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# FRANCE - EUROPE

The  
Washington  
Post

## Scandal-hit François Fillon stays in French presidential race, but rivals sense openings

By James not do.

McAuley

PARIS — Former French prime minister François Fillon defiantly refused to suspend his scandal-ridden presidential bid Wednesday, highlighting political weaknesses that could boost the campaign of the country's far-right leader.

"I will not yield. I will not surrender. I will not withdraw," Fillon said in a news conference after abruptly canceling a campaign appearance.

Fillon, 62, had presented himself to the French public as a caretaker of traditional Catholic conservatism in a country struggling with issues of identity and culture following an influx of mostly Muslim migrants and a string of terrorist attacks that have claimed the lives of 230 people since 2015.

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But Fillon's political fortunes crumbled in spectacular public fashion following the accusation last month — first published in *Le Canard Enchaîné*, a French satirical newspaper — that his wife, Penelope, and two of his children had been paid approximately 900,000 euros (about \$948,000) in government money for work they did

Although nepotism is common in the French political establishment, the allegations of a do-nothing salary had extra teeth. Last week, French prosecutors launched an investigation into the claims of "misuse of public funds."

Conservative French presidential candidate Francois Fillon vowed to continue his presidential campaign on Wednesday despite being placed under formal investigation by magistrates looking into alleged misuse of public funds. Francois Fillon vows to stay in French presidential election race despite scandal (Reuters)

(Reuters)

As the Welsh-born Penelope Fillon had said of her professional relationship with her husband in 2007: "I was never his assistant."

François Fillon has fiercely rejected the accusations of wrongdoing, accusing his opponents and the French media of orchestrating a "political assassination." His approval ratings had plummeted, but his stubborn refusal to budge enabled him to make a slight comeback in recent weeks.

The announcement of the formal investigation led to widespread speculation that Fillon would be forced to drop out. But he stood his ground Wednesday.

"I will be at the rendezvous that democracy — and it alone — gives us to choose our collective future," he said, referring to next month's election.

The accusations have grossly undermined the moral authority of a candidate who had promised to instill fiscal responsibility, slash unnecessary public spending and eliminate as many as 500,000 public-sector jobs.

The scandal has hit Fillon where it hurts: among the predominately rural, agricultural voters who had supported him in the first place. According to the latest study conducted by the Cevipof research center for France's *Le Monde* newspaper, support among those voters for the center-right party — their traditional choice — has plummeted more than 50 percent between 2012 and 2017.

Many of those votes could now be siphoned off by the National Front, the far-right populist party headed by Marine Le Pen. According to the Cevipof study, 35 percent of voters polled said they would back Le Pen in the first round of the vote in late April; only 20 percent said they would support Fillon.

The dwindling popularity of Fillon — who was once seen as a shoo-in to win the presidency — adds another dimension of upheaval to an election that many see as a major turning

point in an increasingly fragile European Union.

With Fillon apparently in decline, the top choices are either Le Pen or the centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron, a former economy minister under France's current president, François Hollande.

Macron has galvanized support among Parisian elites and young people across France, but his vague policy views often alienate voters on both the left and the right.

Le Pen — the daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, a convicted Holocaust denier who founded the National Front in the mid-1970s — sees herself as the third chapter in a global populist upheaval that began with Britain's vote in June to leave the European Union and continued with the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president in November. Le Pen is expected to qualify for the second and final round of the vote, to be held in early May.

Fillon, who handily won conservative primaries in November to become the presidential candidate of *Les Républicains*, France's center-right party, previously served as the country's prime minister between 2007 and 2012, during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.

Bloomberg

## Raphael : France's Election Is Giving the World Deja Vu

Therese Raphael

Nobody has seriously suggested that Russian hackers are behind the troubles facing French presidential candidate Francois Fillon. But apart from that, if you were anywhere on the planet during the recent U.S. election then you might be wondering if you've seen this movie before.

Formerly a front-runner in the French presidential race, Fillon has apologized for errors of judgement but denied acting illegally in employing his wife and kids while in office. He has vowed to fight on, very much as Hillary Clinton did last year. We think we know where this

is going -- it doesn't look good for Fillon -- but in the La La Land of French politics, there are probably more twists and turns to go.

Fillon was nearly Filloff on Wednesday. A French news outlet reported wrongly that his wife Penelope had been taken into custody over allegations that he paid her with public funds for work she didn't do. Fillon cancelled a key campaign appearance -- the annual farm fair in Paris is a mandatory campaign stop for candidates wanting to show their support for rural France -- and hastily scheduled a news conference.

But Fillon did not step down and pass the baton to the man he defeated in the primaries, former prime minister Alain Juppe. Instead, he doubled down. "I will not yield. I will not surrender. I will not withdraw," he announced, saying the French public should decide his worthiness for the highest office of the nation.

It remains to be seen how Fillon's defiance, and his defense, will play out. Not all French, even on the right, will be convinced, especially after a campaign that targeted the sleaze of the French establishment and his former boss, Nicolas Sarkozy, who is under investigation

for misuse of funds in the 2012 campaign.

Fillon's supporters will see their patience tested over the next couple of months. He will face questioning by investigators on March 15 and the case could drag on well past the May 7 second round of presidential voting. His own Republican Party seems to be having doubts about him, though they are stuck without another candidate ready to step up.

And yet, it's not a good idea to count Fillon out. In what is now a three-way race for the Elysee Palace, no one is positioned to win enough votes on April 23 to avoid a two-way runoff. Fillon might seem

handicapped as the only candidate from a mainstream political party, but party structure, grass-roots operations and loyalty may still be powerful enough to be decisive in French elections.

Fillon's main opponent in the first round of voting is Emmanuel Macron, the beguiling 39-year-old candidate of the center-left. He's been accused of a gay extra-marital affair, of being supported by a media cabal, of using public funds for his En Marche movement while he was still a minister. He even faces doubts about his rallies, which seemed to have more grassroots energy before a video emerged showing the same supporters at

multiple events. None of that has proved very damaging so far, yet Macron's supporters tend to like him more than love him.

Fillon, on the other hand, has a deep well of support from conservatives and especially Catholics and more credibility on the crucial issue of economic reform. His tough line on immigration will also appeal to voters tempted by Marine Le Pen but looking for a more mainstream candidate.

Le Pen, the populist, protectionist, anti-immigrant National Front leader, has undergone a remarkable makeover in the last year to improve her electability. Despite leading in the polls with 26 percent, she has

her own struggles. On Tuesday, members of the European Parliament voted to lift Le Pen's parliamentary immunity so that prosecutors can take action against her for tweeting images of Islamic State killings. Allegations over the misuse of EU funds have so far not seemed to dent her popularity, but it's unclear whether she can broaden her coalition or fix the funding problems that have plagued her campaign.

No polls have her even coming close to winning the second round against either Fillon or Macron (and it's worth noting that French polls have a very good track record). The average poll of a second round vote

has missed by only 3 points in presidential elections since 1981; as the Economist noted in an analysis of the polls, that means a fifth of voters opposing Marine Le Pen would have to drop out for her to win, a much larger shift than took place during the Brexit or U.S. presidential votes.

If those predictions carry, the first round will be decisive. While Macron has the edge, Fillon stood up Wednesday and ripped up the latest election script. It may not be the last time before this race is over.

**The  
New York  
Times**

## François Fillon, French Presidential Candidate, Vows to Run Despite Inquiry

Adam Nossiter

Mr. Macron, 39, is currently the favorite to defeat Ms. Le Pen, 48, in the second round on May 7. But Mr. Macron, a former Rothschild banker, is untested and inexperienced politically. His centrist program, some of it in line with the Socialist government he served, is viewed as unappealing to parts of the right-leaning electorate. The momentum, in most of the polls, is with her.

A top National Front official, Florian Philippot, used a television interview after Mr. Fillon's appearance largely to attack Mr. Macron — a clear indication that Ms. Le Pen already considers him her principal opponent.

Even as Mr. Fillon, 62, is increasingly being written off, he has doubled down on his defense, yielding no ground to his critics.

"It's Fillon's final bet," said Laurent Bouvet, a political scientist at the University of Versailles St.-Quentin-en-Yvelines. "He's playing all or nothing. The right, the heart of the right, the one that elected him and doesn't want Le Pen to sweep the stakes, his bet is they won't abandon him, in spite of all his legal problems."

In another country, the shadow hanging over Mr. Fillon would most likely end a campaign for the highest office. But in France, legal problems, even serious ones, rarely end political careers, even though the electorate appears to be showing — in polls, at least — less tolerance than previously for accommodating financial misdeeds in high places.

Even if he were to step aside, his center-right Republican Party has few good options. Mr. Fillon's two main challengers in the party primary both campaigned under the

shadow of past and current investigations.

The runner-up in the primary, Alain Juppé, was convicted in a phony jobs scheme undertaken while he worked at City Hall several decades ago. Nicolas Sarkozy, the former president, who finished third, is the subject of multiple investigations, and in February, he was ordered to stand trial on charges of illegally financing his failed 2012 presidential campaign.

But Mr. Fillon's problems, immediate and future, are different. He campaigned as the candidate of probity. That image has been shattered. And the sums reported to have been pocketed by his wife have shocked the French.

Ms. Le Pen is not untainted by corruption accusations. But her legal difficulties, for now, have hardly dented her standing in the polls — partly because she has never cultivated an image of virtue, and partly because her principal adversary is the European Parliament in Strasbourg, in which she sits and which is widely unpopular, especially among her supporters.

Her legal troubles are also more complex than Mr. Fillon's, and she is not suspected of having personally benefited from any of the alleged financial wrongdoing.

Last week, a top Le Pen aide was charged in an alleged phony jobs scheme. The aide was paid out of Parliament money but was thought to have spent her time working for the National Front.

Another close associate of Ms. Le Pen's, Frédéric Chatillon, has been charged with violating campaign finance laws. Mr. Chatillon's ties to extremist groups on the far right

have been closely documented in the French news media as well.

Ms. Le Pen, invoking her parliamentary immunity, has refused a summons from the police who want to question her in the alleged phony jobs scheme, eliciting harsh criticism from government officials who accuse her of holding herself above the law. Like Mr. Fillon, she could still be formally charged.

She and Mr. Fillon have struck remarkably similar defenses as the accusations have piled up around them. Both blamed the news media as well as the judicial system and civil servants for their problems.

On Sunday, in a fiery speech in the western city of Nantes, Ms. Le Pen lashed out at judges, the legal system, civil servants and the news media, in a manner very similar to Mr. Fillon's on Wednesday — and for that matter, President Trump's in the United States.

Ms. Le Pen said all of them were working in concert to undermine her. "The rule of law is the opposite of government by judges," Ms. Le Pen told her cheering supporters.

"Judges exist to apply the law," she said, "not to subvert the will of the people."

On Wednesday, Mr. Fillon struck a defiant tone in front of the reporters at his campaign headquarters in Paris, proclaiming his innocence and denouncing what he said was an unfair judicial and news media campaign intended to destroy his candidacy.

"I didn't embezzle any money," Mr. Fillon told reporters. "I employed — like almost a third of the members of Parliament — family members because I knew I could count on their loyalty and competence. They helped me, and I will prove it."

"From the beginning," he continued, "I haven't been treated as an ordinary suspect."

And he insisted: "The rule of law has been systematically violated. The press has been an echo chamber for the prejudices of the prosecutors."

Mr. Fillon said angrily that the presidential election was being "assassinated," and he announced his determination to stay in it, because "only the voters can decide who will be president."

The judicial screws have been steadily tightening on Mr. Fillon since newspaper reports in January — especially those in the satirical weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* — said that for years he and his deputy had paid his wife hundreds of thousands of euros in state funds for a possible do-nothing job, and that his children had also benefited from the largess of Mr. Fillon, a former prime minister.

In addition, Mr. Fillon is being scrutinized on suspicion of trafficking a high civilian honor, while prime minister, in exchange for money to his wife from a wealthy publisher friend.

On Wednesday, in front of dozens of aides and members of his center-right party, Mr. Fillon told reporters he would answer a March 15 summons by the magistrates in the case, after which he is expected to be charged formally. The investigation will continue and Mr. Fillon could then stand trial, or the magistrates could drop the charges.

Circumstances look increasingly unfavorable for him. In an article published on Wednesday before Mr. Fillon's news conference, the French newspaper *Le Monde* described him as a "candidate in a



bunker" who was hunched up and in his shell. It noted that he no longer took the train for campaign trips out of fear of being called out by

protesters.

He is often met by protesters banging pots, or "casseroles" in French — a slang term for

corruption affairs. Sometimes the placards read, "Fake jobs for everybody."

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Bisserbe

March 1, 2017 5:41 p.m. ET

PARIS—Two of France's leading presidential candidates, under scrutiny from the justice system, are casting the election as a battle that pits their political parties against the country's establishment and institutions.

National Front leader Marine Le Pen and conservative candidate François Fillon are facing separate criminal investigations into their alleged use of public funds and both have accused investigators and judges in recent weeks of unfairly targeting them and subverting French democracy.

Mr. Fillon, who prosecutors suspect of having used public money as a member of parliament to fund phony jobs for his wife and children, lashed out against judicial officials on Wednesday after he was summoned to appear before judges on March 15. On that date, he said, he will be notified of the filing of preliminary charges, allowing the jobs probe to continue. At the end of the probe, magistrates can decide to charge Mr. Fillon and order him to trial, or dismiss the preliminary charges.

Mr. Fillon said the scheduling of the court appearance—just two days before a deadline for his conservative Les Républicains party to name a possible replacement for him—is a calculated attempt to block his candidacy and shows the justice system is mistreating him. Mr. Fillon has denied the accusations and says his wife and children worked for their salaries.

"This is an assassination," Mr. Fillon told reporters Wednesday. "It isn't

just me who is being assassinated—it is the presidential election."

Ms. Le Pen also faces several probes into her party's finances and her family's wealth. She hasn't been charged and has said she won't talk to the police until after the May 7 final round of voting.

On Sunday, speaking at a political rally in western France, Ms. Le Pen accused magistrates of conducting surveillance on political opponents and playing "dirty tricks."

