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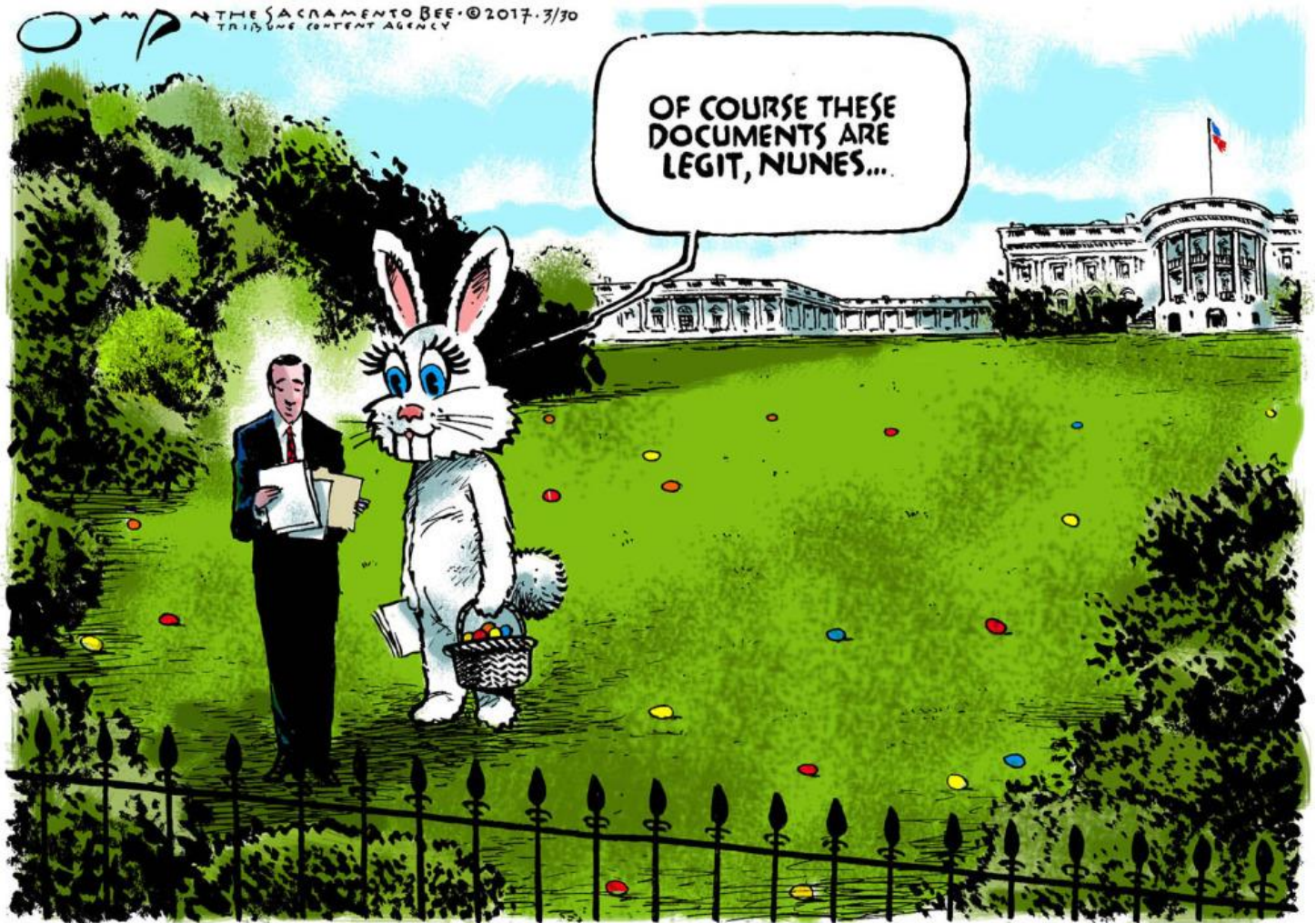
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RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

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FRANCE – EUROPE



France's presidential election may determine the future of the European Union (online)

<https://www.facebook.com/michael.birnbaum1>

LILLE, France — As European leaders assembled in Rome to herald the 60th anniversary of an embattled European Union, Marine Le Pen — fresh off the plane from a somewhat mysterious visit to Moscow — took to the podium this week in this middle-class French city.

After an entrance fit for a queen or a Kardashian, the presidential contender and leader of France's far-right National Front delivered one simple message to the thousands of supporters who crammed into stadium seats to catch a glimpse of her, waving French flags and screaming her name.

"The European Union will die!" Le Pen proclaimed, to a round of raucous applause. "The time has come to defeat the globalists."

[\[France's National Front co-founder Jean-Marie Le Pen says the battle is already won\]](#)

In late April and early May, voters in France's highly contentious presidential elections will decide the future of a country that has struggled with high unemployment, an unprecedented national security threat and a steady stream of largely unwanted migrants. But they will also decide the immediate future of the E.U., a troubled institution that will be saved or destroyed by the will of the same nation that spearheaded its creation. The French elections have become the decisive referendum on the dream of a unified Europe, six decades later.

"That'll be the real significance of the French elections: the survival or the demise of the E.U.," wrote Gérard Araud, France's ambassador to the United States, responding to Le Pen's Lille remarks on Twitter. The sentiment is shared in Paris and Brussels, in France and across Europe: the fate of the 27-state bloc lies with the French.

In recent years the European project — which once knew only expansion — has suffered devastating blows. The austerity measures enacted in Europe's sovereign debt crisis grossly undermined the E.U.'s reputation in many southern member states, the historic migration crisis invigorated a once-dormant network of right-wing populist parties, and the Brexit vote rendered the distant prospect of dissolution a pressing reality. A French departure from the bloc is a possibility, but this, leaders and analysts say, would be instantly fatal in ways that none of Europe's other recent traumas have been.

There are five candidates for the French presidency: Two advocate abandoning the European Union, two are harshly critical of the enterprise, and one argues for it — although with the explicit acknowledgment that the institution needs more democratic oversight and engagement. According to polls, the race will boil down to a contest between Le Pen and [Emmanuel Macron](#), the independent, pro-Europe candidate.

Macron, the 39-year-old former investment banker, cuts a familiar figure in Europe's transnational landscape. He has campaigned in Berlin — in English — and speaks about Europe in dramatically different terms from Le Pen.

"Europe, it's us," he said in a campaign speech this year, also in Lille. "We wanted it. And we need Europe because Europe makes us bigger. Because Europe makes us stronger."

After an hour-long audience earlier this month with German Chancellor Angela Merkel — who has refused to meet with Le Pen — Macron, a frequent target of Russian media attacks, told reporters that there were "many areas of agreement" between them. For many French voters, the choice between Le Pen and Macron has thus become a stark line in the sand: France or Europe, "us" or "them."

[\[A Trump bump to reorder European politics? Not so fast.\]](#)

The E.U. was originally a [French vision](#): Robert Schuman, a former French prime minister, first advocated the integration of Western European heavy industry after World War II, and Jean Monnet, a French economist, saw that integration come to fruition as the inaugural president of the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s, an antecedent of the present-day E.U. As the bloc of nations evolved, it grew around a Franco-German core that has run Europe ever since: French leadership managing German economic might. Excising France from Europe's center would be a bit like removing half a heart: The rest of the organism probably would not survive for long.

Without France, the E.U. would be left without nuclear weapons. It would be shorn of a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. The E.U. would also be deprived of one of its biggest economies, one that has long provided a dovish counterweight to German fiscal hawks with their tough approach to debt and balanced budgets. And Euroskeptics in Italy, Finland and elsewhere probably would quickly move to try to dismantle Europe's remains.

What would be left would be a trading bloc dominated by Germany and deprived of other heavyweights: precisely the scenario that postwar European leaders wanted to avoid.

"It would be an accomplishment of what the Germans tried with two wars, unsuccessfully, without any unit of blame to the Germans," said Stefano Stefanini, a former senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. "Should Le Pen win against all predictions, it would be game over for the European Union."

[\[As France's far-right National Front rises, memory of its past fades\]](#)

In fact, French voters have rejected Europe once — in a 2005 referendum on whether to adopt the

European constitution. Fifty-five percent of voters said "no." Whether they will do the same in the 2017 presidential elections remains an open question.

The anti-European sentiment in France closely mirrors that of the Brexit and Trump phenomena in Britain and the United States, said Vivien Schmidt, an expert in European integration at Boston University.

"It's the same discourse of globalization gone too far, of outrage over high unemployment — and especially youth unemployment," she said. The general unemployment rate in France has hovered around 10 percent for years, and the youth unemployment rate is around 26 percent.

"But it's also sociocultural," Schmidt said. "People really feel a loss of control, political and otherwise. Le Pen gives people a nostalgia for a vanished past, a past most people don't even remember."

In advance of the Brexit vote, polls indicated that Euroskepticism was even higher in France than it was in Britain. But after the uncertainty of Britain's future outside the E.U. — and, in the United States, the turmoil that followed the election of President Trump — more recent analyses suggest that French voters are unwilling to give up on Europe.

According to the results of a survey published jointly by the CSA Institute and La Croix newspaper last weekend, [66 percent](#) of French voters declared an enduring attachment to the E.U. And even higher numbers — [72 percent](#), according to a recent Ifop poll — support keeping the euro currency, against a campaign proposal of Le Pen's to return France to the franc.

Compared with Britain and the United States, savings rates in France remain significantly high, and the euro has consequently enjoyed a relatively high degree of popularity because it has protected against the inflation and frequent devaluations that saw the value of

the French franc plummet in value after 1960 and before 1999, when France adopted the euro.

There is also the more oblique issue of identity: Are "French" and "European" somehow mutually exclusive categories, as the National Front has suggested? Or are they complementary, two sides of the same coin?

"It's true that the French are less European than ever, and there is the sense that Europe is less French than ever," Pierre Moscovici, a French politician serving as the

European commissioner for economic and financial affairs, said in an interview.

"But the French are instinctively, natively, ontologically European. They really don't have the desire to turn the page, to leave," he said. "A 'Frexit,' that's a fantasy."

But leaving the E.U. remains the desired outcome for many French voters, such as Laetitia Bekaert, 45, and her husband Christophe Bekaert, 46, who braved the crowds to hear Le Pen speak Sunday in Lille. They voted no to Europe in

2005, they said, and are eager to do so again.

"We can't continue like this," said Laetitia, a homemaker. "We work so hard, and we give so much to the E.U., which then gives to the arms of millions — but no one here. It's Europe that decides the price of produce."

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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Christophe Bekaert, who said he commutes across the border to work for a British firm in nearby Brussels, agreed. "The law of each country is what's most important to preserve," he said.

"France welcomes everyone," his wife said, "but we the French count above all. For me, it's Marine who is going to save France."

Birnbaum reported from Brussels.



'I Want to Win a Positive Vote.' Emmanuel Macron Tries to Seal the Deal in France

Vivienne Walt / Paris

The man tipped to be the next President of [France](#) has few possessions in his office in Paris's 15th district: Under the bare walls, a handful of photos and mementos, and a watercolor sketch of his wife sit propped on a bookshelf, while other books lie stacked on the carpet. The modest suite, in a drab building in an unfashionable part of town, is temporary digs for [Emmanuel Macron](#), the country's former Economy Minister, who, at 39, has become a game-changing phenomenon in the country's [presidential race](#).

By May, Macron's office could be a lot more ornate: The upper floor of the sumptuous Elysée Palace, with its priceless chandeliers and tapestries. If so, the former Rothschild banker would be the most surprising French president in generations. He has never held elective office, and would be the youngest leader in modern French history. Yet polls show him neck-and-neck with far-right National Front leader Marine Le Pen in the first-round vote on April 23, far ahead of three other major candidates, and then trouncing her in the decisive round on May 7, as the country is expected to unite against Le Pen.

The 5 Candidates in the Battle Royale for French President

Here are the 5 people vying for the French presidency in 2017

There are still deep questions over what a President Macron might be, not least how he will govern with no conventional political party to call his own. But in an interview with TIME on Wednesday, Macron insisted he was not simply there to shut out the National Front candidate. "I want to win a positive vote," he says. His policies would bring back growth and jobs to France, he says, after years of stagnation in the world's sixth-biggest economy. These

include drastically loosening France's rigid labor laws, and luring back hundreds of thousands of French expats, many of them well-off professionals, by scaling back special wealth taxes and encouraging entrepreneurship. "My point is to convince the French people that a positive project and a progressive view is more adapted to our challenges," he said.

Macron is indeed far different from most French politicians; unlike President François Hollande, whose cabinet Macron quit last September, he speaks fluent English and is widely traveled. He also cuts a sharp contrast to the populist wave that has swept the continent—and the U.S. Far different to politicians like Le Pen, Macron wants a strong E.U. that imposes strict commitments on the 27 members left standing after Brexit. The E.U. is one of the most fraught issues in the election campaign. Le Pen has vowed to scrap the country's use of the Euro if she is elected, and to hold a Brexit-style referendum to pull France out of the E.U.

By contrast, Macron believes Brexit is a grave mistake for the British and other Europeans. That strong pro-E.U. stance has made him a ready target for Le Pen, who has hailed Brexit as an act of freedom. She has depicted Macron as subsuming French needs to E.U. bureaucrats in Brussels. Macron spoke to TIME just as Theresa May triggered the process to begin Britain's exit from the E.U., probably by 2019.

"Europe is part of the solution for us," he says. "If you look at the situation on climate, energy, industry, agriculture, immigration, terrorist attacks, we have a lot of challenges. But the best answer is at the European level, because you are much more credible, much stronger." He says that strength is essential also "vis-à-vis the U.S. and China."

With Britain headed out of the E.U., and President Trump now in office, Macron, like many other European politicians, are reordering their alliances. The French elections has shattered the long-held establishment, in which Socialists have traded power regularly with conservatives.

Macron quit President François Hollande's Socialist cabinet last September to form his own political movement, called *En Marche!* (On the Move!), after months of trying to push economic reforms. He says he intends to "make France more attractive and competitive, through reforms, by making France the pro-innovation, pro-researchers, pro-future, country."

Although French presidents have huge power to draft laws, some items will require Parliament's cooperation. So far, it is unclear which party will win French parliamentary elections in June. Much like Congress with Trump's agenda, lawmakers could choose to push Macron's agenda, or hamper it, should he become president.

There's a growing sense the race is his to lose. Key figures from Hollande's inner circle, most recently his former Prime Minister Manuel Valls, have said they intend to vote for Macron, rather than for the candidate of their own Socialist Party. However Macron has warned people not to think of his victory as inevitable, fearing that many conservatives and Socialists might choose to stay home in the second-round election rather than vote for him. Battling complacency is one major task in the campaign's closing weeks. "The dynamic is good, and it is continuing," [he told reporters last weekend](#). "But for me, nothing is over."

Nonetheless, he's already attempting to build alliances. Shortly before speaking to TIME, Macron met in his office with London's

Mayor Sadiq Khan—the only presidential candidate the mayor met with during his two-day visit to Paris — ostensibly to convey his condolences for those killed in last week's terror attack outside Parliament.

But Macron also suggested, in remarks to a group of British journalists, that Europeans needed to band together on some issues against President Donald Trump, whose policies now appear at odds with the prevailing views on the continent. Noting Trump's decision to reverse the Obama administration's energy regulations, Macron told reporters that London and Paris would together mount "a strong battle against pollution, especially in the context of what you saw yesterday: The American President, who decided rather to go backwards."

Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order allowing new coal-power plants in the U.S., and effectively cancelling U.S. commitments to global climate change efforts. President Obama made those commitments as part of the global climate negotiations in 2015—the signature accomplishment of Hollande's five-year rule, and now looking fragile with Trump in the White House.

Asked whether Europe and U.S. were increasingly diverging on key issues like immigration, terrorism, and the environment, Macron replied: "I do hope this will not be the case. We need a Transatlantic relationship vis-à-vis terrorist attacks, climate change and all the global challenges," he says. "But I do note that Mr. Trump has been taking a series of negative decisions."

Despite that, Macron says he believes the U.S. will remain in sync with Europe on policies like climate change. "I'm very optimistic for two reasons," he says. "First is the U.S.

system: checks and balances, which will force him to respect former commitments. We saw that on migration issues. The second point is that you will see the strength of

the long-term, historical relationship [with France]."

As President of France, he says, he would "enshrine the U.S. in this

common perspective. We have so many links and such a common history, that our destiny, in my view, is all together." First, however, he will need to fight his own campaign

battle, and write the next chapter of French history.

CNBC : Here's how France's Le Pen could defy the odds to become president

Sam Meredith

SEBASTIEN BOZON | AFP | Getty Images

Head of the Front National (FN) far-right party, Marine Le Pen.

French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's roadmap to the Élysée Palace in May must first begin by inspiring a sense of urgency among politically apathetic voters, analysts at [Nomura](#) said in a note.

Le Pen, leader of the anti-immigration and anti-[European Union](#) National Front, is currently neck-and-neck with centrist Emmanuel Macron for the first round vote on April 23, according to an Elabe poll. Macron is expected to go on to win the second and final round

run-off vote on May 7, the same poll forecast.

"Mathematically, it remains feasible for Marine Le Pen to win. However, to achieve that, she needs to convince all the voters who, in the second round, have said they will abstain, or vote blank or who are still undecided to vote for her," Charles St-Arnaud, senior strategist and economist at Nomura Securities International, said in a note.

The phenomenon of 'blank' votes is expected to increase in France throughout the 2017 two-stage contest, Nomura predicted, as citizens frustrated with the political establishment opt to submit a nameless vote to the ballot box rather than support a candidate.

An Odoxa poll published Friday estimated that as many as 43 percent of the French electorate have yet to decide who to vote for in the general election.

Trump's victory a 'bad point of reference' for Le Pen

Despite the apparent frustration with the political elite, Nomura underlined the mathematical possibility that French citizens could defy expectations in the voting booth, in a way not dissimilar to U.S. President [Donald Trump's](#) election victory and the [Brexit](#) vote in the U.K.

"Many investors are approaching the French elections with the memory of the Brexit vote and the surprise victory of Donald Trump in the U.S., drawing specifically on Trump's victory. However, major differences

make the US election a bad point of reference," St-Arnaud said.

Le Pen has repeatedly praised Trump for his 2016 election success yet Nomura advised caution to the National Front leader in taking too much inspiration from the former New York Businessman's success.

In France, 50 percent of the votes are required in the second run-off round to be elected President whereas Trump was able to assume the White House with the most Electoral College votes.

Nomura concluded for Le Pen to become president, she must drastically reshape public opinion of her party and reach out to the undecided voters for any hope of victory.



It's hard to be Chinese in Paris. Sometimes, it can be deadly. (online)

By Amanda Erickson

went off and my father ended up on the floor," she told [Le Parisien](#).

Later, she told AFP: "They began to bang on our door and then we heard something we didn't know who it was. By that time I was stricken with panic. My father was really trying to hold back the door and then the door opened all of a sudden. A shot was fired. All of this happened in just a few seconds." She also said the men were [not dressed as police officers](#).

There are [more than 600,000 people](#) of Chinese descent living in Paris, the largest community of Chinese expatriates in Europe. And among these immigrants Liu's shooting has struck a nerve. Many say it's another example of the prejudice and police abuse that Chinese people face in France. "France's ethnic Chinese population have long suffered casual racism and been stereotyped as easy targets for crime," the [BBC wrote](#), because people believe they are weak and carry a lot of cash.

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

March 30 at 12:49 PM

Shaoyo Liu, 56, was preparing dinner for his family, cutting up some fish with a pair of scissors, when the knocks came.

What happened next is a matter of debate.

Police, responding to a call from a neighbor, say Liu tried to attack one of the officers on his doorstep and that police shot and killed him in self-defense.

Liu's lawyer and relatives strongly dispute that claim. They say that before Liu could even answer the door of his Paris home, police pushed it open and shot him as he stood just feet from his daughter. "They smashed the door in, the shot

"We are not the only victims; we never say that," Tamara Lui, president of the community organization Chinese in France, [told the New York Times](#). "But we feel powerless and abandoned by the state."

Liu and others point to a killing last year when a Chinese tailor was beaten to death by a gang of youths. In response, local authorities promised to improve neighborhood policing by offering translation services to those who want to report crime. That never happened, Lui said.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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Calvin Job, a lawyer for Liu's family, said that several clients of Asian ancestry have complained about police brutality recently. "I understand the anger in the community," he said.

This week, that anger erupted. On Monday, about 150 protesters gathered outside a police station in northeast Paris. Some threw rocks and burned cars. Thirty-five people were arrested, and three officers were "lightly wounded," officials said.

We know that this incident has caused some turmoil," another lawyer for the Liu family said Wednesday. "The family wished for this press conference to launch an appeal for calm."

The Chinese government has also gotten involved, calling for a "thorough investigation." This week, China's foreign ministry [called on](#) a French diplomat in Beijing to explain what had happened. They also asked France to better protect "the security and rights" of Chinese people in the European country.

Some Chinese immigrants found China's response reassuring. But others are still scared. "France is not the paradise that I imagined," an immigrant student [told Le Huffington Post](#). "It's a country like any other."

Breitbart : Protests in Paris Continue for Third Night After Chinese Citizen Killed by Police

Hundreds of "Asians" took to the streets of Paris Wednesday night to protest police brutality after a Chinese citizen was shot to death at his home in front of his family during a police raid.

Protesters dragged barricades across streets in central Paris and hurled projectiles at police officers in the third continuous night of protests over the death of 56-year-old Shaoyo Liu. The Chinese male's apartment was raided by police after

the force received reports of a domestic disturbance and a man with a knife.

Video Riots in Paris after Chinese man shot dead

While police say the man attacked them with scissors when they broke down the door of his apartment, his daughter has refuted the claim, insisting he had been cooking for the family when the police stormed in.

Protests in Paris this week / AP Images

As [reported](#) by Breitbart London throughout the week, cars have been burned and heavily armoured riot police have clashed with those protesting the killing. A protest outside a police station on Monday night saw a police car burnt out after a molotov cocktail was thrown through a smashed window, and there have been dozens of arrests.

The police killing of the man and protests following it come among continued unrest in Parisian suburbs over the claimed sexual assault of a young man in custody with a police truncheon. Daily protests demanding 'Justice for Theo' in the north-east of the city have

regularly transformed into relentless violence at night with cars burnt, arson attacks launched against public buildings including a school, and police attacked.

Paris has seen near continuous anti-police protests reaching from the suburbs into the centre for [approaching two months](#).

France24 [reports](#) the Chinese Foreign Ministry summoned a representative from the French Embassy on Tuesday for answers, and to order the French government to make a full investigation into the circumstances of the shooting. Calling for calm in Paris, Beijing made clear its desire for France to "guarantee the safety and legal rights and interests of Chinese citizens in France", and asked its

own citizens to make their demands "in a lawful and reasonable way".

[Fireworks are launched into police lines during protests this week / AFP](#)

Chinese are one of the largest non-European groups in France, making up some two million out of France's 66 million total, yet they are not a high-profile migrant group and are often over-looked in media reports about migrants in the country.

Explaining the prevalence of anti-Chinese racism in France from not the French themselves but other migrant communities, University of Paris academic and Chinese expert Pierre Picquart is reported by France24 as saying: "Chinese are victims of racist attitudes in France, especially from other ethnic

groups... They are targets for crime because they often carry cash and many don't have residence permits, so can be threatened easily. They're angry with police for not protecting them enough.

"Chinese people do not like to protest or express themselves publicly, so when we see them like this, it means they are very, very angry. They've had enough of discrimination."



French person assaulted by knife-wielding man in Shanghai

ABC News

[news](#) and "slander."

Russian President [Vladimir Putin's](#) right-hand man said in an interview today on ABC's ["Good Morning America"](#) that current relations between Russia and the United States are "maybe even worse" than [the Cold War](#).

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also told ABC News chief anchor [George Stephanopoulos](#) that allegations of Russia's trying to interfere in the 2016 U.S. election are ["fake](#)

"It has no evidence at all," he said of the claims.

The spokesman pointed to then-President Barack Obama's sanctions against Russia in response to the alleged election interference as a reason for relations between the two countries being "maybe even worse" than during the Cold War.

Obama in late December announced "a number of actions in response to the Russian

government's aggressive harassment of U.S. officials and cyberoperations aimed at the U.S. election."

The actions included: expulsion of 35 Russians identified by the U.S. as Moscow intelligence operatives and sanctions against five Russian entities and four individuals for alleged cyberassaults on [Democratic party](#) operatives and political organizations during the [presidential campaign](#).

Obama also announced the shutdown of two massive Russian

recreational compounds in Maryland and New York, which U.S. officials said were used for intelligence purposes.

"Is it friendly?" Peskov said of these actions. "I'm afraid no. It's not friendly. It's not legal in terms of international law. So, of course, it was a very significant damage for our bilateral relations organized as a farewell parting by the then-administration in Washington."



Paris exhibition explores racism amid tensions in France

The Washington Times <http://www.washingtontimes.com>

PARIS (AP) - A UNESCO-backed [Paris](#) exhibition exploring the psychology behind racism aims to shed light on why racist acts in France are on the rise, and to educate against prejudice.

"We and the Others, Prejudices of Racism," which opens Friday to the French public at [Paris](#) Museum of Mankind, comes at a prescient moment - during a divisive presidential campaign that's been rife with anti-Islam rhetoric.

This week, deep racial tensions affecting France's large Asian community were exposed in violence that spilled onto [Paris'](#) streets.

Museum organizers said that some French political parties, especially the far-right, have used fear to fuel anti-Islam and anti-immigration policies.

"In politics, French people, especially young people, are taking on prejudiced attitudes and extreme views because they have forgotten where it leads," said co-curator Evelyne Heyer, a professor of genetic anthropology at the National History Museum.

The exhibit, which includes multimedia, objects and text, makes for uncomfortable viewing.

It revisits dark historical moments including the Rwandan Genocide, segregation in the United States, the Holocaust, as well as French colonial rule.

One section's display features a simple metal funnel dated 1943 that was used to gas people in Natzweiler-Struthof, the only Nazi death camp on current French territory. Elsewhere, cabinets showcase colonial-era French scientific textbooks that teach children hierarchical racial difference.

But the exhibit is rooted in the present day.

It presents newly-published research, which shows that while racial tolerance is generally increasing, racist acts and threats have been rising over the last ten years in French society.

Exhibit organizers launched a prominent campaign in the [Paris](#) metro, featuring large poster images

of French celebrities of different ethnic backgrounds reduced to simplified black and white shapes.

The museum hopes that its prime position on the Place du Trocadero, opposite the Eiffel Tower, will help attract tourists from all nationalities.

"This is a very good moment to look at French society... It's been 20 years since scientists proved race doesn't exist, but why is there still racism?" Heyer asked.

"We hope people - and some who are prejudiced - will come and take another look at why they feel the way they do," she added.



Russia's meddling in other nations' elections is nothing new. Just ask the Europeans

Ann M. Simmons

Russia's suspected interference in last year's U.S. presidential election

may have come as a surprise to some. But to many European nations, such an intrusion is nothing new.

For years, Russia has used a grab bag of illicit tactics, including the hacking of emails and mobile phones, the dissemination of fake

news and character assassination, to try to undermine the political process in other countries.

"They have a history of doing this," Roy Godson, professor of government emeritus at [Georgetown University](#), told a [Senate Intelligence Committee](#) hearing Thursday. "They find this a successful use of their resources."

Moscow has recently stepped up this type of activity, targeting political processes in [France](#), [Germany](#) and the [Netherlands](#), among other nations, according to experts who testified on the first day of a series of Senate hearings on Russia's propaganda and intelligence campaign aimed at undermining the 2016 vote.

Russia's tentacles are far-reaching in Europe

Some of the nations Russia has stung are Western foes, others former Soviet republics, or states that fall within Moscow's sphere of influence.

"There are ample examples," Eugene Rumer, director of the Russia and Eurasia program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, told the Senate committee.

Ukraine was hit during its 2004 and 2014 election campaigns, Rumer said. Malware was used to infect the servers at Ukraine's central election commission and was also believed to have been responsible for a December 2015 power outage that left thousands of Ukrainians in the dark, according to media reports.

Hungary, the Baltic States, and the former Soviet republic of Georgia, which Russia invaded in 2008, have also been the target of political subversion by the Kremlin, which has often sought to bolster the political ambitions of far-right and Euro-skeptic parties or foster instability or social unrest, experts said.

"It is really in central and Eastern Europe that they've really been able to practice and hone these techniques and you're now starting to see that they're comfortable enough with them to start to export them to other parts of the world," Hannah Thoburn, a research fellow at the Hudson Institute, said during a conference call about Russia's interference in foreign elections hosted by the Foreign Policy Initiative, a Washington-based think tank, during the U.S. election campaign.

On Wednesday, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman [Richard Burr](#) warned Russia was "actively involved" in efforts to interfere in the upcoming French and German elections.

"We're on the brink of potentially having two European countries where Russia is the balance disruptor of their leadership," Burr said at a news conference. "A very overt effort, as well as covert in Germany and France, already been tried in Montenegro and the Netherlands."

The first round of the French vote is set for April. If no candidate wins a majority, a runoff election between the top two candidates will be held in May.

Experts said Russia's aim was to support France's far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, whose National Front party received an \$11.7-million loan from a Russian bank in 2014, according to several international news reports. Russia has also reportedly lent money to Greece's Golden Dawn, Italy's Northern League, Hungary's Jobbik and the Freedom Party of Austria — all far-right nationalist parties.

Putin has denied meddling in France's politics and has called

accusations of Moscow's interference in the U.S. election "lies."

The Kremlin's political favorites in other European nations — typically populists — have been given favorable news coverage by Russian news outlets, such as the state-owned satellite network RT and the website Sputnik, while their opponents are denigrated, often in fake news stories and by Internet trolls, experts said.

In December, the English-language Moscow Times newspaper reported that RT was given an additional \$19 million to start a French-language channel.

Germany is also believed to have fallen prey to Russian attempts to undermine the country's presidential election, scheduled for September. The country's domestic intelligence agency has accused Russia of cyberattacks and cyberspying, according to a report in November by the Associated Press.

Bruno Kahl, who heads Germany's Federal Intelligence Service, said material hacked from the German parliament and published by the whistle-blower website WikiLeaks came from the same Russian group that hacked the U.S. Democratic National Committee, the AP reported.

"The perpetrators have an interest in delegitimizing the democratic process as such — whomever that later helps," Kahl was quoted as saying.

America's hands are not clean

The U.S. has a long history of trying to influence presidential elections in other countries and did so as many as 81 times from 1946 to 2000, according to a database amassed

by political scientist Dov Levin of Carnegie Mellon University.

That number does not include military coups and efforts to change a regime following the election of candidates whom Washington considered unfavorable — notably in Iran, Guatemala and Chile. Nor does the number of cases include general assistance the U.S. has provided during an electoral process, such as election monitoring.

During the Cold War, the goal of U.S. meddling was primarily to contain the spread of communism, and the approach continued into the post-Soviet era, stretching from the Middle East and Europe to Latin America and the Caribbean, according to Levin's research.

Examples include the spreading of negative news against Marxist Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1990, resulting in the presidential election defeat of Daniel Ortega; training and financial support given to Vaclav Havel's party and its Slovak affiliate in the former Czechoslovakia; and supporting particular candidates in Haiti in an attempt to weaken the presidential prospects of Jean-Bertrande Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest and proponent of liberation theology.

And as Moscow likes to point out, Washington has also tried to sway Russian elections. In 1996, for example, the White House endorsed a \$10.2-billion [International Monetary Fund](#) loan to help shore up the floundering Russian economy and allow then-President Boris Yeltsin to gain popularity while spinning the narrative that only he had the reformist credentials to secure such loans.

Newsweek : Russia's election hacking didn't end in November and wasn't confined to the U.S.

By Cristina Silva On 3/30/17 at 4:36 PM

Russia is "actively involved" in the French and German elections scheduled for later this year, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr warned Wednesday. U.S. officials "feel part of our responsibility is to educate the rest of the world about what's going on," Burr said, because Moscow was launching "character assassination of candidates."

"What ... was a very covert effort [to interfere] in 2016 in the United States, is a very overt effort, as well as covert, in Germany and France,"

he said at a press conference. "The Russians are actively involved in the [French elections.](#)"

Burr said Russia's election interference methods had "already been tried in Montenegro and the Netherlands." U.S. intelligence agencies concluded in January that Putin had ordered a hacking campaign that saw sensitive emails from Democratic leaders released ahead of the November election to help Trump defeat his [Democrat rival Hillary Clinton](#). Before that, Montenegro saw coordinated cyberattacks during its election in October, while the Netherlands

passed out paper ballots earlier this month to avoid election hacking.

France warned the Kremlin in February it would retaliate if it found Russia was meddling in its April 23 election. "We will not accept any interference whatsoever in our electoral process, no more from Russia by the way than from any other state. This is a question of our democracy, our sovereignty, our national independence," Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said.

France's presidential elections have been compared to the U.S. contest in November in part because far-right candidate Marine Le Pen has

been called the French Donald Trump for her opposition to NATO and illegal immigration. She went to Moscow last week to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, who told her: "We do not want to influence events in any way, but we retain the right to meet with all the different political forces, just like our [European and American partners do.](#)" Meanwhile, frontrunner Emmanuel Macron has said his campaign was the target of propaganda published by Russian media.

3 Are Held on Suspicion of Plot to Attack Rialto Bridge in Venice

Elisabetta Povoledo

The Rialto Bridge in Venice was the target of a planned terrorist attack, the Italian police said. Filippo Monteforte/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

VENICE — The Italian police announced on Thursday that they had dismantled a suspected jihadist cell whose members had discussed blowing up the [Rialto Bridge](#), one of the top tourist attractions in Venice.

Three Kosovar men living in Italy were arrested in overnight raids, and one teenager, also from [Kosovo](#), was held, the police said.

The police also conducted nearly a dozen raids in Venice, one in nearby Mestre on the mainland and one in Treviso.

In wiretapped conversations, the men celebrated the [terrorist attack in London](#) on March 22, in which a Briton mowed down pedestrians, killing three of them, and then fatally stabbed a police officer outside Parliament. They expressed their readiness to carry out a similar slaughter here.

One of the suspects, Arjan Babaj, was described by investigators as the chief recruiter and spiritual leader of the group. In one exchange disclosed by the police on Thursday, he said, "If tomorrow I take the oath and I get the order, I will be forced to kill them."

His interlocutor, the teenager, responded, "With Venice, you immediately gain paradise because of all the infidels here." His name was not made public because he is a minor. He spoke of putting "a bomb" at the "Rialto Bridge."

From left: Arjan Babaj, Fisnik Bekaj and Dake Haziraj, the three Kosovars arrested in Venice. Italian Police and Carabinieri/ANSA, via Associated Press

Whether they would have been able to carry out the plan is another matter.

The police said the Kosovars — who were living in Italy with regular work permits — had been under surveillance on suspicion of being in contact with terrorist groups since September 2015. At least one of the arrested men had recently traveled to Syria, the police said.

"The Kosovars were constantly watched, they were never out of our sight," the Venice prosecutor, Adelchi D'Ippolito, said at a news conference on Thursday. "We controlled their every move, all their relationship."

He said the members of the group had been preparing to carry out criminal activities and exercising regularly so they could "keep fit and efficient." They also watched Islamic State videos on the internet to learn "the techniques used to kill people with a knife, and showing how they could be effective and fast in the execution," Mr. D'Ippolito said.

Other videos showed how to build explosives at home, according to investigators.

The Kosovars all lived in a neighborhood near [St. Mark's Basilica](#), investigators said.

