unfortunate that it's happened, but the only thing we can do is move forward."

Write to Nicole Hong at nicole.hong@wsj.com

U.S. Officials See Terror Intervention as Possible Future Model

Updated March 7, 2017 10:40 a.m. ET

U.S. Posts Biggest Monthly Trade Deficit in Nearly Five Years

Jeffrey Sparshott

Updated March 7, 2017 3:12 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The foreign-trade gap for goods and services [increased 9.6% from the prior month](#) to a seasonally adjusted \$48.49 billion in January, the Commerce Department said Tuesday. That was the highest monthly level since March 2012.

Falling exports and rising imports weighed on overall economic output in the final three months of 2016. That pattern shifted slightly in January, with exports growing, but not as fast as imports.

Trade deficits were a prominent issue during the 2016 presidential campaign and President Donald Trump has pledged to make the nation's commercial relationships more balanced.

But the White House must contend with an already strong dollar that rallied in response to Mr. Trump's election, along with domestic demand that shows signs of strengthening, especially business investment. Both are good signs for economic growth but would also

tend to widen the trade deficit, rather than shrink it.

"President Trump has made free and fair trade a central part of his agenda, and correcting this imbalance is an important step in achieving that goal," Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said Tuesday. That will include renegotiation of trade deals and [use of trade enforcement provisions](#), he said.

Erasing the U.S. trade deficit would be a daunting task in any economic environment—the country hasn't posted an annual surplus since the mid-1970s. Last year the gap reached just over \$500 billion, led by a \$309.76 billion imbalance with China.

"The January trade data suggest another drag on growth may be in store," Michael Gapen, chief U.S. economist at Barclays, said in a note to clients.

In response to January's trade numbers, Barclays lowered its estimate for first-quarter GDP by three-tenths of a percentage point to a 1.6% seasonally adjusted annual rate.

That rate would be weaker than the 1.9% pace seen in the fourth quarter of 2016, but likely doesn't auger a more chronic slowdown. Indeed, underlying trade figures suggest rising demand around the globe—U.S. exports rose 0.6% last month while imports jumped 2.3%. (While imports are a negative in the computation of GDP, that doesn't mean they are bad for growth; they are simply subtracted to avoid double-counting when domestic spending on imported goods—as opposed to domestically produced goods—increases.)

One month's data doesn't indicate a clear trend. But in the first month of 2017, the U.S. appetite for capital goods—such as semiconductors and cell phones—as well as autos

and oil all contributed to rising imports. January's imports of autos and parts were the highest on record. U.S. imports of crude oil were the highest since July 2013 while the price per barrel was the highest since August 2015.

U.S. exports of petroleum were the highest in dollar terms since May 2015.

On an inflation-adjusted basis, both goods exports and goods imports were the highest on record, further suggesting that global growth is strengthening.

"With the headwind from the dollar's prior appreciation having eased and global growth picking up quite sharply, the outlook for exports is better now than it has been in some

time," Andrew Hunter, U.S. economist at Capital Economics, said in a note to clients.

Politically, though, trade is likely to remain contentious even if exports pick up.

Underscoring the Trump administration's focus on trade deficits, [it is considering a change to the way they are calculated](#). The Wall Street Journal reported last month. One possible idea would exclude from U.S. exports any goods first imported into the country, a methodology that would make the country's trade gap appear larger than it had in past years.

Write to Jeffrey Sparshott at jeffrey.sparshott@wsj.com



Bolton : Trump, Trade and American Sovereignty

John Bolton

March 7, 2017

6:59 p.m. ET

President Trump's trade rhetoric until now has been simple and effective: America is getting ripped off, he says, and things need to change. Simplicity works on the campaign trail, but how does it translate into actual governance?

Earlier this month the administration submitted the annual National Trade Policy Agenda to Congress. The submission takes particular aim at the World Trade Organization's "Dispute Settlement Understanding," which provides a quasi-judicial process for resolving international trade disagreements. Although technical, even arcane, the DSU is dear to the hearts of global-governance advocates. The Trump administration is right to criticize its performance.

Agreed to during the Uruguay Round of world trade talks in 1994, the DSU has had some successes. But it is often criticized for failing to deter violations of the WTO's substantive trade provisions and for too often exceeding its mandate by imposing new obligations on one or more parties, particularly against American interests.

This alarming trend extends beyond trade. A rising number of international agreements create "judicial" or "legislative" bodies that interpret and expand obligations well beyond what is laid out in underlying treaties, placing them beyond the effective control of domestic democratic institutions. This trend raises legitimate fears among states that they will lose sovereign authority. This fear is particularly acute in America, where

the Constitution unmistakably fixes sovereignty in "We the People."