"In a few weeks this government will be swept away and they will need to take responsibility for their actions," Ms. Le Pen said.

Ms. Le Pen has been a longstanding critic of France's judicial system, but the combative tone is striking from Mr. Fillon, a former prime minister who represents France's main center-right party.

The two presidential contenders' determination to continue their campaigns in the face of criminal investigations is redefining the French election as a struggle against what they view as a politically tainted judicial system.

In France, investigating magistrates and prosecutors have a high degree of autonomy. The government appoints them but has no say over who they charge and how they conduct investigations.

"Mr. Fillon causes damage because he gives credibility to conspiracy theories about the French justice system and the media," said Katia Dubreuil, national secretary for the French magistrates union.

The escalation of tensions led President François Hollande on Wednesday to defend the

independence of judges and French institutions, after refraining from comment on the campaign since deciding late last year not to stand for reelection.

"Being a candidate in the presidential election isn't an authorization to cast suspicion on the work of police and judges, to create a climate of distrust," Mr. Hollande said.

The probe into Mr. Fillon's employment of his wife and children has proved particularly damaging for the center-right candidate, who won November's conservative primary promising to be a scandal-free statesman with the courage to cut back on state spending.

Recent polls for the first round of France's two-round election showed Mr. Fillon slipping further behind Ms. Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron, Mr. Hollande's former economy minister who quit the government last year after founding his own centrist party, En Marche.

Ms. Le Pen would win the first round on April 23 but lose to Mr. Macron in the second-round runoff, polls show.

The preliminary charges Mr. Fillon will face on March 15 mark a significant procedural step, after which a case is either dismissed or ordered to trial. Mr. Fillon said as recently as late January he would pull out of the presidential race if he faced preliminary charges.

Ms. Le Pen's poll ratings have suffered less than Mr. Fillon's, despite the National Front being the focus of several criminal probes.

Police say they suspect Ms. Le Pen and other National Front members used funds earmarked for assistants working inside the Strasbourg-based

European Parliament, of which Ms. Le Pen is a member, to pay party staffers elsewhere in France. EU rules require European Parliament assistants to work at one of the body's offices in Brussels, Strasbourg or Luxembourg and to reside near their workplaces.

Last month, prosecutors brought preliminary charges of breach of trust against Ms. Le Pen's chief of staff, Catherine Griset, in connection to that probe, a spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office said. Ms. Griset wasn't immediately available to comment.

Prosecutors in February filed charges against another close associate of Ms. Le Pen, Frédéric Chatillon, as part of a separate probe into alleged misuse of public funds, according to the spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office. Mr. Chatillon heads Riwal, a company that did communications work for party candidates. He didn't respond to a request to comment.

Ms. Le Pen is also suspected by police of underestimating the value of the Le Pen family's wealth, said a spokeswoman for France's financial-crime prosecutor, which opened a separate probe last year after receiving an alert from the public agency responsible for vetting members of parliament.

Ms. Le Pen has dismissed all the allegations as an attempt to thwart the National Front.

"Magistrates are supposed to enforce the law, not go against the will of the people," she said Sunday.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

12:02 p.m. ET

BRUSSELS—European officials are compiling options for tightening implementation of the 2015 Iranian nuclear agreement, hoping to bolster their case that U.S. President Donald Trump should stick to the accord he has repeatedly criticized.

Officials from Brussels and the European Union countries that

## EU seeks ways to address Trump's concerns on Iran nuclear deal

Laurence Norman

March 1, 2017

helped negotiate the nuclear deal—Britain, France and Germany—plan to present options to U.S. officials in coming weeks.

The Trump administration is carrying out its own review of the nuclear deal. European officials hope that by proactively offering up solutions, they can indicate that they are responsive to Mr. Trump's concerns.

Options range from stepped-up inspections of Iranian activities to stricter interpretations of key provisions of the accord, which

seeks to keep Iran from being able to amass the materials for a nuclear weapon.

However while European officials are eager to show flexibility, any U.S. push to change the terms of the deal could still place Washington and Brussels on a collision course.

European officials are increasingly confident that the Trump administration won't tear up the agreement. The test of that will come in May, when the president must decide whether to extend

executive waivers that the Obama administration used to suspend some sanctions.

Meanwhile, Congress is working on new legislation which could expand sanctions over Iran's regional activities and charges of Iranian support for terrorism and of human rights abuses. While European officials agree that the nuclear deal doesn't preclude sanctions for other issues, they are nervous that some in Congress wish to scuttle the deal by re-creating major economic pressure on Iran.

The United Nations atomic agency, which oversees the Iranian nuclear deal on the ground, has said Iran is complying with the agreement, a position the EU and the Obama administration echoed.

Since the deal took effect in January 2016, European diplomats have praised the way it was being implemented. However there was recognition, following a series of visits to Washington by top European diplomats that the Trump administration wanted "very strong and tough oversight."

"I think on all the different pieces of the deal, you could really push for...a more robust approach," a senior diplomat said.

Some changes seem relatively clear. There will likely be a tighter grip on the as-yet little used procurement channel that vets exports to Iran of goods that could also be used in a nuclear program. Britain and France had already aired concerns about an approved Russian export of uranium ore to Iran. A second shipment from

Kazakhstan is being held up, officials say.

There will likely be a stronger response to any Iranian violation of the deal's caps on key nuclear materials. Iran twice briefly and narrowly exceeded limits on its stockpile of heavy water, a material that can be used in a process to produce plutonium. There is also discussion of forcing Iran to do more with excess material than shipping it to neighboring Omani waters.

Some European officials also want more oversight of Iran's research activities. The issue is crucial: if Iran can develop more advanced centrifuges—machines for spinning uranium into more dangerous forms—it can significantly cut the time it would take to amass enough weapons grade fuel. Iran has always said its nuclear program is for peaceful, civilian purposes.

There are agreed limits on Iran's research work under the deal and the International Atomic Energy Agency carries out inspections at declared nuclear facilities. But one

official said there is "no continuity of knowledge" on Iran's research activities and this could be addressed through the use of cameras, greater Iranian reporting and snap inspections.

There is also more room to enforce a key section of the agreement banning Iran from conducting work to glean nuclear weapon know-how. That enters much trickier territory because some of this work, computer modeling for example, could happen away from declared nuclear facilities—at military sites or even university labs. This could require stepped-up IAEA inspections, some officials say.

Yet there are other ideas circulating in Washington for tightening implementation that European capitals would likely push back on. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, who presides over the nuclear accord's dispute mechanism committee, has repeatedly said Europe won't accept a renegotiation of terms.

In testimony to congress last month, David Albright, a former weapons inspector who the Trump administration has consulted on the Iran deal, listed some of the proposals.

Among them, publishing Iran's confidential long-term nuclear research plans, banning further exemptions of material from the deal's 300-kilogram cap on enriched uranium and demanding regular access to Iranian military sites. He also proposed sending inspectors to Iran's Parchin military site to continue probing Iran's past nuclear work.

Even on Iran's ballistic weapons tests, which European and U.S. officials have criticized, differences persist. Mr. Trump said Iran "is playing with fire" after recent tests but Ms. Mogherini has said they don't violate the nuclear deal. So far, there has been no serious EU discussion of replicating the sanctions that Washington has enacted following the tests.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Once scorned, 'multispeed Europe' is back

Valentina Pop

March 1, 2017

12:11 p.m. ET

As the U.K. prepares to launch divorce talks with the European Union this month, the rest of the bloc is thinking seriously about loosening the ties among the 27 countries that remain.

In a report Wednesday, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker for the first time floated the possibility of the bloc handing back some powers to national governments. These could range from Brussels standing down from policing of government financing of companies, for example, to a broader pullback that would essentially strip the EU back to being merely a single market.

Those were just two of five scenarios Mr. Juncker put forward for how the post-Brexit EU might look in 2025. Unsurprisingly, the EU's disintegration wasn't among them. But with many governments reluctant to hand over more power to Brussels, leading politicians have renewed talk of a "multispeed Europe." This envisions some countries pursuing tighter economic and political integration across the board, but leaving others free to pick and choose the policy areas in which they want to move closer.

Such an approach once invited scorn from convinced Europhiles who wanted to see the bloc march in lockstep toward political union. Now

it seems to have the backing even of lifelong federalists like Mr. Juncker.

Mr. Juncker, the head of the EU's Brussels-based executive body, also mooted the prospect of countries being free to stand back from further integration while retaining the option of binding themselves more closely to the others at a later stage.

He highlighted defense, security, taxation and social matters as areas where consensus at 27 has proven all but impossible to achieve and "coalitions of the willing" may emerge instead.

The concept of having various orbits of countries within the EU, based on their willingness to hand over sovereignty on various policies, isn't new but has never been formally embraced.

Of the 28 nations in the EU now, 19 have dropped their national currency for the euro and 22 have become part of the border-free Schengen area (which includes some non-EU countries like Norway). But at least on paper, all EU members except the U.K. and Denmark are supposed to adopt the euro and all—bar the U.K. and Ireland—are to become part of Schengen one day.

The Juncker paper marks a shift from that tradition, reflecting the growing reality that nationalist, euroskeptic movements have reshaped the political discourse ahead of upcoming elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany and Italy.

Meant to provide food for thought for the 27 EU leaders meeting in Rome this month to discuss the bloc's future after Brexit, the paper also discusses the status quo and a federalist scenario, in which the bloc acts as one on the international stage and sets up several "Silicon Valleys" with EU investment funds.

By not endorsing any scenario, Mr. Juncker sought to strike a balance between nations such as Germany, France and Italy that traditionally favor integration and the more euroskeptic governments in Central and Eastern Europe that want to see power repatriated from Brussels.

The five scenarios also avoid any changes to the EU treaty, a yearslong exercise for which no member-state governments have much of an appetite.

Diplomats preparing for the Rome summit expect a multispeed Europe to emerge as the compromise everyone can agree on, as long as it is kept vague.

"The history of recent years has shown that there will be a multispeed EU, and not all members will participate in the same steps of integration," German Chancellor Angela Merkel said last month.

The host of the Rome summit, Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, reinforced this message by saying that "we need a flexible union, reformed, united where different shades of integration can coexist successfully."

His Maltese counterpart, Joseph Muscat, said last week that "if the only way in which we can stay united is by doing nothing, it is better not to be so united and do something."

The problems, however, will start once the leaders start delving into detail. Take migration, where funding from the EU could be linked to countries' willingness to take in refugees, which countries in Central and Eastern Europe have refused to do.

With less EU money likely to be available after the U.K. leaves the bloc, acrimonious negotiations are expected on the bloc's budget for the next seven years, including what it should be spent on and what conditions should be attached.

"Multispeed Europe is also a way to put pressure on some countries to reconsider blocking some policies, especially now when the EU is under pressure from Brexit and Trump," said Janis Emmanouilidis of the European Policy Center, a Brussels-based think tank, saw a new tone emerging.

"This is not the beginning of the end, but it is a realization that the readiness to make a big integration leap is not there," he said.

## Editorial : Italy's ungracious CIA pardon

March 1, 2017  
7:09 p.m. ET 35

Italian President Sergio Mattarella on Tuesday commuted part of the sentence of former CIA agent Sabrina De Sousa, which is good news but doesn't make up for what has been an egregious case of hindsight political moralizing. Ms. De Sousa has been hounded for more than a decade over her alleged role in the "extraordinary rendition" of a radical Egyptian imam after 9/11.

The commutation followed last week's news that Portuguese authorities had detained Ms. De Sousa, a U.S.-Portuguese dual citizen, and were preparing to extradite her to Italy to serve a four-year sentence. Mr. Mattarella reduced her term to three years, which under Italian law means she's unlikely to spend time in jail, although the conviction might stay

on her record.

An Italian court in 2009 convicted Ms. De Sousa and 25 other U.S. officials in absentia over a 2003 operation to render the imam, known as Abu Omar, from Milan to Egypt. Abu Omar, who was suspected of recruiting jihadists, says he was tortured in Egypt. Egyptian authorities released him without charge, though he was later convicted on terror charges in absentia in Italy.

As Europe soured on what used to be called the war on terror, Abu Omar's case became a liberal cause célèbre, while Ms. De Sousa was demonized in the press as an American "tiger in stilettos." The Italian government eventually pardoned several other Americans involved, but it refused to pardon Ms. De Sousa. Worse, the Bush and Obama Administrations declined to assert diplomatic immunity on her

behalf, though she was working under U.S. State Department cover at the time.

Ms. De Sousa took a risk when she left the U.S. to visit family in Portugal in 2015, knowing she faced potential extradition. Last year Portugal's highest court cleared the way for her extradition. After Italy's commutation, she may serve her time under house arrest or by doing community service in Portugal.

The commutation comes as a relief to her and her family, but Rome should have granted a full pardon. The agents who rendered Abu Omar were acting to protect Italy, in their official capacities, under lawful orders and in collaboration with Italian authorities. Ms. De Sousa deserves better than to have to worry about community service or a potential criminal record clouding her future.

Mr. Mattarella conditioned the commutation on the fact that Washington had terminated the extraordinary-rendition program. That suggests that actions deemed legal at one time might later derail the lives of the patriots who carry them out when the political mood turns. One way to avoid that is for President Trump to make clear the Administration will resist all efforts by the anti-antiterror left to hamper his campaign against Islamic State in foreign and international courts.

The more depressing take-away from the De Sousa episode is that while the Islamist threat to Europe escalates, too many European leaders continue to condemn the steps required to confront and defeat it.

## The New York Times

## After Trump Win, Anti-Soros Forces Are Emboldened in Eastern Europe

Rick Lyman

For more than a half-century, as Europe first struggled from the ashes of World War II and then shrugged off its Soviet shackles, American-backed nongovernmental organizations have been active across Europe, often called upon to explain the West's style of democratic capitalism to people who have known neither. Their presence often annoyed the Continent's more authoritarian-minded leaders, who regard many of the groups to be irritants at best, and threats at worst.

Traditionally, United States administrations of both parties have promoted the spread of democracy and stubbornly defended these advocacy groups. But Mr. Trump has said he will not press America's political system on other countries and has embraced some of Europe's far-right leaders. He also has criticized the European Union and made disparaging remarks about some democratic principles — including his frequent criticism of the news media.