Speaking "on behalf of the city of Venice and its citizens," Mayor Luigi Brugnaro complimented the forces of law and order for breaking up a suspected dangerous jihadist cell operating in central Venice. "I can only express the most sincere

thanks for what you are doing to keep our territory safe," he said.

It was not clear whether an attack was on the horizon, but Interior Minister Marco Minniti said in a statement that the Kosovars had been "planning a trip to the jihad territories, and once they had heard the news of the attack in London on March 22, they had expressed admiration and commented on the possibility of carrying out an action in our country."

As conservative lawmakers on Thursday called for tougher laws against immigration, Msgr. Francesco Moraglia, the Roman Catholic patriarch of Venice (the city's equivalent of an archbishop), said it was important not to give in to panic.

"Our city, which has always been open to dialogue and place where cultures meet, must continue to believe in encounter and dialogue," he said in a statement. "As Venetians, we don't intend to forget these values."

London Attacker Made Test Run, Security Officials Say

Benoit Faucon and Jenny Gross

Updated March 30, 2017 6:11 p.m. ET

LONDON—Investigators have concluded that the 52-year-old man who killed four people in a car-and-knife attack near Parliament made a test run in the days before, two security officials said Thursday.

U.K. investigators are still trying to piece together the motives and planning behind Khalid Masood's [attack last week](#), the worst in Britain since a series of coordinated bombings in 2005 killed 52 people.

Two security officials said tracking of his car's GPS showed he drove across Westminster Bridge and approached Parliament on Saturday, March 18. The following

Wednesday he plowed into pedestrians on the crowded bridge before crashing his car outside Parliament and stabbing a policeman. He was shot dead by police.

Masood's movements show he prepared the attack, rather than making a last-minute decision beforehand, the officials said.

But it also suggests he wasn't a trained terrorist. In that case, he "would have come on the same day of the week, or at least a weekday, to ensure the security measures and traffic were similar," one official said.

A London police spokesman said "the investigation is live and ongoing, and we're not prepared to comment further at this time."

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, saying in a statement that it was a response to U.S.-led coalition strikes against the extremist group. But police said they have [found no evidence](#) he was linked to Islamic State or al Qaeda. Investigators have said that they believe he acted alone and was inspired by Islamist terrorism.

The new detail fits into what is known about Masood's final days.

Five days before the attack, on March 17, he checked into the Preston Park Hotel in Brighton late in the evening and left early the next morning, according to the hotel receptionist. He was back at the hotel in Brighton on Tuesday, the day before the attack.

He had rented a gray Hyundai Tucson compact SUV at an

Enterprise Rent-A-Car in Birmingham, about a mile from the house where neighbors said he once lived. It wasn't clear exactly when he had rented the car or whether the same car was used in the practice run and on the day of the attack.

Masood spent most of Tuesday in his room and ate a takeout kebab for dinner, before driving to London the next morning and carrying out the bloody attack.

Born Adrian Elms, he left few signs about what led him to stage the attack. He had [criminal convictions and had spent time in prison](#), but wasn't considered a terror risk, authorities have said.

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U.K. Steps Out of EU and Into a 'Bureaucratic Jungle'

Jenny Gross and Jason Douglas

Updated March 30, 2017 6:21 p.m. ET

LONDON—The U.K. government on Thursday published proposals to convert thousands of European Union laws and regulations into U.K.

law, a first step in a potentially contentious and lengthy process that highlights the many hurdles ahead as Britain maps out its post-Brexit relationship with the bloc.

The proposals, presented to Parliament by Brexit secretary David Davis on Thursday, pave the way for lawmakers to begin deciding

whether to keep, alter or ditch 19,000 EU statutes that currently apply to the U.K. as soon as the country formally withdraws.

The scope of the job has sparked concerns that some politicians will use the process as an opportunity to rewrite U.K. laws in their favor.

The U.K. is on track to leave the EU by March 2019 after Prime Minister Theresa May on Wednesday [officially notified European leaders of Britain's intention to leave](#), starting the clock on two years of exit talks.

"Converting EU law into U.K. law, and ending the supremacy of

lawmakers in Brussels, is an important step in giving businesses, workers and consumers the certainty they need," Mr. Davis said. The "Great Repeal Bill" would scrap a 1972 law that makes EU law applicable in Britain and transpose existing EU law into U.K. legislation.

The bill will be formally introduced for debate in Parliament later in the year. Determining which laws to scrap and which to keep is expected to be divisive.

Mr. Davis said the government estimates that 800 to 1,000 measures will need technical changes—for example, if a rule references EU regulators that no longer oversee the U.K.—and has proposed doing this through a mechanism meant to speed the process that requires little parliamentary scrutiny.

But politicians who supported staying in the block say they worry that the Conservative Party will try to sneak in more controversial changes, such as eroding workers' rights and other environmental regulations, and that they are prepared to fight.

"If needed, we will grind the government's agenda to a standstill, unless proper and rigorous safeguards are given over the Great Repeal Bill," Liberal Democrat lawmaker Tom Brake said in a statement.

Mrs. May said Wednesday that the U.K. would ensure workers' rights are protected and maintained.

The plan is essential if the U.K. is to deliver on pledges to voters who backed Brexit that exiting the EU would allow the country to leave behind European regulation as well as the jurisdiction of EU courts.

Lawyers said that without such a step, the U.K. would end up in a legal limbo when it leaves the EU after applying European law for more than 40 years. "It would leave a massive black hole in our domestic legal system," said Kieran Laird, head of constitutional affairs at law firm Gowling WLG.

Parliament's House of Commons, in a research report published in February, said whittling down and altering the thicket of EU rules that will apply to Britain is "potentially one of the largest legislative projects ever undertaken in the U.K."

"This is a bureaucratic jungle, the scale of which few understand and none have experienced," said Michael Heseltine, defense secretary under former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Lord Heseltine supported staying in the EU.

Martyn Day, a Scottish National Party legislator, said he is concerned lawmakers won't have enough influence over the process and that the time frame for

converting thousands of regulations is unreasonable.

"We're stripping out 40 years of EU membership in an 18-month set of negotiations," Mr. Day said. "I genuinely don't think it's possible to do, and to do it in a way where you get a credible solution. I think we'll be left with a mess."

Members of Parliament who supported Brexit hailed the move as an important step toward taking back control of rules and regulations from the EU.

"The Great Repeal Bill will just get powers back," said David Amess, a Conservative lawmaker who said Parliament had much more power when he joined 34 years ago than it has today. "Most MPs can't judge the way we've lost power—I can. It's all just gone to unelected bureaucracies and to the European Union."

The U.K. set out negotiating guidelines Wednesday for coming exit talks that will include issues like the rights of EU and U.K. citizens post-Brexit and a new free-trade accord to replace the country's membership of the EU's single market.

In her letter notifying the EU, Mrs. May suggested that cooperation and counterterrorism would be weakened if the U.K. left the bloc without a deal.

Mr. Davis denied that the U.K. had threatened to withdraw cooperation with other European states on security matters if it didn't get a good deal overall, saying earlier Thursday in an interview on the British Broadcasting Corp. that it was an argument for having a deal.

Mrs. May spoke to EU leaders from France, Spain, Ireland, Italy and Poland after formally starting the process of leaving the bloc, and was well-received, a spokesman for Downing Street said.

"The feedback that we have had is that the tone of the letter was appreciated and considered to be constructive," said James Slack, Mrs. May's spokesman.

Corrections & Amplifications

Kieran Laird is the head of constitutional affairs at law firm Gowling WLG. An earlier version of this article incorrectly referred to the firm as Gowley WLG.

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Appeared in the Mar. 31, 2017, print edition as 'U.K. Launches Legal Rewrite With 'Great Repeal Bill'.'

The New York Times Editorial : The Complex Cost of Brexit Gets Clearer

Daniel Leal-Olivas/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Almost nine months passed between that day in June when the British stunned the world by voting to quit the [European Union](#) and this Wednesday, when Prime Minister Theresa May [delivered the letter](#) formally starting the two-year disengagement — more like disentanglement — process.

Much has been said in these intervening months about the potential consequences of Brexit for Britain, Europe and the world, warning that the process will be hugely complex, impossible to complete in two years, painful for both sides, fraught with risk and riddled with a frightening array of

unknowns.

The European Union is no simple economic union, from which an exit means changing some trading rules. Since the Treaty of Rome was signed 60 years ago establishing the European Economic Community — the union marked the anniversary four days before Mrs. May dispatched her letter — the "European project" has been an experiment in shared values, sovereignty, standards and laws among nations with differing histories, styles and languages.

While much attention has been focused on the potential damage to the British economy, especially if the talks collapse — and most projections are bleak — that is hardly the only consequence. The Scottish Parliament [voted this week](#) to have another go at breaking with

Britain, and Britain's ties to Ireland are being re-examined. The fate of thousands of British citizens working in the union and of the bloc's citizens working in Britain is in question.

The negotiations might turn ugly over Britain's "exit bill," the many billions of euros that the European Union may demand in various dues and contributions. The French have demanded that terms of the exit be settled before any trade talks. On the legal front, Britain needs to revise more than 12,000 regulations and thousands of laws that either incorporate or are shaped by European legislation. On the international front, Brexit is music to the ears of President [Vladimir Putin](#), in whose zero-sum worldview any weakening of Europe equals the strengthening of his Russia.

As for Europe, it's hard to underestimate the importance of the union in maintaining peace on the Continent, creating a functional single market, and serving as a potent counterweight to authoritarian countries.

Whatever disdain the British might feel for the European Union, its survival and strength should be as important to Britain as they are to the remaining members. And however strongly the union might want to make an example of Brexit that other members will not want to follow, there is no gain in making the rift with Britain worse than it is. There is no turning back from Brexit, and the challenge now for Britain and the European Union should be to do the least harm to each other and the world.



EU Says It Can't Block Russia-Backed Nord Stream 2 Pipeline

Emre Peker

March 30, 2017

4:41 p.m. ET

Russian pipeline project and instead proposing negotiations with Moscow to alleviate the [security concerns of some of its members](#).

Under pressure from about a dozen governments led by Poland, the EU had been attempting to block Nord Stream 2, which would provide a second gas link from Russia to Germany and double the Baltic Sea

export capacity of Russian state-owned energy company, PAO Gazprom.

At stake is increasing the bloc's reliance on Russian energy at a time

BRUSSELS—The European Union is giving up on efforts to stop a

when Brussels has sanctioned Moscow for its military intervention in Ukraine and EU governments warn of political meddling by the Kremlin. The pipeline would allow Russia to divert its gas shipments to Europe away from Ukraine, cutting off an economic lifeline for the country beleaguered by violence and instability.

In a March 28 letter to the Danish and Swedish governments, seen Thursday by The Wall Street Journal, the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said it has no basis to bar the planned pipeline.

Pushing for a political solution, the commission said it would seek a mandate from EU governments to broker a deal with Russia that would define Nord Stream 2's legal framework and align it with Brussels's priorities.

"We don't like Nord Stream 2 politically," said Anna-Kaisa Ikonen, an energy spokeswoman at the commission. "This being said, there are no legal grounds for the commission to oppose Nord Stream 2...because [EU] rules do not apply to the offshore part of the pipeline."

The letter, written in response to a Jan. 25 request by Denmark and Sweden for a "prompt assessment" of the pipeline project, ends a long-running debate

on whether the EU's political concerns could be translated into legal action against Nord Stream 2.

Still, the commission reiterated its position that the project jars with EU objectives to diversify and secure gas-supply sources, curb dependence on major providers like Gazprom, and prevent a concentration of transit routes.

"The commission sees no need for new infrastructure of the magnitude of Nord Stream 2," Vice President Maros Sefcovic and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete said in their letter. "The commission will also continue supporting the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine."

Policy makers are crafting the commission's request for a mandate to broker a deal with Russia, and a timeline for the process is not yet available, an EU official said.

The commission's statements "contain no major revelations," said Russia's envoy to the EU, Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov. He declined to comment on whether Russia would negotiate a bilateral agreement with the EU on Nord Stream 2, citing the lack of a proposal for talks.

It is also unclear whether EU governments that have sparred over

Nord Stream 2 would green-light the commission's bid to seek a deal with Russia.

Poland and other eastern members of the EU, which benefit from transit fees and supply security as long as Russia uses existing pipelines, staunchly oppose doubling the existing Baltic Sea connection's capacity to 110 billion cubic meters a year—enough to meet Germany and France's combined annual consumption.

Berlin, on the other hand, has sought to prevent political meddling in Gazprom's project, which is also backed by European energy companies.

During an October 2015 meeting in Russia with President Vladimir Putin, then German Economic Affairs and Energy Minister Sigmar Gabriel said the parties should strive to ensure that the EU doesn't get regulatory oversight of Nord Stream 2. "If we can do this, then opportunities for external meddling will be limited," said Mr. Gabriel, who is now Germany's foreign minister.

Even if EU governments mandate the commission to negotiate with Russia, Moscow may have little incentive to sit down for talks on an intergovernmental agreement now

that the EU has said it lacks authority on offshore pipelines.

For Nord Stream 2, a wholly owned subsidiary of Gazprom based in Switzerland, the commission's acknowledgment marks a major vindication. The company—which had been planned as a joint venture including [Royal Dutch Shell PLC](#), [Wintershall AG](#), [Uniper SE](#), [OMV AG](#) and [Engie SA](#) until Polish regulators derailed it—has long argued that it is fully compliant with all laws and regulations.

The European firms continue to back the project, which has already committed €4 billion (\$4.3 billion), applied for regulatory approval in Sweden, and shipped about 700 kilometers of pipes to warehouses around the Baltic Sea, more than a quarter of what's needed.

"The commission confirmed that the national authorities are in charge of approving the project, which is something we have said all along," said Sebastian Sass, Nord Stream 2's EU representative. "As far as an intergovernmental agreement is concerned, we don't see a need for that, because for us the legal framework is clear."

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Putin Exploits Europe's Divisions in Bid to Dominate Gas Supply

James Marson

Updated March 30, 2017 4:57 p.m. ET

KARLSHAMN, Sweden—This small port town offers a textbook case of how Russian President Vladimir Putin has thwarted U.S. and European efforts to rein in Moscow's most powerful source of leverage and cash: energy.

Karlshamn's local leaders in January opened its port to Russia's state-owned energy company, PAO Gazprom, in defiance of Swedish national authorities alarmed by [a growing Russian military presence](#) in the Baltic Sea. A subcontractor for a Gazprom subsidiary is now allowed to store pipes here for an \$11 billion undersea natural-gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, easing the path for a project opposed by Sweden's national government, the European Union and the U.S.

"We are not afraid of the Russians," said Per-Ola Mattsson, Karlshamn's mayor, who supports the agreement. "But in Stockholm, I think they are."

Sweden is a prime example of Mr. Putin's divide-and-conquer strategy as he attempts to maintain Russia's

status as an energy powerhouse and a geopolitical force in Europe. The Nordic country has reinstated a military draft and moved troops to a strategic Baltic Sea island in response to Russian military moves, but it can't stop Karlshamn from helping Gazprom because local governments in Sweden have strong authority over local affairs.

The pipeline, called [Nord Stream 2](#) and expected to be completed at the end of 2019, is a priority for Moscow, which depends on pipeline gas sales for more than 10% of its export revenues. It would double the capacity of the existing Nord Stream pipeline to Germany and allow Russia to bypass Ukraine to reach its most lucrative European markets.

U.S. and European authorities have worked against Nord Stream 2, saying it deepens Russia's influence. The EU and the Obama administration said it would deprive Ukraine of economic leverage and a crucial source of income in the wake of Russia's invasion there. The Trump administration's position isn't clear. The State Department didn't respond to requests to comment.

Moscow is moving forward by exploiting disjunction and competing priorities in the EU, which on

Thursday [indicated it couldn't block the pipeline outright](#).

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has been a driving force behind EU economic sanctions against Russia over its intervention in Ukraine, but she has also supported Nord Stream 2, calling it a commercial project. Germany, the largest importer of Gazprom's gas, is shepherding the project through the EU despite opposition from more than a half-dozen members. Nord Stream 2 will make Germany the main hub for gas imports into Europe.

European energy companies were blocked from helping to build it because of Polish antitrust claims but are actively trying to find a way to stay involved.

European countries to Germany's east such as Slovakia and Poland call Nord Stream 2 a political venture designed to increase Russia's leverage. They worry about reduced income from Russian gas flows through their countries, as well as a recurrence of the 2009 natural-gas crisis, when Russia restricted gas flows in a dispute with Ukraine over energy payments.

"It is about politics and influence," Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė said of Nord Stream 2 at a conference in Munich in February.

The Kremlin, Gazprom and Nord Stream 2 executives say the project has nothing to do with politics. The pipeline "isn't directed against any of our partners," Mr. Putin said at a meeting on March 22 with the leadership of German chemical group [BASF SE](#). He said rising consumption and falling production in Europe made it an "absolutely natural project" and that the pipeline is of "a purely commercial nature."

While EU members are debating, Russia is developing: About 700 kilometers of pipes, more than a quarter of the total needed for the project, have been shipped to ports in the Baltic Sea region, and 5 kilometers more are sent every day. The project's onshore component in Russia is under construction.

Building Nord Stream 2 would hand Mr. Putin an important victory in demonstrating the limits of Western efforts to restrain him economically. Despite U.S. sanctions that [pushed Russia into a recession](#), Mr. Putin and Russian companies allied with him have secured funding for an

enormous natural-gas project in the Arctic and sent oil-production levels to post-Soviet records.

The EU has in recent years managed to curb the power of Gazprom to dictate gas prices. New regulations and pipelines allowed neighbors to share gas, and countries built plants to allow imports of liquefied natural gas. Gazprom has offered to change the way it does business in response to an EU antitrust case against the company. Europe is looking to the U.S., Australia and Africa for future gas imports.

Still, Russia has cemented its grip on supplies to Europe anyway, largely through cheap pricing and readily available supplies. Last year, Gazprom said it exported record amounts of gas to the EU, accounting for more than one-third of imports.

Even EU members who don't rely on Russia for gas are unnerved, including Sweden. Leaders of this

northern European nation of some 9.5 million say Russia's moves to control Europe's gas supplies coincide with Mr. Putin's aggressive military moves in the Baltic Sea.

[Russia will hold large-scale military exercises](#) near the Baltic states in September, which will take place at the same time as military drills by Western forces in Sweden. Russia is also building up military forces in the Kaliningrad exclave and has increased conventional and cyberespionage, Swedish officials say.

In response, Sweden is sending a battle group of 300 troops, including a mechanized infantry and a tank company, to the Baltic Sea island of Gotland.

Sweden isn't a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, but it is stepping up coordination with the military alliance.

The pipeline became a divisive issue in Sweden when a

subcontractor of Nord Stream 2 AG, which is wholly owned by Gazprom, had wanted to use two Swedish ports: one on Gotland and the other in Karlshamn.

The defense ministry raised security concerns, and Gotland rejected the proposal.

Swedish Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist said in an interview that the government wanted legislative changes that would give central authorities power to decide on matters concerning national security at major infrastructure sites.

"We are against Nord Stream 2," said Mr. Hultqvist, calling it "a problem from a European perspective."

Karlshamn, a 350-year-old port town of some 20,000 people, was gripped by debate. Allowing pipes to be stored in its harbor would bring around \$10 million in revenues and 30 jobs, but it would also help Russia.

"For me, what is obviously not good for Sweden and the EU cannot in the same sentence be good for Karlshamn," said Magnus Gärdebring, leader of the local opposition.

Mr. Mattsson, the mayor who supported the project, argued Karlshamn already services ships with Russian crews and stores Russian crude oil, so why reject the pipeline? His office received heated emails accusing him of being a Russian stooge, an aide said.

"If we have to stop business like this, do we have to stop all business that has to do with Russians?" Mr. Mattsson said. "We can't decide for Sweden and the European Union."

Write to James Marson at james.marson@wsj.com

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INTERNATIONAL

**The
New York
Times**

New ISIS Tactic: Gather Mosul's Civilians, Then Lure an Airstrike

Michael R.
Gordon

Civilians in western Mosul faced battles between Iraqi security forces and the Islamic State in March. Ivor Prickett for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — A United States military spokesman said Thursday that Islamic State fighters had been herding local Iraqi residents into buildings in western Mosul, calculating that rising civilian casualties would restrain the United States from using airstrikes to help retake that half of the city.

"What you see now is not the use of civilians as human shields," said Col. Joseph E. Scrocca, a spokesman for the American-led task force that is battling the Islamic State, also known as [ISIS](#) or ISIL. "ISIS is smuggling civilians into buildings so we won't see them and trying to bait the coalition to attack."

An episode this week in which Islamic State fighters forced civilians inside a building, killing one who resisted, was observed by American surveillance aircraft. Islamic State fighters then positioned themselves inside the same structure to fire on Iraqi forces, according to an account provided in a briefing for Pentagon reporters by Colonel Scrocca.

No video of the episode was released on Thursday, but he said the video would soon be made public.

The furor over the March 17 American airstrike that led to the collapse of a building in western Mosul, killing scores if not hundreds of Iraqi civilians, as well as Defense Department allegations that Islamic State fighters deliberately placed the civilians in harm's way, have caused a change in American tactics. "It has caused some adjustments to our procedures," Colonel Scrocca said, though he declined to say what specific changes had been made.

What has not changed is the generals' decision to give greater authority to American officers on the battlefield to call in airstrikes. That decision was taken after Lt. Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, the commander of the task force that is battling the Islamic State, was told by subordinates that it was taking too long to conduct airstrikes when Syrian fighters were battling to take the town of Manbij in the northern part of the country and Iraqi fighters were first starting to take Mosul. The new procedures also will apply to the efforts to retake Raqqa, Syria, the Islamic State's capital.

"This is a discussion that started in a November time-frame, and we started to pursue this. We recognized what we were stepping into," Gen. Joseph L. Votel, the commander of the United States Central Command, said in an interview Wednesday. "It was actually implemented for eastern Mosul, the whole urban environment, and frankly, as we kind of get ready for Raqqa. We are enabling our on-scene commanders across the area of operations."

The stepped-up pace for carrying out airstrikes has been welcomed by Iraqi forces, which have suffered enormous casualties in the Mosul operation. In the first 37 days of the Iraqi offensive to take western Mosul, 284 Iraqi troops were killed and more than 1,600 were wounded. During the 100 days that it took Iraqi forces to take the eastern part of the city, 490 Iraqi troops were killed and more than 3,000 were wounded.

The number of Islamic State fighters who have been killed is not known with certainty. But Colonel Scrocca said there were about 2,000 fighters in western Mosul before the recent Iraqi offensive, and that the number of militant fighters was now less than half that size.

General Votel described the decision to let "on-scene commanders" call in airstrikes as a return to the standard doctrine of the United States for conducting urban warfare. He said the new procedures did not weaken protections for civilians.

"We do expect on-scene commanders to use their field-expedient means to make assessments about civilians, and if they can't satisfy themselves that they are not there, then they bring it up to a higher level and they don't strike," he said. Any decision to strike mosques, schools or hospitals where militants may be hiding will continue to require higher-level review.

Still, the sheer volume of American firepower that is being applied in Mosul underscores the risk for the hundreds of thousands of civilians who are believed to be trapped in the areas controlled by the Islamic State in western Mosul. Defense Department officials said the United States-led coalition had carried out attacks with 700 bombs and rockets and another 400 strikes with satellite-guided Himsars missiles over the last week in Mosul.

The United States has begun a formal investigation into the March 17 strike and other air attacks in

that neighborhood where civilians were injured or killed. American officials have acknowledged that an American airstrike played a role in the March 17 attack. But they have

raised the possibility that explosives planted by the Islamic State fighters in the building led to much of the destruction.

Iraq's Counterterrorism Service has reported two episodes in which it said the Islamic State forced civilians into buildings that were rigged with explosives. The video

that the Pentagon has said it will soon release would be the first instance that the United States has independently confirmed and made public.

The New York Times Editorial : Iraqi and Syrian Civilians in the Crossfire

The Editorial Board

Harry Campbell

The Pentagon insists that there has been no major change in its rules for airstrikes against the [Islamic State in Iraq and Syria](#), and that a surge in civilian casualties is a result of increased military operations in western Mosul, said to be the most intense urban combat since World War II.

Nevertheless, the disturbing number of casualties raises concerns that President Trump's approach to counterterrorism puts too many civilians at risk and ultimately leads more people to side with the terrorists.

Western [Mosul](#), where Iraqi ground forces backed by American advisers and American airstrikes are trying to defeat about [2,000](#) ISIS fighters, is a warren of homes and narrow streets. Military commanders have acknowledged that scores of civilians were killed by an American airstrike there on March 17, although they noted that militants might have packed the basement of the destroyed building with explosives. It may be the largest loss of civilian life since the anti-ISIS campaign began in 2014.

This month, more than 60 other people were killed in a strike on a mosque complex in Aleppo, Syria, where local residents said a religious gathering had been taking place, but American military officials said Al Qaeda was their target. The military has also been accused of killing about 30 Syrians in an airstrike on a school near Raqqa; officials say that early indications show it hit Islamic State fighters.

While the increase in civilian casualties began under President Barack Obama, it has accelerated under Mr. Trump and now surpasses the number of civilian deaths caused by Russia in Syria, according to Airwars, a nonprofit group that tracks the data. At least [1,353 civilians](#) in Iraq have been killed by airstrikes carried out by the American-led coalition, the group said.

During the presidential campaign, Mr. Trump talked fast and loose about bombing ISIS, killing not just the terrorists but also their families, and reviving torture, even though it is illegal under American and international law. He postposterously claimed to have a secret plan to defeat ISIS and said he knew more about the group than the generals did.

That reckless attitude has raised questions about whether Mr. Trump has removed constraints on how the Pentagon wages war. Administration officials deny this, and military officials say commanders are still required to follow strict protocols meant to avoid civilian casualties, according to The Times's Ben Hubbard and [Michael Gordon](#).

Nonetheless, Mr. Trump has given Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and top military commanders, who complained of micromanagement by the Obama White House, more freedom to maneuver. For instance, he granted their request to declare parts of three provinces in [Yemen](#) an "area of active hostilities," giving commanders greater flexibility to strike. Later, a [Special Operations raid in late January](#) led to the death of many civilians and an American commando.

Mr. Trump has also continued some changes that began in November under Mr. Obama that make it easier for commanders in Iraq and Syria to call in airstrikes without waiting for permission from more senior officers. Military experts say that makes sense because the fight against ISIS is intensifying and there are more American advisers near the front lines to call in strikes.

Also, the Iraqi forces who are doing the fighting in Mosul are requesting more air support.

It is impossible to avoid all civilian casualties, especially in crowded cities like Mosul where about a [half-million](#) civilians have been directed by their government to stay in place or have been forbidden to leave by ISIS fighters, who use innocents as shields. That's why it's doubly important that the United States and its allies continue to adhere to protocols that minimize civilian casualties, investigate civilian deaths allegedly caused by American airstrikes, report the findings publicly and compensate aggrieved families. On such matters, the United States has had a much better record than Russia, which showed no restraint in helping the Assad regime seize Aleppo last year.

Moreover, there is little evidence that the president has a strategy to foster long-term stability in a postwar Iraq and Syria. A military victory against ISIS that leaves Iraqis and Syrians seething over a bloody trail of civilian deaths, and that fails to address the political tensions that give terrorists space to flourish, is likely to be very short-lived.



Miller and Sokolsky : Trump is in for long war on ISIS

Aaron David Miller and

Richard Sokolsky

Published 12:14 p.m. ET March 30, 2017 | Updated 18 hours ago

In northern Syria on March 26, 2017. (Photo: Stringer, epa)

Two recent events tell the sad tale of why President Trump cannot, as he promised, ["totally obliterate ISIS."](#)

On the same day that the vaunted anti-ISIS global coalition of [68 nations](#) and international organizations met in Washington, a lone homegrown terrorist was wreaking havoc in downtown London with an [SUV and a knife](#).

The contrast demonstrates the painful and politically inconvenient fact that the so-called war on terror is bound to be a long one, perhaps without end; and that the international community is unlikely to win it in any conventional sense.

Unless Trump comes to understand this, he's going to make a bad situation even worse. And here's why.

Beware the Quick Fix: Politicians love declaring war on things. We have the war on poverty (now a half century old), drugs, mental illness, cancer and terror, to name a few. And now we have a president who has persistently claimed that he's going to do so much winning that Americans are going to get tired of it. But grandiose plans to solve systemic problems aren't really the dominant part of the American story. Instead it's more as Reinhold Niebuhr described it — [proximate solutions to insoluble problems](#). It took us 150 years to even begin to deal with the problems of race and racial inequality in America; and despite the progress we've made, by the looks of things, we're not there yet. It's been almost sixteen years since 9/11; despite the impressive gains made against ISIS and al-Qaeda, we are nowhere

close to crushing the jihadis. Al-Qaeda is [expanding in Syria](#); its affiliates plot against the United States in [Yemen](#); and ISIS offshoots operate in [Sinai](#), [Libya](#), [Afghanistan](#) and [east Africa](#).

A Hot House for Terror: One reason there can't be a quick fix to the global jihadi problem is that the Middle East will remain an incubator for jihadi terror for years to come. A witches' brew of bad governance, bleak economic opportunities, sectarian hatreds between Sunnis and Shiites and beleaguered Sunni communities in Iraq and Syria have created a pool of recruits and resentments on which the jihadis and their vicious ideology feed. Most Arab governments have yet to take ownership of the problem or the solutions. This broken, angry, and dysfunctional region cannot be put on a better trajectory without credible and accountable institutions, transparency, accountability, at least good enough governance, and

wise leadership. And this struggle will last generations.

The Paradox of Success: The destruction of the Islamic State's caliphate and defeat on the battlefield may only make the challenge more complex. Battle hardened and well trained, financed and equipped ISIS fighters will disperse to the deserts of Syria and Iraq and swell the ranks of ISIS chapters in Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan; they will return to their homes in Europe determined to create havoc. The governments in Iraq and Syria and the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition do not have a viable strategy to either stabilize and reconstruct areas liberated from ISIS control or to defeat the Islamic State where it decamps. And neither does the United States.

The Real Threat to the US: Organized foreign jihadi groups pose a serious threat to the U.S., though since 9/11 there has not been a single successful terror

attack planned and directed by a foreign terror organization here at home. But as the London attack demonstrates, homegrown jihadis influenced and inspired by jihadi propaganda and ideology — constitutes a more serious one. Indeed, in the U.S., of the 13 jihadi terrorists who were responsible for killing 94 Americans since 9/11, all were [American citizens or legal residents](#) and eight were native-born U.S. citizens, according to research by New America.

Presidential Dos and Don'ts: In the face of these sobering realities, the president needs to reframe the way he relates to this problem.

First, he should stop hyping the jihadi threat. It's serious but not existential, and exaggerating or misunderstanding



The Christian Science Monitor

March 30, 2017 —The battle to retake the Iraqi city of Mosul from Islamic State, which began five months ago, has now become the most intense urban warfare since World War II. Street-to-street fighting in Mosul's western and older section has put Iraqi forces to the test against ISIS fighters, who took Iraq's second-largest city in 2014.

Yet unlike any previous urban combat in the history of war, the battle for Mosul includes an unusual protection for civilians. Humanitarian workers have set up a chain of lifesaving care facilities for



FEBRUARY 2019 — "It sounds like a Frederick Forsyth novel."

The Western intelligence alliance that had held firm since the end of World War II was finally shattered this month by U.S. President Donald Trump. To understand how it came to this, one must consider the above quote, which [appeared](#) in the *New York Times* back in the heady spring of 2017 and would quickly be lent the undue authority to eventually jeopardize the entire Five Eyes intelligence-sharing program.

The speaker was former CIA analyst Larry C. Johnson, who left the agency in 1993, and the comparison he wished to draw was between the U.S. government's relationships with its closest allies and the plots of best-selling British pulp spy novels. In March 2017, Johnson claimed on his [blog](#) that

g it can lead to bold and disastrous responses. (See the second Iraq war.)

POLICING THE USA: A look at [race, justice, media](#)

Second, he needs to be honest and level with the American people that this fight will likely go on for years.

Third, he has to stop stigmatizing and alienating the [3 million Americans of the Muslim faith](#) who are a key ally in preempting and preventing radicalization at home.

With over [900 hundred open cases](#) of domestic jihadi related activities, the FBI needs the cooperation and coordination of local Muslim communities to have any hope of countering violent extremism. The president's and his advisers' anti-

Editorial : A ring of care for Mosul's civilians

The Christian

the wounded, from the front lines to field clinics only 10 minutes away. As tens of thousands have fled the fighting, they are quickly being given necessary physical care, and later any rehabilitative or mental treatment.

This chain of care around Mosul represents a renewed interest by the United Nations and other international bodies to implement two core ideas of humanitarian law — that the violence of war must have its limits and innocent life must be protected. ISIS may not abide by the Geneva Conventions but Iraq and its foreign partners are determined to embrace the global norm that calls for the prevention of unnecessary suffering in war.

This Is How Five Eyes Dies

FEBRUARY 2019 — "It sounds like a Frederick Forsyth novel."

Britain's signals intelligence agency GCHQ — or, as he repeatedly called it, "GHCQ" — intercepted communications within Trump Tower during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. His evidence for this? GCHQ Director Robert Hannigan had resigned three days after Trump's inauguration. Hannigan announced that he would be caring for his ill wife and elderly parents, but Johnson saw a darker plot in the timing, writing, "I do not believe in coincidences." Like many a conspiracy theorist before him, Johnson sought out a reassuringly malevolent order amid the world's daily churn of chaos. The real reason, he surmised, was obvious: The Brits had passed intelligence they had gathered on Trump to the Obama administration, and as soon as Trump was apprised of this, Hannigan had been forced to step down.

Johnson repeated this fanciful claim on the Kremlin-funded network RT,

Muslim rhetoric during the campaign and his clear desire to bar Muslims from entering this country have made law enforcement's work that much harder.

Finally, the president needs to speak out against extremism, prejudice and hatred in all of its forms. Securing the homeland at the expense of permanently undermining the values we stand for is neither a necessary or an acceptable trade-off. Indeed, those values aren't a liability but a critically important asset at home and abroad in what promises to be the long war against global jihad.

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adviser and negotiator in Republican and Democratic administrations. Richard Sokolsky recently retired after 37 years in the State Department. He is currently a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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Doctors Without Borders. The Iraqi government has also contributed.

This unprecedented application of humanitarian law in urban warfare needs to be copied in other ongoing battles in the Middle East, such as in Yemen and Syria. Embedded in this practice is the universal idea that each individual has a right to health regardless of ideology or creed. The more the world embraces that idea and cares for the innocent in war, perhaps wars will become less violent. The bonds of humanity can be a strong defense against the claims of physical power.

Much of the attention in the battle for Mosul has focused on civilian casualties, most of which are intentional acts of barbarity by ISIS. The group "ruthlessly exploits civilians to serve its own ends, and clearly has not even the faintest qualm about deliberately placing them in danger," says UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini. Yet ISIS's disregard for civilians is up against the rest of the world's loving concern for Mosul's besieged residents. This is reflected in the pre-battle spending to position care facilities near the city. Many of the facilities are run by the World Health Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and

after which it was picked up by Andrew Napolitano, a Trump confidant and pundit for Fox News. Two days later, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer cited Napolitano's comments at a briefing, provoking an [unusually forceful denial](#) from the Brits.

Intelligence insiders were aghast. Johnson was best-known for a [hoax in 2008](#) in which he claimed Michelle Obama had been caught on tape using the racist term "whitey." More recently, he had claimed, without evidence, that it wasn't the Russians who had hacked the Democratic National Committee but the CIA.