The U.S. has in the past rejected or renounced international agreements that were not conducive to its interests. In 1986 the Reagan administration withdrew from the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. In 2002 the Bush administration unsigned the Rome Statute, which created the International Criminal Court. The U.S., thankfully, still has not ratified the Law of the Sea Treaty, thereby avoiding the jurisdiction of the tribunal it creates.

Washington has also blocked declarations by periodic "treaty-review conferences," which have a similar tendency to expand member-state obligations beyond those contained in the original agreements. Likewise, the Trump administration is considering withdrawing from the U.N. Human Rights Council, whose creation the Bush administration voted against in 2006, and which the U.S. did not join until President Obama took office in 2009. The American people are often the last to learn of their new and purportedly legally binding commitments.

That isn't to say that these international decision-making bodies are established exclusively to evade the burdens of America's Constitution, only that evasion is their clear consequence. The unspoken objective is to constrain the U.S., and to transfer authority from national governments to international bodies.

The specifics of each case differ, but the common theme is diminished American sovereignty, submitting the United States to authorities that ignore, outvote or frustrate its priorities. Nothing in the

Constitution contemplates such submission to international treaties or bodies. While many European Union governments seem predisposed to relinquish sovereignty, there is scant hint of similar enthusiasm in America. Moreover, the United Kingdom just dealt a stunning blow to the notion of Europe's "ever closer union." By reasserting their sovereignty, the British are in the process of escaping, among other things, the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights.

That brings us back to trade. The DSU is not, as some say, analogous to U.S. courts, which preserve the Constitution's nationwide free-trade area through the "dormant Commerce Clause" doctrine. America is a real civil society where real courts have real enforcement capabilities—a far cry from the "global community" fantasyland. If Americans feel increasingly unable to restrain the exercise of judicial and legislative power at home, why should anyone be surprised to learn that international bodies are even worse?

Limiting an aggrieved country's ability to resort to the DSU is not a rejection of free trade. To the contrary, it is a rejection of the unaccountable, legalistic morass into which free trade can all but disappear. In reality, ignoring DSU outcomes has always been an option for those prepared to face the consequences.

What is the World Trade Organization's central objective? Is it to promote actual free trade, or is it merely to reify the DSU? If, in fact, this faltering dispute-resolution mechanism is the WTO's central pillar, without which global free

trade is doomed to collapse, we can legitimately conclude there is something gravely wrong with the direction of the basic enterprise.

Some countries cause more global trade problems than others. China is doing tangible harm to the regime of liberal international trade by striking first, and sometimes repeatedly, in violation of substantive WTO obligations in fields like intellectual property protection. Such countries—not those that retaliate rather than submit to the DSU—deserve the world's ire.

If the DSU fails to deter repeated acts of trade aggression because of its cumbersome nature and faulty decisions, then the problem is likely the DSU, not its critics. Ironically, many global-governance advocates play down the DSU's significance since it involves only trade, not existential political questions. Such modesty might seem becoming, but precedents established in one aspect of international affairs inevitably bleed into others.

The burden properly lies with the White House to specify how it will confront the DSU's failings, many of which seem embedded in its design. Whatever steps President Trump recommends should be understood and measured against the larger dangers of global governance. The shadows cast by other flawed multilateral "authorities" make clear that U.S. sovereignty is at stake.

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

Chougule : The Democratic Party's Hypocrisy on Secret Ballots

Akash Chougule
March 7, 2017

6:56 p.m. ET

The new Democratic National Committee chairman's rocky start has gotten a bit rockier. Following an uncharacteristically contentious and high-profile election, former Labor Secretary Tom Perez narrowly beat Rep. Keith Ellison of Minnesota for the job. Fearing backlash from progressives who supported Mr. Ellison, the Democrats tried to keep the ballots secret. That violated the DNC's bylaws, and they [released](#) the roll call results on Monday after prodding from Wall Street Journal reporters.

This is the height of hypocrisy: The Democratic Party tried to get away with covert voting in its own elections, but when it comes to American workers, it sings a different tune.

For years Democrats—following union marching orders—have sought to deny millions of workers the protection of a secret ballot in union elections. Organized labor prefers that employees make these choices openly, often in front of union organizers or on the doorsteps of their own homes. These “card check” elections allow unions to see exactly who stands with or against

them—making countless workers vulnerable to harassment and intimidation.

Mr. Perez has long supported card-check campaigns and opposed secret ballots. Speaking at an AFL-CIO event in [2010 \(when he worked in the Justice Department\)](#), he called for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, which would have enabled unions to bypass secret ballots altogether and exclusively use card-check campaigns. That legislation died after failing to secure enough support in the Senate, even though Democrats held a lopsided majority.