For populist leaders like Mr. Orban, who has steadily steered Hungary toward so-called illiberal democracy, this new tone from the White House is regarded as a major opportunity.

"They see it as a historical moment," said Jozsef Peter Martin, executive director of Transparency International's Hungary branch. "The geopolitical situation has changed."

For years, populist and authoritarian governments have been targeting "foreign-funded" organizations in

many parts of the world, from China to India, and especially in Vladimir V. Putin's Russia. Similar talk was common in Central and Eastern Europe, but now governments in Hungary and elsewhere are pushing beyond political speeches to propose legislation.

"Orban has talked about the Trump era being a new international opportunity for Hungary," said Marta Pardavi, co-founder of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, which gets about 30 percent of its funding from Soros-backed foundations. "He said it was a gift to us."

Gergely Gulyas, a vice president of Hungary's governing party, agreed that Mr. Trump's victory had created a geopolitical climate more attractive to Hungary's current leaders, but he cautioned against seeing that as the decisive reason for the crackdown.

"I think we would have done this even if Hillary Clinton had won," he said.

He and other supporters of the Hungarian government say the outcry by civil society is a vast overreaction to what is simply a common-sense attempt to force the organizations to be more "transparent" — effectively turning the language of the advocacy groups against them.

In Hungary, governing party officials first began criticizing foreign-funded N.G.O.s in 2013. The following year, state investigators targeted organizations that received money from the Norway Grants, which the

Scandinavian nation uses to promote social and economic equality in the formerly communist East. Agents raided the Budapest offices of three organizations and demanded documentation from dozens of others. But the investigators' final report, released last fall, found no serious infringements of Hungarian law, and no charges were leveled.

But shortly after Mr. Trump's election, Fidesz leaders immediately renewed their attacks on "foreign-funded" N.G.O.s, as the new villains were groups sponsored by Mr. Soros, while also proposing new legislative restrictions. Fidesz officials have not unveiled their proposals but say they intend to create a registry of such organizations and force them to disclose their financial details. Some officials have proposed forcing local N.G.O. leaders to disclose their personal finances.

"It is only about transparency," Mr. Gulyas said. "This is a debate that is taking place around the world. An important debate about the future of democracy."

But advocacy groups say it is more about harassment and intimidation. Stefania Kapronczay, executive director of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, which gets over half its funding from Soros-backed organizations, said Hungarian officials were "testing the waters" to see "what they can get away with." New restrictions would have a "chilling effect," she said.

"Some small N.G.O.s just quit," she said. "The willingness of people to cooperate with us decreases."

Born in Budapest in 1930, Mr. Soros and his Jewish family survived the Nazi occupation with false identity papers. He eventually became a Wall Street financier and ultimately made billions through his own hedge fund, Soros Fund Management. He established the Open Society Foundations as an umbrella group for his philanthropy and has given more than \$12 billion to date. His philanthropic work promotes democracy, government accountability and freedom of expression — and, he has said, is driven by his memories of life under the Nazis.

"You couldn't come up with a better enemy figure today," said Jan Orlovsky, director of the Slovak branch of the Open Society Foundations. "George Soros brings up all of the stereotypes we have lived with all our lives — about Jews, bankers and, in Slovakia, also about Hungarians."

Chris Stone, the president of the Open Society Foundations, described the governmental crackdowns as "a campaign by government leaders who are impatient with the institutions of democracy."

Macedonia, struggling to form a new government in the debris of a two-year political crisis, has taken perhaps the most forceful anti-Soros stance. The Stop Operation Soros campaign pushes the idea that



international pressure — from N.G.O.s and Western governments — forced the recent fall of the right-wing government of Mr. Gruevski, who hopes to return to power.

"We believe that, in these murky times, it is really important to take away the mask of the so-called civic organizations and to clearly reveal their political goals and actions, as well as their financing," said Nenad Mirchevski, a founder of the movement.

In Poland, against a flare-up of anti-Soros statements, Prime Minister Beata Szydlo said her government intended to create a new body to coordinate state funding for all nongovernmental organizations. In

Slovakia, a far-right-wing party proposed forcing "foreign-funded" N.G.O.s to register with the government. That effort did not succeed, but that did little to slow the tide of anti-Soros speech.

"Demonic forces of evil, represented by Soros, the Clintons, the Bush family and others, have not come to terms with losing the election, so they keep attacking Trump and want to get rid of him," said a recent article in Hlavne Spravy, a right-wing Slovak daily.

From the moment Romania's nominally socialist party was returned to power in December, its populist leader, Liviu Dragnea, has pressed for more control over

N.G.O.s. "I have something against Mr. Soros," Mr. Dragnea said in a late January interview. In Bulgaria, both Mr. Soros and organizations that defend human rights have come under attack. A local newspaper, shortly after Mr. Trump's victory, described Mr. Soros as a "liberal terrorist." In Serbia, local right-wing and pro-Russian publications have linked Mr. Soros to the Rothschilds, highlighted his Jewishness and described his efforts as an "anti-Trump radical movement."

"And we are only at the start of the story," said Laszlo Majtenyi, director of the Eotvos Karoly Institute in Budapest, a Soros-founded organization, and a left-wing coalition candidate for president in

April. Once the government has stigmatized the groups as "foreign-funded," he said, future crackdowns will be easier.

And there is always the chance that authoritarian governments will feel emboldened enough to simply toss out the offending organizations.

"This is where European democratic values will be defended," said Goran Buldioski, director of the Open Society Initiative for Europe. "In Hungary and Poland, not in Western Europe. Democracy is more than just the ballot box, and it is more than something that happens every four years."

## INTERNATIONAL

The  
Washington  
Post

### Editorial : The U.S. should use its leverage on Syria

PRESIDENT TRUMP'S relations with, and intentions toward, the Russian regime of Vladimir Putin remain troublingly opaque. So it was a pleasant surprise on Tuesday when his ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, excoriated Moscow for blocking action against the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad for its illegal use of chemical weapons. Russia and China, which joined in vetoing a sanctions resolution, "made an outrageous and indefensible choice," Ms. Haley said. "They turned away from defenseless men, women and children who died gasping for breath when Assad's forces dropped their poisonous gas. They ignored the facts. They put their friends in the Assad regime ahead of our global security."

Ms. Haley was only stating plain truths. An investigation ordered by

the U.N. Security Council concluded months ago that Syrian government forces dropped chlorine-filled barrel bombs on rebel-controlled areas three times in 2014 and 2015 — a blatant violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention that the Assad regime joined in 2013. In reality, Damascus has used the horrific weapons considerably more often than that; Human Rights Watch found that it dropped them systematically on civilians in Aleppo last year. Yet Moscow and Beijing refused to accept the evidence and tried to put off a vote on sanctioning those found responsible for the attacks.

Ms. Haley, who lunched with Mr. Trump and Vice President Pence the day before the Security Council's meeting, insisted on a vote so that the Putin and Xi Jinping regimes were forced to go on the record. Then she bluntly called them out. "It's a sad day on the Security

Council," she said. "When members start making excuses for other member states killing their own people, the world is definitely a more dangerous place."

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The ambassador's forceful diplomacy was useful for more than sending the message that the Trump administration will be, like all U.S. administrations before it, ready to oppose war crimes. We hope it also is meant to put Mr. Putin on notice that Mr. Trump's stated willingness to join with him in fighting the Islamic State will not extend to tolerating gross human rights violations or propping up the blood-soaked Assad dictatorship. An alliance with Russia that abetted such actions would only discredit the United States, including with its major allies in the Middle East; the chief beneficiary would be Iran,

which has made the Assad regime its puppet and which has the largest interest in sustaining it.

Mr. Putin, who has frequently hinted that he could be willing to dispense with Mr. Assad, has been trying to orchestrate a new Syrian peace process with Turkey that all but excludes the United States. Predictably, it is going nowhere — in part because, as The Post's Liz Sly reports, players on both sides are waiting to see what stance the new U.S. administration adopts. This is leverage that Mr. Trump should use: If Mr. Putin wants his help to settle the Syrian conflict and protect Russia's interests there, he should be obliged to split with Iran and abandon a regime that drops chlorine on women and children.

The  
New York  
Times

### Russian Airstrike in Syria Hits U.S. Allies by Mistake

Michael R. Gordon

WASHINGTON — Russian aircraft mistakenly bombed Syrian Arab fighters who were being trained by the United States, the commander of the American-led operation in Iraq and Syria said Wednesday. American advisers were about three miles away when the Russian strike occurred.

The episode pointed to the risk of unintended clashes among the myriad forces operating on a fluid

battlefield in Syria, as the American command looks toward the fight to retake Raqqa, the Islamic State's de facto capital in the country.

Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, who commands the American-led task force that is fighting the militants in Iraq and Syria, said the strike by Russian and Syrian government planes led to casualties among the Syrian fighters, but he declined to say how many were hurt or if any were killed.

He added that the Russian attack appeared to have been a mistake: The Russian military thought it was bombing villages held by the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, when in fact they were recently occupied by Syrian Arab fighters.

"We had some Russian aircraft and regime aircraft bomb some villages that I believe they thought were held by ISIS," General Townsend said in a video news conference with reporters at the Pentagon. "Actually on the ground were some of our Syrian Arab coalition forces."

A spokesman for the American-led command in Baghdad said that the Russian airstrikes took place about 10 miles southwest of Manbij. The Russian bombing stopped after American military officers at the air war command in Qatar called their Russian counterparts in Syria.

In Moscow, the Defense Ministry asserted that the United States had provided the coordinates of American-backed forces in northern Syria before the airstrikes and that Russian and Syria warplanes had



not struck any areas that had been properly designated.

"No airstrikes were carried out by either Syrian or Russian aircraft in areas designated by the U.S.," the ministry said in a statement.

The battlefield in northern Syria is crowded with a diverse array of forces near Al Bab, including Turkish-backed Syrian militias, Syrian government forces, Kurdish and Arab fighters backed by the United States, and ISIS militants.

"Around Al Bab, all the forces that are acting in Syria have converged literally within hand-grenade range of one another," General Townsend said.

There has been a similar convergence of forces to the east where Syrian government forces

have advanced to the point where they are within "rifle range" of Syrian Arab fighters backed by the United States who are defending the area around Manbij, the general added.

"It's very difficult and complicated," he said.

General Townsend said the United States was encouraging all sides to focus on the fight against the Islamic State and not let tensions among groups divert them from the need to take Raqqa.

"That's what we ought to keep our efforts focused on and not fighting deliberately or accidentally with one another," he said.

This is the second time in recent weeks that there has been an episode of so-called friendly fire involving the Russians. Last month,

Russian fighters mistakenly bombed Turkish soldiers near Al Bab.

The Russian airstrikes also raise the question of whether the American military needs to broaden its dialogue with Russian commanders over operations in Syria. Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met last month in Azerbaijan with Gen. Valery V. Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian general staff. It was their first meeting and the discussion included how to "enhance communications," the Pentagon said.

Discussing the fighting in Iraq, General Townsend also said that some low-level Islamic State fighters had sought to escape from Mosul disguised as civilians, but that they had been detained.

He said that there were 12,000 to 15,000 ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria, some 2,000 of them in western Mosul and in and around the nearby town of Tal Afar.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has presented the White House with his recommendations on how to step up the military campaign against ISIS, which President Trump vowed to "demolish and destroy" in his address to Congress on Tuesday.

General Townsend suggested that he did not foresee the United States "bringing in large numbers of coalition troops" to help with Iraq and the assault on Raqqa.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### In Mosul, residents rebuild as Iraqi forces fight Islamic State

Ben Kesling and  
Awadh Altaie

March 1, 2017 5:30 a.m. ET

MOSUL, Iraq—Ibrahim Akram carried a 3-foot hookah pipe down a bombed-out street recently in the part of Mosul recaptured from Islamic State by Iraqi forces, basking in the freedom to enjoy a smoking habit that drew beatings from the extremists.

As Mr. Akram, who is 20, stopped to join a group of friends, an Iraqi helicopter in the sky behind him let loose a volley of rocket fire at Islamic State targets across the Tigris River, where Iraqi forces are fighting street-by-street to recapture the rest of the city.

Mr. Akram, unfazed, turned to watch the attack in the distance. He said he had no sympathy for the terror group. "If my brother was with Islamic State, I would kill him," he said.

Life in Mosul is divided. Residents on the east side are starting to rebuild neighborhoods just over a month after Islamic State was pushed out. Salesmen tend to carts loaded with vegetables and bakeries

are open for business. Government workers operating a backhoe recently replaced a water main damaged by the fighting.

At the same time, the battle is escalating on the west side. On Tuesday, Iraqi forces continued pushing into densely populated areas where Islamic State has dug tunnels and set up booby traps, after capturing a major bridge across the Tigris a day earlier.

The return to normal life is challenging in areas where Islamic State was ousted. Residents in the east are dealing with onerous security measures and contending with shortages of fresh water, basic goods and medical supplies.

"The local government is working hard, but they need more time," said Ibrahim Jalal, who was patching bullet holes in the walls of a former nursery school that Islamic State used as a sniper's nest.

Mr. Jalal, 34, said he used to be an administrator at Mosul University but is now working as a mason. The university, which was taken over by the militants, is essentially destroyed.

His boss, Mohammed Yaseen, complained about the lack of running water or electricity where he lives. He said that some Islamic State militants who remained in the east are trying to melt back into the population.

Roughly 2 million Iraqis lived in Mosul before Islamic State took over in mid-2014. The Sunni majority of Mosul has long been wary of the Shiite-dominated central government.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, mindful of the dissatisfactions that led some Sunnis to embrace Islamic State initially, has worked to curb sectarianism around the city.

But Kurdish Peshmerga fighters operate checkpoints a few miles from Mosul, while the Shiite-dominated military is active in the city and militia groups on the outskirts.

Food and water are primarily trucked in from either southern Iraq or Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region, about 50 miles away. At one major river crossing on the road to Erbil, the main bridge has been blown up, leaving traffic to take turns

crossing a single-lane temporary metal span.