In normal circumstances, nobody close to power would have taken seriously the conspiracy theories of this discredited crank. But since January 2017, the American president has been a man of the same stamp, having entered politics propagating the [lie](#) that Barack

Obama wasn't born in the United States. Spicer, with Trump's blessing, clutched at Johnson's claims in a desperate attempt to bolster Trump's own [fabrication](#) that Obama had wiretapped him illegally.

The invoking of Frederick Forsyth was fitting, though ironic. Best-known for the classic thriller *The Day of The Jackal*, the British novelist's specialty is making fantastical near-future [plots](#) seem plausible. But even he would have struggled to sell the story of an American president giving credence to a conspiracy theory, fanned by a Russian propaganda network, that the British had spied on him at the behest of his predecessor.

In light of subsequent events, this farcical episode seems less like Forsyth than John le Carré at his most downbeat.

Before its disbandment, Five Eyes was the world's most significant

intelligence alliance. Founded in the aftermath of World War II with an agreement between the United States and the U.K., and later expanded to include Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, it entailed the mutual sharing of signals and communications intelligence between these countries — and the understanding they would not spy on each other. The terms of the arrangement had not always been upheld, and relations had occasionally been fraught, with Washington previously threatening others with expulsion or suspension from the group.

But the alliance had borne fruit on countless occasions, particularly between Britain and the United States. Anglo-American cooperation had been [crucial](#) in tracking Soviet ballistic missile-carrying submarines during the Cold War, and the United States had for decades relied heavily on British listening posts in its former empire for signals intelligence in the [Middle East](#) and elsewhere. Following 9/11, American and Pakistani intelligence [arrested](#) Osama bin Laden's aide Khalid Sheikh Mohammed on the strength of an intercepted text message, leading to a wealth of intelligence about planning against British targets.

Some spies in the alliance's member countries had initially welcomed Trump's presidency, imagining they would be able to take advantage of his ignorance to increase their budgets and minimize interference in their activities. But looming over everything was the specter of Russian interference. In late 2016, former MI6 officer Christopher Steele had handed the FBI a dossier detailing dozens of sourced claims that Russian intelligence had cultivated and compromised Trump years before he became a presidential candidate.

Investigations by Congress into the relationship between the Trump administration and Russia sparked a Cold War between the U.S. president and his own intelligence agencies. Trump derided every new piece of evidence

as fake news, and coupled with the public's fatigue at a seemingly never-ending political circus, that managed to reduce a scandal that in scale and severity eclipsed Watergate to a mere sideshow for most Americans. But U.S. intelligence officials were less easily distracted and began to wonder how they could share secrets with a president who might be compromised by a hostile power.

The best-selling members of Trump administration survivors have now confirmed Trump's own [insistence](#) that intelligence briefings be as brief as possible ("you know, I'm, like, a smart person") gave them some leeway. Under the guise of concision, they omitted as much potentially sensitive information as possible. On the rare occasions that Trump asked for more, they buried him in a mix of bureaucratized and espionage jargon. If National Security Agency analysts intercepted a message in Damascus from a terrorist courier working with minimal information about the rest of the organization, they would provide the president with a 45-page report titled "Provisional assessment of ELINT take from interception of cutout to handler in Syria," knowing he would almost certainly not read it. Pressed to explain the operation face-to-face, they would use similar tactics and retreat to explaining procedures for protecting sources in excruciating detail. Trump, increasingly distrustful, started intimating that he would cut budgets for time-wasters who couldn't give him straight answers.

Halfway through Trump's first year in office, even the Russians had concluded that Trump was too volatile. In September 2017, a clip was uploaded to YouTube in which someone looking and sounding exactly like Trump was heard giving explicit requests to prostitutes in a hotel room once frequented by the Obamas in Moscow, backing the most sensational claim of the Steele dossier. And yet even this proved unable to penetrate Trump's "fake news" defense. There was a media

frenzy, and senior Democrats and some Republicans alike called for Trump to resign or be impeached, but Trump claimed the clip had been concocted with an actor and produced by his enemies.

The real bombshell came in December 2018. Overnight, WikiLeaks published a cache of high-level correspondence between British and American intelligence analysts about their investigations into Vladimir Putin's business dealings. One document quoted by Julian Assange in an interview on conspiracy site and [Trump favorite](#) InfoWars seemed to suggest the Brits had recommended that the president be "taken out." The full context made it clear the suggestion had been to remove Trump from the distribution list for reports on Putin, but the damage was already done. Watching the interview over breakfast in Mar-a-Lago, the president reached for his smartphone.

Trump's subsequent Twitter rant eclipsed even the wiretapping crisis. In a series of rapid-fire tweets, Trump accused the British of plotting to assassinate him. By the end of the day, he had fired the directors of the CIA and NSA and ordered all U.S. agencies to suspend sharing intelligence with the British. He even temporarily added Britain to the list of countries whose citizens could not enter the United States. After several frantic calls from British Prime Minister Theresa May, who promised an investigation into the allegations, he quietly rescinded that order.

Reporters pressed Trump and his aides for evidence for the assassination claim other than an obvious linguistic misunderstanding but had as little success as they had with previous claims.

Despite pleas from the intelligence community, Trump's order to suspend all cooperation with Brits was not lifted but extended. His anger with the British dated back to the Steele dossier and the idea that GCHQ had spied on him. Now he took his revenge, ordering the

dismantling of projects with British intelligence piece by piece. This eventually brought to an end Five Eyes' founding [agreement](#). In response, the Brits naturally also stopped sharing their intelligence, including the fruits of their listening posts in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. Terrorist cells started thinking about how to benefit from the new blind spots.

Today, Britain, already weakened from Brexit and no longer a member of Europol, is looking for alliances elsewhere in this field. Australia and New Zealand are still too small to risk losing their access to U.S. signals intelligence, but Canada has decided to take Britain's side. The United States has reportedly tried to woo Germany and France into a closer arrangement, but the leaders of both countries envisage their own resignations if WikiLeaks or anyone else ever exposed that they had made a deal with an American administration despised by their voters. Italy, Denmark, and others have filled in some of the gaps left by the Brits and the Canadians, but decades of infrastructure and expertise have not been easy to replace.

Five Eyes had lasted through the Cold War and beyond but had finally been undone by Donald Trump misunderstanding a mischievous leak distributed through Russian cutouts. What happens next depends in large part on the upcoming U.S. presidential election in November 2020. If Mike Pence, who has resigned as vice president to challenge Trump in the Republican primary, wins the election, as the polls indicate, some in the intelligence community are optimistic that Five Eyes could be resurrected under his presidency. Terrorists, criminals, and tyrants around the world have benefited from the collapse of the arrangement, but perhaps, slowly, things can start to return to something like normal again — and the day of the crackpots will finally be behind us.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Trump Nafta Blueprint Raises Concerns in Canada and Mexico

William Mauldin in Washington, Paul Vieira in Ottawa and Juan Montes in Mexico City

Updated March 30, 2017 6:47 p.m. ET

The Trump administration's early proposal for overhauling the North American Free Trade Agreement disappointed lawmakers who expected the U.S. to take a hard line in the renegotiation, and

heartened business-oriented free-traders in Congress.

At the same time, the draft document left the trade community in Mexico and Canada wary that Washington is seeking greater authority to impose tariffs on its closest trading partners in talks that are expected to begin sometime this summer.

The document of negotiating objectives circulating on Capitol Hill

and viewed by The Wall Street Journal showed the administration's efforts to balance disparate constituencies on trade as it seeks to start renegotiating Nafta—a top campaign promise of President Donald Trump.

The document indicated that the White House is serious about opening the door to "Buy American" provisions and negotiating greater flexibility to impose or reinstate tariffs on Mexican and Canadian

goods. It includes seven objectives to set stronger North American rules for labor and the environment—big priorities for Democrats in Congress.

But the draft plan doesn't include rules on currency manipulation and wouldn't eliminate Nafta's system for arbitration of disputes between companies and governments, which is popular with businesses but widely criticized by liberal

lawmakers and some conservatives.

"This language falls far short of what needs to be accomplished," said Rep. Sander Levin (D., Mich.), a longtime critic of Nafta who also opposed the TPP, saying a "deep disparity [with Mexico] in labor costs and in wages has to be addressed."

The blueprint suggests that many of the Trump administration's harshest warnings to trading partners may not be carried into the talks. Mr. Trump threatened to pull the U.S. out of Nafta if Mexico City and Ottawa don't agree to a major rebuilding of the deal, which came under intense political fire from Democrats and Republicans last year.

Myron Brilliant, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's executive vice president, said he was pleased with the direction of the Nafta policy. "For those deeply concerned about the direction of the Trump administration, it's reassuring that there are areas where there is large agreement with the business community," he said.

Several key members of Congress with influence over trade policy were tight-lipped about the proposal Thursday. Aides said they are hoping to influence the administration while it is still in the process of completing its final objectives for the talks.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer said the draft notice "is not a statement of administration policy." He said the administration was focused on getting Robert Lighthizer confirmed as U.S. trade representative and made responsible for Nafta negotiations.

Aides and advisers say Mr. Lighthizer has worked behind the scenes on trade policy. The draft document was signed by Stephen Vaughn, the acting U.S. trade representative, who has represented steel firms along with Mr. Lighthizer. It was sent to

members of the Senate Finance Committee as well as others on Capitol Hill.

The Mexican peso weakened after reports of the proposal surfaced, falling from 18.66 per U.S. dollar on Wednesday night to 18.73 by midmorning Thursday, before recovering much of its lost ground.

Goldman Sachs economist Alberto Ramos said the slide was a reaction to the open-ended language that could allow protective tariffs on certain goods, potentially eliminating the largely duty-free trade the original Nafta imposed across the continent.

The administration's tariff stance "smacks of discretion, it's loosely defined and it can be invoked at any time," Mr. Ramos said. "The market didn't like that."

That wariness was apparent in Mexico City. "Our approach is not to let our guard down," said Moises Kalach, who heads a private-sector advisory board to Mexico's government for the coming negotiations. "If there are minor changes [to the pact], then that's welcome, but we need to plan for all scenarios."

Mexico's government had no immediate response to the draft proposal. Private-sector economists largely welcomed it as far less extreme than prior threats to undo the trade accord or impose broad quotas that restrict trade. But they cautioned it was still early in the process.

"The proposal looks to be very in line with existing U.S. trade laws," said Luis de la Calle, an economist who was on the original negotiating team for the Mexican government.

In Canada, the Trump administration's document appeared to temper hopes for a simple process that were awakened among Canadian business groups when Mr. Trump said Nafta only required "tweaking" when it came to Canada.

The Trump administration is "not proposing to rip up Nafta, but it is opening up the entire deal to renegotiation," said Jayson Myers, former head of Canada's biggest manufacturing lobby and now a Guelph, Ontario-based trade consultant. "These are not modest demands and could have far reaching consequences."

Another concern among Canadian trade watchers is the elimination, as proposed in the draft document, of a special Nafta panel that reviews the temporary tariffs member countries impose on each other in response to alleged dumping or subsidies. The document cites "U.S. experiences where panels have ignored the appropriate standard of review and applicable law."

Without the review panel, described in Nafta's Chapter 19, political interference could drive tariffs in response to alleged dumping or subsidies, said John Boscarol, a Toronto trade lawyer with McCarthy Tetrault.

The Trump administration's draft also contains language about a level playing field when it comes to taxes, which might allow the White House to justify the introduction of a border-adjusted tax, said Eric Miller, a former senior Canadian official and now a Washington-based consultant specializing in U.S.-Canada affairs.

"We will be using Nafta as a partial means for addressing" the disparity in border taxes among the three countries, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said Thursday on CNBC. "One way or another we need a resolution of that problem."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he looked forward to working with U.S. and Mexican officials on improving Nafta, but warned any attempt to erect new trade barriers would have repercussions across the continent. The closely integrated U.S. and Canadian economies "would be damaged by any thickening or the

imposition of any tariffs or penalties at the border," said Mr. Trudeau at an event in a Toronto suburb hosted by auto parts maker [Magna International Inc.](#)

Mr. Trudeau said the draft notice represented a first step before formal Nafta renegotiations start, adding he was unaware when those talks would commence.

To a large degree Mr. Trump is constrained by the mood of Congress, since any Nafta overhaul that results in a change in U.S. law would need a majority in the House and Senate to take effect. President Barack Obama hoped to use worker-friendly rules and environmental standards to recruit swaths of Democrats to support his trade policy, but most lawmakers in his party broadly rejected his efforts to secure the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership, which would have included Mexico and Canada.

But overall, the Nafta objectives laid out in the document, such as a call to update the accord to address technology issues, appeared more likely to please Republicans in Congress—the same lawmakers who helped Mr. Obama pass 2015 legislation that paved the way for the TPP.

"There's much to like about it, there's areas where we'll make suggestions," said Rep. Kevin Brady (R., Texas), the chairman of the committee that oversees trade in the House. "But I think both Republicans and Democrats are eager to begin negotiations."

—Bob Davis and David Luhnnow contributed to this article.

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U.S. Forces Get More Freedom to Strike Militants in Somalia

Dion Nissenbaum

March 30, 2017 9:47 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump has given the U.S. military more latitude to go after al Qaeda militants in east Africa, as part of an expanding global campaign against Islamic extremists, American officials said Thursday.

The Pentagon proposal signed by Mr. Trump Wednesday night allows the U.S. military to more

aggressively target al-Shabaab fighters in Somalia, where American special operations forces are working with Somali soldiers.

Under former President Barack Obama, U.S. forces in east Africa could carry out airstrikes and joint raids against the extremist group only on a case-by-case basis. Decisions by U.S. forces on the ground required high-level approval.

Now, Mr. Trump has officially declared part of Somalia an "area of active hostilities," allowing the U.S.

military to strike al-Shabaab—an al Qaeda affiliated extremist group that controls a large southern swath of the country—with less oversight from Washington.

"If we're going to be able to do this effectively, efficiently and go after the enemy when we need to and do this trans-regionally, you can't have a centralized process out of DC," said a senior U.S. military official.

The revised rules also place fewer restrictions on the U.S. military's targeting policies. It will have new

freedom to help Somali forces launch offensive raids and airstrikes against the militants, U.S. officials said.

The change is part of a broader effort by Mr. Trump to give the U.S. military more leeway to fight extremist groups around the world, marking a shift from the Obama administration, when some military officials felt constrained by the White House.

The Pentagon is putting more forces into Syria to fight Islamic

State, stepping up airstrikes against the militant group in Mosul, Iraq, and working more closely with Saudi Arabia to target Iran-backed extremists in Yemen.

Somalia is at the forefront of the U.S. counterterrorism campaign in Africa. Fighters with al-Shabaab have carried out attacks against African Union forces, oceanfront restaurants and police stations. In 2013, the group attacked a mall in Nairobi, Kenya, killing more than 60 people.

The decision on Somalia, military officials said, is a reflection of the

Pentagon's expanding campaign against Islamic militants.

"We can't just fight this fight in region to region, wrap one region up and move to the next region," said one senior U.S. military official. "There has to be some simultaneity here, and it clearly is a trans-regional problem, and you can't do it sequentially."

The move in east Africa comes as the Pentagon is providing more intelligence and logistic support for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates fighting Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen. The Pentagon has also sent more forces

to Syria and Iraq as the U.S. military tries to deliver a crippling blow to Islamic State's two major strongholds, Mosul and Raqqa, Syria.

U.S. military officials said the new approvals from Mr. Trump aren't expected to lead to a bigger American presence in Somalia, where a few dozen special operations forces currently operate at any one time.

U.S. officials say the president's approval of the Pentagon plan, first reported by the [New York Times](#), does not ease current guidelines on minimizing civilian casualties.

Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, head of U.S. Africa Command, told Pentagon reporters last week that he wanted more "flexibility" in Somalia, but that he wanted to ensure that the decisions wouldn't lead to more civilian casualties.

"You've got to power-down the decision making authority in order to be responsive," he said. "So it's very, very important. And obviously the cardinal rule in these types of engagement is to not make more enemies than you already have. And I think we go to great pains to do that."

**The
New York
Times**

Trump Eases Combat Rules in Somalia Intended to Protect Civilians

Charlie Savage
and Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON — President Trump has relaxed some of the rules for preventing civilian casualties when the American military carries out counterterrorism strikes in Somalia, laying the groundwork for an escalating campaign against Islamist militants in the Horn of Africa.

The decision, according to officials familiar with internal deliberations, gives commanders at the [United States Africa Command](#) greater latitude to carry out offensive airstrikes and raids by ground troops against militants with the Qaeda-linked Islamist group Shabab. That sets the stage for an intensified pace of combat there, while increasing the risk that American forces could kill civilians.

Mr. Trump signed a directive on Wednesday declaring parts of Somalia an "area of active hostilities," where war-zone targeting rules will apply for at least 180 days, the officials said.

The New York Times [reported the Pentagon's request for the expanded targeting authority on March 12](#), and Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, the top officer at Africa Command, publicly acknowledged that he was seeking it at a [news conference last Friday](#).

"It's very important and very helpful for us to have little more flexibility, a little bit more timeliness, in terms of decision-making process," General Waldhauser said. "It allows us to prosecute targets in a more rapid fashion."

In a statement issued several hours after The New York Times first published news of the directive, Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, acknowledged that Mr. Trump had approved the Pentagon's proposal to expand its targeting authority "to defeat Al

Shabab in Somalia" in partnership with African Union and Somali forces.

"The additional support provided by this authority will help deny Al Shabab safe havens from which it could attack U.S. citizens or U.S. interests in the region," he said.

Previously, to carry out an airstrike or ground raid in Somalia, the military was generally required to follow standards that President Barack Obama imposed in 2013 for counterterrorism strikes away from conventional war zones, like those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Those rules, known as the Presidential Policy Guidance, required high-level, interagency vetting of proposed strikes. They also said that the target must pose a threat to Americans and that there must be near-certainty that no civilian bystanders would die.

Under the new guidelines, Africa Command may treat Somalia under less-restrictive battlefield rules: Without interagency vetting, commanders may strike people thought to be Shabab fighters based only on that status, without any reason to think that the individual target poses a particular and specific threat to Americans.

In addition, some civilian bystander deaths would be permitted if deemed necessary and proportionate. Mr. Trump's decision to exempt much of Somalia from the 2013 rules follows a similar decision he made for parts of Yemen shortly after taking office.

The new directive for Somalia is another example of how the American military is accelerating the ways it carries out combat missions under the Trump administration, reducing constraints on the use of force imposed by the Obama administration.

As the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has recently moved into the city of Mosul, [civilian casualties have spiked](#). One American strike on March 17 [may have killed scores of civilians](#), and human rights groups have questioned whether the rules of engagement were to blame.

While American commanders say the formal rules of engagement have not changed in Iraq, they acknowledge that the system for calling in airstrikes there has been accelerated. Gen. Joseph L. Votel, the commander of United States Central Command, said on Wednesday that the new procedures made it easier for commanders in the field to call in airstrikes without waiting for permission from more senior officers.

The loosening of the rules in Somalia comes against the backdrop of a broader, continuing Trump administration policy review about whether to scrap the 2013 rules altogether. The decision was described by officials familiar with the new directive who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss military planning.

Luke Hartig, a former senior director for counterterrorism at the National Security Council during the Obama administration, said greater action could be helpful in dealing with a threat, pointing to the Obama administration's decision last year to temporarily declare the region around Surt, Libya, an active-hostilities zone. That decision similarly permitted airstrikes that helped Libyan forces root out Islamic State militants.

But it also increases certain risks, he said.

"The downside is you risk potentially greater civilian casualties or potentially killing militants who are not part of our enemy," Mr. Hartig

said. He warned that such deaths could make local partners turn against the United States and fuel terrorist recruitment.

Mr. Trump's decision to relax targeting limits in Somalia comes at a time of famine, which has increased the frequency of groups of people moving around, often while armed, in search of food and water — increasing the risk of mistaking civilians as Islamist fighters.

General Waldhauser said at the news conference that Africa Command had "war-gamed" the "significant" issues raised by that factor.

"It's our responsibility to make sure that we don't have any catastrophes and we don't take out a group of people who is moving to find water or food," he said. "So, we are very, very conscious of that."

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis first presented the proposal to relax targeting limits in Somalia at a dinner with Mr. Trump about five days after his inauguration, according to officials familiar with internal deliberations.

At that same dinner, Mr. Mattis also presented proposals to similarly remove swaths of Yemen from the Obama-era targeting limits and carry out a raid against Yemen's Qaeda branch. Mr. Trump, the officials said, immediately approved the two proposals for Yemen, while the National Security Council began reviewing the Somalia proposal.

The review for Somalia was slowed, officials have said, by criticism of the raid in Yemen, which resulted in numerous civilian deaths, the death of a member of the Navy SEALs and the loss of a \$75 million aircraft. Still, the Central Command, which oversees military operations in Yemen, has carried out a fierce campaign of airstrikes in Yemen.

The United States' campaign against the Shabab in Somalia has been expanding over the last several years. That Islamist group is complex, with some factions focused on controlling Somalia, while others want to participate in external terrorist operations in line with Al Qaeda's global war.

In 2013, the group carried out the [attack at the Westgate mall](#), in Nairobi, Kenya, that killed more than 60 people and wounded more than 175. Since then, it has adopted more sophisticated forms of terrorism, including [nearly bringing down a Somali airliner](#) in February with a bomb hidden in a laptop computer.

To counter the Shabab, the United States has increasingly used Special Operations forces, airstrikes, private

contractors and African allies. Hundreds of American troops now rotate through makeshift bases in Somalia, the largest military presence since the United States pulled out of the country after the "[Black Hawk Down](#)" battle in 1993. They have served as trainers and advisers to African Union and Somali government forces, and have sometimes participated directly in combat.

Against that backdrop, Mr. Trump's escalation is less a break with his predecessor than an intensification of a trend that dates to Mr. Obama's last year in power.

Last year, the Obama White House permitted the military to increase airstrikes in Somalia without always going through the high-level vetting process detailed in the 2013 rules. Instead, the military justified some

strikes under an expansive interpretation of an exception for "self-defense" — including some that defended partner forces combating the Shabab even if no Americans were under direct threat.

And as The Times [reported in November](#), the Obama administration — after [years of internal debate](#) — decided to designate the Shabab an "associated force" of Al Qaeda. That shored up the executive branch's authority to wage war in Somalia by bringing the Shabab under Congress's authorization to use military force against the perpetrators of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Even before the new relaxations of the rules, 200 to 300 American Special Operations forces have been working with soldiers from

Somalia and other African nations like Kenya and Uganda to carry out more than a half-dozen raids every month, according to senior American military officials. The Navy's classified SEAL Team 6 has been heavily involved in many of these operations.

The Pentagon has acknowledged only a fraction of these missions. But even the publicly available information shows a marked increase in recent years. The Pentagon announced 13 ground raids and airstrikes in 2016, up from five in 2015, according to data compiled by New America, a Washington think tank. Those strikes killed about 25 civilians and 200 people suspected of being militants, the group found.



U.S., Turkey Set on a Collision Course

Yaroslav Trofimov

March 30, 2017 5:30 a.m. ET

ISTANBUL—Turkey expected a honeymoon with President Donald Trump. Instead, it increasingly looks like Ankara and Washington are heading for a squabble, if not a divorce.

For now, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has bitten his tongue and avoided attacking the Trump administration with the kind of [inflammatory statements that he routinely hurls at European](#) and regional leaders. The White House, too, has kept largely mum about Turkish affairs. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is holding meetings in Turkey on Thursday, aiming to maintain a bond that U.S. officials continue describing as vital.

Yet, on several key issues of this complicated relationship between the two North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies, a head-on collision with potentially unpredictable consequences seems more and more possible.

These flashpoints include Washington's handling of Mr. Erdogan's Pennsylvania-based nemesis, cleric Fethullah Gulen. Even more important is the growing American support for Syrian Kurdish forces affiliated with the PKK, or Kurdistan Workers' Party, a group designated as terrorist by Ankara and Washington alike.

Mr. Trump, during last year's U.S. presidential campaign, praised Mr. Erdogan for resisting the failed July coup attempt. Former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn wrote an op-ed last November that largely echoed Ankara's talking

points. [Mr. Erdogan, usually a fierce defender of Muslim causes who faces a critical referendum April 16](#), for his part maintained an unusual silence even when Mr. Trump promulgated a travel ban on citizens of seven majority-Muslim nations.

Now, however, a new dynamic has emerged. [Mr. Flynn has had to resign](#) over his contacts with the Russian ambassador, and recently reported that he had been a lobbyist for Turkish interests. On Monday, a senior Turkish banker was arrested in New York as part of a probe into violating sanctions against Iran.

[Mr. Trump's attention in the Middle East, meanwhile, has focused mostly on the military operations against Islamic State](#)—operations in which the Syrian Kurdish group, known as PYD, has become the Pentagon's favored partner, Turkish objections notwithstanding. The PYD is the dominant force in a military alliance that also includes Arab fighters and that is known as the Syrian Democratic Forces.

"There had been enthusiasm in Ankara, and hope that a reset [with Washington] can be envisioned," said Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat who heads the Edam think tank in Istanbul. "Today there is an awakening that the relationship with Trump and the Trump administration may not unfold the way Ankara had initially hoped for."

Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), the head of the House intelligence committee, put it less diplomatically in an appearance this month on Fox News. "Our relationship with Turkey is strained and I think it's going to become even more complicated as we begin to try to get ISIS out of Iraq and Syria," Mr. Nunes said.

It's unclear just how serious a breakdown could be—and whether it would involve [the U.S. losing access to Turkey's Incirlik air base](#). Mr. Erdogan has recently suggested that Moscow could become an alternative ally, and mulled the purchase of Russia's S-400 air and missile defense system. However, no matter how much he may disagree with Washington, even Mr. Erdogan would likely balk at becoming significantly more dependent on Russia as his only remaining friend.

"It would be more of the same—an unhappy marriage, but without a divorce," predicted Aydin Selcen, a Turkish analyst who served as a senior diplomat in Iraq and Washington.

More than anything, it's the disagreements over Syria under former President Barack Obama that severely strained the U.S.-Turkish relationship. In Ankara's view, Mr. Obama, by initially encouraging an uprising and then backing off his threats to use force against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, left Turkey exposed to the fallout—and [forced to absorb three million Syrian refugees](#).

Over the past two years, Ankara also seethed at the U.S. aid for PYD in northern Syria. Instead of reversing that policy, as Ankara had expected, Washington appears to be doubling down on support for the Syrian Kurdish group. In early March, the Pentagon went as far as deploying American forces between PYD and Turkish lines [near the northern Syrian town of Manbij](#), effectively blocking a planned offensive by Turkey and its Syrian allies. Then, in recent days, the

U.S.—in its most high-profile military operation in Syria so far—airlifted the PYD and its allied Arab fighters across the Euphrates, to [the strategic Tabqa Dam near Raqqa](#).

The PYD-led Kurdish and Arab fighters in the Syrian Democratic Forces "have been quite effective on the ground, and we're obviously going to continue to support them," a senior State Department official said ahead of Mr. Tillerson's trip. "But we are, of course, very mindful of Turkey's concerns."

That's not something Ankara wants to hear. Yasin Aktay, the deputy chairman of Mr. Erdogan's ruling party, didn't disguise his dismay about the Trump administration's Syria moves.

"It is very disappointing but we are still trying to keep our hope," Mr. Aktay said in an interview. "The U.S. is a very serious ally of Turkey, and we expect from our ally and from our friend to see the truth and to change their policy in accordance with the truth."

For now, [Turkey hasn't acted on its frustrations, hoping that a broader deal can still be negotiated with the Trump administration](#). Both countries have interests beyond Syria, another Turkish official noted, and the Trump administration can't hope to deliver on its goal of limiting Iran's regional power if it doesn't have Ankara on its side.

"We still expect the Trump administration to realize that there is no difference between PKK and PYD and Daesh," Mr. Aktay added, using another term for Islamic State. "PYD is the extension of Assad's and Assad means Iran, so when you help PYD, it means that you help Iran, indirectly."



On whirlwind trip to Turkey, Tillerson tries to assuage a frustrated ally

By Kareem Fahim

ANKARA, Turkey — Secretary of State Rex Tillerson traveled to Turkey on Thursday hoping to preserve the Trump administration's cordial relationship with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan despite deep policy disagreements that threaten to drive the allies apart.

But flashes of tension during the visit left doubts about whether Tillerson had succeeded and raised new questions about the future of the U.S. relationship with the NATO ally and partner in the broader fight against the Islamic State militant group.

Even before Tillerson landed, Turkish officials this week leaked to the local news media a damaging rumor about the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul that seemed timed to put pressure on the secretary's visit. At a news conference with Tillerson on Thursday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu recited a litany of complaints, including annoyance with a U.S. plan to support Kurdish fighters in Syria. Turkey says the fighters are part of a terrorist group.

[\[Video: Tillerson pledges support to Turkey in fight against terrorism\]](#)

Tillerson said his discussions in Turkey, which included a two-hour meeting with Erdogan, had been "frank."

(The Washington Post)

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Ankara on March 30, and met with the Turkish foreign minister to discuss the fight against the Islamic State and the strengthening of "economic ties." Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Ankara on March 30, and met with the Turkish foreign minister. (The Washington Post)

"These are not easy decisions," he

said, referring to the debates with Turkey over combat strategy in Syria. There was "no space between Turkey and the United States in our commitment to defeat" the Islamic State, he said. "But there were difficult choices that need to be made."

Erdogan has pinned lofty hopes on his relationship with President Trump, betting that the new leader would be a more sympathetic partner than his predecessor. Turkey's frustrations with President Barack Obama stemmed from anger at a U.S. plan to support a Kurdish-Arab force in Syria for an assault on Raqqa, the de facto capital of the Islamic State militants. Turkey is concerned that the plan could strengthen Syrian Kurdish fighters it regards as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a Kurdish separatist group outlawed in Turkey.

Another sore spot is Washington's noncompliance with a request to extradite Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish Muslim cleric living in exile in Pennsylvania. Turkey accuses Gulen of spearheading a coup attempt against Erdogan's government last summer.

U.S. officials say the evidence provided by Turkey so far is insufficient to make a legal case for extradition.

[\[What you need to know about Turkey and the Trump administration\]](#)

On Thursday, Tillerson was full of praise for Turkey, calling the nation a "long-standing ally" and "friend" and expressing sympathy for victims of attacks by Kurdish militants. He did not comment on the Turkish government's broad purge of state institutions after last summer's coup attempt or the

ongoing crackdown on civil society activists, journalists and academics.

Tillerson also did not meet with any of Erdogan's political opponents, because there was no time in his schedule, U.S. officials said.

Still, Trump, who spoke in glowing terms about Erdogan during the U.S. presidential campaign, has shown no sign of deviating from Obama-era policies that had so angered Turkey, including a reliance on the Syrian Kurdish force, known as the People's Protection Units, or YPG. In the months since Trump took office, the United States and Turkey have managed to avoid any open confrontation over their differences, with Turkish officials showing optimism that the relationship could only improve.

Something may have changed this week, however.

On Wednesday, Turkish news media reported that a telephone call had been made from the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul to one of the top suspects in last summer's military coup attempt — an incendiary allegation ahead of Tillerson's visit. The U.S. Embassy in Ankara quickly issued a statement confirming the phone call on July 21. But the embassy said the call was "far from suspicious" and was made to inform the suspect, Adil Oksuz, that his U.S. visa had been revoked at the behest of Turkish authorities.

[\[What Turkey was looking for when Trump called Erdogan\]](#)

Turkish authorities say Oksuz, a theology professor from Ankara, was a top aide to Gulen. Prosecutors think Oksuz helped facilitate meetings between renegade generals in Ankara ahead of the July 15 coup attempt, according to Turkish media reports.

The U.S. Embassy's explanation for the call did little to quiet the controversy. Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said the government was waiting "for a more satisfying answer" from the United States.

At the news conference Thursday, Cavusoglu also cast doubt on the embassy's account, saying, "We want to see the details in concrete terms."

The Turkish president and his supporters are seen as especially volatile partners these days, as they fight for votes at home in advance of a referendum in April that could give Erdogan broad new powers and extend his term in office. The referendum has already sparked bitter fights between Turkey and several European allies, including Germany and the Netherlands. U.S. officials said Tillerson was well aware of that context before he traveled to Ankara.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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Meanwhile on Thursday, Belgian media reported that fighting broke out among Erdogan's supporters and opponents as Turks lined up to vote in the referendum at the Turkish Embassy in Brussels, the Associated Press reported.

Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel said via Twitter that he will "apply zero tolerance for violence surrounding the Turkish referendum."

Turkish citizens in six European countries have until April 9 to vote in the referendum.

Erin Cunningham in Istanbul contributed to this report.



US-Turkey deal on ISIS assault? Why that's a tough sell for Tillerson.

The Christian Science Monitor

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Thursday in Ankara.

March 29, 2017 Istanbul—On paper, the United States and Turkey are on the same side in the fight against the Islamic State jihadists.

But on the battlefield, as a key offensive nears to force ISIS out of its Syrian capital of Raqqa, the two NATO allies could not be further apart in their choice of the means to do the job — an issue that will dominate Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's meeting with Turkey's

Frustration is mounting on both sides, with the US and Turkey backing competing Syrian proxies as the primary attacking force in the Raqqa offensive.

Tensions between the US and Turkey, however, go far deeper than the disagreement over Syria, analysts say, and are fed by diminishing hopes in Ankara that Donald Trump's succession of Barack Obama would bring a fresh

perspective that would lead to a fundamental improvement in bilateral relations.

Mr. Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) expected a more sympathetic hearing from the Trump administration, after years of increasing friction with President Obama over Erdoğan's authoritarian slide, human rights issues, and the US alliance with Kurdish fighters in Syria.

"The US is pursuing a policy that Turkey hates, no matter who delivers the message," says Aaron Stein, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council in Washington. "I don't really see any overlapping interests. We have drifted very far apart."

Washington's choice to lead the Raqqa offensive is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an umbrella group led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia.

But Turkey insists that its own non-Kurdish Syrian proxy force tackle Raqqa, and accuses both the US and Russia of backing a "terrorist" group that is determined to create a Kurdish mini-state, allied with Turkey's own ethnic Kurdish separatists.

Turkey is demanding the US cut ties with the SDF-YPG and is threatening not to take part in the Raqqa offensive, which is expected to start soon after Turkey votes in an April 16 referendum on the expansion of Erdoğan's presidential powers.

"It's going to be Raqqa, Raqqa, and Raqqa," Mr. Stein, author of "Turkey's New Foreign Policy," says of Mr. Tillerson's meeting with Erdoğan. Expectations on the US side are that it will not go well, he says.

"I don't think there is any real room for maneuver until after Raqqa falls, and the pace of the battle slows down," says Stein. "Then maybe you can put it back together again, on the broader geo-strategic level and say, 'OK, the tactical relationship [with Syrian Kurds] is over, let's work together to combat broader threats.'"

Syria may be the biggest bone of contention, but it is only part of a list of Turkish grievances that has caused the escalation of US-Turkey tensions in recent years. They include the arrest Monday at JFK airport of a top executive of one of Turkey's biggest state-owned banks, accused of facilitating the evasion of US sanctions against Iran.

Turkey is angry, too, that Washington has not deported the Pennsylvania-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, whom Turkey accuses of orchestrating a failed coup attempt last July.

Expectation of common ground

Some in Turkey had speculated that President Trump's tough and uncompromising talk, his stated commitment to

battling ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and his pro-business outlook would prove a close match for Erdoğan that might yield more common ground.