As labor secretary, Mr. Perez also embraced regulations meant to limit the information available to workers voting on unionization. Most notable was the administration's “ambush election” rule that took effect in 2015. The [regulation](#) did away with the 25-day wait between when a union election is ordered and when it is held. Labor followed that up last year with its “persuader rule,” which required employers to disclose to the Labor Department any conversation with outside counsel about union efforts. A federal judge in Texas issued a permanent injunction against the rule in [November](#), after earlier having [called](#) it “arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion.”

The reason Mr. Perez and unions support card-check and other coercive tactics is simple: They are effective at bullying fence-sitting employees into union membership. It has been in the union playbook for decades.

The AFL-CIO's 1961 Guidebook for Union Organizers [says](#): “NLRB pledge cards are at best a signifying of interest at a given moment. Sometimes they are signed to ‘get the union off my back.’” In a survey of unionizing campaign [outcomes](#) published by the AFL-CIO in 1989, the labor group conceded “it is not until the union obtains signatures from 75% or more of the unit that the union has more than a 50% likelihood of winning” a secret-ballot election.

United Food and Commercial Workers organizer Joe Crump was more direct. He wrote in a 1992 article for the journal Labor Research Review: “If you had massive employee support, you probably would be conducting a traditional” secret-ballot election. But with card check, Mr. Crump noted, “you don't need a majority or even 30% support among employees.”

The data back up these assertions. A 2009 [analysis](#) by the law firm Foley Hoag found that when British Columbia required secret ballots

from 1984-92, unions won 73% of elections. After 1992, when the government allowed card-check campaigns, unions won 91%. In [1999](#) the AFL-CIO's George Meany Center for Labor Studies analyzed 100 card-check campaigns. The union won nearly 80%, compared with under 50% of secret-ballot elections.

Democrats and Republicans alike should be willing to extend private voting rights to American workers, and the Employee Rights Act is a good way to do it. Introduced in the last Congress by then-Rep. Tom Price (R., Ga.) and Sen. Orrin Hatch (R., Utah) and expected to be reintroduced this year, the bill provides secret-ballot protections in all union elections. It's a measure that even union households can find easy to support.

Whether voting for the president of the United States or a city councilman, U.S. citizens have long enjoyed the privacy of secret ballots in the voting booth. Members of Congress from both parties should ensure Americans are given that protection in the workplace too.

Mr. Chougule is director of policy at Americans for Prosperity.



Editorial : Stop the grandstanding on Planned Parenthood

Opinion A column or article

in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

March 7 at 7:39 PM

IT'S PRETTY clear that a proposal floated by the White House to safeguard federal funding to Planned Parenthood if the group stopped providing abortions never stood a chance of even being considered by the group. “[Non-negotiable](#),” said one Planned Parenthood official. But the fact that the idea was broached at all is significant as the latest sign that Republicans recognize the problems — and likely political repercussions — of cutting off funds to an organization that is held in high regard by the American public for providing critical health-care

services.

Weakening or destroying Planned Parenthood has been high on the GOP agenda for years, and with the party in control of the White House and both houses of Congress, the threat is real. [The bill released Monday](#) by House Republicans to repeal the Affordable Care Act includes a provision that would block people with [Medicaid](#) coverage from receiving care at [Planned Parenthood](#) health centers. “Defunding” — the term commonly used by Republicans — is a misnomer since the group doesn't receive a blank check or a line-item appropriation from the government but instead is reimbursed, like any other health-care provider, for preventative health care, including birth control, cancer screenings,

and sexually transmitted disease testing and treatment.

[Except in very rare instances](#), no federal money pays for abortions, a fact that underlies the illogic of the Republicans' ideological attack on the organization. If Republican efforts succeed, the victims will be the low-income people, both men and women, who rely on Planned Parenthood for basic health care. The argument that other providers will fill the gap is, as experts have repeatedly said, a complete myth.

No doubt the White House understands it's between a rock and a hard place in trying to satisfy the GOP's conservative base by living up to its campaign promises while [most Americans are opposed](#) to

stripping Planned Parenthood of federal funding. Hence, as the New York Times [reported](#), the trial balloon of seeing if Planned Parenthood would be willing to stop providing abortions. Whatever one's personal views about abortion, it is legal, and Planned Parenthood was right not to consider selling out the interests of its patients.

It's time for the White House to go back to the drawing board to figure a way out of its dilemma. Here's an idea: Study what President Trump [said as a candidate](#) about Planned Parenthood. “Millions and millions of women — cervical cancer, breast cancer — are helped by Planned Parenthood,” [he said](#) in a February 2016 debate. In other words: Stop the grandstanding and allow this respected health organization to continue its work unimpeded.