"It takes about 10 hours to go from Erbil to Mosul and back," a trip that normally takes about three hours, said Kamal Ali, a truck driver who was waiting with a cargo of shoes at one of a series of checkpoints outside Mosul.

Prices are rising in Mosul, he said, and added, "If traffic eased up, it would be cheaper."

Despite the challenges, Mr. Akram and his friends talked excitedly about a post-Islamic State Iraq, with schools where they have books and the prospect of getting real jobs, and where they no longer have to worry about being tortured by the extremists.

Mr. Akram said he had been detained many times by Islamic State for smoking, which was forbidden by the militants. The most-recent time, he said jailers beat his fingertips with a metal pipe. A fingernail on his left hand was still black.

## The Washington Post

### U.S.: Kurds will participate in some form in attack on Raqqa

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

Forces combating the Islamic State in Syria should focus on defeating the militants rather than wasting energy and resources fighting among themselves, the head of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq and Syria said Wednesday.

Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend said that Kurdish fighters would participate "in some form or fashion" in the upcoming operation to retake the city of Raqqa, the Islamic State's de facto capital in Syria. But he insisted that they will largely be "local Kurds" from the Raqqa area who pose no threat to neighboring Turkey.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said this week that Turkish

forces would participate in the offensive but that any involvement by the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units, or YPG, was unacceptable. Turkey considers the YPG, which has been in the forefront of U.S.-backed ground operations in Syria, to be a terrorist organization in league with its own separatist Kurds and responsible for terrorist attacks inside Turkey.

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Townsend said he has "seen absolutely zero evidence" of that. Pentagon officials have been negotiating with Turkey for weeks in an effort to include its forces in the Raqqa offensive while not throwing

out existing plans for YPG participation.

*[U.S. military aid is fueling big ambitions for Syria's leftist Kurdish militia]*

"We encourage all forces to remain focused on the counter-ISIS fight and concentrate their efforts on defeating ISIS and not toward other objectives that may cause the coalition to divert energy and resources away from Raqqa," Townsend told reporters via a video link from Baghdad. ISIS is an acronym for the Islamic State.

Discussions over how and when to begin the operation have continued as the Pentagon this week delivered its updated plan for that and other counter-Islamic State operations in Syria and Iraq. Townsend said he had provided his own recommendations for the plan but declined to discuss them until the White House has finished its deliberations.

Asked about expectations that the administration will send more troops to Syria and Iraq to supplement the current 500 in the former and 5,000 in the latter, he said, "I don't foresee us bringing in large numbers of coalition troops, mainly because what we're doing is, in fact,

working."

But he acknowledged the challenges posed by the Raqqa operation, as well as the larger problems of the crowded and chaotic battlefield in northwestern Syria.

"Just this week ... last week, we saw Turk and Turk proxy forces converge with Syrian regime and Syrian proxy fighters, ISIS being in the mix there," Townsend said. "We have YPG, Syrian Democratic Force fighters and Syrian Arab Coalition fighters also bumping right up against each other there. And then here in the last 48 hours, we've seen Syrian regime forces advance through ISIS-held villages to essentially rifle-range or hand-grenade range with Syrian Arab Coalition fighters holding the area around Manbij."

The Syrian Democratic Forces are rebels participating in Turkey's military advance south from its border with Syria toward the Islamic State-held town of al-Bab. The Syrian Arab Coalition is the joint Kurdish-Arab group moving south toward Raqqa. Both are being assisted by U.S. Special Operations forces and U.S. warplanes.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, Townsend revealed, Russian and Syrian

aircraft aiding the Turkish advance bombed "our Syrian Arab Coalition forces" between al-Bab and Manbij, causing some rebel casualties.

He said he believed that the pilots thought they were bombing the Islamic State. U.S. forces, just a few miles away, called in the information and halted the airstrikes, Townsend said. Moscow later denied that Russian or Syrian aircraft had bombed the area.

The United States and Russia established a hotline in 2015 in which a U.S. colonel in Qatar and a Russian colonel in Syria work to "deconflict" operations and prevent aerial collisions. Senior U.S. officials have not cooperated directly with the Russians, in part because of 2014 legislation that forbids engagement because of Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

Senior U.S. military officials in the Middle East have advocated for increased deconfliction talks, citing the proximity in which the militaries are operating in Syria. But the military has been widely opposed to President Trump's proposed cooperation with Russia in the broader counterterrorism fight.

At a NATO conference last month, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis

accused Russia of violating international law with "aggressive" and "destabilizing" actions, including interference in U.S. and other elections, and said the United States is "not in a position right now to collaborate on the military level."

Russia has been the primary backer of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his separate conflict against opposition forces fighting a civil war against him with backing from the United States and European and regional powers.

In a report issued Wednesday in Geneva, a special U.N. investigative commission said that all sides in the civil war committed war crimes during the battle for Aleppo late last year, including the Syrian government's deliberate bombing of a humanitarian convoy and use of chemical munitions.

Syrian warplanes, it said, "meticulously planned and ruthlessly carried out" the Sept. 19 attack, killing 10 aid workers who were preparing to deliver humanitarian assistance to besieged civilians during a supposed cease-fire.

Both Syria and Russia had denied the attack.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## **A raid in remote Yemen and a SEAL's death still reverberate for Trump (UNE)**

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

Almost as soon as the team of U.S. and Emirati commandos slipped into the darkened village, their weapons shouldered in the moonless night, a surprise counterattack erupted and a veteran Navy SEAL was hit.

Struggling to hold off an escalating fusillade from al-Qaeda fighters and armed Yemeni tribesmen, the American forces, fearing the worst for their injured comrade, made an urgent request for a helicopter to evacuate Chief Petty Officer William "Ryan" Owens.

The 36-year-old SEAL, who would later die of his wounds, is now at the center of a debate over the first counterterrorism operation of the Trump administration, one that has provided ammunition for critics of the new president's decision-making process and dealt a potential blow to future action against one of the world's most potent militant groups.

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President Trump paid tribute to the fallen SEAL on Tuesday night in his

address to a joint session of Congress, singling out Owens's widow, Carryn, in a sharply emotional episode that juxtaposed the president's assertions about the success of the raid with his apparent attempts to distance himself from the criticism it has generated.

According to current and former officials, the discussions leading up to the Jan. 29 raid, intended as the first step in a major expansion of U.S. counterterrorism operations in Yemen, marked a departure from the more hands-on, deliberative process used by the previous administration.

The raid, the product of a more abbreviated White House process, has been followed by confusion within the U.S. government over how operations against al-Qaeda in Yemen will proceed. It has also generated friction with a key counterterrorism ally, smarting from the lack of adequate notice about the raid and, according to local reports, up to 31 Yemeni civilian deaths.

*[U.S. service member killed in Yemen is first combat death of Trump tenure]*

The raid, which took place just over a week into the Trump administration, came as U.S. military officials sought to restore their counterterrorism capability in Yemen, severely damaged in the country's ongoing civil conflict. In 2015, the United States was forced to suspend a long-standing program that partnered Special Operations forces with Yemeni troops on the ground, severely limiting the U.S. government's ability to track and disrupt a feared militant adversary, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Long seen as a particularly threatening branch of al-Qaeda, the group has used the chaos that followed the 2011 Arab Spring to expand its influence, seizing territory and recruiting supporters from Yemen's tribal society. It has also demonstrated an ambition to strike the U.S. homeland.

Hoping that expanded operations would provide an opportunity to recover information that would increase their understanding of AQAP's network and goals, military officials last fall developed proposals to resume a more robust counterterrorism program.

Colin Kahl, a former official who oversaw Middle East issues at the Pentagon and was national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden, said a proposal put forward by the Pentagon in the final weeks of the Obama administration would have expanded military authorities to conduct partnered ground operations and placed additional Special Operations and aviation assets in the region. "This was a big piece of business," Kahl said.

*[A deadly U.S. raid in Yemen reveals strength of al-Qaeda affiliate]*

A tearful Carryn Owens, the widow of U.S. Navy SEAL William "Ryan" Owens who died in a raid in Yemen, received a standing ovation from Congress when President Trump acknowledged her husband's bravery. A tearful Carryn Owens, the widow of U.S. Navy SEAL William "Ryan" Owens who died in a raid in Yemen, received a standing ovation from Congress when President Trump acknowledged her husband's bravery. (Photo: Melina Mara, The Post/Reuters)

(Reuters)

In early January, White House officials examined the military request but decided to table a decision for the new administration, recommending to incoming officials that they conduct a thorough review of the proposal.

On Jan. 25, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis requested urgent approval at a dinner meeting with Trump of a nighttime mission that represented a first step in expanding activities against AQAP. The meeting was also attended by Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; then-national security adviser Michael Flynn; CIA Director Mike Pompeo; and a handful of others. Trump approved the operation.

According to one senior administration official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide new details of the internal deliberations, Trump was provided information on the proposed raid earlier that day, during his morning intelligence meeting. He also briefly dropped by a discussion on the topic that Flynn was holding in his office.

The following day, the operation was discussed at a previously scheduled meeting among sub-Cabinet officials chaired by K.T. McFarland, Trump's deputy national security adviser.

Asked what risks the operation carried, Gen. Paul Selva, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ticked off a list of possible problems that military officials believed could occur, including the potential for U.S. or civilian casualties and the possibility that militants might be bracing for an attack, officials said. While officials believed AQAP might be preparing for an unspecified assault rather than operating with knowledge of the Jan. 29 raid, the operation still posed an elevated risk to American forces.

In part because the operation had already been approved by Trump and in part because the meeting was also scheduled to cover other topics, discussion of the raid was as short as around 25 minutes, according to several accounts, and as long as 40, according to the senior administration official.

In either case, the brisk treatment of a high-risk operation stands in contrast to similar deliberations during the Obama administration,

known for its extensive litigation of risks in military activities and tight control of tactical decision-making.

"In previous operations like this, we would sit around the table for two hours and scrub everything. The intelligence agencies would put down maps. We'd have congressional folks talk about reaching out to Congress. The State Department would do its political assessment," Kahl said. "You can't cover the complexity of a topic like that in 23 minutes."

*[In deadly Yemen raid, a lesson for Trump's national security team]*

Former officials have also criticized the raid, saying it has strained relations with the Yemeni government. U.S. officials said Matthew Tueller, the U.S. ambassador to Yemen, had promised to notify President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi as the operation got underway. Diplomats said Hadi was notified of the raid.

After reports of the raid and a high civilian death toll became public, the Yemeni government reacted, first signaling it had suspended U.S. permission to mount ground operations and then publicly backtracking on that move. In another indication of the internal confusion that has characterized the early Trump administration, officials at the State and Defense departments said that raids had not been suspended, while the senior administration official said the suspension remains in effect.

The State Department and the Yemeni Embassy in Washington declined to comment.

Eric Pelofsky, who served as special assistant to President Barack Obama and senior director for North Africa and Yemen on Obama's national security staff, said the raid "risked significant damage to our counterterrorism cooperation with the Yemeni government. We do not yet know what the cost of that damage will be."

David Maxwell, a former Special Operations officer who is associate director for Georgetown University's Security Studies Program, said Special Operations commanders would have reviewed the raid proposal carefully and signed off only if they thought it was a viable plan.

"But the enemy has a vote, and there is no perfect intelligence," Maxwell said. "Every mission is high-risk, and we always have to be willing to accept the casualties."

Such risks were certainly on the minds of the Navy SEALs that night after an elite Special Operations air regiment dropped them at their insertion point in remote central Yemen.

According to Yemeni officials, AQAP fighters had chosen the village of Yaklaa as a training site because of its remoteness and its sympathetic residents. They described Abdul-Raouf al-Dhahab, an important local tribal leader, as an AQAP supporter.

In another illustration of the complexity of the environment facing U.S. forces, Dhahab had recently struck a deal with the Yemeni government to fight rival Houthis rebels, making him both a U.S. counterterrorism target and an ally of the U.S.-backed effort to restore Hadi's government-in-exile to power.

Around 1 a.m., the combined team of roughly two dozen U.S. and Emirati commandos arrived in Yaklaa, a collection of mud-brick houses scattered among hilly terrain and bordered by a minefield. According to Yemeni security and tribal officials, the foreign forces used nonlethal grenades and suppressed rifles as they fought their way into the homes of Dhahab and another suspect, both of whom were killed.

*[Trump passes blame for Yemen raid to his generals: 'They lost Ryan']*

Yemeni and tribal officials described a chaotic scene that followed, saying that tribal leaders, even those without an affiliation with AQAP, took up arms out of loyalty to Dhahab and a desire to protect their village.

"Any person who has dignity and honor would not stand by and watch his neighbors and relatives and tribesmen being attacked and do nothing," said Saleh Hussein al-Aameri, a tribal leader who was close enough to hear the gunfire.

According to U.S. officials, providing new information about the raid, the AQAP fighters withdrew to a nearby building, unleashing grenades and gunfire despite the women and children around them. Unable to

shoot their way out of the engagement, U.S. forces called for air support to attack the building.

The commandos gathered what they could — computer equipment, documents and pictures of the now-dead midlevel tribal leaders they had hoped to capture — before withdrawing under the cover of Marine Cobra gunships and Harrier attack jets that began strafing Yemeni positions with their 25mm cannons and rockets.

"Anything that moved in the area was targeted by American helicopters," Aameri said.

With the number of injured U.S. personnel rising, a Marine Quick Reaction Force was launched from the USS Makin Island, an amphibious assault ship in the Gulf of Aden. But that evacuation operation went awry, too: Three additional service members were wounded when an approaching MV-22 Osprey lost power and hit the ground. The \$75 million aircraft was then scuttled to keep it out of AQAP hands.

It's not known whether Emirati forces were killed or wounded in the operation.

The U.S. military is conducting investigations into the operation, including a probe into reports of noncombatant deaths.

While critics have questioned the intelligence gained in the raid, leaders at the White House and Pentagon have repeatedly defended its value.

The White House was dealt a blow last week when news reports revealed that Owens's father, Bill, questioned the necessity of the raid and had refused to meet with Trump when his son's remains were repatriated in early February.