So far, that has not happened. US efforts to improve ties include half a dozen high-level meetings with Turkish officials so far, including visits by CIA director Mike Pompeo and the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joseph Dunford.

The top American general was quietly taken in mid-February to the base where Turkey is training its own Syrian Arab forces, in a bid by Turkey to convince the US to employ them in the Raqqa battle, instead of the Kurdish fighters, says the Ankara-based analyst Metehan Demir.

"He was to some extent convinced, and he was expected to give an answer to the Turkish side," says Mr. Demir. "The [US] answer was to help SDF. Therefore there was huge disappointment on the Turkish side.

"One way or another, the US eventually will include Turkey in this game, because without Turkey it's not that easy to carry out this operation, either with the SDF or any other force," says Demir. "The problem is ... Turkey says it is impossible for its involvement, as long as Kurdish forces will be included."

Sensitive to Turkey's domestic politics, the US appears to be holding off starting the Raqqa offensive until after the mid-April referendum. As a sweetener, Tillerson may offer assistance to help rebuild parts of northern Syria occupied by Turkey's cross-border Operation Euphrates Shield.

A State Department official this week said Washington was "very mindful of Turkey's concerns," and that Tillerson would discuss "interim deescalation zones based on cease-fires or other means," as well as Turkey's joint peace efforts with

Russia and Iran in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Visit is political, not military

Yet there is little sign the Pentagon will turn its back on the Kurdish militia, which has proven the most effective anti-ISIS force fighting in Syria.

On Monday, Erdoğan again scolded the US. "We don't consider your business with a terrorist organization appropriate taking into account our strategic partnership and alliance in NATO," he said.

"I think the military front of the Turkish-American relationship is blocked, and does not seem like it will be unblocked," retired Turkish Brig. Gen. Haldun Solmaztürk told Voice of America Turkish.

Tillerson's visit "is to keep political relations under control, not to make progress on the military front," said General Solmaztürk. "It's obvious that Turkish national interests and American national interests are clashing when it comes to Syria and the Middle East in general.... I am seriously worried about the future of Turkish-American relations."

Turkey could respond by limiting US or NATO access to its eastern airbase at Incirlik, which has been instrumental in conducting US-led, anti-ISIS air operations.

But analysts say that, even though Turkey has warmed to Russia in recent months – Turkey's foreign minister is visiting Moscow Wednesday – there is a limit to those ties. Turkey has been surprised to see Russian forces with Kurdish flags in northern Syria, reportedly side-by-side with the Americans in supporting the SDF-YPG. There appears little danger of the US-Turkey feud causing Ankara to turn away from the Western alliance.

In the Raqqa offensive "we see the dark intentions of the militant Kurds" to capture an Arab city and create a "Kurdish federation," says İlnur Çevik, an aide to Erdoğan writing in

the pro-government Daily Sabah newspaper.

"The Americans are thus playing into the hands of the Kurdish militants willingly or unwillingly as they continue to embolden [their] dreams of a mini-state in Syria" that would stretch from Iraq to the Mediterranean, wrote Mr. Çevik.

Did Turkey misread US stance?

The US commander in charge of the anti-ISIS coalition notes that Kurds make up less than 10 percent of the population of northern Syria, and can't impose their own rule by force.

"I don't expect any Kurdish units to remain in Raqqa," said Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, in a conference call with reporters from Baghdad Tuesday. The SDF are expanding their Arab elements in preparation for the Raqqa offensive.

"What we have seen as Syrian Democratic Forces have liberated a good 20 percent or more of northern Syria, is they have recruited fighters from the local area. They have led the assault to liberate their own towns and villages," said Townsend. "Once those have been liberated, they believe the local fighters, Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen alike ... they leave them to govern it and they move on."

Turkey's leaders "profoundly misread the new [Trump] administration, and the forces they were inheriting, who have a battle plan that's been on the books for over a year now," says analyst Stein.

"The Syria stuff just seems set in stone. The Turks are pushing against forces that are bigger than them within the US government. They must be furious," he says.

"From the proponents of the YPG strategy, the line is very much, 'We gave this [Turkey-backed units] a shot many, many times. You didn't produce forces, and so we just had to keep going.' The frustration is felt on both sides."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

March 30, 2017 6:51 p.m. ET

The relationship between Egypt and the U.S. will look sunnier on Monday, when President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi visits President Trump in Washington. Under the Obama administration, Mr. Sisi's authoritarianism made him persona non grata. The key question: Can Mr. Trump translate the warm welcome into a "good deal" for America?

Trager : Can Trump Cut a Deal With Egypt?

Eric Trager

This isn't the first U.S.-Egypt "reset." Upon taking office, President Obama courted Mr. Sisi's predecessor, Hosni Mubarak, who had resented the Bush administration's "freedom agenda." Mr. Obama emphasized convergence with Egypt on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, while playing down human-rights concerns.

Mr. Obama's priorities shifted, however, once Mr. Mubarak was overthrown in 2011. The White

House backed Egypt's democratic transition and cooperated with the Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammed Morsi, who won the 2012 presidential election.

The following year, after mass protests in Egypt, the military, led by Mr. Sisi, ousted Mr. Morsi and oversaw a deadly crackdown on Morsi supporters. The Obama White House responded by withholding weapons shipments. Cairo interpreted this as U.S. support for the Muslim Brotherhood,

which Egypt soon declared a terrorist organization. Weapons shipments resumed in 2015, but Cairo's distrust of Washington persisted. Meanwhile, Egypt deepened its ties to Russia through arms deals and joint military exercises.

Now Mr. Sisi will encounter a friendlier White House. Mr. Trump is skeptical of democracy promotion and won't press Egypt on political reform. Officials in the Trump administration have praised Mr.

Sisi's 2014 speech urging Muslim clerics to combat extremism. And they share his view that the Brotherhood is a terrorist organization.

Warmer relations could improve intelligence sharing and strategic cooperation. At the very least, Cairo should consult with Washington regarding Russia's reported deployment of troops in western Egypt. Perhaps support for Mr. Sisi would dampen the anti-Americanism in Egypt's media. If Mr. Trump insists, maybe

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Netanyahu Pushes New West Bank Settlement

Rory Jones in Tel Aviv and Felicia Schwartz in Washington

March 30, 2017 6:59 p.m. ET

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday proposed the first new settlement in decades in the West Bank as Israeli officials and the White House appear to have reached an understanding on future settlement construction.

The new settlement will be built to accommodate roughly 40 families—about 300 residents—evicted in February from [a settlement outpost called Amona](#). Mr. Netanyahu's office said. The move needs to be confirmed by the Israeli cabinet, his office said.

The announcement comes as U.S. and Israeli officials in recent weeks have conducted talks on limiting settlement construction in the West Bank after [President Donald Trump asked Israel to hold off](#).

The Trump administration gave the new settlement tacit approval on Thursday, by refraining from condemning the

Mr. Sisi will release Aya Hegazy, a U.S. citizen who has been arbitrarily detained since 2014.

Still, both countries' domestic politics pose challenges. Egyptian officials have requested more U.S. military and economic aid. Egypt also wants Washington to renew cash-flow financing, which enables it to sign more expensive weapons contracts. But Mr. Trump vows to cut foreign aid.

Meanwhile, Mr. Trump ought to prioritize Egypt's counterterrorism efforts. Egypt's military was built to

fight land wars, and its brass refuses to focus aid on counterterrorism. Cairo may try to win this debate by playing to Mr. Trump's pledge to create jobs: Buying weapons systems ultimately helps employment in the defense industry.

Mr. Trump's best chance to cut a "good deal" with Mr. Sisi may be on Monday, when the Egyptian leader receives the Washington welcome he has long desired. But if Mr. Sisi pockets that victory without conceding anything on his country's deepening relationship with Russia, settlement construction, as past Democratic and Republican administrations have done.

A White House official said the Trump administration has made clear that "further unrestrained settlement activity does not help advance peace" and welcomed Israel's commitments to consider U.S. concerns about settlements in the future.

"With regards to the new settlement for Amona residents, we would note that the Israeli Prime Minister made a commitment to the Amona settlers prior to President Trump laying out his expectations, and has consistently indicated that he intended to move forward with this plan," the official said.

The talks between the U.S. and Israel have aimed at creating the conditions to get Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table on a future peace deal, according to U.S. and Israeli officials.

The U.S. on Thursday called on Israelis and Palestinians to take

"reasonable actions moving forward that create a climate that is conducive to peace" and said it would continue to work with the parties and regional powers.

Palestinians and much of the international community consider all construction in the West Bank illegal ahead of final status talks to create a Palestinian state in the territory.

"Today's announcement once again proves that Israel is more committed to appeasing its illegal settler population than to abiding by the requirements for stability and a just peace," said Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which negotiates with Israel in peace negotiations.

Israel's high court in 2014 deemed the community of Amona had been built on private Palestinian land and ordered it razed.

The statement from Mr. Netanyahu's office on Thursday also said that some 2,000 new housing units in settlements, out of roughly 5,700 recently approved for construction, had been approved for

prosecution of Americans, or aid priorities, Mr. Trump will have wasted Washington's best hand in years.

Mr. Trager is a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and author of "Arab Fall: How the Muslim Brotherhood Won and Lost Egypt in 891 Days."

marketing, an indication that the government had held off on marketing some recently-approved construction.

As of 2014, about 385,900 Jewish Israeli settlers lived in the West Bank, according to the CIA World Factbook. The Factbook estimated the Palestinian population of the West Bank and East Jerusalem at 2.7 million as of July 2016.

Mr. Netanyahu faces calls from members of his own party and coalition to continue to build settlements and abandon the notion of a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

The issue of settlement construction helped contribute to a strained U.S.-Israel relationship during President Barack Obama's terms in office.

Write to Rory Jones at rory.jones@wsj.com and Felicia Schwartz at Felicia.Schwartz@wsj.com

Appeared in the Mar. 31, 2017, print edition as 'Netanyahu Proposes West Bank Building.'

**The
Washington
Post**

Israel set to approve first new settlement in 20 years

By Ruth Eglash
JERUSALEM — Israel's government on Thursday appeared set to approve the construction of a new Jewish settlement in the West Bank for the first time in 20 years, despite fierce opposition from Palestinians and a recent request from the White House to hold back on settlement activity.

The move, which was [unanimously approved](#) by the security cabinet and is awaiting a final go-ahead from the wider cabinet, is meant as compensation for the settlement of Amona, which was demolished more than a month ago after Israel's Supreme Court ruled that it was built on land privately owned by Palestinian farmers.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been under pressure at home to uphold his promise to the 40 families [evicted from Amona](#) to resettle them on an alternative parcel of land in the West Bank.

If the plan for the new settlement goes ahead, it would contradict [a request by President Trump](#) in February for Israel to "hold back" on settlements until an understanding is reached between the two governments on the issue.

A team of Israeli officials, led by Israel's ambassador to the United States, Ron Dermer, met last week with Jason Greenblatt, Trump's special representative for international negotiations, to find a solution. The talks, however, ended in a stalemate, with the White

House expressing its "concerns" about settlement construction.

Israel's settler movement has expected Trump to be more supportive of its goals to expand its communities in the West Bank after eight years of restrictions and criticism during the Obama administration.

Greenblatt has expressed the Trump administration's interest in restarting the stalled peace process between the two sides. But a new Israeli settlement could make achieving that goal more difficult.

Greenblatt visited the region earlier this month, meeting with Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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According to Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, roughly 125 settlements have been built on land Israel occupied after the 1967 war with Jordan. Israel has continued to build additional housing units inside those settlements over the years.

There are a further 100 outposts, or small communities, viewed as illegal even by the Israeli government.

Palestinians oppose the existence of Israeli settlements, seeing them as an expansion of Israel into territory they hope will one day be part of a Palestinian state. Much of

the international community views Israeli settlements as illegal.

"Israel's relentless efforts to expand its illegal settlement enterprise with

the aim of displacing Palestine and replacing it with 'Greater Israel' should send a strong message to governments worldwide that they

need to intervene immediately and to undertake concrete measures to hold Israel accountable with serious punitive measures," said Hanan

Ashrawi, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's executive committee.



Would Israeli bill squelching mosque calls violate freedom of religion?

The Christian Science Monitor

March 30, 2017 RAMLA, Israel— Shortly before noon, the Muslim call to prayer rang out from the imposing al-Omari mosque across this mixed Jewish-Arab town, wafting over a crowded market.

No one seemed to pay heed, aside from a small group of men who assembled for the noon prayer. But the call blaring from the loudspeakers is now on the front line of another culture conflict in Israel.

Israel's parliament, the Knesset, is considering two bills that would silence mosque loudspeakers, at least during night hours, on the grounds that they cause an unnecessary noise disturbance.

The issue has caused heated debate about the place of religion in the public space in Israel.

Sponsors of the bill say it is designed to prevent noise pollution.

Motti Yogev, a rightist parliament member who has sponsored one of the bills, told the legislature that the proposed law expressed "the simple principle according to which freedom of religion should not harm the sleep and quality of life of citizens."

Talal Abu Arar, a member of the Joint Arab List, the Arab party in parliament, calls the bill "anti-

democratic and designed to harm Muslim freedom of religion."

"For hundreds of years the call to prayer did not bother anyone, and now suddenly it does? This is part of the incitement against Arabs and Muslims in general. We will not honor this law, and continue calling to prayer as usual," he says.

During a stormy debate when the bills passed a preliminary vote, Ayman Odeh, the Joint List leader, tore up a copy of the bill as others Arab lawmakers shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is great). Palestinian Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, make up about 20 percent of Israel's citizens.

The controversial bills have been backed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said Israel was trying to strike a balance. "Israel is committed to freedom for all religions, but is also responsible for protecting citizens from noise," he said recently.

Yedidia Stern, vice president of the Israel Democracy Institute, an independent think-tank, says Israel already has noise regulations in place that could be enforced against unduly loud calls of the muezzin, the Arabic term for the caller to prayer.

The new legislation, Mr. Stern says, was introduced by "some parliament members pushing a nationalist agenda, which is not

necessarily anti-Islamic, but trying to establish that the public sphere in Israel is Jewish and not otherwise, and trying to minimize interference with its Jewish character."

Stern compared the bill with a recent ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union, which decided that a private business in Belgium had the right to dismiss a Muslim woman because her hijab, or headscarf, violated the business's ban on religious garb at the workplace. The Luxembourg-based court ruled that the move was not discriminatory.

In Israel, there are customary restrictions in force that show deference to observant Jews. Roads through ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem are closed on the Sabbath, and on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement and the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, traffic across the country comes to a halt.

The bill to silence the call to prayer has drawn condemnation from Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, and still needs to pass three more votes in the Knesset to become law. But for the men gathered for mosque prayer in Ramla, it remains a threat to longstanding custom.

"The bill is unnecessary. We've been living in a mixed city for decades with everyone respecting the rites of the other," says the

imam of the mosque, Suleiman Abu Swis. "This has been part of the prayer service for 1,400 years, five times a day all over the world."

Mr. Abu Swis says that noise-level problems had been resolved quietly with city officials. "If there is a will, there can be coexistence," he adds, noting that Arabs in Ramla refrain from using their cars out of respect for Yom Kippur.

Sitting in his grocery store nearby, Shlomo Houtta, a Jew of Moroccan origin, says he enjoys the melodies of the recitation of the Koran, but mosque speakers appear to have been turned up of late as a show of religious assertion.

"There's religious extremism on both sides, and I think it's being done to annoy us," he says. "I don't mind if it's at a reasonable volume."

Badri Yosfan, a Jewish immigrant from Iraq, says the pre-dawn call to prayer sometimes interrupts the sleep of his grandchildren, though it does not disturb him during the day.

Emerging after prayers at the mosque, Musa Abu Hilwa says that every house of prayer has its cacophony of sounds.

"The Christians have their church bells," he says. "Everyone should respect the other's freedom of religion."



Putin Threatens Protesters With Stricter Measures

Nathan Hodge

Updated March 30, 2017 2:40 p.m. ET

MOSCOW—Russian President Vladimir Putin compared a recent [wave of street demonstrations in Russia](#) to the first stirrings of the Arab Spring, warning on Thursday that his government would deal harshly with unsanctioned protests.

"This tool was used at the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring," Mr. Putin said, referring to anticorruption protests held Sunday in Moscow and many other cities, Russian news agencies reported. "We know very well what this led to, what bloody events this led to."

Thousands of Russians took to the streets Sunday in protests that were [spurred by lawyer and anticorruption activist](#) Alexei

Navalny. In Moscow, riot police faced down marchers at an unsanctioned rally along one of the central boulevards of the capital, arresting hundreds.

A court in Moscow on Monday issued a [small fine and 15-day jail term](#) against Mr. Navalny for organizing the demonstration and resisting police.

"Everyone who goes outside the boundaries of the law should be punished in accordance with Russian legislation," Mr. Putin said, according to the news agency Interfax.

The Kremlin leader's remarks broke a conspicuous silence on the anticorruption protests, which received scant attention on state-dominated airwaves. And Mr. Putin lashed out at Western criticism over the detention of antigovernment

demonstrators, suggesting there was an agenda to interfere in Russia's affairs.

"Appeals to Russia of this kind are purely politicized, in order to exert influence on the domestic political life of the country," Mr. Putin said, according to Interfax.

The Kremlin has long been wary of any affront to state power, and Russian officials often accuse Washington of trying to engineer "regime change" through popular revolts in the post-Soviet space. The Russian leader on Thursday described the street protests that led to the ouster of Ukraine's pro-Moscow president in 2014 as a "coup d'état."

Andranik Migranyan, a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, said he saw a broad desire among ordinary

Russians for a tougher line on official corruption, but added that he did not think Sunday's protests would build the same momentum as political demonstrations seen in 2011 and 2012 over parliamentary elections marred by allegations of fraud.

"A lot will depend on the reaction of the authorities," he said. "If those meetings hadn't been organized under the slogans against corruption, I don't think people would have mobilized."

Mr. Putin was appearing at a forum in the northern city of Arkhangelsk on natural-resource development in the Arctic. The Russian leader has cast himself as a defender of the environment, and Russian state television broadcast images of his visit Wednesday to the Arctic archipelago of Franz-Josef Land to

see the results of environmental cleanup efforts in the region.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who was a focal point of the antigovernment protests, accompanied Mr. Putin on the visit.

Mr. Navalny and his Anti-Corruption Foundation mobilized the protests in part through an online video that

accuses Mr. Medvedev of acquiring a hidden property empire, disguised through offshore companies and charitable foundations.

The Kremlin has dismissed the allegations as baseless, and Mr. Medvedev hasn't responded publicly to the claims.

Separately, Mr. Putin fielded questions about U.S. allegations of hacking to influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential election, something he described as "endless and groundless accusations of some kind of interference."

The Russian president said his deputies had extended offers to

U.S. lawmakers to come to Moscow to "talk frankly on key issues of bilateral relations," but that they had received "no answer."

Write to Nathan Hodge at nathan.hodge@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Jonathan Cheng

Updated March 30, 2017 11:00 p.m. ET

SEOUL—South Korean authorities arrested former President Park Geun-hye after a court ruled she should be held while prosecutors accusing her of bribery and abuse of power seek an indictment, confining her to a prison cell just three weeks after she was [removed from office](#).

Ms. Park, 65 years old, will be jailed in the latest chapter of a wide-ranging corruption scandal that has already [led to her impeachment](#) and put the country's most powerful businessman, the de facto head of the [Samsung](#) conglomerate, behind bars. Ms. Park has denied wrongdoing.

Seoul Central District Court judge Kang Bu-yeong said that there was a need to hold Ms. Park in custody because of concerns about destruction of evidence. Ms. Park had appeared for her hearing on Thursday morning and then awaited her verdict in a temporary detention room at the prosecutors' office.

The decision, issued in the predawn hours on Friday, was the latest

Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye Is Arrested in Corruption Probe

shock wave from the scandal that has rocked Asia's fourth-largest economy since the first reports of alleged improprieties surfaced in the fall.

Ms. Park was accused by prosecutors of helping a longtime friend, Choi Soon-sil, extort donations from the country's biggest business empires, including the Samsung conglomerate, in exchange for political favors.

[Prosecutors have indicted Lee Jae-yong](#), the Samsung leader, and Ms. Choi, on corruption charges. Both are on trial and have denied wrongdoing. Mr. Lee's legal team is expected to lay out his defense during a hearing slated to begin Friday afternoon in Seoul.

The downfall of Ms. Park has been swift. Daughter of Park Chung-hee, South Korea's longest-serving president, the conservative Ms. Park took office in 2013, taking a hard line on North Korea and developing close ties with the country's conglomerates, known as chaebol.

Her tenure in office was dogged by scandals and complaints of aloofness and ineffectiveness. The [defining moment of her presidency](#)

before the corruption scandal may have been her absence for several hours on a day in April 2014 when a ferry sank with more than 300 people on board, many of them high-school students on a field trip.

The corruption allegations first arose in the fall last year after reporters discovered a tablet computer of Ms. Choi's which appeared to show that she had access to confidential state secrets. Public demonstrations mounted as prosecutors began investigating Ms. Choi's activities, and Ms. Park made a series of public apologies.

In November, prosecutors charged Ms. Choi with interfering with state affairs and [named Ms. Park as an accomplice in her friend's alleged extortion scheme](#). In December, South Korea's National Assembly voted overwhelmingly to impeach her, stripping her of her presidential powers while the Constitutional Court deliberated on her fate.

On March 10, the eight members of the court voted unanimously to remove Ms. Park from power, stripping her of her presidential immunity from criminal prosecution. She returned to her private residence two days later, and was

questioned by prosecutors the following week in a session that lasted for more than 20 hours.

Ms. Park's arrest comes ahead of a formal indictment, which according to South Korean judicial law must come within 20 days of her confinement. Prosecutors had said that detention was essential amid the continuing investigation, given concerns that Ms. Park would destroy evidence.

Two of Ms. Park's predecessors, former presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, who ruled South Korea from 1980 to 1993, were sentenced to life and 17 years in prison, respectively, for a variety of charges including treason and corruption, though both were pardoned after serving portions of their sentences.

Ms. Park, the country's first woman president, was also the first to be removed from office by impeachment.

Write to Jonathan Cheng at jonathan.cheng@wsj.com

Appeared in the Mar. 31, 2017, print edition as 'South Korea's Ousted President Arrested.'

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Ben Otto, Jonathan Cheng and Yantoultra Ngu

Updated March 30, 2017 11:19 p.m. ET

Malaysia sent the embalmed body of the slain estranged half brother of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un back to North Korea in exchange for nine Malaysians detained in Pyongyang, both countries said, breaking a weekslong diplomatic deadlock over a brazen killing.

The complex exchange that began on Thursday followed a week of secretive talks in Malaysia. The remains of Kim Jong Nam were loaded onto a plane bound for Beijing as a Malaysian air force plane departed from Pyongyang

Kim Jong Nam Assassination Drama Deepens With Body-for-Hostages Swap

with three Malaysian diplomats and their six family members. Both governments said they had agreed to lift travel bans introduced in March to prevent each other's nationals from leaving their territories, and said Mr. Kim's remains would be sent to his homeland.

The nine Malaysians touched down in Kuala Lumpur at about 5 a.m. on Friday and were greeted by the foreign minister.

Shortly after the deal was announced Thursday evening, media outlets including Japan's NHK and Channel News Asia in Singapore began airing video purportedly showing two men

aboard the Beijing-bound flight whom Malaysian police had wanted to question as suspects in the murder plot and who had taken refuge in North Korea's Embassy during the standoff. Neither country had mentioned the two men. Malaysia's police chief and the foreign minister declined to answer questions.

If confirmed, the return of the two men to Pyongyang would raise the chance that North Koreans allegedly involved in the plot wouldn't face prosecution in Malaysia. Police believe most of the North Korean suspects are back in their country, which denies playing any role in the killing.

There was no news of a third suspect that police believed was also in hiding at the embassy.

The exchange brought to a close a bizarre international drama triggered by the killing of Mr. Kim at a crowded departures hall of Kuala Lumpur International Airport on Feb. 13. Malaysian authorities said a hit team led by North Korean men exposed Mr. Kim to VX nerve agent—which the United Nations has banned as a chemical weapon of mass destruction—killing him within 20 minutes.

South Korean intelligence officials said the men were connected to North Korea's government, including six it said worked for the

foreign and state security ministries. Malaysia has issued international arrest warrants for four of the men who escaped and declared several others suspects, including the two men the media outlets have identified as such. The only North Korean man who was detained was ultimately deported for lack of evidence. Two women—one from Vietnam, the other from Indonesia—are standing trial for murder, accused of applying the toxin to Mr. Kim's face.

The women, who would face the death penalty if convicted of murder, claim they were duped into playing what they thought was a prank on Mr. Kim as part of a video gag. Their next court date is expected in mid-April.

The Malaysian police investigation into Mr. Kim's death badly frayed ties between North Korea and Malaysia. Malaysia is one of the most important global business hubs for North Korea, a country under stiff U.N. sanctions over its nuclear-weapons program.

Norshahril Saat, an analyst at the ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute in Singapore, said the two countries would maintain commercial relations, and that both would be able to portray Thursday's events as a win to domestic audiences.

"Malaysian leaders can hail this as a diplomatic victory for Malaysia, that the government is able to secure safe return of its citizens," Mr. Saat said. "North Korea would not want to prolong the conflict, as it could add further embarrassment to the Kim family."

He added: "Both Malaysia and North Korea have more to lose if the conflict is prolonged."

Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman said on Friday morning that "this is diplomacy at its best." He refused to take questions.

One of the three returned diplomats, Mohd Nor Azrin Md Zain, thanked diplomats from Sweden, Poland, Pakistan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia for their help during the period of banned travel in Pyongyang, saying their embassies had offered to assist in bringing back goods on their regular visits to nearby Beijing. He added that the Malaysians had been allowed to continue to freely communicate by phone and messaging services.

After North Korea criticized the investigation as part of a conspiracy against it, Malaysia expelled Pyongyang's ambassador and ended visa-free travel for North Koreans, a rare privilege for citizens of the reclusive communist regime.

Both countries placed travel bans on each other's nationals, trapping the diplomats in Pyongyang and several hundred North Korean laborers, diplomats and businesspeople in Malaysia.

North Korea sought possession of Mr. Kim's body and the return of suspects who had taken refuge in the country's embassy. Malaysia kept the body until completing an autopsy and for weeks said it would send the body to Mr. Kim's family living outside North Korea.

The half brothers had been estranged for years, with the elder Kim Jong Nam living in Macau as Kim Jong Un rose to power and called for his sibling's assassination, South Korean intelligence officials said. The elder Kim's family went into hiding upon learning of his death, and their whereabouts are unknown.

On Thursday, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak said Malaysia had received a letter from Mr. Kim's family asking that the remains be sent to North Korea. He didn't specify which members of the family sent the letter. Mr. Najib also said his primary concern was the repatriation of Malaysians in Pyongyang, and said a police investigation into the killing would continue.

"I have instructed for all possible measures to be taken to bring those responsible for this murder to justice," Mr. Najib said.

The lasting impact of the murder and standoff was uncertain. North Korea said "the importance of bilateral relations was reaffirmed" in meetings that led to the exchange and that the countries "agreed to positively discuss the reintroduction of the visa-free system." Mr. Najib's statement omitted both issues. Neither government mentioned Kim Jong Nam by name.

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Corrections & Amplifications
A Malaysian diplomat expressed thanks to embassies of several nations in North Korea, including Poland. An earlier version of this article incorrectly included the embassy of the Netherlands instead of Poland. (March 31)

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The New York Times

Torres

Venezuela Muzzles Legislature, Moving Closer to One-Man Rule

Nicholas Casey and Patricia Torres

IQUITOS, Peru — [Venezuela](#) took its strongest step yet toward one-man rule under the leftist President Nicolás Maduro as his loyalists on the Supreme Court seized power from the National Assembly in a ruling late Wednesday night.

The ruling effectively dissolved the elected legislature, which is led by Mr. Maduro's opponents, and allows the court to write laws itself, experts said.

The move caps a year in which the last vestiges of Venezuela's democracy have been torn down, critics and regional leaders say, leaving what many now describe as not just an authoritarian regime, but an outright dictatorship.

"What we have warned of has finally come to pass," said Luis Almagro, the head of the Organization of American States, a regional diplomacy group that includes Venezuela and is investigating the country for violating the bloc's Democratic Charter.

Mr. Almagro called the move a "self-inflicted coup," a term used in Latin America to denote takeovers typical

of the 1990s in Guatemala and Peru — but virtually unheard-of in the region today.

Recent months have seen a swift consolidation of power by Mr. Maduro as scores of political prisoners have been detained without trial, protesters violently repressed and local elections postponed. In taking power from the National Assembly, the ruling removed what most consider to be the only remaining counterbalance to the president's growing power in the country.

The court said that lawmakers were "in a situation of contempt," and that while that lasted, the justices themselves would step in to "ensure that parliamentary powers were exercised directly by this chamber, or by the body that the chamber chooses." It did not say whether it might hand power back.

Members of the National Assembly denounced the ruling on Thursday.

"They have kidnapped the Constitution, they have kidnapped our rights, they have kidnapped our liberty," said Julio Borges, the opposition lawmaker who heads the body, holding a crumpled copy of the ruling before reporters on Thursday.

Oneida Guaípe, an opposition lawmaker from the country's central coast, said the body would continue to do its work, even if its laws would now be ignored when it produced legislation. "This is demonstrating before the world the authoritarianism here," she said. "The people chose us through a popular vote."

The ruling was also a challenge to Venezuela's neighbors, which met in Washington this week to put pressure on the country to hold elections, and to discuss a possible expulsion of Venezuela from the O.A.S. on the grounds that the country is not democratic.

Last week, the United States, Canada and a dozen of Latin America's largest nations called for Mr. Maduro to recognize the National Assembly's powers, a rare joint statement that reflected deep impatience with his government.

"We consider it a serious setback for democracy in Venezuela," the United States State Department said on Thursday of the court decision. Peru withdrew its ambassador in protest.

David Smilde, an analyst from the Washington Office on Latin America, a human rights advocacy

group, said it might now be up to Venezuela's neighbors to encourage the country to hold elections again, given resistance from within the government. "The Maduro government seems to have no intention of respecting the basic elements of electoral democracy," he said.

Critics say a long litany of other moves by the government are taking a toll on Venezuela's democracy. Perhaps most visible to Venezuelans was an effort last year to hold a recall referendum against the president, whose popularity is sinking along with the country's collapsing economy.

While such a referendum was permitted by the country's Constitution, and highly favored in polls, Mr. Maduro alternatively called the effort illegal or a coup staged by his opponents. In October, a lower court suspended the process on the grounds that there had been irregularities in the gathering of signatures.

Meanwhile, political prisoners continued to be arrested. In January, Mr. Maduro established a new "anti-coup commando" to round up political dissidents accused of treason. The group has taken aim at

members of the opposition, arresting many, including a city councilman from central Venezuela and a deputy lawmaker in the National Assembly.

In February, after CNN en Español, the network's Spanish language channel, broadcast an investigation that linked Venezuela's vice president to a passport fraud scheme in the Middle East, Mr. Maduro ordered the channel off the air. The government has blocked the Caracas bureau chief of The New York Times from entering the country since October.

But to many, the gradual assault against the National Assembly, more than a year in the making, was the most telling sign of democratic erosion in Venezuela.

"It has come in fragments," Carlos Ayala Corao, a Venezuelan lawyer and legal analyst, said of the court's actions against the legislature. "They have been slicing it in pieces."

The conflicts began in December 2015, when rising grievances about

the country's faltering economy propelled Mr. Maduro's opposition to win control of the legislature. It was the first time in years that the chamber was not dominated by the movement founded by the former leftist President Hugo Chávez.

Mr. Maduro initially said he accepted the vote. He even appeared before opposition lawmakers to give his annual address on the state of the government in January of last year. But the Supreme Court, packed with loyalists to Mr. Maduro shortly before the National Assembly took power, was chipping away at the chamber's powers.

It refused to let it seat four lawmakers on the grounds that there had been voting irregularities. That denied the opposition of a supermajority, which would have given it expanded powers over Mr. Maduro. The National Assembly went back and forth on the ruling, but eventually complied.

As the National Assembly began to get to work, it continued to clash

with the court. By last spring, the legislature had written laws delivering on campaign promises like one measure to invigorate the economy and another to free more than 100 political prisoners, only to see the court overturn them as unconstitutional.

When Mr. Maduro tried to increase his own powers under a state of emergency that he declared, the legislature rejected the effort. But the court sided with the president. In October, the court stripped the National Assembly of its power to review the annual budget, leaving Mr. Maduro in charge of the country's purse strings.

More recently, legislators tried to block the president from pursuing oil ventures without their approval. In Wednesday's ruling stripping the National Assembly of its lawmaking powers, the court said the president had the right to make these oil deals.

It said its ruling was justified by the Assembly's choice to keep the lawmakers onboard whose

elections had been questioned earlier. This act, it said, rendered the Assembly itself invalid.

With few protesters in the streets of Caracas on Thursday, it was unclear what popular support the opposition might get from the public.

Analysts say many Venezuelans feel as dispirited by the opposition as by leftist leaders, given the opposition's continued defeat by the government. Opposition leaders called for protests on Saturday and in the coming week but have been unable to draw large crowds since last fall.

John Magdaleno, a political consultant, said he expected a wider crackdown against the opposition from Mr. Maduro in coming weeks, and possibly more arrests.

"In my opinion, from now on, there will be growing pressures against lawmakers," he said, "and it's probable there will be much greater persecution of political leaders."

ETATS-UNIS

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**
Julian E. Barnes

Mike Flynn Offers to Testify in Exchange for Immunity (UNE)

Shane Harris,
Carol E. Lee and

Updated March 30, 2017 9:00 p.m.
ET

WASHINGTON—Mike Flynn, President Donald Trump's former national security adviser, has told the Federal Bureau of Investigation and congressional officials investigating the Trump campaign's potential ties to Russia that he is willing to be interviewed in exchange for a grant of immunity from prosecution, according to officials with knowledge of the matter.

As an adviser to Mr. Trump's presidential campaign, and later [one of Mr. Trump's top aides](#) in the White House, Mr. Flynn was privy to some of the most sensitive foreign-policy deliberations of the new administration and was directly involved in discussions about the possible lifting of sanctions on Russia imposed by the Obama administration.

He has made the offer to the FBI and the House and Senate intelligence committees through his lawyer but has so far found no takers, the officials said.

Mr. Flynn's attorney, Robert Kelner, wouldn't comment on details of his discussions involving Mr. Flynn, but noted he is a decorated Army veteran with a lifetime of public service. "General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it, should the circumstances permit," Mr. Kelner said.

It wasn't clear if Mr. Flynn had offered to talk about specific aspects of his time working for Mr. Trump, but the fact that he was seeking immunity suggested Mr. Flynn feels he may be in legal jeopardy following his brief stint as the national security adviser, one official said.

Representatives for the FBI and Senate Intelligence Committee declined to comment. Officials with the House Intelligence Committee didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Flynn was [forced to resign](#) after acknowledging that he misled White House officials about the nature of his [phone conversations with the Russian ambassador](#) to the U.S. during the presidential transition.

Mr. Flynn's communications with the Russian ambassador, [Sergei](#)

[Kislyak, have been scrutinized by the FBI](#), which is examining whether Trump campaign personnel colluded with Russian officials who are alleged to have interfered with the presidential election, according to current and former U.S. officials. Russia has denied the allegations.