Shepard : Trump has already made America great again

Alicia Shepard
3:18 a.m. ET March 8, 2017

Protesters in New York on Feb. 26, 2017. (Photo: Kena Betancur, AFP/Getty Images)

After only a few weeks in the White House, President Trump has done as promised during campaign rallies storming the country: He's made

America great again. But not necessarily in the way he intended.

Trump's polarizing personality, his ongoing battles with the truth, his unrelenting attacks on the media,

his sexist statements about women and his promise to undo Obamacare have energized Americans across the entire political

spectrum, revving them up in unprecedented ways.

In short, Trump has breathed new life into the freedoms in the First Amendment.

Let's start with the once dying-on-the-vine news business. For much of this century, all the news about the future of news was gloomy. Newspapers were slashing staffs, subscriptions were declining; the internet was killing the business. Prospects weren't much better for cable TV or the networks.

But with the "Trump bump," there's a resurgence of interest in the news. This attentiveness is certainly intensified by the president tweeting that the media is the "enemy of the people."

Those fighting words [brought more than 80 journalism groups](#) together to condemn Trump's attacks on press freedom. The public is equally energized. News subscriptions are skyrocketing, non-profit news outlets are getting record donations and cable news, such as CNN, is enjoying impressive ratings, big digital audiences and record profits.

Even more unimaginable a few years ago, on a recent Sunday, [First Amendment supporters](#) marched from *The New York Times* to several other nearby news offices to demonstrate the need for a free press to ensure democracy prevails.

"Every time he tweets, it [drives subscriptions wildly](#)," *New York*

Times executive editor Dean Baquet said on CNN's *Reliable Sources*. "The last several years as newspaper subscriptions sort of dwindled, as newspapers, particularly local newspapers, worried about their future. I think what's happened in the last couple of months, I have to say, has been tremendous for news organizations. Our mission is clearer than it's ever been."

The *Times* and some news organizations are also beefing up staff and tapping into the hunger for factually accurate, fair contextualized information. The *Times*, for example, added [276,000 new digital subscribers](#) in the fourth quarter — the best quarter for the paper since 2011. It's added [25,000 on the print side](#) — best since 2010. The figures are also encouraging for *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, ProPublica and others.

One new digital *Times* subscriber is Billy Marsden, 25, who admitted that for years he'd read the paper pirating his mom's subscription. "I started subscribing because I think it's worth \$200 to keep well-informed," said Marsden, a San Francisco consultant with Bain & Company. "There's never been a more important time to support an independent press than today."

As a millennial, Marsden isn't a typical subscriber. But there's nothing typical about these Trumpian times. In addition to

creating a greater demand for reliable information, Trump's presidency has spiked record numbers of females interested in running for political office at the local, state and federal level.

Last month, [New York Magazine](#) reported that more than 13,000 women were planning to run for office. That's an incredible figure considering how few women are in office. Although 51% of the population, women only hold 20% of seats in the U.S. House (84 of 435) and U.S. Senate (20 of 100). State legislatures are about 25% female, according to the [Center for American Women and Politics](#) at Rutgers University.

Emily's List, a political action committee that supports pro-choice Democratic women, said that since the November election it has heard from more than 4,000 women who might run for office — 1,600 since the inauguration. [VoteRunLead](#) and [She Should Run](#) also report an uptick in interest.

POLICING THE USA: A [look at race, justice, media](#)

And women are much more vocal about not putting up with sexual assault after hearing Trump brag about grabbing women "[by the pussy](#)" on a recording shortly before the election. The incident provided an opportunity for discussions about what is and isn't acceptable behavior.

Trump has unwittingly motivated people to get active and speak out — even if for different political reasons.

Notably, large vocal crowds filled his campaign rallies, revealing a new wave of political interest on the right — just as an estimated [3.2 million marching the day after](#) Trump's inauguration showed a commitment on the left. People are civically engaged. They want their voices heard, belying the much-maligned stereotype of an apathetic electorate.

The president's promise to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act has lawmakers facing angry crowds at once-ignored [town hall meetings](#). On both sides, fear of losing health care coverage is evident.

This isn't the same as the peace and love protests of the 1960s and 1970s that galvanized a generation and brought an end to the Vietnam War. But maybe it could be. What is significant is that Americans of all political persuasions believe they have a voice, opportunities and a news media determined — regardless of presidential assaults — to soldier on and ferret out the truth.

Alicia Shepard is a veteran media writer and a former ombudsman for NPR. Follow her on Twitter [@Ombudsman](#)