Speaking to Congress on Tuesday, Trump cited Mattis's description of the raid as a success, but the president has also appeared to distance himself from the operation. Earlier this week, he said the generals "lost Ryan."

Ali Al-Mujahed in Sanaa, Yemen, contributed to this report.

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL**

2017 2:28 p.m. ET

ISMALIA, Egypt—Women traveling on buses in northern Sinai say

## ISIS violence, intimidation escalate in Egypt's northern Sinai

Dahlia Kholaif

Updated March 1,

Islamic State fighters have boarded the vehicles, introduced themselves as religious police and threatened to whip them and splash them with acid if they don't comply with the militants' dress code.

"They lectured us on how to dress according to Islamic Shariah [law], and warned that those who don't wear full-face veils or travel without a male guardian will face punishment," said Marwa Elfarr, a

teacher who was traveling from Al Arish to Rafah, near Egypt's border with the Gaza Strip.

Such bus-boarding incidents by Islamic State militants, two of which occurred last week, coincide with a



wave of attacks targeting Egypt's Coptic Christian families, spurring an exodus from the volatile northern area of the peninsula.

In the past week, at least 154 Christian families have fled their homes in Al Arish for Ismailia, the closest major city, according to church officials, marking the largest uprooting of Egyptians by violence in recent years.

The escalating violence and intimidation against both Muslims and Christians have again exposed the weakness of the Egyptian army in the region, despite pledges by President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi to restore security.

"Cairo's claimed strategy for countering jihadist violence in north includes protection of the local population, but here we see [Islamic State] fighters successfully targeting the region's most vulnerable population," said Zack Gold, an expert on Sinai at the Atlantic Council.

Such attacks by Egypt's Islamic State affiliate, known as Sinai Province, are designed to project power as the group loses ground in its Syrian and Iraqi strongholds, Mr. Gold added.

The radical group doesn't control any territory in northern Sinai but operates there with virtual impunity. Ms. Elfar said her bus was stopped by the masked men despite passing several Egyptian military checkpoints along the 25-mile journey from Al Arish to Rafah.

A spokesman for Egypt's military declined to comment Wednesday on the flight of Christians from the area and on Ms. Elfar's testimony, referring questions to the government.

Mr. Sisi, a former general, came to power in a 2013 military coup promising to eradicate extremism. His failure to quell the insurgency has led to criticism from Coptic Christians, who comprise some 10% of Egypt's population, and others targeted by Islamic State.

During separate meetings in Cairo last week with Egyptian security officials and Commander Gen. Joseph Votel, head of U.S. Central Command, Mr. Sisi said counterterrorism and the protection of minorities were a priority for Cairo.

But on Wednesday, Amnesty International said the Egyptian leader hadn't done enough to protect Christians in Sinai and elsewhere in Egypt.

While attacks by Islamic State and other militant groups mainly target security forces and soldiers in northern Sinai, insurgents have staged some of their deadliest attacks elsewhere in Egypt.

Sinai Province claimed responsibility for the downing of a Russian passenger jet over Sinai in October 2015 that killed all 224 people aboard. In December, it took responsibility for a suicide bombing at Cairo's main Coptic cathedral compound, which 29 Christians dead.

A Sinai Province video released last month identified the purported bomber in the cathedral attack and promised that more Egyptian Christians would be killed.

The video confirmed a string of sectarian killings by unidentified armed men in Al Arish, which left at least seven Christians dead, including last week's shooting of a Coptic man in front of his family.

Nagwa Fawzy, a Christian restaurant owner, fled Friday with 42 of her Christian relatives after her brother-in-law and nephew were shot and killed by unknown gunmen who then set their home ablaze. Her sister survived the attack, which Sinai Province is suspected of carrying out.

"I wouldn't have left. I have a business and a home there. Al Arish has been my home since 1969," Ms. Fawzy said. But after her family was killed, "staying was impossible."

She is now living in a youth hostel in Ismailia with little more than the clothes on her back, she said. Egypt's government has promised to cover housing and education costs for those who fled. But some say they fear a lack of security rather than money.

"Let's face it, soldiers and police forces in Al Arish, armed and licensed to kill, are scared," said one of Ms. Fawzy's nephews, Sameh, 35. "Why would we not be?"

—Tamer El-Ghobashy in Cairo contributed to this article.

#### Corrections & Amplifications

In his meetings with Gen. Joseph Votel, head of U.S. Central Command, Mr. Sisi said counterterrorism and the protection of minorities were a priority for Cairo. An earlier version of the article incorrectly quoted Mr. Sisi as saying counterterrorism and the protection of minorities were a priority for Washington. (March 1, 2017)

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

# Residents cry foul as Israeli military prepares to raze Bedouin village in West Bank

Rory Jones

Updated March 1, 2017 11:12 a.m. ET

KHAN AL AHMAR, the West Bank—Halimeh Zahayka runs a Palestinian school here built in 2009 with walls of mud and old tires. Soon she may have no building at all.

Last week, the Israeli military deemed the entire village was constructed illegally, setting the stage for the school and other buildings here to be razed. A lawyer for the village said he expected an Israeli demolition order on Thursday.

The ruling put this ramshackle village of 35 Bedouin families settled over half a century ago at the center of the conflict over who should govern the West Bank.

Some of Khan Al Ahmar's 170 residents say Israel just wants the land to expand a nearby Jewish settlement. They argue that demolition would indicate that Israel is no longer committed to a peace deal that allows for the creation of an independent Palestinian state, a so-called "two-state solution." Israel says its goal is merely to take down illegal structures.

Indications from Israel and U.S. President Donald Trump that they aren't wedded to a two-state solution have deepened unease among Palestinians.

"Many people within the Israeli government have taken the election of Trump as an opportunity to bury the two-state solution," said Xavier Abu Eid, a spokesman for the Palestine Liberation Organization, which negotiates with Israel. "One way to do that is through the forcible displacement of people from their homes."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said he is committed to achieving a peace agreement with Palestinians, but recently sidestepped questions about whether that included the creation of a Palestinian state.

The Oslo Accords of the 1990s—the U.S.-brokered blueprint for peace between Israel and the Palestinians—divided the West Bank into three parts ahead of negotiations on a final peace agreement. Area A contains the main Palestinian population centers and is administered by the Palestinian Authority. Area B is

controlled by both Israel and the Palestinians. Israel controls Area C, which makes up roughly 60% of the West Bank and is where settlements are located.

Some lawmakers in the ruling coalition, including Minister of Education Naftali Bennett, say they want to formally make Area C part of Israel and give citizenship to the Palestinians living there. Around 300,000 Palestinians lived in Area C in 2014, according to the U.N., as did 385,900 Jewish Israeli settlers, according to the CIA World Factbook.

Demolitions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank increased after Mr. Netanyahu's government came to power in May 2015. Last year, the army razed 867 Palestinian homes in Area C, nearly twice 2015's demolitions.

Some opponents of the demolitions say Israel is trying to force Palestinian communities in Area C to move closer to Palestinian cities so they won't vie with Israelis for land.

"This larger policy is designed to allow Israel to hold as much land as possible with as few Palestinians on

it as possible," said Amit Gilutz, spokesman for B'Tselem, a left-wing nongovernmental organization that monitors demolitions of Palestinian homes.

"This is a step towards annexing C, resulting in the killing of the two-state solution," said Khan Al Ahmar village spokesman Eid Khamis Jahalin.

Israeli officials reject such allegations. They say demolitions are the result of court rulings against illegal construction and aren't connected to settlement expansion. Israel doesn't consider settlements or demolitions an obstacle to a peace agreement.

Israeli officials note that buildings constructed illegally in Jewish settlements also are demolished. On Tuesday, the military began evacuating nine homes in a Jewish settlement that the high court said were built on Palestinian land. Last month, the army evicted 300 Israelis from an illegal outpost, called Amona, for a similar reason.

U.N. officials argue that the situation is different for Palestinians, who seldom receive permission from the Israeli military's Civil Administration,



which administers the West Bank, to legally build. The Civil Administration didn't provide numbers of Palestinian building permits issued in recent years.

Khan Al Ahmar was settled by Bedouins displaced during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. The village, with its school and dwellings of wood and corrugated metal, is now wedged between two Jewish settlements.

Some Israeli lawmakers in Mr. Netanyahu's ruling coalition hope to

expand one of the settlements, Ma'ale Adumim, and make it the first Jewish settlement the government formally annexes. They have drafted a bill to achieve that end.

The village is accessible by a dirt track from a highway between that links Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. The school was built in 2009 with funding from European nongovernmental organizations.

The Civil Administration said it plans to move the Palestinian Bedouin in

Khan Al Ahmar and other Bedouin in Area C to a planned community near Jericho where "the families will be assigned plots of land that include residential infrastructure such as water, electricity, and sewage, while maintaining the population's lifestyle."

Last week, the Israeli military delivered "stop work" notices to the Khan Al Ahmar school and other buildings here—a formal step in the process leading to demolition.

In the office of Ms. Zahayka, the head teacher, maps of Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip adorned the walls alongside pictures of the late Yasser Arafat, the late Palestinian leader. Nearby, children bent over open textbooks.

"We will never leave this area," Ms. Zahayka declared. "Even if they demolish, we will teach on the ruins."

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Three words — radical Islamic terrorism — expose a Trump administration divide (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/greg.jaffe.5>

With three words President Trump exposed one of the biggest rifts inside his administration: the divide between the national security pragmatists and the ideologues pressing for more sweeping change.

Trump vowed on Tuesday that his administration is taking strong measures to protect the United States from "radical Islamic terrorism," slowing his cadence to enunciate the words. The president was still speaking when Sebastian Gorka, a deputy assistant to the president, added an exclamation point to his remarks. "RADICAL ISLAMIC TERRORISM!" Any questions?" he tweeted.

The president's remarks and Gorka's tweet, which had been taken down by Wednesday morning, could be read as a direct rebuke of Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, Trump's new national security adviser. Less than a week earlier McMaster told his staff in an "all hands" meeting that he did not like the broad label and preferred talking about specific adversaries, such as the Islamic State, according to officials who were in the meeting.

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He said that groups, such as the Islamic State, were "un-Islamic" and referred to them as "criminals" and "thugs."

The disagreement is more than just rhetorical and sheds light on a

significant divide in the White House between McMaster and Stephen K. Bannon, Trump's chief strategist. Bannon leads the Strategic Initiatives Group, an internal White House think tank, and was also named by Trump to a position on the National Security Council, giving him a major role in the formulation of foreign policy. Gorka is one of his senior advisers, focusing on issues involving counterterrorism, immigration and refugees.

*[For a Trump adviser, an odyssey from the fringes of Washington to the center of power]*

Bannon's stark, nationalist convictions offer a contrast to the rest of Trump's foreign policy team, which is dominated by generals, such as McMaster and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who have been strong advocates for an America engaged in the world through strong, multilateral alliances.

The differences are particularly sharp on Islam, where the views of Gorka and Bannon mark a fundamental departure from the approach that Republican and Democratic administrations have taken to counterterrorism and the Muslim world over the past 16 years.

Bannon has said that the United States is locked in a brutal and bloody civilizational conflict with a "new barbarity" that has its roots in radical Islam. McMaster, who led U.S. troops in Iraq in 2005 and 2006, has taken a different view, insisting that the primary drivers of jihadist terrorism are rooted in the collapse of governance, torture and deep-seated sectarian and ethnic grievances.

"Every time you disrespect an Iraqi, you're working for the enemy," he told his troops in Iraq when they were battling Islamic militants.

On Wednesday Gorka defended the president's use of the phrase "radical Islamic terrorism," calling them the "clearest three words" of the president's speech. "The enemy is radical Islamic terrorism," Gorka said in an interview with NPR. "That has not changed, and it will not change."

He also dismissed suggestions that there was a rift inside the administration and insisted that McMaster's words had been mischaracterized in news reports. He said that McMaster was referring specifically to the Islamic State when he said that the term "radical Islamic terrorism" was not helpful.

"We are talking about the broader threat," Gorka said. McMaster's remarks were first reported by the New York Times.

McMaster's private remarks last week were designed to help calm a staff that had been roiled and demoralized by the sudden resignation of his predecessor, retired Lt. Gen Michael Flynn. Flynn had misled the vice president about a phone call with the Russian ambassador.

In addition to talking about terrorism, McMaster also described Russia, China and North Korea as the three most pressing nation-state threats to the United States.

The public dispute, less than a week into McMaster's tenure, highlights the perilous balancing act facing the general as he moves into the White House. Some of McMaster's friends and former military officers have

said that retiring from the military before taking the job as national security adviser would have provided him more leverage in internal debates.

"In a civilian capacity he has much more latitude to say, 'In 48 hours, I am gone,'" said retired Army Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, who served in the Clinton administration. "If he's got to tell Bannon to shut the hell up in the next meeting, that's easier to do as a civilian."

McMaster is joining an NSC that has not yet been fully staffed and a Trump national security team that has yet to fill numerous positions in the Pentagon and State Department. The absence of senior political appointees in those agencies could in the near term give Bannon and others in his group an outsized role in policy debates.

McMaster has a reputation for not holding back in disagreements with superiors. In the late 1990s, McMaster's book "Dereliction of Duty" harshly criticized the military's senior leadership during the Vietnam War for failing to tell President Lyndon B. Johnson that his strategy of gradual escalation could not work.

The debate over the exact nature of McMaster's remarks suggests another challenge for the general. "He also shouldn't let the president or other White House officials misrepresent his positions in public," said a friend, who spoke on the condition of anonymity so he could talk frankly without compromising McMaster's relationship with the White House.

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL**

## White House explores options, including use of military force, to counter North Korea

Carol E. Lee and Alastair Gale

March 1, 2017 5:30 p.m. ET

An internal White House review of strategy on North Korea includes the possibility of military force or regime change to blunt the country's nuclear-weapons threat, people familiar with the process said, a prospect that has some U.S. allies in the region on edge.

While President Donald Trump has taken steps to reassure allies that he won't abandon agreements that have underpinned decades of U.S. policy on Asia, his pledge that Pyongyang would be stopped from ever testing an intercontinental ballistic missile—coupled with the two-week-old strategy review—has some leaders bracing for a shift in American policy.