Mr. Flynn also [was paid tens of thousands of dollars by three Russian companies](#), including the state-sponsored media network RT, for speeches he made shortly before he became a formal adviser to Mr. Trump's campaign, according to documents obtained by a congressional oversight committee.

At a House Intelligence Committee hearing last week, Democratic lawmakers requested a copy of the security-clearance form that Mr. Flynn was required to file before joining Mr. Trump in the White House, to see if he disclosed sources of foreign income.

And they have asked the Defense Department to investigate whether Mr. Flynn, a retired Army general, violated the Constitution's emoluments clause by accepting money from RT, which U.S. intelligence officials say is part of a state-funded media apparatus, without authorization, according to a

letter several Democratic lawmakers sent Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis in February.

Mr. Kelner, Mr. Flynn's attorney, decried the "unfounded allegations, outrageous claims of treason" and other charges by lawmakers and media commentators.

"No reasonable person, who has the benefit of advice from counsel, would submit to questioning in such a highly politicized, witch-hunt environment without assurances against unfair prosecution," he said.

Congress and the executive branch have the power to grant immunity from prosecution in exchange for witness testimony or cooperation in an investigation. People granted immunity still can be prosecuted for perjury if they give false information.

Traditionally, investigators grant immunity when they believe a witness's information is important to the investigation and might not be able to be obtained otherwise. During the investigation of Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server, the FBI granted limited [forms of immunity to some of her aides](#). Mrs. Clinton wasn't charged in the matter.

A grant of immunity from Congress would require approval from two-thirds of the congressional committee requesting testimony or a majority vote in the full House or Senate. Congress would then need to notify the attorney general and get the approval of a district court judge.

Mr. Flynn, 58 years old, also has drawn questions about whether he properly disclosed aspects of his work after he left military service.

Earlier this month, Mr. Flynn filed registration forms acknowledging he had previously [worked as a](#)

**The
New York
Times**

Michael Flynn Offers to Testify Before Congress in Exchange for Immunity

Mark Mazzetti and Matthew Rosenberg

An immunity deal would make it impossible for the Justice Department to prosecute Michael T. Flynn. Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — Michael T. Flynn, the former national security adviser, has offered to be interviewed by House and Senate investigators who are examining the Trump campaign's ties to Russia in exchange for immunity from prosecution, according to his lawyer and a congressional official.

But the congressional official said investigators were unwilling to broker a deal with Mr. Flynn — who [resigned last month](#) for misleading White House officials about his contacts with Russia's ambassador to the United States — until they are further along in their inquiries and they better understand what information Mr. Flynn might offer as part of a deal.

In a statement on Thursday evening, Mr. Flynn's lawyer confirmed discussions with the House and Senate intelligence committees about possible testimony by his client. The lawyer, Robert Kelner, did not provide specifics about the terms under which Mr. Flynn would testify, but



Experts tell congressional investigators of hacks to Clinton's and Rubio's email, bot swarms of false information, and the prospect of 'information nukes' still lurking in Russian hands.

The Senate Intelligence Committee heard during a wide-ranging hearing on Thursday — its first into Russian interference in the 2016 election —

[foreign agent](#) on behalf of Turkish government interests. The Wall Street Journal reported that while serving as an adviser to the Trump campaign, Mr. Flynn met with top Turkish government ministers and [discussed removing a Muslim cleric](#) from the U.S. and taking him to Turkey, according to former Central Intelligence Agency Director James Woolsey, who attended, and others who were briefed on the meeting. The Turkish government has accused the cleric of being behind an attempted coup last year.

A spokesman for Mr. Flynn disputed the account, saying "at no time did

said that "no reasonable person, who has the benefit of advice from counsel, would submit to questioning in such a highly politicized, witch-hunt environment without assurances against unfair prosecution."

"General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it, should circumstances permit," the statement said.

The [Wall Street Journal reported](#) Mr. Flynn's offer to testify.

The F.B.I. is investigating whether any of President Trump's advisers colluded with the Russian government in its efforts to disrupt the 2016 presidential election. An immunity deal would make it extraordinarily difficult for the Justice Department to prosecute Mr. Flynn.

It is unclear whether any of Mr. Trump's other former advisers have asked for immunity from the congressional committees.

It is common for witnesses to demand immunity in exchange for their testimony to ensure that their words cannot be used to prosecute them. Under federal law, Congress can grant witnesses immunity for their testimony, but lawmakers normally do so only after consulting with prosecutors.

That Russian operatives launched a sophisticated, broad campaign that targeted not just the election but sought to deepen division and sow distrust in Western society, and that the worst of the "active measures" campaign may be yet to come.

The target list for Russian hackers was wider than previously understood, said Thomas Rid, a

Gen. Flynn discuss any illegal actions, nonjudicial physical removal or any other such activities."

Mr. Flynn is one of at least four people associated with the Trump campaign who are part of a wide-ranging counterintelligence [investigation by the FBI](#), according to the current and former U.S. officials.

The other three—former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort and former Trump advisers Roger Stone and Carter Page—all have volunteered to speak to the House and Senate committees and haven't

asked for immunity from prosecution, according to the individuals, committee officials and representatives for the individuals.

—Aruna Viswanatha and Byron Tau contributed to this article.

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Congress normally avoids doing anything that could disrupt a federal investigation. Federal law allows the Justice Department to delay a congressional immunity deal but not block it outright.

The Justice Department declined to comment on Thursday evening.

Some experts cautioned against drawing hasty conclusions about Mr. Flynn's request for immunity.

"At this early stage, I wouldn't read anything into this request beyond smart lawyering," said Mark Zaid, a Washington lawyer who specializes in national security cases. "In such a politically charged, high-profile national security case, I couldn't imagine not first asking for immunity."

"I would suspect both Congress and the F.B.I. will first generate additional evidence from smaller players before deciding to immunize General Flynn," Mr. Zaid said.

Mr. Flynn, a retired three-star Army general and former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, was one of Mr. Trump's earliest advisers on national security issues during the presidential campaign. He drew attention for his strident attacks against former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, as well as for his advocacy of forging closer ties to the Russian government.

He has long argued that the United States and Russia have many common interests, including combating terrorism, and in December 2015 he attended a gala in Moscow during which he sat next to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

But it was his contacts with Russian officials that ultimately led to his short tenure as Mr. Trump's national security adviser. Specifically, Mr. Flynn had several phone conversations late last year with Sergey I. Kislyak, the Russian ambassador. In one of the calls, the two men discussed sanctions that the Obama administration imposed on Russia in response to the Russian government's efforts to disrupt the presidential election.

Mr. Flynn misled some White House officials, including Vice President Mike Pence, about the substance of the phone calls, saying that he and the ambassador had only exchanged holiday pleasantries.

He resigned from the job in mid-February, saying in a statement that he had given the vice president and others "incomplete information" about the conversations with Mr. Kislyak.

[Report](#)

Russian Interference Went Far Beyond DNC Hack, Senate Panel Hears

scholar of cyberwarfare and a professor at King's College London. Those targets included the personal email address of Hillary Clinton, which was subjected to phishing attempts by hackers working on behalf of GRU, Russian military intelligence, as well as former campaign staffers for Sen. Marco Rubio (R.-Fla.), a noted Russia

hawk. Another such attempt had occurred in the last 24 hours, Rubio said, adding that none had been successful.

Given the wide range of Russian targets, Clint Watts, a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, told the Senate panel that Moscow may be sitting on a trove of

explosive information, or what he called "information nukes."

The Senate hearing comes as former National Security Adviser ret. Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn has offered to testify before House and Senate investigations of the Trump campaign's ties to Russia in exchange for immunity from prosecution, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. At the same time, partisan politics threaten to undermine the House investigation. The House Intelligence Committee's parallel inquiry has ground to a halt amid calls from Democrats that its chairman, Rep. Devin Nunes (R.-Calif.), recuse himself from the investigation.

Democrats argue that Nunes is running political interference on Capitol Hill on behalf of the Trump administration after he claimed that American intelligence agencies had collected information on Trump aides during the campaign. On Thursday, the *New York Times* [revealed](#) that two White House aides had supplied Nunes with those intelligence reports. A spokesman for Nunes refused to comment on the chairman's sources.

Shortly after the publication of the *Times'* story, the White House invited Nunes and Rep. Adam Schiff (D.-Calif.), the

House Intelligence Committee's ranking Democrat, to review intelligence reports. At a press briefing later in the day, Schiff said he would accept the invitation, but noted it was impossible to say whether those reports were the same obtained by Nunes earlier this month.

"We want to find out," Schiff said, "if in fact these are the same materials earlier provided to the chairman, why that circuitous method was employed to provide them to the committee."

The Senate committee, in contrast, has sought to downplay partisan divisions.

"If we politicize this process our efforts will likely fail," committee chair Sen. Richard Burr (R.-N.C.), said on Thursday. "The public deserves to hear the truth about possible Russian involvement in our elections, how they came to be involved, how we may have failed to prevent that involvement, what actions were taken in response if any, and what we plan to ensure the integrity of future free elections."

By a combination of overt and covert techniques, Russian intelligence operatives employed a campaign of propaganda, hacking and leaking, and disinformation to allow Russia to "hit above their

weight," Roy Godson, an emeritus professor at Georgetown University, told the Senate panel Thursday.

These tools are used by Russia to compensate for what Eugene Rumer, a former U.S. intelligence officer for Russia and Eurasia, described as Russia's "conventional shortcomings vis-a-vis the West." The Russian economy is far smaller than those of its adversaries, and its defense spending far smaller.

"A handful of cyber criminals cost a lot less than an armored brigade but can cause a lot of damage," said Rumer, now a senior fellow and the director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Russia's efforts to bolster its national power sometimes has surprising targets. In 2014, for example, Russian bots flooded a White House petition advocating returning Alaska to Russia. In a short time, the petition gained 39,000 signatures, Watts told the committee.

"Our examination of those signing and posting on this petition revealed an odd pattern – the accounts varied considerably from other petitions and appeared to be the work of automated bots," Watts said. "These bots tied in closely with other social media campaigns we

had observed pushing Russian propaganda."

In another instance described by Watts, Russian bots picked up a false report by RT, a Russian-government controlled broadcaster, that a U.S. airbase in Incirlik, Turkey, was being overrun by protesters. Pro-Russian bots immediately picked up the story, blasted it across Twitter, and promoted it as a replay of the deadly 2012 attack on the U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya.

In fact, only a small group of protesters had gathered outside the airbase.

The 2016 election campaign marked a watershed moment for Russian efforts to influence American politics through cyberspace, largely because Moscow found a willing partner, Watts suggested.

Asked why the Russian campaign was so successful, he offered a simple diagnosis: Active measures worked this time because "the commander in chief has used Russian active measures at times against his opponents."

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Louise Radnofsky, Rebecca Ballhaus and Natalie Andrews

Updated March 30, 2017 7:52 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump, beset by an early legislative failure and the continuing clouds of investigations into his presidential campaign, tried to get back on offense on Thursday.

In a morning tweet, Mr. Trump [threatened to campaign](#) against members of the House Freedom Caucus, a group of conservative Republicans whom the president blames for killing his effort to overturn former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act in the GOP-led House.

"The Freedom Caucus will hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don't get on the team, & fast," Mr. Trump posted on Twitter. "We must fight them, & Dems, in 2018!"

Hours later, senior White House officials announced that Deputy Chief of Staff Katie Walsh would leave the administration to join America First Policies, an outside

Donald Trump, After Setbacks, Tries to Go on Offense (UNE)

group that aims to bolster Mr. Trump's agenda.

"It was abundantly clear that we didn't have air cover when it came to calls coming into lawmakers" during the health-care fight, said Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, for whom Ms. Walsh had worked at the Republican National Committee before both headed to the White House. "No one can fix this problem better than Katie Walsh."

Meanwhile, during his daily briefing, Mr. Trump's press secretary, Sean Spicer, invited top lawmakers to the White House to review classified information that he said was relevant to House and Senate intelligence panels' probes of alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election and any possible ties to Mr. Trump's campaign.

The strategic shifts are aimed at shoring up a White House that is preparing for new battles in Congress. The intra-party fight could undermine GOP unity just as lawmakers must [pass a budget measure](#) to avoid a government shutdown, an outcome that some Republicans worry would be politically devastating, given that

they now control both chambers of Congress and the White House.

In addition, the White House and congressional Republicans are working on an overhaul of the tax code, a legislative effort fraught with financial risks to individuals and corporate sectors, as well as risks for lawmakers running for re-election.

Close votes on those issues would again elevate the role of the Freedom Caucus, a group of about three dozen House Republicans who hold a conservative ideology that calls for extreme limits on the role of government and rarely deviate from their positions. The group is far from a majority. But with roughly 218 votes needed to pass legislation, they can effectively block bills from passing unless House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) seeks support from Democratic lawmakers.

Members of the conservative group refused to back the health-care plan of Messrs. Trump and Ryan because they said it didn't go far enough in repealing the ACA. That dealt a major defeat to the president in his first attempt to pass major legislation. Next month, the group could create a new headache

for the administration if it makes hard-line demands when Congress faces the deadline to pass the budget resolution to keep the government funded.

Rep. Jim Jordan (R., Ohio), a co-founder of the group, dismissed the president's threat on Thursday. "We're trying to help the president, but the fact is you've got to look at the legislation," Mr. Jordan said on Fox News, referring to the health-care bill. "And it doesn't do what we told the voters we were going to do, and the American people understand that."

During the campaign, Mr. Trump regularly attacked some Republicans, in addition to Democrats. But his intra-party insults were mostly aimed at the party establishment, including Mr. Ryan, while he frequently campaigned with conservative rank-and-file members of his party, including [North Carolina Rep. Mark Meadows](#), now the leader of the Freedom Caucus.

That began to shift in negotiations around the health-care plan, when Mr. Trump indicated that he knew which lawmakers were appearing on which television shows and other

media to indicate reservations about the bill.

Mr. Trump also said he had committed to memory the margins by which he had won their districts. And during the health-care debate, Vice President Mike Pence taped radio interviews in their districts to urge support of the bill and for them to get in line behind the White House.

Thursday afternoon, Mr. Trump had another message for them in a new round of tweets.

"If @RepMarkMeadows, @Jim_Jordan and @Raul_Labrador would get on board we would have both great healthcare and massive tax cuts & reform," he wrote.

In a second tweet, he asked: "Where are @RepMarkMeadows, @Jim_Jordan and @Raul_Labrador? #RepealANDReplace #Obamacare."

He also praised an op-ed by Rep. Ken Buck (R., Colo.), a member of the Freedom Caucus, which laid out the congressman's support for the House health-care bill. "Looks like some in the Freedom Caucus are helping me end #Obamacare," Mr. Trump wrote.

The tone of the tweets was echoed by some House leaders. Mr. Ryan issued his own words of warning in a television interview that aired Thursday morning, expressing concern that Mr. Trump could shift

to the left on health care if Republicans can't come together.

"If this Republican Congress allows the perfect to be the enemy of the good, I worry we'll push the president into working with Democrats," Mr. Ryan told CBS.

Speaking to reporters at the U.S. Capitol, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R., Texas) was asked about the president's tweet threatening to target the Freedom Caucus in the 2018 midterm elections.

"He's clearly put out and frustrated by what occurred," said Mr. Brady, a Texas Republican. He also said that Republicans must "unify behind this president."

That prospect is far from certain, though.

All but two known Freedom Caucus members won a similar or greater share of the vote in their districts than Mr. Trump did last year.

Michigan Rep. Justin Amash, an outspoken member of the caucus during the health-care debate, won his re-election with a margin that was about eight percentage points higher than Mr. Trump's support in his district. Mr. Jordan was approximately four percentage points ahead of the president's tally, and Mr. Meadows garnered about one percentage point more of the vote.

Rep. Mo Brooks (R., Ala.), another member of the

Freedom Caucus, said the president's tweet was "not very constructive. The way to get votes is not to name-call. The way to get votes is to have better legislation."

In recent Gallup polls, Mr. Trump's approval rating sank to lows of 35% and 36%, though it ticked up to 38% on March 29. President Barack Obama hit his low mark of 38% in 2011 and 2014, according to Gallup.

Mr. Trump initially had conciliatory words for the lawmakers when the bill was pulled Friday, but since then has stepped up the pressure, saying Monday that the Freedom Caucus snatched "defeat from the jaws of victory."

Freedom Caucus members, for their part, said the bill, which also repelled some more centrist House Republicans, didn't represent a full repeal of the Obama administration health-care law.

Despite the host of outside groups that formed since Mr. Trump's election to support his agenda, the groups have made few efforts, including in fights over the confirmation of the president's cabinet and his Supreme Court nominee.

Ms. Walsh will serve as a senior adviser to America First Policies, an outside nonprofit already staffed by top Trump campaign officials, including digital strategist Brad Parscale. So far, the group has run few ads, mailers or phone calls to

voters, frustrating top White House officials.

A second outside group, called Making America Great—headed by Rebekah Mercer, a top donor to Mr. Trump during the campaign—this week began airing \$1 million in TV ads praising Mr. Trump's actions during his first months as president.

Mr. Priebus met with reporters in his West Wing office on Thursday, along with Mr. Trump's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and Ms. Walsh. Mr. Kushner said the administration was "very supportive" of Ms. Walsh's decision to leave the White House, while Mr. Bannon praised the "vital" role she played in the administration.

The White House hasn't found a successor for Ms. Walsh, whose departure takes away one of Mr. Priebus's key allies.

—Michael C. Bender, Peter Nicholas and Dante Chinni contributed to this article.

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The Washington Post Trump threatens hard-liners as part of escalating Republican civil war (UNE)

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

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

President Trump on March 30 tweeted that he would "fight" the House Freedom Caucus in the 2018 midterm elections after the group blocked the health-care bill. President Trump on March 30 tweeted that he would "fight" the House Freedom Caucus in the 2018 midterm elections after the group blocked the health-care bill. (Video: Bastien Inzaurrealde/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

President Trump threatened Thursday to try to knock off members of the House Freedom Caucus in next year's elections if they don't fall in line — an extraordinary move that laid bare an escalating civil war within a Republican Party struggling to enact an ambitious agenda.

In a series of tweets that began in the morning, the president warned that the powerful group of hard-line conservatives who helped block the party's health-care bill last week would "hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don't get on the team, & fast."

The president vowed to "fight them" as well as Democrats in the 2018 midterm elections, a warning that his allies said was intended in the short term to make members of the Freedom Caucus think twice about crossing him again. But Trump's pledge was met with defiance by many in the bloc, including some members who accused him of succumbing to the establishment in Washington that he had campaigned against.

Later in the day, Trump [singled out three of the group's members](#) in another tweet, saying that if Reps. Mark Meadows (N.C.), Jim Jordan (Ohio) and Raúl R. Labrador (Idaho) got on board, "we would have both

great healthcare and massive tax cuts & reform."

Most of the roughly three dozen Freedom Caucus members were elected from safe Republican districts, and many of them faced no primary opposition. To make good on his threat, Trump would have to recruit GOP candidates to make the case that the Republican incumbent they face was unhelpful to an unorthodox, populist president.

Trump's frustrations with the Freedom Caucus also reflect only part of his challenge in moving legislation, even in a Congress where his party controls both chambers. If Trump does too much to mollify members of the hard-line group, he risks alienating a similar number of more moderate Republicans in districts won or narrowly lost by last year's Democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton.

And on many pieces of Trump's congressional agenda, he'll need

the support of at least some Democrats, particularly in the Senate, an uncertain prospect given the toxic partisan environment on the Hill.

House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) told reporters a few hours after Trump's first tweet on Thursday that he sympathized with him.

"I understand the president's frustration," Ryan said. "About 90 percent of our conference is for this bill to repeal and replace Obamacare and about 10 percent are not. And that's not enough to pass a bill."

Ryan said he had no immediate plans to bring the bill back to the House floor, saying it was "too big of an issue to not get right."

Trump and his White House advisers have been particularly frustrated by the intransigence of several prominent Freedom Caucus members, led by Meadows.

In White House meetings, Trump lobbied them intensively, only to see the bill collapse last Friday after Meadows and some of his allies said they would not vote for it. The bill also faced strong opposition from a group of moderate Republicans who were concerned it went too far in cutting Medicaid and leaving millions more people without insurance.

(The Washington Post)

House Freedom Caucus Chair Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) and Rep. Andy Harris (R-Md.) spoke to reporters about the House GOP health-care plan, which failed to come to a vote March 23. House Freedom Caucus Chair Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) and Rep. Andy Harris (R-Md.) spoke to reporters about the House GOP health-care plan. (The Washington Post)

"This has been brewing for a while," a White House official said of Trump's decision to pressure and possibly target Freedom Caucus members.

"Our view is: There's nothing as clarifying as the smell of Air Force One jet fuel. So if he needs to bring in the plane and do a rally, he's going to think about doing that," said the official, who requested anonymity because the official was not authorized to speak publicly.

The official added that Trump and White House aides are "sick and tired" of seeing Freedom Caucus members on television in recent days.

Trump's threat comes as Republican leaders are bracing for a month of potential GOP infighting over spending priorities. Congress must pass a spending bill by April 28 to avert a government shutdown.

Beyond that, the same divide that derailed the health-care legislation could imperil the next marquee legislation that Trump wants to tackle: tax reform.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer told reporters Thursday that Trump remains committed to "a bold and robust agenda," adding: "He's going to get the votes from wherever he can."

Since Friday's debacle, Trump and his aides have increasingly talked up the possibility of working with Democrats on a reboot of the

health-care bill and other priorities — but that prospect has also divided Republicans on Capitol Hill.

In a CBS News interview that aired Thursday morning, Ryan said he does not want to see Trump have to work with Democrats on revamping the Affordable Care Act — drawing flak from some members of his own party, including Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), who said Trump's bipartisan overtures should be encouraged.

[\[Hill Republicans trying to avert a shutdown need Democrats — and Trump\]](#)

"He's irritated," anti-tax advocate Grover Norquist said in explaining Trump's decision to lash out at Freedom Caucus members. "During the health-care discussions, the Freedom Caucus would say they'd support him if they got one thing, then they'd want another thing. If you're Trump, you wonder, 'Why are these people meeting with me if they're always going to be a 'no' vote?'"

If Trump gets involved in Republican primaries, Norquist said he thinks it's possible he could "get some scalps."

Though Trump's national job approval numbers are historically low for a new president, he remains popular in many of the districts where Freedom Caucus members were elected. At the same time, most of those members won a larger percentage of the vote in their districts than Trump did.

On Capitol Hill, Trump's tweet was met with a range of reactions: Some members said it could prove counterproductive while others praised him for using the power of his office in a way he hasn't to this point.

Rep. Mark Sanford (R-S.C.), who has called for health-insurance reform to work its way through Congress more slowly, said that with Trump's tweet on Thursday, the president was taking exactly the wrong approach.

"The idea of threatening your way to legislative success may not be the wisest of strategies," Sanford said Thursday. "His message yesterday was that he wanted to work with Democrats; I guess the message today is, 'We need to fight against Freedom Caucus members and

Democrats.' ... It's a case of shooting messengers who were, rightfully, pointing out problems in a bill that the American public has not shown a proclivity toward."

Jordan, another Freedom Caucus member, said the break with Trump was based on real policy differences, not a lack of loyalty.

"The president can say what he wants and that's fine. But we're focused on the legislation," Jordan said.

Some of the harshest responses to Trump came via Twitter, his preferred means of provocative communication. Those included a tweet from Rep. Justin Amash (R-Mich.), who said that Trump's support of the health-care bill signaled he was now part of the Washington elite.

"It didn't take long for the swamp to drain @realDonaldTrump," said Amash, a member of the Freedom Caucus and one of Trump's frequent GOP critics. "No shame, Mr. President. Almost everyone succumbs to the D.C. Establishment."

Rep. Chris Collins (R-N.Y.), a Trump ally, said the president's focus on the Freedom Caucus was well placed as the White House attempts to steady itself and rethink its congressional coalitions.

Collins, a member of the Tuesday Group, a group of moderate House Republicans, rejected the notion — put forth this week by members of both groups — that there could be an accommodation between them on the health-care bill.

"The Tuesday Group will never meet with the Freedom Caucus, with a capital N-E-V-E-R," Collins said, spelling out the last word.

Some Republicans said they see potential for Trump forging a governing coalition that includes some Democrats.

"Trump is a New York-type bargainer who wants to get something done," said Rep. Peter T. King (R-N.Y.). "That approach will give him a lot of room to maneuver on taxes and infrastructure. Once you break the barrier that every bill has to have total Republican support, you can be more creative."

Michael Steel, who was a senior aide to former House speaker John

A. Boehner (R-Ohio), said there is potential in some districts for Trump to dislodge Freedom Caucus members.

"If the president chooses to support primary challengers to House members who've been unhelpful, it wouldn't necessarily be an ideological challenge," Steel said. "It would be based on loyalty to the president, or lack thereof."

But Steel added: "You don't necessarily have to wait for 2018 for this to have an effect."

There is precedent for Republican leaders taking aim at Freedom Caucus members. A spate of 2015 ads purchased by the American Action Network, a nonprofit issue advocacy group with ties to House GOP leaders, targeted Jordan and two other hard-liners for opposing a Department of Homeland Security funding bill.

Those ads infuriated members of the caucus, then only months old, and spawned a confrontational relationship that culminated in Boehner's resignation six months later.

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One open question is whether the National Republican Congressional Committee, the GOP's House campaign arm, would intervene on behalf of incumbents targeted by Trump.

Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Ohio), the NRCC's chairman, chuckled Thursday after a reporter read him Trump's tweet.

"I want to be very clear: We have a policy of helping out incumbents that pay their dues," Stivers said, referring to the hundreds of thousands of dollars GOP lawmakers are expected to raise for the committee each election cycle. "As long as they pay their dues, we're gonna be there for them. ... If I was them, I'd take a look and see how I'm doing on my dues."

Philip Rucker, David Weigel, Sean Sullivan and Scott Clement contributed to this report.

The New York Times **'We Must Fight Them': Trump Goes After Conservatives of Freedom Caucus**

Glenn Thrush and Jonathan Martin

WASHINGTON — President Trump launched a vengeful tirade against

conservatives in his own party on Thursday in an attempt to kick-start health care talks and show that he remains a force to be feared in the

looming battles over the budget, a tax overhaul and infrastructure.

In an early morning Twitter attack, Mr. Trump singled out members of the House Freedom Caucus, which scuttled his [health care overhaul](#)

last week. "The Freedom Caucus will hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don't get on the team, & fast," he wrote. "We must fight them, & Dems, in 2018!"

He continued on Twitter throughout the day, naming individual members of the caucus, likening them to Democrats and urging other Republicans to "fight them" in the 2018 midterm elections if they do not back his agenda.

But the Republican upstarts hardly cowered in the face of Mr. Trump's criticism. They struck back, some of them ridiculing the president, using his own taunting and confrontational social media style.

"Stockholm Syndrome?" Representative Tom Garrett of Virginia asked on Twitter, suggesting that the president had become captive to the Republican establishment he attacked during the campaign.

"It's a swamp not a hot tub. We both came here to drain it. #SwampCare polls 17%. Sad!" wrote Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky, who often sides with the caucus on votes, mocking the president's drain-the-swamp campaign pledge.

This was the moment when Mr. Trump, riding a wave of populist anger, was supposed to be at his most fearsome — enforcing discipline on his fragmented party. But in the wake of last week's stunning defeat of legislation to replace the Affordable Care Act, which further eroded his already flagging poll numbers, Mr. Trump has made an abrupt shift from courting his party's most conservative lawmakers to hurling threats at them, a vivid illustration of his difficulties uniting a still-riven [Republican Party](#).

"Intimidation may work with some in the short term, but it never really works in the long run," said Representative Mark Sanford of South Carolina, who opposed the health overhaul pushed by the White House and written by House Speaker Paul D. Ryan.

Mr. Trump and his team believe the Twitter attacks will re-establish his tough-guy leverage in coming negotiations. It also has the added virtue of allowing the most expressive of presidents to give voice to his anger.

And they were not done out of impulse. Mr. Trump's advisers have become more involved in his free-form Twitter feed in the last few weeks, ever since his impetuous, conspiratorial posts about President Barack Obama's supposedly wiretapping his phones touched off a still-running controversy.

Stephen K. Bannon, Mr. Trump's chief strategist, has counseled a tough tone with the rebels, instructing his staff to use Twitter as a rhetorical prod to keep the party in line. Dan Scavino, an aide who controls Mr. Trump's official White House Twitter account, recently moved into Mr. Bannon's West Wing office, where he closely monitors social activity by and about the president, according to two officials.

A handful of people have always had access to Mr. Trump's personal Twitter account, but in the weeks since the president's accusation against his predecessor, there has been a stricter imposition by aides to make sure there is a strategic imperative behind his posts, according to two people briefed on the process.

The cannon blasts at the House Freedom Caucus followed nearly a week of the president's stewing about the debacle over his failed health care effort. He did not take the loss especially well. His aides quickly began discussions about reopening negotiations that would at least demonstrate a commitment to what in the past has been one of his party's most urgent priorities.

The House Freedom Caucus came away from the health care fight feeling emboldened, and Mr. Trump's senior advisers are now mindful of the need to slow any momentum the group has going into other legislative battles, including the budget fight just four weeks away.

The health care bill that the many House members rejected was extremely unpopular. Only 17 percent of Americans — and 41 percent of Republicans — supported the proposal, according to a Quinnipiac poll released last week.

Presidents — from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Mr. Obama — have said they would campaign against rebels in their own parties, and the

threats have mostly been empty. Mr. Trump seems especially ill-equipped to follow through, senior Republicans say. Beyond blustery Twitter messages, he has so far not shown even a willingness to take them on.

In the mostly conservative House districts where Mr. Trump could target lawmakers, voters are likely to be more in sync with their representatives, who felt that the rollback of the law did not go far enough, than their president, who simply wanted a win.

When Mr. Sanford, fresh off helping torpedo his party's health care bill, showed up at a Berkeley County Republican meeting in South Carolina on Saturday, he was met with applause and praise.

"It's fairly banal," said Representative David Schweikert, Republican of Arizona and a member of the caucus, said of Mr. Trump's attack. "We are used to it. It goes with the job. He is not the first president who has attacked us, just the first from our own party."

If the back and forth between Mr. Trump and the House hard-liners inflamed tensions between the president and some of his most loyal, if not exactly ideologically aligned, congressional supporters, it bound the president more closely to Mr. Ryan, reinforcing the most unlikely of shotgun political marriages.

"I understand the president's frustration," Mr. Ryan told reporters on Thursday when asked about the president's morning Twitter attack. "I share frustration."

All week, the White House lurched between battering conservatives and trying to win them over. On Wednesday — about 18 hours before Mr. Trump's Twitter blast — senior officials invited two dozen leaders from conservative groups for a closed-door session to plot a path ahead.

Participants, who were instructed by the organizers of the event not to divulge details of the meeting, or even the groups attending, described the hourlong session as a welcome but long overdue policy discussion. It included a candid, polite airing of complaints that they have been largely left out of the loop on major administration

decision making, according to people who attended.

The meeting, put together by Mr. Trump's conservative outreach director, Paul Teller, at the request of conservatives, included representatives of the Heritage Foundation, Americans for Limited Government and Judicial Watch, all of whom were critical of some administration policies, including the health bill.

Thomas Fitton, the president of Judicial Watch — a conservative legal advocacy group that successfully sued the Obama administration for the release of Hillary Clinton's State Department emails — made a pointed pitch for the release of all documents pertaining to Russia's interference in the election campaign controversy, according to people who attended the session in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building beside the White House.

Mr. Fitton, the participants said, told Mr. Teller that the president needed to be committed to a policy of extreme transparency about contacts between Russian government officials and Trump associates during the 2016 campaign, including [Michael T. Flynn, the former national security adviser](#), and [Jared Kushner, Mr. Trump's son-in-law](#).

He also asked Mr. Teller and other administration officials present to more rapidly approve bottled-up Freedom of Information requests about Russia and other topics — likening the foot-dragging on legally mandated disclosure to what he said was the Obama administration's flouting of immigration laws.

An activist in attendance said that Mr. Teller nodded, took notes and was noncommittal.

Mr. Trump's targeting of the Freedom Caucus came on a day of an unexpected change in his senior staff. Katie Walsh, a deputy to Reince Priebus, the White House chief of staff, announced her sudden departure after less than three months on the job to work for a "[super PAC](#)" allied with Mr. Trump. The White House offered no explanation for the timing of her departure.

**NATIONAL
REVIEW
ONLINE**

Editorial : Freedom Caucus -- Republican Health Care Bill Defeat Not All on Freedom Caucus

The demise of the American Health Care Act, House speaker Paul Ryan and the White House's ill-fated effort to reform Obamacare, has prompted a

cascade of finger-pointing as Republicans try to assign blame for their recent embarrassment. The White House and much of the Republican establishment have

settled on a familiar scapegoat: the famously stubborn 30 or so members of the House Freedom Caucus. On Thursday morning, President Trump tweeted: "The

Freedom Caucus will hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don't get on the team, & fast. We must fight them, & Dems, in 2018!"

We have been not infrequent critics of the Freedom Caucus, who often seem oblivious to Ronald Reagan's observation that "my 80 percent friend is not my 20 percent enemy." There is no doubt that members of the caucus can be frustrating and prone to an unrealistic tactical maximalism.

Yet in this latest episode, the Freedom Caucus was mostly in the right (and it wasn't just them — members from all corners of the House GOP found it impossible to back the bill). The American Health Care Act was a kludge of a health-care policy. Described as a way to simultaneously repeal key elements of the Affordable Care Act and replace them with market-oriented reforms, the bill in its final form managed to do little of either. Freedom Caucus members were particularly

concerned about the willingness of House leaders to leave the vast majority of Obamacare's regulations on the books — after Republicans spent seven years promising that the party would "repeal and replace Obamacare." Even the rationale that the AHCA would be better than nothing was hard to justify; it probably would have further destabilized the individual market, while millions fewer would have been insured.

No wonder that strong-arming on behalf of the bill didn't work. According to news reports, in the final hours, the White House sent adviser Steve Bannon to tell obstinate Freedom Caucus members that they "have no choice" but to vote for the bill. It's hard to imagine a less effective pitch to a group that has long accused Republican leaders of

trying to coerce conservatives into falling in line against their principles.

In any case, the now-or-never rhetoric around the bill has now been exposed as a convenient exaggeration. The House is exploring whether it can revive the repeal-and-replace effort, as it should. Some members of the Freedom Caucus are demanding an immediate, straight-up repeal of the Affordable Care Act, or at least of its taxes and spending, which is unrealistic. But for all their reputed rigidity, most of the Freedom Caucus had accepted the inclusion in the Ryan bill of tax credits for people without access to Medicare, Medicaid, or employer-provided insurance — a policy that they had previously tended to oppose.

That the president has decided to declare war, at least rhetorically, on

this bloc of his own party's congressional majority is a reminder of one of the other key elements of the AHCA collapse: For all of the praise heaped on the president's negotiating acumen, he has yet to demonstrate it in his dealings with Congress. Trump's tweet has all the hallmarks of ineffectually blowing off steam, since it's hard to imagine the president and his supporters following through with the organizing and funding it would take to try to take out conservative members representing deep-red districts. If Trump wants to win over the Freedom Caucus — and all the other members — who opposed the health-care legislation, the first step should be obvious, if more difficult and less satisfying than popping off on Twitter: Get them a better bill.