The U.S. review comes as recent events have strained regional stability. Last month, North Korea launched a ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan, and the estranged half brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was killed in Malaysia.

Chinese and North Korean officials are holding talks in Beijing, the first known high-level meeting in nearly a year, and Beijing recently curtailed coal imports from North Korea.

U.S. officials have underscored the possible military dimensions of their emerging strategy in recent discussions with allies, according to people familiar with the talks.

During Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's two-day summit in February with Mr. Trump, U.S. officials on several occasions stated that all options were under consideration to deal with North Korea, according to a person familiar with the discussions.

It was clear to the Japanese side that those options encompassed a U.S. military strike on North Korea, possibly if Pyongyang appeared ready to test an ICBM, this person said. The Japanese side found that scenario "worrisome," he said.

U.S. allies in recent years have closely aligned with Washington in trying to increase diplomatic and economic pressure on Pyongyang in an effort to force it to drop its nuclear program. But the new U.S. policy review has generated anxiety in Japan and South Korea about a radical shift. After North Korea said this year it was ready to test an ICBM, Mr. Trump wrote on Twitter, "It won't happen!"

About two weeks ago, deputy national security adviser K.T. McFarland convened a meeting with national security officials across the government and asked them for proposals on North Korea, including ideas that one official described as well outside the mainstream.

The request was for all options, ranging from U.S. recognition of North Korea as a nuclear state to military action against Pyongyang. Ms. McFarland's directive was for the administration to undergo a comprehensive rethink of America's North Korea policy.

The national security officials reported back to Ms. McFarland with their ideas and suggestions on Tuesday. Those options now will undergo a process under which they will be refined and shaped before they are given to the president for consideration.

The heightened prospect of U.S. military action in North Korea could encourage China, which fears the fallout of a military confrontation with its neighbor, to take steps Washington has long sought to choke off Pyongyang's economic lifeline.

In the wake of Mr. Trump's election, leaders in Tokyo and Seoul have sought to intensify the existing U.S. strategy of exerting economic and diplomatic pressure against North Korea.

"We will make sure that the North changes its erroneous calculations

by further enhancing sanctions and pressure," South Korea's acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn said in a speech Wednesday.

South Korea and the U.S. kicked off major annual military exercises Wednesday, part of a long-running strategy of prioritizing defensive military preparedness to ward off North Korean aggression.

After North Korea tested a ballistic missile last month just as Messrs. Abe and Trump were meeting in Florida, the Japanese leader called for Pyongyang to comply with a United Nations ban on such tests and said Tokyo and Washington would strengthen their alliance.

In his own brief remarks after Mr. Abe, Mr. Trump didn't mention North Korea, saying only that the U.S. "stands behind Japan, its great ally, 100%."

Japan is concerned it could get sucked into a regional conflict by a U.S. military strike on North Korea, said Tetsuo Kotani, a senior fellow at the Japan Institute of International Affairs, a Tokyo think tank.

Another fear for Japan is a scenario in which the U.S. instead holds talks with North Korea and reaches a deal that would lead to Washington disengaging from the region, he said.

Under its pacifist constitution, Japan remains heavily dependent on U.S. military support, not only to counter North Korea, but also China, which has stepped up a territorial challenge against Japanese-administered islands in the East China Sea.

"Direct talks between Mr. Trump and Kim Jong Un would be a nightmare scenario for Japan," Mr. Kotani said.

Last month, the State Department withdrew visa approvals for top North Korean officials to visit New York for unofficial talks with retired U.S. officials following the killing of

Mr. Kim's half brother, according to people familiar with the matter, dealing a setback to any attempt at rapprochement.

Mr. Trump has recently stated the U.S.'s commitment to defending both Japan and South Korea to leaders of both countries. A spokeswoman for Japan's foreign ministry declined to comment on the details of Mr. Abe's talks with Mr. Trump, while a spokesman for South Korea's foreign ministry couldn't be reached for comment.

As annual military exercises were set to begin, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis spoke Tuesday to South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-koo, emphasizing that "any attack on the United States or its allies will be defeated, and any use of nuclear weapons will be met with a response that is effective and overwhelming," said Pentagon spokesman Capt. Jeff Davis.

The U.S. is in the process of installing advanced missile defenses, known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, in South Korea. As part of that, South Korea said this week that it has completed a transfer of land needed as a station for the system, Capt. Davis said.

Despite concerns about a military confrontation between the U.S. and North Korea, the acceleration of Pyongyang's nuclear and missile program has emboldened calls by military hawks in Japan and South Korea for capabilities to pre-emptively hit North Korean military facilities if an attack appears imminent.

Masahiko Komura, the vice president of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, said recently that Japan should begin discussing whether to acquire such an ability. In parliament, Mr. Abe said there were no plans to do so.



## House Intelligence panel publicizes scope of Russia probe

By Karoun Demirjian

The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence will probe allegations of links between political campaign officials and the Russian government, as well as how classified information about alleged contacts came to be leaked to the media, its leaders announced late Wednesday.

Committee Chairman Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) and ranking Democrat Adam B. Schiff (Calif.) released the long-awaited document outlining four lines of inquiry for the

committee's investigation — a summary of a six-page document defining the scope of the investigation that remains classified.

The committee will probe whether Russia's "active measures include links between Russia and individuals associated with political campaigns or any other U.S. person." Such a category could include alleged contacts between Trump campaign members and Kremlin officials — although Nunes told reporters Monday he had seen no evidence that any improper contact had taken place.

Nunes has instead stressed the importance of finding out the source of leaks of classified information that revealed the phone calls between former White House national security adviser Michael Flynn and Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, as well as other reports of Trump advisers with ties to Russian officials. Those leaks are also a subject of the committee's investigation.

The committee also pledged to explore what cyber activities and other active measures Russia directed against the United States or

its allies, and the U.S. government's response to those measures.

Nunes and Schiff said they would "seek access to and custody of all relevant information" to carry out the investigation, "including law enforcement and counterintelligence reports." They promised, however, not to "impede any ongoing investigation."

They pledged to conduct the investigation by doing interviews, taking testimony, and reviewing the underlying intelligence that contributed to the intelligence community's recent assessment that

Russia had interfered in the 2016 elections to assist Trump's chances of victory. Nunes and Schiff stressed in their statement that they expected the intelligence community to "provide any other relevant intelligence to the committee," as well.

The joint statement from Schiff and Nunes is a notable moment of bipartisanship in an otherwise rocky week for the committee, in which Schiff openly challenged Nunes's determination that the intelligence would not establish any connections between the Russian government and the Trump team. Schiff argued that it was too early to make such a determination, given that the committee had not received any

documents or conducted any witness interviews in the course of the investigation.

Nunes also came under fire for calling a reporter at the behest of the Trump administration to combat a New York Times story describing frequent contacts between the Trump team and the Russian government. He said he did not see anything inappropriate in making the phone call.

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The statement publicly outlining parameters was expected to be released as early as Monday evening, but was delayed. Still, both leaders struck bipartisan, cooperative tones in the release Wednesday night.

Noting that the Intelligence Committee had been "investigating Russia for years," Nunes said the committee was "determined to continue and expand its inquiries into these areas, including Russian activities related to the 2016 U.S. elections."

"On a bipartisan basis, we will fully investigate all the evidence we collect and follow that evidence wherever it leads," he added.

Schiff stressed that point as well, adding that "we must follow the facts wherever they may lead ... and that must also include both the Russian hacking and dumping of documents as well as any potential collusion between Russia and U.S. citizens."

"Anything less than a full accounting of all the facts will be insufficient to protect the country and meet the expectations of the American people," he added.

## **The New York Times** Obama Administration Rushed to Preserve Intelligence of Russian Election Hacking

Matthew Rosenberg, Adam Goldman and Michael S. Schmidt

"I have no idea what this allegation is about," he said. "It is false."

Mr. Trump has denied that his campaign had any contact with Russian officials, and at one point he openly suggested that American spy agencies had cooked up intelligence suggesting that the Russian government had tried to meddle in the presidential election. Mr. Trump has accused the Obama administration of hyping the Russia story line as a way to discredit his new administration.

### **Jeff Sessions's Testimony on Russia Contacts**

In this footage from his confirmation hearing, Attorney General Jeff Sessions says he "did not have communications with the Russians." A Justice Department official more recently said Mr. Sessions had two conversations with Ambassador Sergey I. Kislyak.

By THE NEW YORK TIMES on March 2, 2017. Photo by Al Drago/The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

At the Obama White House, Mr. Trump's statements stoked fears among some that intelligence could be covered up or destroyed — or its sources exposed — once power changed hands. What followed was a push to preserve the intelligence that underscored the deep anxiety with which the White House and American intelligence agencies had come to view the threat from Moscow.

It also reflected the suspicion among many in the Obama White House that the Trump campaign might have colluded with Russia on election email hacks — a suspicion

that American officials say has not been confirmed. Former senior Obama administration officials said that none of the efforts were directed by Mr. Obama.

Sean Spicer, the Trump White House spokesman, said, "The only new piece of information that has come to light is that political appointees in the Obama administration have sought to create a false narrative to make an excuse for their own defeat in the election." He added, "There continues to be no there, there."

As Inauguration Day approached, Obama White House officials grew convinced that the intelligence was damning and that they needed to ensure that as many people as possible inside government could see it, even if people without security clearances could not. Some officials began asking specific questions at intelligence briefings, knowing the answers would be archived and could be easily unearthed by investigators — including the Senate Intelligence Committee, which in early January announced an inquiry into Russian efforts to influence the election.

At intelligence agencies, there was a push to process as much raw intelligence as possible into analyses, and to keep the reports at a relatively low classification level to ensure as wide a readership as possible across the government — and, in some cases, among European allies. This allowed the upload of as much intelligence as possible to Intellipedia, a secret wiki used by American analysts to share information.

There was also an effort to pass reports and other sensitive materials to Congress. In one instance, the State Department sent a cache of

documents marked "secret" to Senator Benjamin Cardin of Maryland days before the Jan. 20 inauguration. The documents, detailing Russian efforts to intervene in elections worldwide, were sent in response to a request from Mr. Cardin, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, and were shared with Republicans on the panel.

"This situation was serious, as is evident by President Obama's call for a review — and as is evident by the United States response," said Eric Schultz, a spokesman for Mr. Obama. "When the intelligence community does that type of comprehensive review, it is standard practice that a significant amount of information would be compiled and documented."

The opposite happened with the most sensitive intelligence, including the names of sources and the identities of foreigners who were regularly monitored. Officials tightened the already small number of people who could access that information. They knew the information could not be kept from the new president or his top advisers, but wanted to narrow the number of people who might see the information, officials said.

More than a half-dozen current and former officials described various aspects of the effort to preserve and distribute the intelligence, and some said they were speaking to draw attention to the material and ensure proper investigation by Congress. All spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were discussing classified information, nearly all of which remains secret, making an independent public assessment of the competing Obama and Trump administration claims impossible.

The F.B.I. is conducting a wide-ranging counterintelligence investigation into Russia's meddling in the election, and is examining alleged links between Mr. Trump's associates and the Russian government. Separately, the House and Senate intelligence committees are conducting their own investigations, though they must rely on information collected by the F.B.I. and intelligence agencies.

On Wednesday, a Justice Department official confirmed that Mr. Sessions had two conversations with Ambassador Kislyak last year, when he was still a senator, despite testifying at his Jan. 10 confirmation hearing that he had no contact with the Russians. At that hearing, Mr. Sessions was asked what he would do if it turned out to be true that anyone affiliated with the Trump team had communicated with the Russian government in the course of the campaign. He said he was "not aware of any of those activities."

"I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign and I didn't have — did not have communications with the Russians, and I'm unable to comment on it," Mr. Sessions said at the time.

However, Justice officials acknowledged that Mr. Sessions had spoken with Mr. Kislyak twice: once, among a group of ambassadors who approached him at a Heritage Foundation event during the Republican National Convention in Cleveland in July and, separately, in an office meeting on Sept. 8. The contacts were first reported by The Washington Post.

Sarah Isgur Flores, Mr. Sessions's spokeswoman, said "there was absolutely nothing misleading about his answer" because he did not

communicate with the ambassador in his capacity as a Trump campaign surrogate. She said Mr. Sessions had at least 25 conversations in 2016 with ambassadors from a range of nations — including Britain, Japan, China, Germany and Russia — while on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The revelation prompted congressional Democrats to issue a torrent of statements reiterating their demands that Mr. Sessions recuse himself from overseeing any investigation into Russia's contacts with the Trump campaign. So far, Mr. Sessions has demurred.

Representative Adam B. Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said in a statement on Wednesday that if the reports about Mr. Sessions were accurate, "it is essential that he recuse himself from any role in the investigation of Trump campaign ties to the Russians." Mr. Schiff added, "This is not even a close call; it is a must."

Representative Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader of the House, called on Mr. Sessions to resign, saying on Twitter that "he is not fit to serve as the top law enforcement officer of our country."

A White House official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, backed up Mr. Sessions late Wednesday, calling the accusations "the latest attack against the Trump administration by partisan Democrats."

At a CNN town hall on Wednesday, Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, said he did not know if there was anything between the Trump campaign and the Russians. But he added that if there was, "it is clear to me that Jeff Sessions, who is my dear friend, cannot make this decision about Trump."

At his confirmation hearing on Wednesday, former Senator Dan Coats, Mr. Trump's nominee for

director of national intelligence, told the Senate Intelligence Committee that "I think it's our responsibility to provide you access to all that you need."

Some Obama White House officials had little faith that a Trump administration would make good on such pledges, and the efforts to preserve the intelligence continued until the administration's final hours. This was partly because intelligence was still being collected and analyzed, but it also reflected the sentiment among many administration officials that they had not recognized the scale of the Russian campaign until it was too late.

The warning signs had been building throughout the summer, but were far from clear. As WikiLeaks was pushing out emails stolen from the Democratic National Committee through online publication, American intelligence began picking up conversations in which Russian officials were discussing contacts with Trump associates, and European allies were starting to pass along information about people close to Mr. Trump meeting with Russians in the Netherlands, Britain and other countries.