**The
Washington
Post**

Gerson : Trump's failing presidency has the GOP in a free fall

By Michael Gerson

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

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President Trump on March 30 tweeted that he would "fight" the House Freedom Caucus in the 2018 midterm elections after the group blocked the health-care bill. President Trump on March 30 tweeted that he would "fight" the House Freedom Caucus in the 2018 midterm elections after the group blocked the health-care bill. (Video: Bastien Inzaurrealde/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

Heading into last year's election, Republicans knew that this problem — the tea party predicament, the Freedom Caucus conundrum, the Boehner bog — had to be dealt with. The GOP needed a large and capable leader who could either unite the whole party (at least temporarily) with a bold, conservative vision, or peel off some centrist Democratic support with innovative policy. They needed an above-average president.

In the aftermath of the GOP health-care debacle came a revealing act of candor. House Speaker Paul D. Ryan [admitted](#) that his party, which controls the House, Senate and White House, is not yet a "governing party" because it could not "get 216 people to agree with each other on how we do things."

What they got is unimaginably distant from any of these goals. They got a leader who is empty — devoid of even moderately detailed preferences and incapable of using policy details in the course of political persuasion.

Since the rise of the tea party, there have been perhaps 30 members of the House — the [Freedom Caucus](#) — who have been consistently unwilling to vote for center-right policy because their anti-government convictions are unappeasable. Incited and abetted by conservative media, they made then-Speaker John Boehner's (R-Ohio) life a living hell, and have greeted Ryan (Wis.) with sharpened pitchforks.

Republicans got a leader who is impatient and easily distracted — by cable news on the Russian scandal or by Arnold Schwarzenegger's TV ratings. The content and consequences of his tweets are bad enough; worse is the disordered personality traits they reveal — vindictiveness, shallowness and lack of discipline. Trump spent a total of [18 days](#) on his health-care bill before demanding a vote. And he made no speech to the nation to advance his ideas — as every other recent president would have done.

So a party at the peak of its political fortunes is utterly paralyzed. A caucus in control of everything is itself uncontrollable.

Republicans got an administration that is incompetent. The White House policy process has been erratic and disorganized. It has failed to provide expert analysis or assistance to Congress and did little

to effectively advocate the president's policy in ways that could have united the party.

Republicans got an administration that is morally small. Trump's proposed budget would require massive cuts in disease research, global development and agricultural programs — just as a famine gathers a hideous strength. The proposed budget practices random acts of gratuitous cruelty.

This is a pretty bad combination: empty, easily distracted, vindictive, shallow, impatient, incompetent and morally small. This is not the profile of a governing party.

It can hardly surprise us. The president had no governing experience. He has no detailed governing agenda. He trashed everyone who tried to govern in the past. And we somehow expect him to overcome the complex governing task presented by the Freedom Caucus?

His new strategy is to go on the [attack](#): "The Freedom Caucus will hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don't get on the team, & fast. We must fight them, & Dems, in 2018!" By targeting individual congressmen, as Trump has now done, he runs the risk of looking pathetic if they remain un intimidated. And will he really carry this campaign beyond his Twitter feed? Have rallies in their districts? Criticize them on conservative talk radio? Raise money for their more moderate opponents? If he takes this route, then the GOP civil war will reach a new stage of bitterness, with legislative progress postponed until

a core faction of the party is tweeted into submission or defeated.

Some Republicans choose to comfort themselves by repeating the mantra: "Gorsuch, Gorsuch, Gorsuch." But that does nothing to change Trump's stunningly high [disapproval ratings](#). Or the stunning [rebuke by the FBI director](#) concerning his claim of being wiretapped by President Barack Obama. Or the stunning rejection of his central campaign promise by elements of his own party. Or his stunning ignorance of the basics of policy and leadership.

And all this has come in the course of the president's political honeymoon. What, for goodness' sake, will the marriage be like?

It is now dawning on Republicans what they have done to themselves. They thought they could somehow get away with Trump. That he could be contained. That the adults could provide guidance. That the economy might come to the rescue. That the damage could be limited.

Instead, they are seeing a downward spiral of incompetence and public contempt — a collapse that is yet to reach a floor. A presidency is failing. A party unable to govern is becoming unfit to govern.

And what, in the short term, can be done about it? Nothing. Nothing at all.

Read more from [Michael Gerson's archive](#), [follow him on Twitter](#) or [subscribe to his updates on Facebook](#).

Politics newsletter

Robinson : Republicans are so hopeless, Trump may have to work with Democrats

<https://www.facebook.com/eugenerobinson.columnist>

Will anyone be left standing when the Republican circular firing squad runs out of ammunition? Or will everybody just reload and keep blasting away, leaving Democrats to clean up the bloody mess?

The political moment we're living through is truly remarkable, but not in a good way. Republicans control the White House and both chambers of Congress, so we're basically in their hands. But they have nothing approaching consensus on what they should be doing — and they have failed to show basic competence at doing much of anything.

This absurd situation was illustrated Thursday when House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.), appearing on "CBS This Morning," tried to explain why he wants to lead yet another suicide charge up Health Care Hill.

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[Ryan said he worries](#) that if Republicans don't repeal the Affordable Care Act and pass some sort of replacement, then President Trump will "just go work with Democrats to try and change

Obamacare and that's not, that's hardly a conservative thing. . . . If this Republican Congress allows the perfect to be the enemy of the good, I worry we'll push the president into working with Democrats. He's been suggesting that as much."

Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), usually a man of measured words, responded with [a barbed tweet](#): "We have come a long way in our country when the speaker of one party urges a president NOT to work with the other party to solve a problem."

[Trump went on Twitter as well](#), primarily to lash out at the House GOP conservatives who helped scuttle the slapdash American Health Care Act that Ryan tried — and disastrously failed — to ram through last week: "The Freedom Caucus will hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don't get on the team, & fast. We must fight them, & Dems, in 2018!"

But which Republican agenda? The House majority wants ideological purity of the kind found in Ayn Rand novels and the writings of obscure Austrian economists. The Senate majority favors traditional conservative policies and seeks self-preservation. Trump seeks adulation, a crown of laurels and the strewing of rose petals at his feet.

The House looks hopeless. Republicans hold 241 seats, a massive majority — yet could not

come close to mustering the 216 needed last week to approve [the ill-fated health-care bill](#). House Republicans passed about 60 measures to repeal all or part of Obamacare while Barack Obama was president — but now, with a Republican in the White House, they can't pass even one.

Ryan somehow acquired a reputation as a policy wonk but really is an ideologue, as shown by his comments Thursday. He worries less about whether policies work or not — whether, in this case, more people have health insurance — than whether policies fit his definition of "conservative" or "not conservative." Also, he doesn't seem to be very good at counting votes, which is a clear requirement in the House speaker job description.

To be fair, he does have the problem of [the Freedom Caucus](#) — a group of 30 to 40 House Republicans who are far to Ryan's right, which puts them beyond the outer fringe. If politics were the solar system, they would be the Oort Cloud, out there past Pluto. It is hard to imagine any health-care bill that is acceptable to both the Freedom Caucus and a majority of Americans.

The White House looks hopeless, too. Trump's inner circle is like the Court of the Borgias, full of intrigue and backstabbing. And there have been plenty of opportunities for

rivals to wield their knives: Advisers Stephen K. Bannon and Stephen Miller, the "economic nationalists," came under attack when Trump's first, amateurish attempt at a Muslim travel ban got blocked by the courts. Chief of Staff Reince Priebus — like Ryan, part of the "[Cheesehead Mafia](#)" from Wisconsin — bore much of the blame for the health-care debacle. Economic adviser Gary Cohn and his staff are derided by others in the administration as "[the Democrats](#)." Jared Kushner is fortunate to have the Teflon coating that comes from being the boss's son-in-law.

That leaves just two viable centers of power — Senate Republicans under Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (Ky.), who is nothing if not wily; and House Democrats under Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.).

It's probably going to take Democratic votes to keep the government funded past April 28 and avoid a shutdown. Trump's only path forward on health care, a problem he now owns, may indeed be working with the Democrats. When I saw her at the Capitol this week, Pelosi was in a surprisingly good mood.

Read more from [Eugene Robinson's archive](#), [follow him on Twitter](#) or [subscribe to his updates on Facebook](#). You can also join him [Tuesdays at 1 p.m. for a live Q&A](#).

Kinzinger : How the Freedom Caucus Is Undermining the G.O.P.

Adam Kinzinger

Members of the House Freedom Caucus after a meeting at the White House last week. Doug Mills/The New York Times

WASHINGTON — Governing is not easy. We learned this the hard way as Speaker Paul Ryan stood before House Republicans last week and told us he was withdrawing the Obamacare replacement plan. Despite campaign promises to repeal and replace by the president and most Republicans, the votes were not there to pass the American Health Care Act. And just like that, [the effort was dead](#).

As soon as the news broke, the finger-pointing began. Accusations against President Trump and Mr. Ryan flew around Capitol Hill, and headlines proclaimed that this was a major blow to the Republican agenda. My office phones began

ringing off the hook. I received emails from supporters and friends dismayed that our most basic promise had already been broken.

From my perspective, however, claiming that the party was in disarray is untrue. A vast majority of us were ready to vote yes, but one faction of the party made it impossible: the House Freedom Caucus.

Interesting name for a group of about three dozen members that refuses to let the will of the people advance on the House floor, a group that Mr. Trump himself [scolded on Twitter](#) on Thursday for undermining the Republican agenda, and our party as a whole.

Perhaps I'm joining the finger-pointing here by blaming the caucus. But I'm fed up. Americans need to understand what happened.

Earlier in the week, I was summoned to the White House to share my concerns about the health care legislation and to meet with Mr. Trump and Vice President Mike Pence. In this meeting, I found the president willing to listen to the concerns of House members. He made every effort to see what, if anything, could be done to resolve differences. I witnessed a vice president who deeply understood the dynamics of this Congress and the traps that existed there. You give a concession in one area, and you may lose supporters in another, which certainly became the case. The sausage-making process of legislating is often ridiculed, but it is far preferable to a system where one man dictates his will.

This is why the legislation collapsed: In exchange for their votes on the replacement plan, the members of the Freedom Caucus wanted reductions in essential

health benefits. President Trump agreed in good faith. Some more-moderate Republican members struggled to accept these changes. Yet even knowing that some yes votes had turned to no, the conference went to bed on Thursday thinking that we would vote the next day. To our dismay (but not to my surprise), the concessions were not enough to get the Freedom Caucus on board, as usual.

For two days camera crews crammed the hallway near my office outside the Freedom Caucus's meeting room as reporters tried to determine whether the members were on board. They were not, and they had new demands to share with the news media. Those demands included rescinding Title 1 regulations, which include protections for people with pre-existing conditions and allow young adults to stay on their parents'

health plans until the age of 26. The president, and many of us, had promised to protect these two key provisions.

The Freedom Caucus fully understood that its last-minute demands would doom the bill. The vote was going to fail.

This is a common tactic by the group. Over the years, the caucus has repeatedly demanded more while refusing to compromise. In 2013, a group of conservatives who later became part of the Freedom

Caucus won major concessions on the farm bill, and then still voted against it. In 2015, the caucus made demands for a free-trade bill that were clearly intended to kill the legislation. Their demands were not met and the bill passed without their support.

It's what they do: They move the goal posts, and once that happens, they still refuse to play. We are the Charlie Brown party, hoping that this time, things will be different. But time and again, the Freedom

Caucus is Lucy — pulling the ball out from under us, letting us take the fall and smiling to themselves for making a splash. It's a cheap tactic, not a way to govern, and enough is enough.

In the words of Representative Ted Poe, a Texas Republican who resigned from the caucus after the health care debacle, "[Sometimes you're going to have to say yes.](#)" It is my sincere hope that many in the Freedom Caucus take his words to heart.

This bill was our chance to repeal Obamacare and alleviate the burdens of a failing insurance system. Perhaps we will one day agree on a measure to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. But for that to happen, our collective actions must be in the interests of the American people — and not just one group.



Three White House officials tied to files shared with House intelligence chairman (UNE)

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At least three senior White House officials, including the top lawyer for the National Security Council, were involved in the handling of intelligence files that were shared with the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and showed that Trump campaign officials were swept up in U.S. surveillance of foreign nationals, according to U.S. officials.

The White House role in the matter contradicts assertions by the committee's chairman, Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), and adds to mounting concerns that the Trump administration is collaborating with the leader of the House Intelligence Committee's investigation of Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

Though White House officials have refused to answer questions about the documents shared with Nunes, the White House said in a letter to the House committee Thursday that it had "discovered documents" that might show whether information collection on U.S. persons was mishandled and was prepared to show them to lawmakers.

[\[Chairman and partisan: The dual roles of Devin Nunes\]](#)

One of those involved in procuring the documents cited by Nunes has close ties to former national security adviser Michael Flynn. The official, Ezra Cohen, survived a recent attempt to oust him from his White House job by appealing to Trump advisers Jared Kushner and Stephen K. Bannon, the officials said.

The materials unearthed by Nunes have been used to defend President Trump's baseless claims on Twitter that he had been wiretapped at Trump Tower under a surveillance operation ordered by then-President Barack Obama. FBI Director James

B. Comey and others have said that claim is false.

Nunes reviewed the material during a surreptitious visit to the White House grounds last week. He then returned the next day in a visit he said was arranged so that he could brief Trump on what Nunes depicted as potential abuses by U.S. spy agencies brought to his attention by an unnamed source.

Nunes and White House press secretary Sean Spicer have repeatedly refused to answer questions about the identities of those involved in unearthing the intelligence reports or arranging for Nunes to review them at the White House complex — although Nunes at one point said his source was not a member of the White House staff.

That assertion is under new scrutiny after U.S. officials confirmed that three senior officials at the National Security Council — considered part of the White House — played roles in the collection and handling of information shared with Nunes.

The officials said that the classified files were gathered by Cohen, the senior director for intelligence at the National Security Council.

After assembling reports that showed that Trump campaign officials were mentioned or inadvertently monitored by U.S. spy agencies targeting foreign individuals, Cohen took the matter to the top lawyer for the National Security Council, John Eisenberg.

The third White House official involved was identified as Michael Ellis, a lawyer who previously worked with Nunes on the House Intelligence Committee but joined the Trump administration as an attorney who reports to Eisenberg. Ellis and Eisenberg report to the White House counsel, Donald McGahn.

The involvement of Ellis and Cohen was first reported Thursday by the New York Times.

A spokesman for the NSC declined to comment. Jack Langer, a spokesman for Nunes, said the chairman "will not confirm or deny speculation about his source's identity." Langer also said that Nunes "will not respond to speculation from anonymous sources," despite Nunes's insisting on the anonymity of his own source.

Nunes, who served as an adviser to the Trump transition team, said the files he reviewed had made him concerned that U.S. intelligence agencies had mishandled information on members of the Trump campaign, although Nunes acknowledged that he saw no evidence of illegality.

He appeared to be referring to cases of "incidental" collection on U.S. persons, which generally occur when foreign officials being monitored by U.S. spy agencies either mention an American or communicate with one. The identities of those Americans are supposed to be masked in any intelligence reports disseminated in the U.S. government.

Nunes said that most names were masked in the files he reviewed but that he could still identify Trump campaign officials from context.

Cohen gathered the cases of incidental collection on Trump campaign operatives after arriving at the NSC. One official said Cohen did so as part of research unrelated to Trump's wiretapping tweet. Instead, the official said, Cohen was assembling materials out of concern that intelligence information on U.S. persons was being shared too widely and that unmasking rules were being abused.

The U.S. official said Cohen was not involved in showing the material to Nunes, didn't clear Nunes onto the White House grounds, didn't

review the material with Nunes and wasn't even aware that the material was going to be shared with the committee chairman.

Even so, White House officials appear to have recognized the value of Cohen's material in defending Trump from criticism for his false accusation that he had been wiretapped by Obama.

U.S. officials declined to say who had contacted Nunes or arranged his White House visits, except to note that Cohen had brought his findings to the attention of Eisenberg and that Ellis works for Eisenberg.

Cohen was brought into the administration by Flynn, a former Defense Intelligence Agency director who was fired after [it was exposed that he had misled Vice President Pence and others about his contacts with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak.](#)

During a preliminary meeting this month to discuss the possibility of Flynn testifying before Congress, Flynn's attorney said he wanted to explore the possibility of his client receiving full immunity in exchange for his participation.

Intelligence committee lawyers responded to the attorney by saying that immunity request, which was first reported by the Wall Street Journal, was premature. "That's not on the table," an official said. "We aren't entertaining immunity for anybody."

Flynn frequently battled with the CIA, which mounted a failed effort to have Cohen removed from his job.

After Flynn was replaced by H.R. McMaster, some in the CIA made it known to him that the agency would prefer someone else in Cohen's job. Early this month, McMaster interviewed the agency's suggested candidate, senior CIA analyst Linda Weissgold, and informed Cohen

that he was being moved to another position.

Cohen consulted Kushner and Bannon, Trump's chief White House strategist. After Kushner and Bannon spoke with Trump over the March 11-12 weekend, Cohen was back in place.

Within days, a CIA detailee to the NSC working under Cohen was told without explanation to clear out his desk and return to the agency. The agent, a former and future covert operative whose name is being withheld by The Washington Post at the request of the CIA, was on a standard two-year rotation to the White House.

In its letter to the committee, the White House repeated calls for it to investigate leaks that have led to media reports about contacts by Trump associates with Russian operatives. In particular, it referred to a March 2 MSNBC interview with former Obama

Defense Department official Evelyn Farkas, which has suddenly become a leading element in White House pushback against the Russia allegations and evidence of Trump's claim that the Obama administration has actively sought to undermine his presidency.

The interview took place after the New York Times reported that the Obama White House, fearing the new administration would sweep it under the rug, had spread information about Russian efforts to undermine the presidential election. Farkas said, "I was urging my former colleagues and ... the Hill people, get as much information as you can, get as much intelligence as you can, before President Obama leaves the administration."

"That's why there were so many leaks," said Farkas, now a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

Checkpoint newsletter

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While her comments were widely ignored when initially broadcast four weeks ago, the MSNBC clip suddenly appeared Tuesday on conservative websites and subsequently on Fox News and other television outlets. In a Hugh Hewitt radio interview Wednesday evening, White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus said that its relevance to "surveillance of Trump transition team members is something that we need to figure out."

Spicer, referring to the Obama administration, said the Farkas comment constituted an admission "on the record that this was their goal, to leak stuff."

Farkas, in an interview with The Post, said she "didn't give anybody

anything except advice," was not a source for any stories and had nothing to leak. Noting that she left government in October 2015, she said, "I was just watching like anybody else, like a regular spectator" as initial reports of Russia contacts began to surface after the election.

As a former staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and a former Defense official involved with Russian affairs, she said she "got worried" that the Obama White House was not briefing Congress on what it knew. "I know how the Russians operate," she said, and called former colleagues to make sure Congress was being informed.

Adam Entous, Abby Phillip, Jenna Johnson, Philip Rucker, Karoun Demirjian and Julie Tate contributed to this report.

**The
New York
Times**

2 White House Officials Helped Give Nunes Intelligence Reports

Matthew Rosenberg, Maggie Haberman and Adam Goldman

WASHINGTON — A pair of White House officials helped provide Representative Devin Nunes of California, a Republican and the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, with the intelligence reports that showed that President Trump and his associates were incidentally swept up in foreign surveillance by American spy agencies.

The revelation on Thursday that White House officials disclosed the reports, which Mr. Nunes then discussed with Mr. Trump, is likely to fuel criticism that the intelligence chairman has been too eager [to do the bidding](#) of the Trump administration while his committee is supposed to be conducting an independent investigation of Russia's meddling in the presidential election.

It is the latest twist of a bizarre Washington drama that began after dark on March 21, when Mr. Nunes got a call from a person he has described only as a source. The call came as he was riding across town in an Uber car, and he quickly diverted to the White House. The next day, Mr. Nunes gave a [hastily arranged news conference](#) before going to brief Mr. Trump on what he had learned the night before from — as it turns out — White House officials.

The chain of events — and who helped provide the intelligence to Mr. Nunes — was detailed to The

New York Times by four American officials.

Since disclosing the existence of the intelligence reports, Mr. Nunes has refused to identify his sources, saying he needed to protect them so others would feel safe going to the committee with sensitive information. In his public comments, he has described his sources as whistle-blowers trying to expose wrongdoing at great risk to themselves.

That does not appear to be the case. Several current American officials identified the White House officials as Ezra Cohen-Watnick, the senior director for intelligence at the National Security Council, and Michael Ellis, a lawyer who works on national security issues at the White House Counsel's Office and was previously counsel to Mr. Nunes's committee. Though neither has been accused of breaking any laws, they do appear to have sought to use intelligence to advance the political goals of the Trump administration.

Sean Spicer, the White House spokesman, refused to confirm or deny at his daily briefing that Mr. Ellis and Mr. Cohen-Watnick were Mr. Nunes's sources. The administration's concern was the substance of the intelligence reports, not how they ended up in Mr. Nunes's hands, Mr. Spicer said.

The "obsession with who talked to whom, and when, is not the answer," Mr. Spicer said. "It should be the substance."

Jack Langer, a spokesman for Mr. Nunes, said in a statement, "As he's stated many times, Chairman Nunes will not confirm or deny speculation about his source's identity, and he will not respond to speculation from anonymous sources."

Mr. Cohen-Watnick, 30, is a former Defense Intelligence Agency official who served on the Trump transition team and was originally brought to the White House by Michael T. Flynn, the former national security adviser.

He was nearly pushed out of his job this month by Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, who replaced Mr. Flynn as national security adviser, but survived after the intervention of Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, and Stephen K. Bannon, Mr. Trump's chief strategist.

Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said he accepted an invitation on Thursday to review the same materials that Mr. Nunes had seen. Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times

The officials who detailed the newly disclosed White House role said that this month, shortly after Mr. Trump [claimed on Twitter](#) that he was [wiretapped](#) during the campaign on the orders of President Barack Obama, Mr. Cohen-Watnick began reviewing highly classified reports detailing the intercepted communications of foreign officials.

There were conflicting accounts of what prompted Mr. Cohen-Watnick to dig into the intelligence. One official with direct knowledge of the events said Mr. Cohen-Watnick began combing through intelligence reports this month in an effort to find evidence that would justify Mr. Trump's Twitter posts about wiretapping.

But another person who was briefed on the events said Mr. Cohen-Watnick came upon the information as he was reviewing how widely intelligence reports on intercepts were shared within the American spy agencies. He then alerted the N.S.C. general counsel, but the official said Mr. Cohen-Watnick was not the person who showed the reports to Mr. Nunes.

That person and a third official said it was then Mr. Ellis who allowed Mr. Nunes to view the material.

The intelligence reports consisted primarily of ambassadors and other foreign officials talking about how they were trying to develop contacts within Mr. Trump's family and inner circle before his inauguration, officials said.

The officials all spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the intelligence and to avoid angering Mr. Cohen-Watnick and Mr. Ellis. Officials say Mr. Cohen-Watnick has been reviewing the reports from his fourth-floor office in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, where the National Security Council is based.

The officials' description of the intelligence is in line with Mr.

Nunes's characterization of the material, which he said was not related to the Russia investigations when he first disclosed its existence.

According to Mr. Nunes, who served on the Trump transition team, he met his source on the grounds of the White House. He said he needed a secure location where people with security clearances could legally view classified information, though such facilities could also be found in the Capitol building and at other locations across Washington.

The next day, Mr. Nunes gave a news briefing at the Capitol and then returned to the White House to brief Mr. Trump on the information before telling other committee members about what he had reviewed. His actions have fueled criticism that the committee, under his leadership, is unable to conduct a serious, independent investigation.

On Thursday, Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said he needed clarification on whether White House officials had pursued "a circuitous route"

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Strassel : What Devin Nunes Knows

Kimberley A. Strassel

March 30, 2017 6:53 p.m. ET

California Rep. Adam Schiff may not offer much by way of substance, but give him marks for political flimflam. The ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee was so successful at ginning up fake outrage over his Republican counterpart that he successfully buried this week's only real (and bombshell) news.

Mr. Schiff and fellow Democrats spent this week accusing Chairman Devin Nunes of carrying water for President Trump, undermining the committee's Russia investigation, and hiding information. The press dutifully regurgitated the outrage, as well as Mr. Schiff's calls for Mr. Nunes to recuse himself from the investigation into possible Russian electoral meddling.

All this engineered drama served to deep-six the important information Americans urgently deserve to know. Mr. Nunes has said he has seen proof that the Obama White House surveilled the incoming administration—on subjects that had nothing to do with Russia—and that it further unmasked (identified by name) transition officials. This goes far beyond a mere scandal. It's a potential crime.

to feed Mr. Nunes the materials so he could then hand them to Mr. Trump.

"If that was designed to hide the origin of the materials, that raises profound questions about just what the White House is doing that need to be answered," he said. He later said he accepted an invitation on Thursday to review the same materials that Mr. Nunes had seen.

Yet even before Thursday, the view among Democrats and even some Republicans was that Mr. Nunes was given access to the intelligence reports to divert attention from the investigations into Russian meddling, and to bolster Mr. Trump's debunked claims of having been wiretapped.

G.O.P. Intelligence Chairman Apologizes

Representative Devin Nunes put the credibility of the House Intelligence Committee in doubt after bypassing committee Democrats and taking information straight to the president.

By MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT and SUSAN JOAN ARCHER. Photo by Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times. [Watch in Times Video](#) »

We've known since early February that a call by former national security adviser Mike Flynn to the Russian ambassador was monitored by U.S. intelligence. There's nothing improper in tapping foreign officials. But it was improper that Mr. Flynn's name was revealed and leaked to the press, along with the substance of his conversation. The media nonetheless excused all this by claiming one piece of Mr. Flynn's conversation (sanctions) was relevant to the continuing investigation into Trump-Russia ties.

Around the same time, Mr. Nunes's own intelligence sources informed him that documents showed further collection of information about, and unmasking of, Trump transition officials. These documents aren't easily obtainable, since they aren't the "finished" intelligence products that Congress gets to see. Nonetheless, for weeks Mr. Nunes has been demanding intelligence agencies turn over said documents—with no luck, so far.

Mr. Nunes earlier this week got his own source to show him a treasure trove of documents at a secure facility. Here are the relevant details:

First, there were dozens of documents with information about Trump officials. Second, the

On both counts, Mr. Nunes appears to have succeeded: The House inquiry into Russian meddling that he is leading has descended into a sideshow since he disclosed the information, and the administration has portrayed his information as vindicating the president's wiretapping claims.

Yet Mr. Nunes [has dismissed](#) Democratic calls [to step aside](#). Instead, he has canceled all committee hearings for now, stalling his own investigation, which opened last week with a hearing during which James B. Comey, the director of the F.B.I., [publicly disclosed](#) that the bureau's investigation into Russian meddling included an examination of any evidence that Trump associates had colluded in the effort.

The chaotic situation prompted the leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which is running its own investigation, to [bluntly state](#) on Wednesday that their work had nothing to do with the House inquiry. And television news programs have been dominated by arguments about whether the incidental intelligence gathering of Mr. Trump and his associates was the real issue, or simply a

speculation that it was interfering with the FBI's Russia probe.

Meantime, few things match the ludicrous furor over Mr. Nunes's source-meeting place, or his visit to brief Mr. Trump. Congress members must view most classified material on executive-branch grounds, since that's the only way to access it physically. Having discovered the former administration's surveillance of Trump officials, Mr. Nunes had a duty to let the White House know. (Imagine if he'd sat on it.) He could hardly let Democrats know first, since their only interest these days is in leaking and twisting stories. And the reason he held press briefings before and after his meeting with Mr. Trump was to be transparent about his purpose.

To sum up, Team Obama was spying broadly on the incoming administration.

Mr. Schiff's howls about Mr. Nunes's methods are bluster; the Republican was doing his job, and well. Mr. Nunes has spent years cultivating whistleblowers and sources as part of his oversight responsibilities, and that network scored him information that has otherwise remained hidden. It isn't clear if the White House itself attempted to obtain these documents, but even if it did, the Senate has confirmed few Trump political appointees, which means there aren't many loyal staffers among the Obama holdovers to attempt it. It's also possible the Trump White House was wary of making such a demand, since it would inevitably leak. The last thing the administration wants is wild

distracted from the Russia investigations.

Mr. Nunes has acknowledged that the incidental intelligence gathering on Trump associates last year was not necessarily unlawful, and that it was not specifically directed at Mr. Trump or people close to him. American intelligence agencies typically monitor foreign officials of allied and hostile countries, and they routinely sweep up communications linked to Americans who may be taking part in the conversation or are being spoken about.

The real issue, Mr. Nunes has said, was that he could figure out the identities of Trump associates from reading reports about intercepted communications that were shared among Obama administration officials with top security clearances.

He said some Trump associates were also identified by name in the reports. Normally, intelligence agencies mask the identities of American citizens who are incidentally present in intercepted communications, though knowledgeable readers can often figure out the identities in context.

Hint to the press corps: If Mr. Nunes wanted to tip off the White House about his Russia probe, it'd be a lot easier to speed-dial Steve Bannon secretly from his office.

If Mr. Schiff wants to be trusted with important information, he might start by proving he is trustworthy—rather than rumor-mongering that there is "more than circumstantial evidence" of Trump-Russia collusion. He might voice some concern that a prior White House was monitoring its political opponents. He might ask whether Obama officials had been

"reverse monitoring"—tracking foreign officials solely so they could spy on the Trump team.

Mr. Nunes has zero reason to recuse himself from this probe, because he is doing his job. It's Mr.

Schiff who ought to be considering recusal, for failing to do his own.

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Write to kim@wsj.com.

The
Washington
Post

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson spends his first weeks isolated from an anxious bureaucracy (UNE)

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

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson takes a private elevator to his palatial office on the seventh floor of the State Department building, where sightings of him are rare on the floors below.

On many days, he blocks out several hours on his schedule as "reading time," when he is cloistered in his office poring over the memos he prefers ahead of in-person meetings.

Most of his interactions are with an insular circle of political aides who are new to the State Department. Many career diplomats say they still have not met him, and some have been instructed not to speak to him directly — or even make eye contact.

On his first three foreign trips, Tillerson skipped visits with State Department employees and their families, embassy stops that were standard morale-boosters under other secretaries of state.

[\[On whirlwind trip to Turkey, Tillerson tries to assuage a frustrated ally\]](#)

(Reuters)

Here are key moments from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's speech at the State Department, March 22, at the start of a two-day strategy session among nations and international organizations that are part of a U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State. Key moments from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's speech at the start of a two-day strategy session for a U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State (Reuters)

Eight weeks into his tenure as President Trump's top diplomat, the former ExxonMobil chief executive is isolated, walled off from the State Department's corps of bureaucrats in Washington and around the world. His distant management style has created growing bewilderment among foreign officials who are struggling to understand where the United States stands on key issues. It has sown mistrust among career employees at State, who swap paranoid stories about Tillerson that often turn out to be untrue. And it threatens to undermine the power and reach of the State Department, which has been targeted for a

30 percent funding cut in [Trump's budget](#).

Many have expressed alarm that Tillerson has not fought harder for the agency he now leads.

Rep. Eliot L. Engel (N.Y.), the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said Tillerson called him after the proposed cuts were announced. Engel said Tillerson seemed to share Engel's concern that the cuts are "draconian" and counterproductive. But Engel said Tillerson seemed to signal his acquiescence when he called them "a glide path to what was about to happen."

"I'm chagrined by what's happening, or *not* happening," Engel said.

"When you put it all together, it certainly seems they're trying to downsize the State Department and make it irrelevant. I'm at a loss for words. Why would Tillerson take the job if he was not going to defend his agency?"

Tillerson's low profile reflects his desire to do his job without fanfare, said a senior aide who spoke on the condition of anonymity to comment frankly.

As an oil executive, Tillerson traveled the world negotiating deals behind closed doors, with just one or two aides accompanying him. Tillerson's current aide said the secretary thinks that model served him well.

(Thomas Johnson, Victoria Walker, Danielle Kunitz/The Washington Post)

President-elect Donald Trump has picked Rex Tillerson as his nominee for secretary of state. Here's what you need to know about Tillerson. President-elect Donald Trump has picked Rex Tillerson as his nominee for secretary of state. Here's what you need to know about Tillerson. (Thomas Johnson, Victoria Walker, Danielle Kunitz/The Washington Post)

[\[How Exxon, under Rex Tillerson, won Iraqi oil fields and nearly lost Iraq\]](#)

British Ambassador to the United States Kim Darroch brushed off the concerns about staff vacancies, confusion and a clamp on information. His country's dealings with the Trump administration have gone well starting with Prime

Minister Theresa May's visit to the White House just days after Trump took office, Darroch said.

"We are having absolutely no problem, I promise you, with access or accessibility" at the State Department or White House, Darroch said.

Still, the secretary of state is visibly uncomfortable with the vast infrastructure and expectations of public diplomacy that come with his new role.

Tillerson's slow start has rattled other foreign diplomats. Some complain that with assistant secretary of state positions occupied only by "acting" deputies, they have no one of authority to contact. Tillerson remains the only Senate-confirmed official selected by Trump anywhere inside the State Department building. Weeks after the White House embarrassed Tillerson by rejecting the seasoned foreign policy hand he had selected for a deputy, Republican lawyer John J. Sullivan is the leading candidate. Sullivan held senior jobs in the George W. Bush administration but has no direct experience in the State Department.

Some diplomats have begun meeting with each other to swap notes on how to decipher the fledgling administration's policies.

"We're rowing against the current, and the current has a Twitter account," a foreign diplomat posted in Washington said about how information relayed by State Department diplomats can be undercut by a presidential tweet.

Current and recently departed State Department officials — all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to offer candid assessments of what one called the "benching" of the oldest Cabinet department — said Tillerson is paying a price.

Tillerson's political advisers have little foreign policy experience and little pull at the White House, current and former officials said. Their dealings with the department staff have sometimes been testy and unpleasant.

[\[In China debut, Tillerson appears to hand Beijing a diplomatic victory\]](#)

"Part of it is a deep distrust of bureaucracy," said a senior Senate Democratic aide. "It sets a

command climate that makes people cautious and paranoid. These folks, in their political-commissar roles, take that to an extreme. Everything we have heard is about how small the aperture is for information coming in and going out of the secretary's office. That is not a recipe for success."

For weeks, a rumor circulated in Foggy Bottom — an informal name for the department — that Tillerson was ripping up a grand adjacent office on "Mahogany Row" to install a warren of cubicles for White House-approved political aides who could bypass department employees. According to the senior Tillerson aide, the story was untrue. The secretary is merely converting the office into a conference room, the aide said, intended to be a place where he can convene the sort of strategy sessions he found useful when gaming out oil deals and profit plans at Exxon.

"The man loves his whiteboards. He wanted to build out a spot, a working room, to engage with colleagues and map things out," the aide said.

Tillerson charmed employees on his first day on the job with a pledge to listen and learn — "Hi, I'm the new guy," he said then — but the ensuing weeks suggest that the former executive's boardroom sensibilities are an awkward fit for the diplomatic salon.

Career employees might have helped Tillerson avoid embarrassing gaffes such as the initial decision [not to attend a NATO foreign ministers' meeting](#).

The 28-member session Friday in Brussels was rescheduled to accommodate Tillerson, who reversed course amid criticism that by his planned absence he had offered proof of the new administration's indifference to the transatlantic military alliance.

[\[Rex Tillerson will go to Russia but skip NATO meeting next month\]](#)

"Rookie error, plain and simple," one former State Department employee said, noting that department officials in charge of dealings with NATO and Europe were cut out of many planning discussions.

The debacle may serve as an example of how Tillerson's

corporate insistence on efficient time management did not serve him well, another official said.

But Darroch, the British ambassador, said the dust-up over the NATO meeting ended well, with Tillerson making room for it in his schedule.

"It's great that he's coming over to Europe pretty much just for this meeting, racking up the air miles already, and so it's all fine," Darroch said with a smile.

Tillerson has opted to scrap at least two senior jobs formerly housed on the seventh floor, including that of department counselor, the Tillerson aide said. Some secretaries have used that job as a kind of in-house truth-teller, someone empowered to tell the boss she or he is making a

mistake. Other secretaries of state have used the counselor to act as a surrogate, or like Tillerson, opted not to fill the position at all.

Rumors that Tillerson does not plan to fill the many vacancies at the assistant-secretary level are not true, the aide said. But a lack of guidance from Tillerson since he arrived Feb. 2 has fostered a sense among career diplomats that they are considered an obstacle to change, one department official said.

"We're rooting for our secretary of state to come around, and trying to figure out a way to convince him we do work for administrations of both parties," the official said.

Tillerson has told employees that he will travel less than previous secretaries did and will take a

smaller, faster plane that is more like the corporate jets of his former life. The government plane he is using this week in Europe has room for fewer than a dozen staff members, perhaps half the contingent that customarily traveled with recent predecessors.

No official note-taker accompanied him on a recent trip, so senior aides did the job to have a record of his talks with foreign ministers, according to a congressional aide.

Checkpoint newsletter

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[\[Rex Tillerson's view of media access is completely backward\]](#)

On Thursday, Tillerson held his first visit with State Department employees abroad, at the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, where he appeared to acknowledge some dissent in the ranks when he urged "honest" confrontation of differing opinions.

"That's how we come to a better decision in all that we do. And only if we do that can we then be honest with all of our partners and allies around the world as well. And still, I mean, we're going to have our differences, but we're going to be very honest and open about those, so at least we understand them."

Julie Tate contributed to this report.



Editorial : State Department cuts risk lives

The Editorial Board, USA TODAY

President Trump's proposed budget. (Photo: J. Scott Applewhite, AP)

In his budget proposal, which would gut any number of agencies to pay for massive military increases, President Trump repeats a mantra about achieving security for the American people. "Without safety, there can be no prosperity," he says.

True enough, but the administration's spending plan fails to recognize that safety comes from both military "hard power" and diplomatic "soft power." As a result, it is profoundly shortsighted.

The [budget](#) would increase Pentagon spending by 10%, to \$639 billion, and slash the State Department and related programs by 28%, to \$25.6 billion.

Contrary to public perceptions, foreign aid represents a tiny fraction of the \$4 trillion federal budget. [According to the Congressional Research Service](#), in the past three

decades, foreign aid has never accounted for more than 1.4 cents of every dollar spent by Washington.

Trump's cuts would slash assistance by the U.S. Agency for International Development, relief funding through the United Nations, and Treasury investment programs aimed at stabilizing global hot spots and expanding markets for American businesses.

Stricken areas of the world are breeding grounds for instability and anti-American violence. Severe famine in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen threatens 20 million lives in what officials say could be the worst humanitarian disaster since World War II.

The U.S. African Development Foundation — which Trump would like to shutter — spends just \$28.2 million to assist 1.5 million sub-Saharan Africans through small grants to grassroots organizations, [according to Foreign Policy](#) magazine. That's less than the cost of a single Apache helicopter.



Furchgott-Roth : State Department cuts too small

Diana Furchgott-Roth 6:21 p.m.

ET March 30, 2017

President Trump's budget (Photo: J. Scott Applewhite, AP)

President Trump [has requested \\$25.6 billion](#) for the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, or \$312 per American family — a 28% reduction from 2017.

The Global Climate Change Initiative and the Green Climate Fund are on the chopping block, with cuts suggested for the United Nations, development organizations and educational exchange programs. The president would shift foreign military assistance grants to loans and end overlapping peacekeeping programs.

These cuts are, if anything, too small. President Obama's [last budget](#) spends 110 pages

When soldiers are in the field, diplomats are often close by. State Department officials staffed reconstruction teams spread out across provinces in Afghanistan and Iraq to promote stabilization efforts and negotiate a multitude of peace-seeking agreements.

And as U.S.-supported Iraqi forces drive Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants out of Mosul this year, some of the toughest work will be left to negotiators from America and elsewhere to preserve the peace in a war-ravaged city where the interests of Iraq, Iraqi-Kurdistan, Turkey and Iran intersect.

"When you deploy hard power, you actually need more diplomats," says Charles Ries, a vice president at the RAND Corporation who served in diplomatic posts in Iraq and Greece.

Some of the strongest advocates for a robust diplomatic corps come from the military. "If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately," Marine Gen. James Mattis [said in 2013](#). He's now Trump's secretary of Defense.

Democrats in Congress are already lining up against most of the proposed cuts, as are some leading Republicans, including Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who chairs the state and foreign appropriations subcommittee.

Some State Department programs could undoubtedly be run more efficiently, but it's disappointing that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson didn't push back harder against the magnitude of the cuts targeting his department. As more than 120 retired admirals and generals argued in a [letter to Congress](#) last month, "Elevating and strengthening diplomacy and development alongside defense are critical to keeping America safe."

For a president who never served in the military, and who likes to say he'll listen to the generals, that's advice worth taking to heart.

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describing State Department expenditures without a cost-benefit analysis. We are left to guess about the benefit of these vast sums.

Many of these programs could be privately funded. We do not need State Department educational exchange programs when foreign students are well-represented on college campuses and many Americans study abroad. Many World Bank projects could be funded by large commercial banks

that did not exist when the World Bank was founded in 1944. Even with reductions in funding, the USA would remain the top World Bank donor.

American families should not be paying more than \$3 billion for migration and refugee assistance programs to fund refugees overseas. One recipient, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, has a dubious track record. In addition, the State Department pays

more than \$500 million for refugees in the United States. Neither should Americans contribute \$1.3 billion to international organizations, many of whose members vote against U.S. interests.

The Foreign Service Retirement and Disability Fund was allocated \$221 million. If these pensions cannot be merged with Civil Service pensions, the fund should be self-sustaining.

The State Department has a poor track record. Examples of failure include the Iran deal, Syria, China's military bases in the South China Sea and U.S. backing of anti-Israel policies. American families could be making better use of the funds.

Diana Furchtgott-Roth is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. She served on President Trump's transition team.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

New Trump Orders Take Aim at Trade

Peter Nicholas and Jacob M. Schlesinger

March 30, 2017 11:00 p.m. ET

President Donald Trump plans to sign a pair of executive orders Friday aimed at curbing what he sees as unfair trade practices that have damaged the U.S. economy and wiped out jobs while adding to the nation's trade deficit, administration officials said.

The orders are modest compared with the dramatic changes in trade policy that Mr. Trump promised on the campaign trail. But administration officials said they underscore the president's determination to reset trade relations so that American employers can compete on more equitable terms.

One of the orders calls for a study that will examine past trade agreements and measure whether they delivered the promised benefits. The report, due in 90 days, will also attempt to tally various trade abuses country-by-country so

that the White House has an accurate picture of trade practices that Trump officials conclude are putting the U.S. at a competitive disadvantage, officials said in a briefing at the White House.

Peter Navarro, who [heads the White House's National Trade Council](#), said that "for the first time we're looking comprehensively at the source of what has been a large and persistent [trade deficit](#) that has contributed to job losses, a loss of our manufacturing base and other things."

The second order aims to improve collection of financial penalties against countries that dump products into the U.S. below production costs or illegally subsidize companies exporting products to the U.S. At present, about \$2.8 billion in such duties have gone uncollected, administration officials said. The order seeks to improve collections through "every tool" under U.S. and international law.

Most importers in the U.S. are required to post a security -- usually

in the form of a customs bond -- as a kind of insurance against default on any obligations in the U.S. The order would toughen the requirements on those bonds to make it easier to collect duties imposed on importers accused of dumping.

"We will deter the cheaters," Mr. Navarro said.

The relatively small actions were striking because they were announced by two men seen as trade hard-liners in the administration: Mr. Navarro and [Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross](#). Both have advocated more aggressive trade actions than some of Mr. Trump's other advisers, like [National Economic Council director Gary Cohn](#), who was formerly president of [Goldman Sachs Group Inc.](#)

Officials suggested the orders could lead to bigger actions down the line—especially after the study is completed in 90 days.

Administration officials played down the notion that China is a special

target of the orders. But in describing the measures, they made clear that the U.S. trade deficit with China is the largest, at \$347 billion in 2016.

Mr. Trump is to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping [next week at his Mar-a-Lago home](#) in Palm Beach, Fla. The meeting figures to be tense, with trade an issue that divides the world's two largest economies.

In a pair of tweets Thursday, Mr. Trump wrote: "The meeting next week with China will be a very difficult one in that we can no longer have massive trade deficits and job losses. American companies must be prepared to look at other alternatives."

Write to Peter Nicholas at peter.nicholas@wsj.com and Jacob M. Schlesinger at jacob.schlesinger@wsj.com

Appeared in the Mar. 31, 2017, print edition as 'Trump's Orders Take Aim at Unfair Trade.'

The New York Times

Krugman : Coal Country Is a State of Mind

Paul Krugman

So coal-mining jobs have been disappearing for a long time. Even in West Virginia, the most coal-oriented state, it has been a quarter century since they accounted for as much as 5 percent of total employment.

What, then, do West Virginians actually do for a living these days? Well, many of them work in health care: Almost one in six workers is employed in the category "health care and social assistance."

Oh, and where does the money for those health care jobs come from? Actually, a lot of it comes from Washington.

West Virginia has a relatively old population, so 22 percent of its residents are on [Medicare](#), versus 16.7 percent for the nation as a whole. It's also a state that has benefited hugely from Obamacare, with the percentage of the population lacking health insurance [falling](#) from 14 percent in 2013 to 6 percent in 2015; these gains came

mainly from a big expansion of [Medicaid](#).

It's true that the nation as a whole pays for these health care programs with taxes. But an older, poorer state like West Virginia receives much more than it pays in — and it would have received virtually none of the tax cuts Trumpcare would have lavished on the wealthy.

Now think about what Trumpism means for a state like this. Killing environmental rules might bring back a few mining jobs, but not many, and mining isn't really central to the economy in any case. Meanwhile, the Trump administration and its allies just tried to replace the Affordable Care Act. If they had succeeded, the effect would have been catastrophic for West Virginia, slashing Medicaid and sending insurance premiums for lower-income, older residents soaring.

Also, don't forget that Paul Ryan has long pushed for the conversion of Medicare into an underfunded voucher scheme, which would be

another body blow to retiree-heavy states.

And aside from the devastating effect on coverage, think about how the Republican assault on Obamacare would have affected the health sector that now employs so many West Virginians. It's almost certain that the job losses from Trumpcare cuts would have greatly exceeded any possible gains in coal.

So West Virginia voted overwhelmingly against its own interests. And it wasn't just because its citizens failed to understand the numbers, the reality of the trade-off between coal and health care jobs.

For the striking thing, as I said, is that coal isn't even the state's dominant industry these days. "Coal country" residents weren't voting to preserve what they have, or had until recently; they were voting on behalf of a story their region tells about itself, a story that hasn't been true for a generation or more.

Their Trump votes weren't even about the region's interests; they were about cultural symbolism.

Now, regional cultures that invoke a long-gone past are hardly unique to Appalachia; think of Texans wearing 10-gallon hats and cowboy boots as they stroll through air-conditioned malls. And there's nothing wrong with that!

But when it comes to energy and environmental policy, we're not talking about mere cultural affectations. Going backward on the environment will sicken and kill thousands in the near future; over the longer term, failing to act on climate change could, all too plausibly, lead to civilizational collapse.

So it's incredible, and terrifying, to think that we may really be about to do all of that because Donald Trump successfully pandered to cultural nostalgia, to a longing for a vanished past when men were men and miners dug deep.

Zakaria : Trump was right about health care for most of his life

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

The recent Republican debacle on health care could prove to be an opportunity. It highlighted, yet again, the complexity of the U.S. system, which continues to be by far the most expensive and inefficient in the advanced world. But President Trump could actually use the legislative collapse to fix health care if he went back to basics and to his core convictions on the topic, which are surprisingly intelligent and consistent.

There is an understandable impulse on the right to assume that health care would work more efficiently if it were a free market, or a free market. This is true for most goods and services. But in 1963, economist [Kenneth Arrow](#), who later won a Nobel Prize, offered an explanation as to why markets would not work well in this area. He argued that there was a huge mismatch of power and information between the buyer and the seller. If a salesman tells you to buy a particular television, you can easily choose another or just walk away. If a doctor insists that you need a medication or a procedure, you are far less likely to reject the advice. And, Arrow pointed out, people think they don't need health care until they get sick, and then they need lots of it.

Every advanced economy in the world has implicitly acknowledged his argument because they have all adopted some version of a state-directed system for health care. Consider the 16 countries that rank higher than the United States on the conservative Heritage Foundation's [Index of Economic Freedom](#). All except Singapore (which has a unique state-driven approach) have universal health-care systems that can be described as single-payer (Medicare for all), government-run (the British model) or Obamacare-plus (private insurance with a real mandate that everyone opt in). Hong Kong, often considered the most unregulated market in the world, has a British-style government-run system. Switzerland, one of the most business-friendly countries, had a private insurance system just like the United States' but found that, to make it work, it had to introduce a mandate.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

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While producing a [CNN documentary](#) on health-care systems around the globe, I was particularly struck by the experience of Taiwan, another free-market haven. In 1995, 41 percent of its

population was uninsured and the country had very poor health outcomes. The government decided to canvass the world for the best ideas before instituting a new framework. It chose Medicare for all, a single government payer, with multiple private providers. The results are astonishing. Taiwan has achieved some of the best outcomes in the world while paying only 7 percent of its gross domestic product on health care (compared with [18 percent](#) in the United States). I asked William Hsiao, an economist who helped devise the country's model, what lessons they took, if any, from the United States. "You can learn what *not* to do from the United States rather than learn what to do," he replied.

Americans often assume that despite its costs, American health care provides better services than others. We often hear about the waiting time for care in other countries. But according to the [Commonwealth Fund](#), among industrialized countries the United States is in the middle of the pack for [wait times](#), behind even Britain. Moreover, one of the world's leading experts, [Uwe Reinhardt](#) of Princeton, has found that Americans use less care than the average for developed countries when it comes to things such as seeing a doctor and spending time in the hospital. The problem with the free market is that there is little

profit in prevention and lots in crisis care.

Trump has now taken up the call to repeal Obamacare. But until recently, health care was actually one of the rare issues on which he had spoken out, before his campaign, with remarkable consistency. In his 2000 book "[The America We Deserve](#)," he wrote:

"I'm a conservative on most issues but a liberal on this one. We should not hear so many stories of families ruined by healthcare expenses. ... We must have universal healthcare. ... The Canadian plan ... helps Canadians live longer and healthier than Americans. There are fewer medical lawsuits, less loss of labor to sickness, and lower costs to companies paying for the medical care of their employees. ... We need, as a nation, to reexamine the single-payer plan, as many individual states are doing."

Trump was right on this issue for much of his life. He has now caved to special interests and an ideology unmoored by facts. He could simply return to his convictions, reach out to Democrats and help the United States solve its health-care crisis.

Read more from [Fareed Zakaria's archive](#), [follow him on Twitter](#) or [subscribe to his updates on Facebook](#).

Ignatius : A radical idea for health-care reform: Listen to the doctors

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

Here's a radical idea for reframing the health-care debate on the ruins of the GOP's half-baked plan: Let's listen to doctors rather than politicians. And let's begin with a simple formula offered last week by the National Academy of Medicine: "[Better health at lower cost](#)."

Better and cheaper. It's hard to argue with that prescription. Because the real health-care crisis in America is about delivery of care, more than the insurance schemes that pay the bills. Costs are continuing to rise, even as public health in America declines. We're getting less for more. And the GOP's proposal to starve Obamacare will make that downward spiral worse.

Watching President Trump's "[repeal and replace](#)" debacle play out on Capitol Hill drove me to the doctor — specifically, to [Dr. Delos "Toby" Cosgrove](#), head of the Cleveland Clinic. Cosgrove is one of

medicine's visionaries — sought, unsuccessfully, by the Obama and Trump administrations to head the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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I asked Cosgrove how sensible people should think about health-care reform, now that there's an opportunity for a fresh start. He offered pragmatic advice that's neatly condensed by the Academy of Medicine report: Government should help health-care professionals get the incentives right so that they provide better output (care) with fewer inputs (cost).

Americans don't realize just how bad our system is. Health-care costs are far higher in the United States than in other developed countries, but our health is worse. That's especially true among older

whites without a college education — Trump's core demographic — whose mortality rates are rising alarmingly.

[Life expectancy](#) is declining in the United States for the first time in nearly 20 years, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association. And [the gap in life expectancy](#) between the richest and poorest Americans is 15 years for men and 10 years for women. That's an appalling trend.

The problem certainly isn't that America doesn't spend enough. The United States now pays [\\$3.4 trillion annually](#). But the Academy of Medicine study estimates that 30 percent of this money is wasted on unnecessary services, high prices, inefficient delivery, excess administration and fraud.

These problems long pre-date Obamacare. Health-care expenditures rose as a percentage of GDP from 5 percent in 1960 to 17.8 percent in 2015. The cost of government health programs has increased an astounding 63-fold

since 1974, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

America's problem is that it squanders money on the wrong things — expensive procedures and tests rather than preventive care and social programs. A study of premature deaths estimated that just 10 percent were the result of poor medical treatment, while 40 percent came from behavioral issues, such as obesity and alcoholism.

Most advanced countries recognize that public health is a shared social responsibility. For every dollar spent on health care in developed economies, an average of \$2 is spent on social services, the Academy report notes. For the United States, the social-spending figure is a puny 50 cents.

The Academy offers a four-point plan for altering this miserable combination of high cost and poor care. First, providers should be paid for value — for patient outcomes, not for the volume of procedures. Second, incentives should empower

people to take better care of themselves through wellness programs or lifestyle changes. Third, better connectivity is needed among doctors, patients and others to encourage data-driven advances.

Finally, the Academy argues for community strategies that target the highest-need patients, who are also most costly to treat. The top 5 percent of spenders, often with multiple ailments brought on by

obesity or other chronic conditions, account for 50 percent of total U.S. health outlays.

How would such reforms work in practice? Cosgrove cites his experience at the [Cleveland Clinic](#), which is Ohio's second-largest employer and provides health insurance for more than 80,000 employees and family members.

The Clinic shocked people in 2007 by announcing it wouldn't hire

smokers; since then it has added many incentives for employees to stay fit and be healthy. Sick days have declined 28 percent; the percentage of eligible employees using preventive care for chronic disease has increased from 9 percent to 54 percent; employee health costs have fallen 2.2 percent since 2012.

Health care isn't a political football. Americans should be embarrassed

by our system's performance. As the Trump administration works with Democrats to reformulate health legislation, maybe this time they can agree on reforms that actually treat what's wrong.

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The
Washington
Post

Krauthammer : The road to single-payer health care

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[Krauthammer/95978776589](#)

Repeal-and-replace (for Obamacare) is not quite dead. It has been declared so, but what that means is that, for now, the president has (apparently) [washed his hands of it](#) and the House Republicans appear [unable to reconcile](#) their differences.

Neither condition need be permanent. There are ideological differences among the various GOP factions, but what's overlooked is the role that procedure played in producing the deadlock. And procedure can easily be changed.

House leadership crafted a bill that would meet the delicate requirements of "reconciliation" in order to create a (more achievable) threshold of 51 rather than 60 votes in the Senate. But this meant that some of the more attractive, market-oriented reforms had to be left out, relegated to a [future measure](#) (a so-called phase-three bill) that might never actually arrive.

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Yet the more stripped-down proposal [died anyway](#). So why not go for the gold next time? Pass a bill that incorporates phase-three reforms and send it on to the

Senate.

September might be the time for resurrecting repeal-and-replace. That's when insurers recalibrate premiums for the coming year, precipitating our annual bout of Obamacare sticker shock. By then, [even more insurers](#) will be dropping out of the exchanges, further reducing choice and service. These should help dissipate the preemptive nostalgia for Obamacare that emerged during the current debate.

At which point, House leadership should present a repeal-and-replace that includes such phase-three provisions as tort reform and permitting the buying of insurance across state lines, both of which would significantly lower costs.

Even more significant would be stripping out the heavy-handed [Obamacare coverage mandate](#) that dictates what specific medical benefits must be included in every insurance policy in the country, regardless of the purchaser's desires or needs.

Best to mandate nothing. Let the customer decide. A 60-year-old couple doesn't need maternity coverage. Why should they be forced to pay for it? And I don't know about you, but I don't need lactation services.

This would satisfy the House Freedom Caucus' correct insistence on dismantling Obamacare's stifling regulatory straitjacket — without scaring off moderates who should

understand that no one is being denied "essential health benefits." Rather, no one is being required to buy what the [Jonathan Grubers](#) of the world have decided everyone must have.

It is true that even if this revised repeal-and-replace passes the House, it might die by filibuster in the Senate. In which case, let the Senate Democrats explain themselves and suffer the consequences. Perhaps, however, such a bill might engender debate and revision — and come back to the House for an old-fashioned House-Senate conference and a possible compromise. This in and of itself would constitute major progress.

That's procedure. It's fixable. But there is an ideological consideration that could ultimately determine the fate of any Obamacare replacement. Obamacare may turn out to be unworkable, indeed doomed, but it is having a profound effect on the zeitgeist: It is universalizing the idea of universal coverage.

Acceptance of its major premise — that no one be denied health care — is more widespread than ever. Even House Speaker [Paul Ryan](#) [avers](#) that "our goal is to give every American access to quality, affordable health care," making universality an essential premise of his own reform. And look at how sensitive and defensive Republicans have been about the possibility of people losing coverage in any Obamacare repeal.

A broad national consensus is developing that health care is indeed a right. This is historically new. And it carries immense implications for the future. It suggests that we may be heading inexorably to a government-run, single-payer system. It's what Barack Obama [once admitted](#) he would have preferred but didn't think the country was ready for. It may be ready now.

As Obamacare continues to unravel, it won't take much for Democrats to abandon that Rube Goldberg wreckage and go for the simplicity and the universality of Medicare-for-all. Republicans will have one last chance to try to persuade the country to remain with a market-based system, preferably one encompassing all the provisions that, for procedural reasons, had been left out of their latest proposal.

Don't be surprised, however, if, in the end, single-payer wins out. Indeed, I wouldn't be terribly surprised if Donald Trump, reading the zeitgeist, pulls the greatest 180 since Disraeli "dished the Whigs" in 1867 (by radically expanding the franchise) and joins the single-payer side.

Talk about disruption? About kicking over the furniture? That would be an American Krakatoa.

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THE WALL
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Two Senate Democrats Put Support Behind Neil Gorsuch for Supreme Court

Byron Tau

Updated March 30, 2017 5:43 p.m. ET

Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota said Thursday they would vote in favor of putting Judge Neil Gorsuch on the U.S. Supreme Court, becoming the first Democrats to support President Donald Trump's

[nominee to fill the vacancy](#) left by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia last year.

"I hold no illusions that I will agree with every decision Judge Gorsuch may issue in the future, but I have not found any reasons why this jurist should not be a Supreme Court Justice," Mr. Manchin said.

Ms. Heitkamp added, "He has a record as a balanced, meticulous, and well-respected jurist who understands the rule of law."

In offering their support for Judge Gorsuch, Sens. Manchin and Heitkamp became the first Democrats in the Senate to cross the aisle. Mr. Manchin, part of the centrist wing of the Democratic

Party, is one of the most vulnerable Democrats in the Senate, facing reelection in 2018 in a state that Mr. Trump won by more than 40 points.

Ms. Heitkamp, also a centrist, faces a similarly tough race in North Dakota, which Mr. Trump won by more than 30 points.

Many of their fellow Senate Democrats have [vowed to mount a](#)

[filibuster](#), meaning that Judge Gorsuch will [need 60 votes to be confirmed to the Supreme Court](#) in a body where the GOP controls 52 seats. Republicans have suggested that if the nominee doesn't win enough Democratic votes, they will [unilaterally change Senate rules](#) to eliminate the filibuster on Supreme Court nominees.

[More than 30 Senate Democrats](#) have said they will vote against Judge Gorsuch, who currently sits on the federal 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. A handful of other Democrats, particularly those in conservative-leaning states like the two who announced their yes votes Thursday, haven't publicly made up their minds.

Republicans say Judge Gorsuch is a fair-minded, experienced judge respected by members of both parties, while Democrats say he is an out-of-the-mainstream conservative who favors the powerful. Typically, Supreme Court justices attract some bipartisan support out of deference to the importance of the court as an

institution and to the president's right to select a nominee.

But Democrats are especially upset this year by Republicans' refusal to consider former President Barack Obama's [nomination a year ago](#) of Judge Merrick Garland to the same seat, with many Democrats saying the seat was essentially stolen.

When the Supreme Court seat became vacant last year, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) argued that the winner of the next presidential election should fill the vacancy, a gamble that paid off when Mr. Trump won.

Ms. Heitkamp said Thursday that despite her support for Judge Gorsuch, she remained disturbed by the Senate's treatment of Judge Garland.

"Republicans played politics at its worst with an honorable, deeply qualified jurist—arguably the most qualified nominee in modern history—who had long been supported by Republican and Democratic senators for his unmatched experience," she said.



Former Attorney Gonzales : Gorsuch belongs on the Supreme Court

Alberto R. Gonzales 8:03 a.m. ET March 30, 2017

Judge Neil Gorsuch on Capitol Hill on March 21, 2017. (Photo: Susan Walsh, AP)

Now that the confirmation hearings on the Supreme Court nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch are over, the Senate should move quickly to confirm him.

In accepting the president's nomination to the Court, Gorsuch said, "A judge who likes every outcome he reaches is [very likely a bad judge](#)." This illustrates why he will be a superior Supreme Court justice. He will respect the words of our Constitution and pay appropriate deference to the Court's precedents, as well as consistently interpret the laws passed by Congress according to what the law says, and not based on what he feels the law *should* say. During his testimony, Gorsuch repeatedly affirmed his commitment to the rule of law.

The American Bar Association's standing committee on the federal judiciary unanimously rated Gorsuch to be ["well-qualified"](#) to serve on the Court, meaning he will discharge the duties under his oath of office with fidelity to the Constitution and respect for the separation of powers. His qualifications, however, go well beyond just his past public service and acumen as a jurist.

Simply put: Gorsuch is one of the most truly *decent* human beings I have ever met.

It is his character, discipline and courage that make him so remarkable. As was evident in the hearing, Gorsuch has a respectful, humble demeanor that would make him a wonderful colleague on any appellate court. That demeanor, however, should not be mistaken for timidity. Gorsuch possesses a ferocious intellect and, if confirmed, he will be very effective when engaging with his fellow justices. Based on my own experience on the bench, I predict he will be well liked and respected by other justices, which in turn will make him a consequential leader on the Court.

If Senate Democrats choose to oppose this nomination it will have to be for reasons other than qualifications. Senate Democrats have already expressed frustration that Gorsuch has been nominated to the seat left vacant after Senate Republicans failed to provide a hearing to Obama nominee Chief Judge Merrick Garland. Yes, I agree that Garland was well qualified and I understand why some believe he was treated unfairly. Yes, Garland was innocent and arguably the victim of politics. But Gorsuch is likewise innocent and he too is well qualified. Must he also be sacrificed on the altar of politics? No. It is long past time for members of the Senate to do their job and confirm a

She added, however, that two wrongs wouldn't make a right.

Members of both parties are voicing concern about the direction of the Senate, which is barreling toward a major rules change on Supreme Court nominees absent a last-minute deal. Senate leaders have vowed to confirm Judge Gorsuch over Democratic opposition.

"We're all arguing against it, but we don't know any other options," Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.), who has a history of working across the aisle, said of the rules change. "It's just not a good day. It's not a good time."

"Our base wants him confirmed, and would not understand if we didn't get him confirmed with [our] majorities," Mr. McCain said. "The Democrats are saying this is just another outrage perpetrated by the Republicans. It further polarizes the country...It is a bad thing. It is depressing. I'm very depressed."

The announcements by Sens. Manchin and Heitkamp raise the question of whether other

Democrats who are similarly facing tough re-election fights in Republican-leaning states will follow suit, such as Claire McCaskill of Missouri and Joe Donnelly of Indiana. If so, that could make it harder for Democrats to sustain their filibuster.

In 2013, with Mr. Obama in office, it was Democrats who changed the Senate rules to eliminate filibusters on cabinet nominees and lower court judges, saying Republicans had improperly blocked numerous Obama nominees. They left the filibuster intact for Supreme Court nominees, however.

Now the roles are reversed, with Republicans accusing Democrats of obstructionism and Democrats saying they are exercising their legitimate advice-and-consent role against an objectionable nominee.

Write to Byron Tau at byron.tau@wsj.com

Appeared in the Mar. 31, 2017, print edition as 'Democrats Cross Aisle To Support Gorsuch.'

ninth justice so that the Court is operating at full strength on behalf of the American people.

Democratic senators have also raised concerns about Gorsuch's work while at the Justice Department, and in particular [policies related to the War on Terror](#). Gorsuch deserves credit for his service as a government lawyer and his role in helping George W. Bush keep America safe. However, while I and others relied on Neil for advice and counsel he was not responsible for the policies of the Bush administration, nor was he the lone architect for its legal opinions and conclusions — those represented the cumulative judgment of more senior lawyers, including myself, in the administration. Justice Department lawyers are advocates for the U.S. government and obliged to put forth the best legal arguments in defense of government policy, consistent with the canons of professional ethics and good faith — as would any lawyer. A judge, on the other hand, is required to act as neutral, hearing both sides of a case with impartiality.

POLICING THE USA: A look at [race, justice, media](#)

Finally, Senate Democrats have suggested Gorsuch is outside the judicial mainstream. To the contrary, his remarkable record of being reversed so few times while on the Tenth Circuit confirms he is well within the mainstream. There is

also the allegation that Gorsuch favors corporations and the [wealthy over the little guy](#). It is nonsensical to evaluate a judge's ideology based on winners and losers in the cases before that judge. Rather, Gorsuch should be evaluated based on the methods and principles employed to decide a controversy. When decided properly, equal justice under the law will be achieved in a case every time, irrespective of the winner or loser.

Only a person of extraordinary ability and integrity can properly sit and dispense justice and wisely interpret our laws. In refusing to bow to pressure from Senate Democrats that he explain how he would rule on certain matters, Gorsuch showed restraint and acted in the finest tradition of previous judicial nominees. I have interviewed and studied hundreds of individuals for appointment to the federal bench, including John Roberts and Samuel Alito. Gorsuch will serve with the same level of distinction and independence as those justices and others. I know of no legitimate reason to oppose Gorsuch's nomination, and I urge the Senate to confirm this highly qualified, good man without delay.

Alberto R. Gonzales is the former U.S. attorney general and White House Counsel in the George W. Bush Administration. Presently he is the dean and Doyle Rogers Distinguished Professor of Law at Belmont University College of Law.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

COMMENTS

Editorial : Senate Republican Suicide

March 30, 2017
7:44 p.m. ET 310

House Republicans immolated themselves over health care last week, and now Democrats are hoping the Senate GOP will perform its own kamikaze turn over Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch. If Republicans blink and tolerate Democratic filibusters of High Court nominees, they should hand over their majority to the Democrats now.

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer's strategy is transparent: Stage-manage an unprecedented filibuster against Judge Gorsuch, and then portray Republicans as radicals if they change Senate rules to break it. The gambit is to coax at least three of the 52 GOP Senators to cut a deal with Democrats that hands the minority political leverage over President Trump's judicial nominees.

Mr. Schumer and other Democrats are trying to lure those Republicans into a deal by preaching a false institutionalism that claims to be acting for the good of the Senate. They want to scare the GOP into believing that breaking a filibuster would somehow break the Senate as a deliberative body that requires 60 votes and bipartisan consensus to act.

But the real radical act is a Supreme Court filibuster. Mr. Schumer wants to use the filibuster to defeat Judge Gorsuch outright, or negotiate a deal that gives the judge a confirmation pass of 60 votes in

return for a guarantee that GOP Senators won't break a filibuster on future nominees during the Trump Presidency.

Either result would do great harm to the Senate's advice and consent role under the Constitution, tilt the Supreme Court to the left, reward the most partisan voices in the Senate on the left and right, further inflame grassroots conservative outrage against political elites, and deal a grievous wound to the Republican Party. Other than that, a great day at the office.

Start with the fact that there has never been a partisan filibuster of a Supreme Court nominee. The elevation of Justice Abe Fortas to become Chief Justice in 1968 failed amid bipartisan opposition due to his policy collaboration with the White House while he was a Justice.

The one cloture vote to end debate on that nomination failed 45-43, well short of the 67 votes required at the time. Nineteen Democrats and 24 Republicans voted against cloture in what was the last year of Lyndon Johnson's Presidency, and Fortas asked LBJ to withdraw his nomination.

Filibusters were mooted against William Rehnquist and Samuel Alito but never materialized. A cloture vote against Rehnquist failed in 1971, 52-42, but he was later confirmed 68-26. Justice Alito easily won a cloture vote and was confirmed 58-42. Republicans never even attempted to filibuster Bill

Clinton or Barack Obama's four nominees.

The real break from this tradition began in 2001-2002 when Democrats decided to filibuster George W. Bush's appellate-court nominees, and this example is politically instructive. After the GOP retook the Senate, a rump group of Republicans and Democrats struck the Gang of 14 deal that agreed to confirm nominees except in "exceptional circumstances."

But Democrats ended that deal when they regained power. In 2013 they unilaterally rewrote Senate rules to break the filibuster for appellate nominees so Mr. Obama could pack the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals. Democrats would surely do the same for the Supreme Court the next time they control the White House and Senate, as Senator Tim Kaine explicitly promised to do if Hillary Clinton won the election.

A deal now with Democrats would create a double standard in which GOP nominees are subject to a 60-vote standard but future Democratic nominees aren't. It would also deny other Senators their constitutional right to offer advice and consent by casting a vote on nominees. A filibuster essentially blocks a vote to confirm, though a nominee like Judge Gorsuch would receive more than 50 votes. He could be denied a seat on the Court on purely procedural grounds, something that has never happened.

If Judge Gorsuch is confirmed, the next opening could come as early as the end of the current Supreme

Court term in June and could determine its direction for years. If Democrats know they can block any nominee with a filibuster, they can dictate that no one on Donald Trump's campaign list of 21 potential nominees can be confirmed.

Democrats could guarantee that no one to the right of Justice Stephen Breyer can be confirmed. This would reward the furthest left Senators for their total resistance, which would in turn empower the most recalcitrant voices in the GOP caucus. Far from empowering moderates, a filibuster deal would reward the likes of Elizabeth Warren and Rand Paul.

This would betray the voters who elected Donald Trump and a GOP Senate in 2016. The Supreme Court wasn't some political afterthought last year. It was central to the campaign and crucial in motivating millions of Americans to go to the polls. If you think GOP voters are angry now, imagine what they'll be like if Republicans let Democrats block conservative judges. This would be Senate Republican suicide.

After the health-care fiasco, Republicans need to show Americans they can follow through on their governing promises. If the GOP doesn't want to squander its Senate majority, it will stay united and confirm Neil Gorsuch, even if it means breaking an unprecedented Senate filibuster.

Appeared in the Mar. 31, 2017, print edition.