But what was going on in the meetings was unclear to the officials, and the intercepted communications did little to clarify matters — the Russians, it appeared, were arguing about how far to go in interfering in the presidential election. What intensified the alarm at the Obama White House was a campaign of cyberattacks on state electoral systems in September, which led the administration to deliver a public accusation against the Russians in October.

But it wasn't until after the election, and after more intelligence had come in, that the administration began to grasp the scope of the suspected tampering and concluded that one goal of the campaign was to help tip the election in Mr.

Trump's favor. In early December, Mr. Obama ordered the intelligence community to conduct a full assessment of the Russian campaign.

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In the weeks before the assessment was released in January, the intelligence community combed through databases for an array of communications and other information — some of which was months old by then — and began producing reports that showed there were contacts during the campaign between Trump associates and Russian officials.

The nature of the contacts remains unknown. Several of Mr. Trump's associates have done business in Russia, and it is unclear if any of the contacts were related to business dealings.

The New York Times, citing four current and former officials, reported last month that the American authorities had obtained information of repeated contacts between Mr. Trump's associates and senior Russian intelligence officials. The White House has dismissed the story as false.

Since the Feb. 14 article appeared, more than a half-dozen officials have confirmed contacts of various kinds between Russians and Trump associates. The label "intelligence official" is not always cleanly applied in Russia, where ex-spies, oligarchs and government officials often report back to the intelligence services and elsewhere in the Kremlin.

Steven L. Hall, the former head of Russia operations at the C.I.A., said that Mr. Putin was surrounded by a cast of characters, and that it was "fair to say that a good number of them come from an intelligence or security background. Once an intel guy, always an intel guy in Russia."

The concerns about the contacts were cemented by a series of phone calls between Mr. Kislyak and Michael T. Flynn, who had been poised to become Mr. Trump's national security adviser. The calls began on Dec. 29, shortly after Mr. Kislyak was summoned to the State Department and informed that, in retaliation for Russian election meddling, the United States was expelling 35 suspected Russian intelligence operatives and imposing other sanctions. Mr. Kislyak was irate and threatened a forceful Russia response, according to people familiar with the exchange.

But a day later, Mr. Putin said his government would not retaliate, prompting a Twitter post from Mr. Trump praising the Russian president — and puzzling Obama White House officials.

On Jan. 2, administration officials learned that Mr. Kislyak — after leaving the State Department meeting — called Mr. Flynn, and that the two talked multiple times in the 36 hours that followed. American intelligence agencies routinely wiretap the phones of Russian diplomats, and transcripts of the calls showed that Mr. Flynn urged the Russians not to respond, saying relations would improve once Mr. Trump was in office, according to multiple current and former officials.

Beyond leaving a trail for investigators, the Obama administration also wanted to help European allies combat a threat that had caught the United States off guard. American intelligence agencies made it clear in the declassified version of the intelligence assessment released in January that they believed Russia intended to use its attacks on the United States as a template for more meddling. "We assess Moscow will apply lessons learned," the report said, "to future influence efforts worldwide, including against U.S. allies."



## Republicans vote down attempt to advance debate on Trump-Russia allegations

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Republicans on Tuesday stifled a Democratic attempt to force the Justice Department to produce records related to its investigation of whether Donald Trump and his campaign had secret ties to Russia. A powerful GOP committee chairman said, however, that he would urge federal authorities to continue their probe.

The party-line House Judiciary Committee vote concerned a "resolution of inquiry," an obscure legislative maneuver that allows Congress to demand documents from the executive branch. Under House rules, such a resolution must be debated in committee or be sent directly to the House floor.

*[Democrat moves to force House debate on Trump's alleged business conflicts and Russia ties]*

The resolution was among the steps that members of the Democratic minority in the House have taken to pressure the GOP to toughen its oversight of President Trump and his administration. It asked Attorney General Jeff Sessions to provide records that pertain to any "criminal or counterintelligence investigation" into Trump, his White House team or certain campaign associates; any investment made by a foreign power or agent thereof in Trump's businesses; Trump's plans to

distance himself from his business empire; and any Trump-related examination of federal conflict of interest laws or the emoluments clause of the Constitution.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), who filed the resolution, told his colleagues that the panels' lawmakers should not "bury our heads in the sand."

"The security and integrity of our nation are at stake," he said. "It is



unfortunate that we must resort to a resolution of inquiry to learn the truth about these serious issues. However, the House has so far abdicated its constitutional responsibility to provide meaningful oversight into the Trump administration, and it is time that we do our duty. . . . The public deserves to know the truth about the president, and we must not stop until we get these answers."

Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), the Judiciary Committee chairman, called the resolution "unnecessary, premature and not the best way for this committee or the House to conduct oversight." Instead, he said, he plans to send a letter requesting that Sessions "proceed with investigations into any criminal conduct regarding these matters" — acknowledging, at the same time, that his own requests for a Justice Department briefing on the Russia allegations had gone unanswered.

"This resolution is about politics, not information," Goodlatte said, pointing to a Nadler news release boasting that the resolution would "force" a GOP vote on Trump. "Our oversight efforts can and should be better than that," Goodlatte said.

Also opposing the resolution was Rep. Darrell Issa

(R-Calif.), the former chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee who had gained headlines in recent days by calling on Sessions to step aside and allow an independent prosecutor to handle the Russia probe. Sessions, a former senator, was an early endorser of and key adviser to Trump's campaign, and he has close ties to senior White House aides.

But Issa said Goodlatte's plan to send a letter to Sessions was "fitting and appropriate as a first step," noting his own history while Oversight Committee chairman of being a prolific sender of letters. "Virtually without fail, my investigations started with letters," he said. "So I, with utmost of respect for my colleagues, would ask that we use the system first."

Nadler reminded Issa that he filed his resolution only after three letters Democrats had sent to Republicans went unanswered.

Issa assured him he would persist: "I have a long history of limited patience. . . . I am, if nothing else, tenacious."

The debate took place over the course of several hours Tuesday evening, not long before Trump was set to arrive on Capitol Hill to

address a joint meeting of Congress for the first time, and it was attended by a capacity crowd of liberal activists who were gaveled quiet on several occasions after cheering Democrats' remarks.

The final vote was 18 to 16 along party lines to report the resolution unfavorably, meaning it will not be taken up on the House floor. Besides rejecting the underlying resolution, Republicans also voted down amendments that would have expanded it to include documents on White House contacts with the FBI and on Justice Department deliberations on Sessions's possible refusal.

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The resolution of inquiry stands to become a tool that Democrats, with little leverage as the minority party, will use to highlight issues with the Trump administration. Rep. Joe Kennedy (D-Mass.) introduced another such resolution Monday to force Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price to release records concerning the

administration's plans to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

Tuesday's Judiciary Committee vote came a day after Democrats attempted to bring a resolution to the House floor calling on Trump to release his tax returns to Congress and the public, which he has long refused to do, citing an ongoing Internal Revenue Service audit.

The attempt was turned back on a procedural vote that followed party lines. Two Republicans, Reps. Walter B. Jones Jr. of North Carolina and Mark Sanford of South Carolina, declined to join their GOP colleagues and voted present.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said afterward that by turning back the "sense of Congress" resolution that they had "made themselves accomplices to hiding President Trump's tax returns from the American people."

"The American people deserve the truth about Russia's personal, political and financial grip on President Trump," she said. "If there's nothing there, then what are Republicans afraid of?"



## Why the FBI and a Special Prosecutor Must Immediately Investigate Attorney General Jeff Sessions

Jay Michaelson

"I didn't have communications with the Russians," Sessions said under oath. We now know that he did, and it's time for a full investigation.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions did not tell the truth in his sworn Senate confirmation hearing, and skirted the truth in the written questionnaire accompanying it.

The next steps, according to precedent and law, are clear: An FBI investigation must commence to determine if there are grounds to indict Sessions for perjury, and an independent prosecutor must be appointed to look into Sessions's conduct in particular, and perhaps the Trump administration's ties to Russia in general.

On Jan. 10, Sen. Al Franken cited then-newly released documents alleging high-level Trump campaign contacts with the Russian government. Franken said several times that these documents had not been verified, but then asked, "If there is any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government in the course of this campaign, what would you do?"

Sessions—who had sworn under oath to tell the truth at the start of his hearing—replied, "Sen. Franken, I'm not aware of any of those activities. I have been called a 'surrogate' at a time or two in that campaign, and I didn't have communications with the Russians, and I'm unable to comment."

In fact, as *The Washington Post* revealed Wednesday evening, Sessions did have at least two communications with Russian government figures, including what the *Post* described as "a private conversation between Sessions and Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak that took place in September in the senator's office, at the height of what U.S. intelligence officials say was a Russian cyber campaign to upend the U.S. presidential race."

Separately, as part of the written materials accompanying the confirmation process, Sessions was asked by Sen. Patrick Leahy, "Several of the president-elect's nominees or senior advisers have Russian ties. Have you been in contact with anyone connected to any part of the Russian government about the 2016 election, either before or after Election Day?"

"No," he replied.

Both statements are sufficiently close to perjury to warrant an immediate FBI investigation.

Federal law defines perjury as when an individual under oath "willfully and contrary to such oath states or subscribes any material matter which he does not believe to be true."

Sessions's case depends on the word "willfully." Clearly, the statements were material; they are crucial matters of national security. It's also clear that his response to Franken was inaccurate, and the accuracy of his response to Leahy hangs on the phrase "about the 2016 election," since we don't know what he and the Russian ambassador discussed.

Indeed, Sessions's response to the new revelations is a tacit admission that he did communicate with Russian officials, just not about the campaign. "I never met with any Russian officials to discuss issues of the campaign. I have no idea what this allegation is about. It is false."

"To discuss issues of the campaign," maybe. But his Jan. 10 statement

was far more general: "I didn't have communications with the Russians."

That's clearly not true. But to be guilty of perjury, Sessions had to know that it was untrue.

That's why the next step, in cases such as these, is an FBI investigation to determine what Sessions knew, when he knew it, what other contacts may have taken place, what Sessions and Kislyak discussed, and whether it is plausible that Sessions somehow did not remember his meetings with the Russian diplomat.

The normal procedure is for Congress to request an FBI investigation. Heretofore, House Oversight Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) has declined to investigate a host of alarming allegations regarding Russian contacts with the Trump administration—but this may be different.

Interestingly, when Chaffetz was investigating Hillary Clinton's email server—how quaint those misdeeds seem now—he scolded FBI Director James Comey for not launching an investigation on his own instead of waiting for a request from Congress.

In other words, the FBI need not wait.

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Nor should it. Sessions made a clearly false statement under oath. Is it perjury? That's for a court to decide. But is it worthy of investigation? Of course.

Compare that to Clinton, who may or may not have lied when she said she didn't recall any emails marked as classified on her personal account. For that to be perjury, she would have to have seen the emails marked "C," known what the marking meant, remembered seeing them, and deliberately lied about it. And yet that merited a full FBI investigation that may have swung the presidential election.

Normally, the next step is for the FBI to issue a report, including a recommendation to indict or not to indict, which the Justice Department takes under advisement. In this case, however, it would be absurd for the FBI to tell Sessions to indict himself. Legally, it's a conflict of interest. Practically speaking, it's ridiculous.

Already, the White House is in denial mode, calling the reports "the latest attack against the Trump administration by partisan Democrats." Obviously, this administration cannot be expected to investigate itself when it is already denying there's anything to investigate.

That, of course, is why special prosecutors are appointed, either by the Justice Department, by the president, or by Congress.

To be clear, the appointment of a special prosecutor and the

launching of an FBI investigation are not equivalent to a guilty verdict. Maybe the FBI will find exculpatory evidence. Maybe the special prosecutor will determine that it's impossible to prove that Sessions knew he wasn't telling the truth. Like anyone else, Sessions deserves a fair investigation and, if charged, a fair trial.

But unlike anyone else, Jefferson Sessions is the attorney general of the United States. Surely, as a lawyer with a long and distinguished record, he must recognize the obvious conflict of interest to have his colleagues and subordinates investigating his own activities.

Really, the only remaining question should be the scope of the special prosecutor's mandate. That scope could be quite narrow, confined to Sessions's own conduct and statements. But it should be broader. Now that we know that Sessions has misrepresented

(willfully or not) his own contacts with Russia, we know that the administration's contacts are wider than we thought. We also know that Sessions himself is involved.

As a result, it makes sense to launch a single investigation, rather than appoint a prosecutor with a narrow mandate, only to have to go back and either appoint another one or expand the mandate later. The special prosecutor's office needs a robust mandate to follow the truth where it leads. This is not strictly required by the new Sessions revelations, but it is obviously the most logical—if not the most politically palatable—course of action.

It is also the most patriotic. The stakes could not be higher.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

# Investigators probed Sessions' contacts with Russian officials during election campaign (UNE)

Carol E. Lee, Christopher S. Stewart, Rob Barry and Shane Harris

WASHINGTON—U.S. investigators have examined contacts Attorney General Jeff Sessions had with Russian officials during the time he was advising Donald Trump's presidential campaign, according to people familiar with the matter.

The outcome of the inquiry, and whether it is ongoing, wasn't clear, these people said. The contacts were being examined as part of a wide-ranging U.S. counterintelligence investigation into possible communications between members of Mr. Trump's campaign team and Russian operatives, they said.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, which has been leading the investigation, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. The White House directed requests for comment to the Justice Department.

But disclosures about Mr. Sessions' contacts led quickly late Wednesday to demands that he step aside from any investigation involving the Trump administration, or that he resign for failing to tell the truth during his confirmation hearing.

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## TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

"If there is something there and it goes up the chain of investigation, it is clear to me that Jeff Sessions, who is my dear friend, can not make this decision about Trump," said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.), adding that a special prosecutor might be needed.

Mr. Sessions, in a statement placed on Twitter late Wednesday by his spokeswoman, said: "I never met with any Russian officials to discuss issues of the campaign. I have no idea what this allegation is about. It is false."