The Washington Post

North Carolina governor signs bill repealing and replacing transgender bathroom law amid criticism (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/amber.j.phillips>

(Monica Akhtar/The Washington Post)

In the face of economic pressure, North Carolina lawmakers voted March 30 to repeal and replace the state's controversial bathroom law. Here's what you need to know. (Monica Akhtar/The Washington Post)

North Carolina lawmakers retreated from the state's [controversial law](#) that restricted which public restrooms transgender people can use, repealing it Thursday in the face of economic pressure in favor of a new bill that gay rights groups attacked as discriminatory.

In the face of economic pressure, North Carolina lawmakers voted March 30 to repeal and replace the state's controversial bathroom law. Here's what you need to know. In the face of economic pressure, North Carolina lawmakers voted March 30 to repeal and replace the state's controversial bathroom law. Here's what you need to know.

The legislature approved the bill Thursday and Gov. Roy Cooper (D) signed it, reversing a law that required transgender people to use public bathrooms matching the gender on their birth certificates. The new law drew intense opposition from civil rights advocates because it bans local

governments from passing measures to protect LGBT people. Cooper defended the new measure as an imperfect compromise and said it was not his "preferred solution."

The votes and anger Thursday marked the latest eruption in the fight over North Carolina's so-called "bathroom bill," which has embroiled state politics and came to define the state's public image since lawmakers introduced and hastily signed it a year ago. Since then, North Carolina has been buffeted by economic boycotts, job losses and public criticism, as sports leagues have relocated games, companies have canceled expansions and

some tourists decided to spend their money elsewhere.

[\[North Carolina's bathroom bill cost the state at least \\$3.7 billion, new analysis finds\]](#)

Those forces collided this week, as lawmakers scrambled to agree on a repeal measure to accommodate an ultimatum from the NCAA, the collegiate sports behemoth that relocated some high-profile contests and threatened to withhold others due to the law. The NCAA's threat had added emotional heft this week, as the University of North Carolina's basketball team is getting ready to play in the Final Four, one of the country's premier sporting events.

NCAA President Mark Emmert told reporters Thursday that the organization's board of governors will have to meet to discuss whether North Carolina's actions are a "sufficient" enough change to schedule events in the state going forward. Emmert said he hoped the NCAA would announce its decision next week.

Under the compromise announced late Wednesday and approved Thursday, lawmakers repealed the bathroom law, also known as House Bill 2 (or "H.B. 2"). In addition to its transgender bathroom restrictions, the law also reversed local ordinances expanding protections for LGBT people and limited some minimum-wage standards.

In the new law, legislators imposed a three-year ban on local governments enacting nondiscrimination ordinances — extending it until after North Carolina's next gubernatorial election. The bill — just a [half-page long](#) — also includes a measure stating that "no local government in this state may enact or amend an ordinance regulating private employment practices or regulating public accommodations."

[\[Lawmakers previously tried, and failed, to repeal the bill\]](#)

Local school boards and government agencies were also barred from regulating "multiple occupancy bathrooms, showers or changing facilities," with that left up to state legislators. State Senate Leader Phil Berger (R) and House Speaker Tim Moore (R), who backed the bill, said it would implement until December 2020 "a temporary moratorium" on nondiscrimination ordinances like the one Charlotte passed last year, which prompted state lawmakers to pass the original bathroom bill.

Berger said in a statement that while "compromise is difficult for both sides," he was "pleased this proposal fully protects safety and privacy by keeping men out of women's bathrooms."

Gay rights organizations and civil rights groups assailed the compromise as a "fake repeal" and called it a betrayal, vowing political repercussions for lawmakers who

supported it and calling on sports leagues, businesses and entertainers to continue their economic boycotts.

"This new law does not repeal H.B. 2," Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said in a statement. "Instead, it institutes a statewide prohibition on equality by banning nondiscrimination protections across North Carolina and fuels the flames of anti-transgender hate. Each and every lawmaker who supported this bill has betrayed the LGBTQ community."

Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, said that the bill and similar measures "are based on the vicious lie that trans people represent some type of danger to others."

For some in the state, the new law created new uncertainty. Ashley and Matthew Nurkin, whose 8-year-old transgender daughter is a second grader in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District, said they don't know what the new bill means for her. The school district was in the process of expanding protections for LGBTQ students when H.B. 2 was passed, but the new law bars local school officials from regulating bathrooms. Their daughter's school was also ready to allow her to use the girl's bathroom, but had to reverse course last year because of the state law.

"I think everybody's trying to piece through and find out practically what that means in everyday life for a student like our daughter," said Matthew Nurkin. He said his daughter is "embarrassed and sad" that she has to use a bathroom in the central office instead of one used by other students.

North Carolina's abrupt flip-flop on the bathroom legislation caught many in the state by surprise and prompted criticism from both ends of the political spectrum.

The bill's passage was an important milestone for Cooper, a first-term governor who narrowly won office in November, ousting incumbent Pat McCrory, the Republican who signed H.B. 2 last year. The bill played an outsize role in the

campaign: Exit polls showed that [two-thirds of voters](#) opposed the bathroom law, and Cooper won the support of most of those voters. The new bill Thursday also offered a notable moment of bipartisanship in a state that has recently seen fractious political disputes, with Republican lawmakers seeking to limit some of Cooper's powers in office and feuding with him through the H.B. 2 repeal discussions.

Despite Cooper's backing, Democrats expressed concerns with the repeal measure, with some sounding uneasy about supporting it and others outright refusing to back the bill.

"We would rather suffer H.B. 2 than to have this body one more time deny us the full and unfettered protection of the law," Democratic Rep. Deb Butler, one of two openly LGBT lawmakers, said during the House's debate.

Republican lawmakers who backed the repeal said it would help the state move on to other things. Rep. Scott Stone (R) said that "the time has come for us to get out from under the national spotlight for negative things."

[\[The NCAA led the opposition to HB2, but will North Carolina's repeal be enough?\]](#)

Conservative groups also offered some criticism of the bill Thursday, with Family Research Council President Tony Perkins saying in a statement that "it does signal that elected officials are ultimately willing to surrender to the courts and the NCAA on matters of safety and public policy."

The bill passed through the state's Senate on a vote of 32 to 16. It then moved to the state's House of Representatives, where lawmakers debated it for 90 minutes before it was approved by a vote of 70 to 48.

State lawmakers have previously flirted with repealing H.B. 2, most notably last December when they held [a special session specifically for that purpose](#). That session was called after [Charlotte abandoned its nondiscrimination ordinance](#), which had expanded new LGBT protections. Charlotte's decision to

scrap those protections was aimed specifically at clearing the path for state legislators to then repeal H.B. 2, after Republicans said that city's ordinance was the reason the statewide law was needed.

After a marathon session in which Republicans sparred over whether to fully or partially repeal the bill and Democrats accused them of abandoning their pledge to eliminate the measure entirely, the legislators wound up [leaving the bill in _____ place](#). During that debate, Democrats rejected a version that would have included a six-month moratorium on cities passing nondiscrimination ordinances to protect gay and transgender people, a period that has been significantly extended in the new bill.

[\[The tumultuous history of North Carolina's bathroom bill\]](#)

Possible repeal efforts gained new steam this week in the face of [the NCAA's deadline](#). The potential loss of all of those collegiate events would add to the already sizable damage North Carolina has faced since enacting the bathroom bill. Companies such as [PayPal](#) and [Deutsche Bank](#) have abandoned expansions in the state, the NBA and the NCAA already have moved marquee events elsewhere, and entertainers have canceled concerts and other shows.

These moves have taken a toll: A new estimate [from the Associated Press this week](#) said that over a 12-year period following enactment of the law, H.B. 2 would cost the state at least \$3.7 billion due to these losses.

Kirk Ross in Raleigh and Moriah Balingit and Susan Svrluga in Washington contributed to this report.

Further reading:

[North Carolina, Justice Dept. file dueling lawsuits over transgender rights](#)

[Charlotte set off the fight over the 'bathroom law.' Now it's dealing with the fallout.](#)

This story, first published at 12:33 a.m., has been updated.



North Carolina Lawmakers Repeal Bathroom Bill

Valerie Bauerlein and Jon Kamp

attempt to reverse a tide of businesses and sports events leaving the state because of a policy they considered discriminatory.

the public-facility bathroom associated with the sex listed on their birth certificate. The House later backed the Senate with a 70-48 vote. Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper signed the changes into law Thursday afternoon.

"This is what I believe and I hope you believe is good for North Carolina at this time," Republican Senate President Phil Berger said. "I think it's the right thing for us to do."

But advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

RALEIGH, N.C.—North Carolina lawmakers agreed Thursday to a compromise bill that dials back a controversial bathroom law, an

The Senate voted 32-16 to undo the year-old law known as House Bill 2 requiring transgender people to use

were quick to condemn the effort because they said it still retains harmful parts of the law passed last year. The measure also failed to please conservative lawmakers who wanted to keep House Bill 2 on the books.

Joaquin Carcano, a plaintiff in a lawsuit over House Bill 2 against North Carolina brought by LGBT advocacy groups, said in a news conference that Thursday's action rolled back protections for transgender people.

As part of the deal, the lawmakers passed a new bill that still blocks local governments from regulating access to bathrooms until December 2020. State lawmakers passed the original bill last year to head off an ordinance in Charlotte that allowed transgender people to use the bathroom associated with their gender identity.

Thursday's votes were the result of a compromise Republican lawmakers and Mr. Cooper struck late Wednesday. The governor, whose opposition to the bathroom bill helped him gain office in the November election, said the result wasn't perfect but was a step in the right direction. He expressed confidence that it would bring sports leagues and businesses back to the state.

"What we have to do right now is take this important step," Mr. Cooper said. "This was the best deal we could get."

The repeal is necessary for North Carolina venues like Greensboro Coliseum to be considered by the National Collegiate Athletic Association at a meeting this week to set tournament schedules for

games in all sports from 2018 to 2022.

Last fall, the NCAA removed coming tournament games from North Carolina, joining the National Basketball Association, [PayPal Holdings](#) Inc. and other groups in canceling events and investments in the state because they said the state law is discriminatory toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. On Twitter on Wednesday, Levi Strauss & Co. and [Dow Chemical](#) Co. both called for the law to be repealed.

It remains unclear whether the compromise will be enough to satisfy businesses that have exacted an economic toll on North Carolina since state lawmakers rushed the controversial bill into law last year.

Republicans hold supermajorities in both chambers of the state's legislature, but the GOP had been split over whether to repeal House Bill 2 because many conservatives favor keeping it in place.

Breaking with the Republican leadership, some conservative senators didn't back the move, arguing that the law protected public safety. Sen. Dan Bishop of Charlotte called the repeal "a betrayal of principle."

"In the final analysis," he said, "we will have taken a step backward."

Meanwhile, the compromise also failed to satisfy many who argued it was discriminatory. Advocates in the LGBT community criticized the proposal, with the Human Rights Campaign, a national group, saying it doubled down on discrimination. [A similar compromise fell apart in December.](#)

**The
New York
Times**

Bathroom Law Repeal Leaves Few Pleased in North Carolina

Richard Fausset

ATLANTA — For a year, it prompted boycotts, demonstrations and economic fallout that helped dethrone a sitting governor. In the end, in a strange and profoundly American collision of polarized politics, big-time sports, commerce and the culture wars, North Carolina's notorious House Bill 2 was finally laid to rest on Thursday — though many were left wondering if some of its negative effects might linger.

Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, signed legislation repealing the law after it was approved by the Republican-controlled legislature. House Bill 2 had restricted the ability of municipalities to enact anti-discrimination policies and required transgender people in government and public buildings to use the

bathroom that corresponds with the gender on their birth certificate.

In addition to repealing House Bill 2, the new law gives the General Assembly the sole power to regulate access to "multiple occupancy restrooms, showers or changing facilities." It also creates a moratorium on local nondiscrimination ordinances through 2020.

The compromise agreement came amid a looming threat that the N.C.A.A., which had already relocated a year's worth of championship tournament games from the state, was planning to eliminate more, including future men's Division I basketball tournaments. It was met with bitter criticism from gay rights groups, which said it was barely a repeal at all, and from conservatives, who

Republican Rep. Scott Stone, who represents Charlotte, said the fact that liberals and conservatives don't like the bill "probably shows it's a pretty reasonable compromise." His district is home to many big companies, he said, and many more are refusing to consider investing in North Carolina because of House Bill 2.

Senate Democratic Leader Dan Blue urged Democrats to approve the repeal despite calls from groups like the North Carolina NAACP not to, as a way to reset the state politically and economically to where it was before the law passed.

"Not only is it a question of dignity that we have to debate," Mr. Blue said. "It's the question of what's good for 10.2 million people in a broad sense."

The Greensboro Coliseum has hosted 13 NCAA men's basketball tournament competitions, most recently in 2012. According to the Greensboro Convention and Visitors Bureau, the loss of several days of NCAA tournament men's basketball games this year cost about \$14.5 million in lost spending on everything from restaurants to hotel rooms.

The NCAA tournament venue selection process accelerated the legislative talks in a state where basketball is part of the culture. Teachers incorporate March Madness scores into their math classes. Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University combined have won a dozen NCAA men's basketball championships. The University of North Carolina is

headed to the Final Four this weekend in Phoenix.

NCAA President Mark Emmert said Thursday that he was pleased that North Carolina had taken steps to repeal House Bill 2, and he expects the 16 university and college presidents who lead the NCAA to meet later this week to discuss whether the repeal is "a sufficient change in the law" to satisfy the NCAA's concerns.

"Everybody loves being in North Carolina for our games," Mr. Emmert said. "It's a state, obviously, that in many ways is synonymous with college sports."

Mr. Cooper, who took office in January, campaigned on a promise to repeal House Bill 2, which he has called a stain on the state. Former Gov. Pat McCrory, a Republican, has blamed his narrow loss in November on opposition to the law. Mr. McCrory was the rare Republican to lose in North Carolina, in a year when President Donald Trump, a Republican, carried the state.

Other states are considering similar legislation. [A bill in Texas passed a key legislative committee earlier this month](#) after a contentious hourslong hearing that lasted until 5 a.m. But the bill hasn't yet been debated in the House and it is unclear whether it would have the support of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican.

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Appeared in the Mar. 31, 2017, print edition as 'North Carolina Relents on Bathroom Policy.'

said it backtracked on protecting public safety and traditional values.

In a news conference on Thursday, Mr. Cooper said that the agreement would begin undoing the economic damage and that both sports events and economic development would begin coming back to the state. This week, The Associated Press calculated that North Carolina stood to lose more than \$3.7 billion over the next dozen years if House Bill 2 were not repealed.

"This is not a perfect deal and it is not my preferred solution; it stops short of many things we need to do as a state," Mr. Cooper said. "In a perfect world, with a good General Assembly, we would have repealed HB2 fully today, and added full statewide protections for L.G.B.T. North Carolinians."

Still, it remained to be seen if the deal would now lift what Mr. Cooper has called "the dark cloud hanging over our state."

The N.C.A.A. president, Mark Emmert, said on Thursday that the league's governing board would soon determine whether the changed law was "sufficient" for "the board to feel comfortable going back to North Carolina." The National Basketball Association, which relocated its most recent All-Star Game to New Orleans to protest House Bill 2, did not reply to a request seeking comment.

The Atlantic Coast Conference, which pulled recent league championships out of the state, indicated that it would take a fresh look at North Carolina.

"The recently passed legislation allows the opportunity to reopen the discussion with the A.C.C. Council of Presidents regarding neutral site conference championships being held in the State of North Carolina," John Swofford, the commissioner, said.

PayPal, which in April had canceled an expansion in Charlotte over its concerns about the law, did not respond to a request for comment. A number of celebrities and organizations that had announced they were boycotting the state since the law's passage one year ago had not commented on the repeal on social media.

Pope McCorkle III, a public policy professor at Duke, called the deal an "awkward compromise." He said it would ultimately be judged by how many of the sports events, entertainers and businesses who had turned on the state would eventually change their minds.

"There could be a split among the outside arbiters about whether this is good enough," he said. "The deal is only as good as what it achieves in terms of the change in economic development perceptions nationally."

It appeared that the threat of losing even more big-time basketball games had much to do with the breakthrough. The agreement comes on the eve of basketball's Final Four weekend, with the University of North Carolina men's team facing off against Oregon on Saturday night in Glendale, Ariz.

Looming even larger, perhaps, was the broader threat of sustained business boycotts.

The New York Times Law

The Editorial Board

Facing a deadline to do away with a law that turned North Carolina into a national pariah by denying the right of transgender people to use public restrooms of their choice, state lawmakers rashly settled on a terrible compromise.

On Thursday, [they repealed the law](#) in name but not in substance, hoping to assuage organizations and employers that have boycotted the state to protest its discriminatory law. The National Collegiate Athletic Association had given state politicians until Thursday to get rid of the law before it would resume holding championship games in the state.

Governor Roy Cooper, of North Carolina, speaking to the media

Yet despite these stakes, and in a sign of the deep fissures that continue to run through both the state and the nation, there was little celebration when the law finally died.

On Thursday, the American Civil Liberties Union and Lambda Legal, a gay rights group, called the compromise a "fake" repeal bill that "keeps in place the most harmful parts of the law." The Human Rights Campaign and other gay rights groups called the deal "shameful" and accused the governor and the legislature of engaging in a "sell out" of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Some religious and cultural conservatives denounced the removal of transgender bathroom provisions. Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, based in Washington, said the compromise showed that "elected officials are ultimately willing to surrender to the courts and the N.C.A.A. on matters of safety and public policy." Others argued that girls and women would be robbed of privacy and dignity if forced to confront biological men in restrooms.

Gay rights advocates said that the moratorium on local anti-discrimination ordinances, combined with the absence of a statewide anti-discrimination law addressing sexual orientation and gender identity, would leave lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people at risk of continued discrimination.

"That, to me, is astonishing, that we're going to make L.G.B.T.

earlier this month. Eamon Queeney for The New York Times

All those who have taken a principled stance against the law, known as H.B. 2, should stand firm. The law's revision would deprive North Carolinians of protection from discrimination for years, and retains the odious notion that transgender people are inherently dangerous.

"We can never compromise on fundamental civil rights," William Barber II, the president of the state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said in a call with journalists Thursday morning. "It was never just a bathroom bill. It's a bill that discriminates against so many people in so many ways."

The original bill, which was signed into law in March 2016 by Gov. Pat

people wait another four years to be protected from being fired because they're gay," said Chris Fitzsimon, director of NC Policy Watch, a liberal group.

There appeared to be some disagreement about the freedom that local governments would have to pass protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people under the new law. Mr. Cooper said that local governments were now free to "pass protections for their L.G.B.T. employees."

Cathryn Oakley, senior legislative counsel for the Human Rights Campaign, said she did not believe that was the case. "I don't think the language supports that," she said.

Under the new law, transgender people in state government buildings will not be prohibited from using a bathroom that does not match the gender on their birth certificate. Mr. Cooper emphasized the impact on school children. "Now transgender kids aren't subject to the horrible requirement and embarrassment that could put them in more danger of being bullied or preyed on," he said.

The Obama-era Justice Department had issued guidelines to public schools stating that denying students the ability to use the restrooms of their choice violated Title IX, the 1972 federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education. A Virginia case that might have settled the matter was scheduled to be heard by the United States Supreme Court, but when President Trump's Justice Department rescinded the guidelines, the justices in March

McCrary, a Republican, was in retaliation to an ordinance the city of Charlotte approved weeks earlier barring discrimination against gays, lesbians and transgender people. Charlotte's measure established that transgender people had a right to use public restrooms that correspond with their gender identity. The state law mandated that transgender people use restrooms that matched the gender marker listed on their birth certificate, and barred localities from enacting laws to protect gays, lesbians and transgender people from discrimination.

It's mystifying that Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat whose narrow election in November was seen as something of a referendum on H.B. 2, would regard the amended law as a suitable compromise. The

sent it back to a lower court to decide.

Jane Wettach, a law professor at Duke, said that beyond schools, few institutions had ever policed people's bathroom choices. "Which is what made the law sort of symbolic," she said, referring to House Bill 2.

House Bill 2 has already dealt a major political blow to the Republican Party in North Carolina, with the backlash helping Mr. Cooper defeat former Gov. Pat McCrory, a Republican, by a razor-thin margin in November. Time will tell if Mr. Cooper retains the support of disappointed gay rights advocates on the left wing of his coalition. National gay rights groups could also see a perceived loss of clout if the N.C.A.A. and other sports organizations ignore their continued protests and decide to play ball in the state.

If the costly drama in North Carolina serves as a cautionary tale to other conservative-leaning states looking to take up such volatile social issues, only some appear to have heeded it. On Thursday in Texas, some conservatives reiterated their support for a bill that would revise the laws regulating bathroom use in government buildings. The bill has been approved by the State Senate. But according to The Texas Tribune, it may not survive in the House.

The Tribune reported that Texas businesses were worried the proposal could cost them "hundreds of millions of dollars" in revenue.

repeal law did away with the birth certificate requirement, which was unenforceable all along because it would have turned law enforcement officials into genital inspectors. But it bars schools and other government entities from adopting policies allowing transgender people to use the restroom of their choice. And it still prohibits anti-discrimination ordinances until 2020.

Mr. Cooper said the compromise with the Republican-controlled legislature was "not perfect," but he held out hope that the repeal would start to "repair our reputation." He and other Democrats who supported the compromise said they concluded that a modest step toward undoing the law was the best they could hope for while Republicans have veto-proof

majorities in the legislature. That is misguided. The deal was struck days after [The Associated Press reported](#) that the backlash against the law would cost North Carolina at least \$3.7 billion in business over 12

years.

Getting employers and organizations to steer business and jobs to North Carolina should require more than window dressing. State officials must address the

underlying problem: a law that enshrines discrimination against minorities and perpetuates harmful stereotypes about transgender people. Until they do, business as

usual will represent an endorsement of bigotry and intolerance.



Editorial : Congress voted to repeal Web privacy rules. Now, Congress should replace them.

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

By [Editorial Board](#)

[The Post's View](#)

Opinion

Opinion Interpretation of the news based on evidence, including data, as well as anticipating how events might unfold based on past events

March 30 at 7:43 PM

THEY SAY the Internet never forgets, and remembering is particularly profitable for broadband providers such as Comcast and Verizon: Collecting consumer information can allow Internet companies to tailor advertisements to individual customers. Out of concern for user privacy, the Federal Communications Commission [promulgated](#) rules last year restricting how companies could use that information. But Congress moved to [repeal](#) the rules this week. Now, if President Trump signs their bill, it will be on legislators to craft privacy

protections that they find more reasonable.

In the Obama-era net neutrality overhaul, the Federal Trade Commission, which could have addressed privacy concerns, lost its jurisdiction over Internet service providers. The FCC, newly the only cop on the beat, moved to fill the gap with stringent regulations on when and how companies could collect user data. The FCC's rule applied only to broadband companies and not to platforms such as Google and Facebook, which mine similar data on a similar scale. Consumers, the thinking went, should have more of a choice about the kind of information their broadband providers can control and sell, because in the modern age they may not have much choice about whether to use the Internet or what company to buy access from. By contrast, it was suggested, they don't have to use Facebook if they don't like its privacy policies.

Critics nevertheless argued that the FCC had fashioned its rules all

wrong. Not only had the FCC given Google and Facebook a free pass, but instead of mirroring the FTC's opt-out framework, which allows consumers to request that companies relinquish their data-collection rights, the FCC adopted an opt-in regime that required companies to obtain permission from consumers to collect data in the first place — placing an unnecessary burden on providers. The FCC also [failed to distinguish](#) between sensitive data, such as a user's health history, and less sensitive data, such as what newspaper a user likes to read. These same critics, who included congressional Republicans, claimed the FCC passed its rules along partisan lines with no effort to secure buy-in from the other side of the aisle.

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Some of the criticism was fair. But now those Republicans have axed the rules along partisan lines with no effort to replace them: The Congressional Review Act, which Congress used to strike down the regulations, is a blunt instrument that now bars the FCC from drafting any replacement order that would be "substantially the same" as the overturned rule. In other words, at the moment only Congress can make something happen.

So what next? Congress could pass provider oversight back to the FTC and give the commission authority to establish a more carefully crafted policy. Or legislators could draft their own rules. Internet commerce depends on companies' abilities to draw in advertising dollars, and drawing in those dollars depends on access to user information. At the same time, users deserve a say in how their sensitive information is used. Congress will have to take this on, because right now arguably no one else can.



Ohm : Congress's vote to eviscerate Internet privacy could give the FBI massive power

By Paul Ohm

By Paul Ohm March 30 at 7:57 PM

Paul Ohm is a professor at Georgetown University Law Center and faculty director of the Georgetown Center on Privacy and Technology.

Many are outraged about congressional efforts to eviscerate Internet privacy regulations set by the Federal Communications Commission under President Barack Obama. But a frightening aspect to the bill remains underappreciated: If signed, it could result in the greatest legislative expansion of the FBI's surveillance power since 2001's Patriot Act.

Don't believe anyone who suggests that the law merely returns us to the state of the world before the FCC finalized its landmark privacy rules in October. The obvious reason Internet service providers burned through time, money, political capital and customer goodwill to push for this law was to ask for a

green light to engage in significantly more user surveillance than they had ever before had the audacity to try.

This must be the reason, because on paper, the law accomplishes little. President Trump's handpicked choice to head the FCC, Ajit Pai, [already began work to roll back these rules](#) in a more orderly fashion. Make no mistake: ISPs aren't just asking for relief from a supposedly onerous rule; they want Congress's blessing. Once Trump signs the bill, diminishing the FCC's power to police privacy online, ISPs will feel empowered — perhaps even encouraged — by Republicans (no Democrats voted for this measure) to spy on all of us as they never have before. And spy they will.

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How, then, does this law — which would directly affect only private behavior — benefit the FBI? From 2001 to 2005, I worked for the Justice Department and spent a lot of my time advising law-enforcement agents and prosecutors who wanted to track Internet behavior. Many of our investigations led directly to a specific IP address — the identifier for a particular computer or device — which then prompted a request to an ISP for more information. [Tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of these requests](#) arrive at ISPs around the country every year.

Many — perhaps most — of these requests do not involve criminals; instead, they lead to victims of crimes, mere witnesses or otherwise innocent people. These requests have typically sought only information about the identity of the person associated with the IP address because the FBI understands that this is the only information ISPs tend to collect.

But because of the way ISPs are likely to react to this law, FBI agents and other law-enforcement officials will understand that ISPs will be able to reveal much more about every one of us. By adding a single short paragraph to an application for a court order through the Stored Communications Act (this wouldn't even require a search warrant), the FBI would be able to order your ISP to divulge every website you have contacted and every app you have used. In cases in which the FBI has obtained a search warrant, it could ask your ISP to reveal every single piece of content that it has a record of you having viewed — over the course of years. Our government-access laws do not require the FBI to tell you about these requests, and the FBI almost always forces a gag order on ISPs, ensuring that you will never find out.

To be clear, nothing in this new law would expressly give the FBI any new power. But old, outdated laws such as the Electronic

Communications Privacy Act tend to expand FBI power whenever a private actor begins to track our behavior in new ways. What the new law would do is give ISPs the incentive and the congressional and presidential seal of approval to construct the richest database of Web surfing and app-usage behavior the world has ever seen.

This will be a

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Editorial : Betsy DeVos's Many Choices

March 30, 2017
7:34 p.m. ET 48 COMMENTS

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos gave her first big policy speech on Wednesday, and you probably didn't read about it because the media barely covered it. The speech discussed the evidence that school choice can improve the lives of millions of students, but that's so

honey-pot attracting the FBI and other law-enforcement agencies like flies.

A little less than a decade ago, I introduced the idea of the "[Database of Ruin](#)" — a digital dossier containing one fact about each of us that we wouldn't want anyone else to know. Since I coined this phrase, I have watched with concern as this database has

continued to grow and take shape. Companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Uber and many others have each constructed their own pieces of it.

But never has one industry been cut loose to generate one spine of information that could serve the needs of law enforcement so well — until now. Congress just approved the single greatest expansion of the

Database of Ruin to date — and Verizon, Comcast, AT&T, Time Warner, CenturyLink and the rest of our broadband providers are racing to build it.

much less important than, you know, how Sean Spicer answered questions at the White House press gaggle.

[Speaking at the Brookings Institution, Mrs. DeVos discussed her support for the many varieties of education choice](#) and how they can help the many varieties of children and families: "Open enrollment, tax

credits, home schools, magnets, charters, virtual schools, education savings accounts and choices not yet developed all have their place, but no single one of these is always the right delivery method for each child."

This is welcome modesty from a federal government that has for years tried to find the single

education model, or single reform, that could be replicated everywhere. That top-down approach may have fit the U.S. society and economy of 120 years ago, but it doesn't work now. Mrs. DeVos's entire speech is worth reading, but with that one insight she is off to a fine start.

Appeared in the Mar. 31, 2017, print edition.

**The
Washington
Post**

Rampell : Trump may force thousands of legal immigrants to stop working or head home

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

Come Monday, the Trump administration may quietly revoke the ability of hundreds of thousands of immigrants — [almost all women](#) — from legally working in the United States, forcing them to choose between heading back to their kitchens or leaving the country altogether.

They are the spouses of workers here on high-skilled visas, and are typically high-skilled themselves. Many have launched businesses that created jobs for U.S. citizens, whose employment may in turn be at risk, too.

Take, for instance, 37-year-old entrepreneur Keerthi Ranjith, who lives in South Riding, Va.

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Ranjith came to the United States in 2004 as the dependent spouse of her husband, a software engineer on an [H-1B visa](#). Ranjith, a teacher, knew that one condition of leaving India was that she would, at least temporarily, have to give up her rewarding career; at the time, spouses of H-1B workers were prohibited from doing paid work.

Still, her husband's company promised to sponsor him for a green card, which meant that in a few

years both of them would again be able to work. She could put her professional skills to use and bring in a second income for their growing family.

At least, that's what she thought. The couple hadn't counted on the interminable green-card backlog for Indian nationals.

Under current law, there's an annual per-country cap on green cards, and it's the same number for every country regardless of population. That means people from tiny nations such as Lichtenstein can get green cards almost immediately after clearing the sponsorship and screening process, while those from countries such as India and China may wait decades.

Ranjith waited and waited. Restless at home but barred from getting a job, she volunteered at her children's school and began dreaming about one day launching her own business: an after-school tutoring center. She had her Indian educational credentials transferred and obtained a Virginia teaching license. She researched books and curriculums and scouted out locations.

Years passed, and members of Congress several times tried and failed to fix the broken green-card system. (Then-Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) played a pivotal role in scuttling one effort.) Finally, the Obama administration offered a workaround: Starting in [May 2015](#),

the administration announced, spouses of skilled workers awaiting green card approval would be allowed to work.

And so, after 11 years more or less on the sidelines, Ranjith was granted authorization to get a job — or, in her case, to start a business.

She moved fast. Within a month, she opened the South Riding Learning Center. Today nearly 250 students are enrolled, and she employs more than 15 people.

"All my employees," Ranjith is quick to note, "are citizens, of course. They were all born here."

Now, under President Trump in the White House and Sessions at the Justice Department, Ranjith and her 15 American employees may all lose their jobs.

As a senator, in addition to opposing green-card reform, Sessions vehemently [objected](#) to the rule that allowed Ranjith to open her business. Now he has a quick and easy way to eliminate her work authorization: He could stop defending it in court.

A lawsuit challenging the rule was [filed](#) in 2015 and recently landed in federal appeals court. The Trump administration asked for a [60-day pause](#) to "allow incoming leadership personnel adequate time to consider the issues."

On Monday, those 60 days will be up.

The Justice Department, representing the Department of Homeland Security, hasn't tipped its hand, but Sessions's past statements bode ill for people such as Ranjith. A settlement with the plaintiffs would effectively allow Sessions to kill the rule without going through the long, arduous regulatory process normally required for repeal. (The advocacy group Immigration Voice asked to join the case on grounds that the government may not be adequately representing the interests of its members; the judge, perhaps waiting to see what the government will do, has not yet ruled on its request.)

Ranjith is not sure what she'll do if her work authorization is revoked, which would mean she could no longer run the business she started — and sank her family's savings into. If she couldn't sell it, she might have to file for bankruptcy. The financial loss could be so crushing that her family — including her two U.S.-born children — could decide to leave.

"I have waited patiently, I paid taxes, I volunteered, I waited for the rules to change, and I did everything correctly," she said. "But maybe this means we need to start over."

So tell me: Just how would it make America great again to drive away hard-working job-creators like Keerthi Ranjith?

**The
New York
Times**

Bloomberg : Climate Progress, With or Without Trump

Michael R. Bloomberg

They are closing because consumers are demanding energy from sources that don't poison their air and water, and because energy companies are providing cleaner and cheaper alternatives. When two coal plant closings were announced last week, in southern Ohio, the company explained that they were no longer "[economically viable.](#)" That's increasingly true for the whole industry.

A week before President Trump signed the executive order to begin rolling back the Clean Power Plan, Moody's Investor Service [released a report](#) concluding that wind power could displace up to two-thirds of coal-fired power production in 15 Midwestern states. The reason? The average cost of wind power has dropped to \$20 per megawatt, compared with the more than \$30 cost per megawatt for electricity from many coal plants in the region. Why would consumers pay more for a power source that may kill them?

In 2010, airborne coal pollution [was killing 13,000 Americans](#) a year, according to the Clean Air Task Force, a nonprofit environmental group. Today, that number is about 7,500. When politicians talk about

the "war on coal," they never mention the lives being saved.

There is virtually nothing the Trump administration can do to stop advanced technology and consumer preferences from driving down coal's market share still further. (A decade ago, coal was the source of half of American electricity production; today it's down to one-third.) In fact, even if the Clean Power Plan disappears entirely, we would still be in a position to meet our Paris commitment, which is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 26 percent below 2005 levels by 2025.

Consider the data. When we made the commitment in Paris, we were already about a third of the way there, thanks mostly to the closing of so many coal plants. The Sierra Club's [Beyond Coal campaign](#), which works to replace coal with cleaner forms of energy (and which my foundation supports), projects that more plant closings will get us to nearly two-thirds of our goal.

In combination with existing federal policies that can't be undone, like vehicle fuel efficiency standards through model year 2021, the last third can be achieved by cities and businesses that are taking action to

cut pollution and improve their energy efficiency. This week, many of the 81 major corporations (including Apple and Wal-Mart) that [signed](#) a pledge in 2015 to reduce their emissions reaffirmed their commitments, and Anheuser-Busch InBev announced that it aims to get 100 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2025. (My company is pursuing the same goal.)

No mandate from Washington is forcing these companies to act — just their own self-interest.

Cities, too, are acting out of self-interest. By improving their air quality and becoming greener, cities turn into more attractive places to live and work. And where people want to live and work, businesses want to invest. That's Economics 101, and mayors understand it even when Washington doesn't.

In both red and blue states, cities — which account for about two-thirds of the country's emissions — are taking the lead in the fight against climate change. More than 130 American cities have joined the [Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy](#), and all are determined to see that we meet our Paris goal. Their local policies —

expanding mass transit, increasing the energy efficiency of their buildings, installing electric vehicle charging stations, creating bike share programs, planting trees, to name just a few — will help ensure we do.

There is a real danger in failing to recognize the tremendous progress we're making. Claims that the United States will no longer be able to meet its Paris obligations give other countries an excuse to walk away from theirs. How terrible it would be if a misunderstanding of American climate leadership — which is not based in Washington and never has been — led to an unraveling of the Paris agreement.

I wish President Trump and his administration would recognize the health, economic and environmental benefits of tackling climate change. But their failure to do so is no reason to be despondent. Thanks to forces beyond the Washington Beltway that have reached a critical mass, we should be more optimistic than ever about our ability to lead — and win — the fight against climate change.