During his confirmation hearing for attorney general in January, Mr. Sessions, a Republican senator from Alabama, testified under oath that he had no contact with Russian officials as a campaign surrogate and never discussed the 2016 election with Russian officials.

But Mr. Sessions spoke with the Russian ambassador to the U.S., Sergei Kislyak, while the Republican National Convention was under way in Cleveland last summer, according

to his spokeswoman, Sarah Flores. He also spoke with Mr. Kislyak on another occasion last year, in a meeting in his Senate office, she said, clarifying that the meeting was in person and not on the phone as she had initially said.

Ms. Flores said the contact last July occurred when Mr. Sessions spoke at a Heritage Foundation event attended by Mr. Kislyak in Cleveland, appearing in his capacity as a senator, not a campaign official. She said several ambassadors approached Mr. Sessions after his speech at the Heritage Foundation event, including Mr. Kislyak.

"It was short and informal," she said.

She said the attorney general wasn't aware that his communications have been under investigation.

During his confirmation hearing in January, Mr. Sessions was asked what he would do if any evidence emerged that someone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government during the campaign and said: "I'm not aware of any of those activities."

"I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign and I didn't have—did not have communications with the Russians, and I'm unable to comment on it," he said.

Ms. Flores said Mr. Sessions wasn't required to disclose the contacts because they took place in his

capacity as a senator, not a campaign official.

"The attorney general has been very clear that as a senator he had conversations with the Russian ambassador," Ms. Flores said in a statement. "Last year, the senator had over 25 conversations with foreign ambassadors as a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, including the British, Korean, Japanese, Polish, Indian, Chinese, Canadian, Australian, German and Russian ambassadors."

The focus of the U.S. counterintelligence investigation has been on communications between Trump campaign officials and Russia. The inquiry involving Mr. Sessions is examining his contacts while serving as Mr. Trump's foreign-policy adviser in the spring and summer of 2016, one person familiar with the matter said.

The investigation is being pursued by the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Treasury Department, officials have said. Counterintelligence probes seldom lead to public accusations or criminal charges.

However, the probe, if ongoing, could create a highly unusual and sensitive political dynamic given that the FBI is part of the Justice Department that Mr. Sessions, as attorney general, now leads. Mr. Sessions has only been in office for under a month and the investigation began before he was nominated and approved by the Senate.

The FBI's role in the investigation into Mr. Sessions' conversations left the agency "wringing its hands" about how to proceed, said one

person familiar with the matter.

Mr. Trump asked for the resignation of his national security adviser, Mike Flynn, after Mr. Flynn misled Vice President Mike Pence over the nature of a conversation he had in December with Russia's ambassador to the U.S.

The White House has denied any inappropriate interactions between associates of Mr. Trump and Russian officials. Asked during a news conference in February if anyone advising his campaign had contact with Russia during the campaign, Mr. Trump said "nobody that I know of."

Committees in the House of Representatives and the Senate are investigating Russia's alleged involvement in the election campaign and possible ties or communication between Russian officials and the Trump campaign.

Russia has denied interfering in the U.S. election, blaming accusations on American politicians who want to sabotage relations between the two countries.

Some Republicans contend that the Russia investigations are politically motivated and are being pushed by people who were furious that the FBI, led by its director, James Comey, continued to investigate Hillary Clinton's emails late into the 2016 election campaign. These Republicans say that the Russia investigations will prove to be without foundation.

Until this week, Mr. Sessions had resisted calls to remove himself from any role investigating possible ties between Trump associates and Russia. Democrats have said he

should do so because of his place advising the Trump campaign.

On Monday, he suggested he would take himself off a case under certain circumstances, though he left out any specifics. Mr. Sessions told reporters he would "recuse myself on anything that I should recuse myself on, that's all I can tell you."

Late Wednesday, a number of Democrats, including House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) and Rep. Elijah Cummings (D., Md.), said Mr. Sessions should resign for failing to disclose his contacts with Russian officials.

As a senator, Mr. Sessions was a sharp critic of Russia. He supported kicking the country out of the Group of Eight summit and called for sanctions against Moscow for its 2014 invasion of Ukraine.

"I believe a systematic effort should be undertaken so that Russia feels pain for this," Mr. Sessions said at the time.

But his rhetoric softened after he endorsed Mr. Trump, and he advocated better relations with Russia.

Mr. Sessions joined the Trump campaign in February 2016 at a rally in the former senator's home state of Alabama. Within days, Mr. Trump named him chairman of his campaign's national-security advisory committee.

It is unclear whether anyone in Congress knew about the investigation into Mr. Sessions' Russian interactions before Mr. Sessions was confirmed.

The investigation into Mr. Sessions' communications comes amid calls from Democrats and some

Republicans for an independent inquiry into the possible cooperation between the Trump campaign and the Russian government to influence the 2016 election, particularly through cyberattacks.

U.S. intelligence agencies already concluded that Russia hacked the Democratic National Committee and the personal email account of Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman, John Podesta. Emails from both were released on the website WikiLeaks.

At first, Mr. Trump disputed that assessment, but later said: "I think it was Russia, but we also get hacked by other countries."

Justice Department regulations require the attorney general to remove himself from investigations that present a real or perceived conflict of interest. But ultimately, there is no practical mechanism, other than public pressure or an impeachment proceeding, to force the matter.

The law has changed since wide-ranging probes into the Clinton administration, when a three-judge panel could appoint an "independent counsel" or a "special prosecutor." Today, the attorney general retains far more control over the scope of a special investigation and its prosecutorial jurisdiction.

Mr. Sessions can also appoint a temporary "special counsel" from outside the Justice Department to conduct an investigation into a particularly sensitive matter and possibly prosecute related wrongdoing.

—Lisa Schwartz contributed to this article.

## POLITICO Sessions under fire over Russia meetings

By Sen. John Cornyn

Leading Democrats seek his resignation.

Top congressional Democrats called on Attorney General Jeff Sessions to resign Wednesday after revelations that he had met with the Russian ambassador in the months before the election — meetings that Sessions did not disclose during his confirmation hearings.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) led the effort late on Wednesday night, accusing Sessions of "lying under oath" during confirmation proceedings about his contacts with the Russians.

Story Continued Below

"The Attorney General must resign," Pelosi wrote in a statement. "There must be an independent, bipartisan, outside commission to investigate the Trump political, personal and financial connections to the Russians." Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), the ranking member on the House oversight committee, also called on Sessions to resign, as did Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.).

In a statement in the wee hours of Thursday morning, Sessions said, "I never met with any Russian officials to discuss issues of the campaign."

"I have no idea what this allegation is about," he added in his short statement. "It is false."

The news — first reported by the Washington Post — that Sessions met with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak twice last year,

including a conversation in Sessions' Senate office, may be the political smoking gun Democrats have been looking for. They've been pushing for months to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate any ties between Donald Trump's campaign and Russian government officials, following a steady drumbeat of news stories saying there had been repeated contacts.

It wasn't just Democrats amping up the pressure. Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham said a special prosecutor should be appointed if investigators find any evidence of wrongdoing by the Trump campaign, adding that Sessions should recuse himself from any investigation into contacts between the campaign and Russia.

"I don't know that there's anything between the Trump campaign and

the Russians. I'm not going to base my decision based on newspaper articles," Graham (R-S.C.) said during a CNN town hall where he appeared with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.). "If there is something there, and it goes up the chain of investigation, it is clear to me that Jeff Sessions, who is my dear friend, cannot make this decision about Trump."

An Obama White House national security official said the administration was gravely concerned in its final days about increasingly apparent ties between Trump associates and Russians, and about what appeared to be promises made by more than one individual to representatives of Russian President Vladimir Putin about policy changes that would



occur once Trump was sworn in as president.

The senior Obama White House official was not told the names of the specific individuals involved because the official's portfolio was foreign policy, not intelligence, so they were not briefed on aspects of the investigation involving U.S. persons.

"It seems pretty clear that [former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn] was not a rogue here," the senior official said. "I don't believe that Flynn was the only person promising things to the Russians, communicating to them what would happen once the Trump administration came in."

The senior official was not aware of any specific information suggesting that Sessions was one of the Trump associates discussing potential changes in U.S.-Russia relations once Trump was sworn in.

These latest developments come amid a sharp dispute in Congress over how to investigate Trump's ties to Russia, with Democrats on the House and Senate Intelligence Committees questioning whether their Republican chairmen are fit to lead impartial probes.

House Chairman Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) and Senate Chairman Richard Burr (R-N.C.) both made calls to reporters at the behest of the White House to challenge reports of repeated contacts during the campaign between Trump aides and Russian officials, as The Washington Post reported over the weekend.

And Nunes appeared to prejudice the outcome of his committee's investigation on Monday, telling reporters that intelligence officials had shared with him the high points of their investigations and that he had seen no evidence of collusion between the Trump campaign and Moscow. The panel's ranking Democrat, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), chastised Nunes later that day, saying their committee investigation was only in its initial stages and hadn't even begun collecting evidence.

Many Democrats and a few Republicans — including McCain and Graham — have called for a select committee to investigate the issue, but GOP leaders have so far rejected those calls, which would give them less control over the course of the investigations.

According to the Wednesday Post story, Sessions' conversations with Kislyak took place in July and September. The second meeting reportedly occurred in Sessions' Senate office. Sessions did not disclose those discussions during his January confirmation hearing in response to a question.

Sessions was asked directly by Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.): "If there is any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government in the course of this campaign, what will you do?"

Sessions responded, "Senator Franken, I'm not aware of any of those activities. I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign and I did not have

communications with the Russians, and I'm unable to comment on it."

In a separate exchange, Sessions was pressed on whether he would recuse himself from an investigation of the Trump campaign's ties to Russia. At the time, he said, "I don't think I've made any comment on this issue. ... I would review it and try to do the right thing as to whether not it would stay within the jurisdiction of the attorney general or not."

Sarah Isgur Flores, a Sessions spokesperson, said: "There was absolutely nothing misleading about his answer," during the confirmation process, noting that he had over 25 conversations with ambassadors as a member of the Armed Services Committee.

"He was asked during the hearing about communications between Russia and the Trump campaign — not about meetings he took as a senator and a member of the Armed Services Committee," Flores said.

A senior Trump campaign national security adviser confirmed the broad outlines of the Wednesday Post story, and said that Sessions not only spoke briefly with Kislyak at the GOP convention in Cleveland, but that the senator was then invited to a lunch at the ambassador's house to continue the conversation.

After discussing the potential downside of the lunch given the allegations of Russian hacking of the election, Sessions declined the lunch, according to the senior campaign adviser, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he

is being considered for jobs in the Trump administration.

Sessions spoke to Kislyak at an event sponsored by the State Department and Heritage Foundation that brought about 50 ambassadors to both parties' nominating conventions in July, the adviser said.

At the GOP one, Sessions gave a keynote luncheon address, where he was clearly identified as a senior national security adviser to Trump. As he was walking out, he was approached by a few of the ambassadors, including Kislyak,

"He had individual sidebar conversations with the ambassadors," the advisor said of Sessions. "There were a lot of other people there, a big scrum of people walking and talking. I saw them talking, but I don't know what they said."

The adviser said there was nothing nefarious about the conversations between the ambassador and Sessions, and that that is perhaps why the senator didn't mention it during his confirmation hearings or in other venues.

"I don't know why he would do that, if that's what he did," the adviser said. "Maybe he thought [the conversation] was in his capacity on [the Senate] Armed Services Committee. But why the senator wouldn't explain the conversations, I don't know."

*Josh Gerstein and Henry C. Jackson contributed to this story.*



## Sessions met with Russian envoy twice last year, encounters he later did not disclose (UNE)

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Then-Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) spoke twice last year with Russia's ambassador to the United States, Justice Department officials said, encounters he did not disclose when asked about possible contacts between members of President Trump's campaign and representatives of Moscow during Sessions's confirmation hearing to become attorney general.

One of the meetings was a private conversation between Sessions and Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak that took place in September in the senator's office, at the height of what U.S. intelligence officials say was a Russian cyber campaign to upend the U.S. presidential race.

The previously undisclosed discussions could fuel new congressional calls for the appointment of a special counsel to investigate Russia's alleged role in the 2016 presidential election. As attorney general, Sessions oversees the Justice Department and the FBI, which have been leading investigations into Russian meddling and any links to Trump's associates. He has so far resisted calls to recuse himself.

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When Sessions spoke with Kislyak in July and September, the senator was a senior member of the influential Armed Services Committee as well as one of

Trump's top foreign policy advisers. Sessions played a prominent role supporting Trump on the stump after formally joining the campaign in February 2016.

(Senate Judiciary Committee)

Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) questioned attorney general nominee Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) about news that intelligence officials briefed President-elect Trump on unconfirmed reports that Russia has compromising information on Trump. Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) questioned attorney general nominee Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) about news that intelligence officials briefed President-elect Trump on unconfirmed reports that Russia has compromising information on Trump. (Senate Judiciary Committee)

At his Jan. 10 Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing, Sessions was asked by Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) what he would do if he learned of any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government in the course of the 2016 campaign.

"I'm not aware of any of those activities," he responded. He added: "I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign and I did not have communications with the Russians."

*[Trump administration sought to enlist intelligence officials, key lawmakers to counter Russia stories]*

Officials said Sessions did not consider the conversations relevant to the lawmakers' questions and did



not remember in detail what he discussed with Kislyak.

"There was absolutely nothing misleading about his answer," said Sarah Isgur Flores, Sessions's spokeswoman.

In January, Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) asked Sessions for answers to written questions. "Several of the President-elect's nominees or senior advisers have Russian ties. Have you been in contact with anyone connected to any part of the Russian government about the 2016 election, either before or after election day?" Leahy wrote.

(Victoria Walker/The Washington Post)

Then-Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) spoke twice in 2016 with Russia's ambassador to the U.S., Sergey Kislyak, but did not mention this during his confirmation hearing to become U.S. attorney general. Sessions was asked about possible contacts between President Trump's campaign and the Russian government. Jeff Sessions spoke twice in 2016 with Russia's ambassador to the U.S., Sergey Kislyak, but did not mention this during his confirmation hearing. (Victoria Walker/The Washington Post)

Sessions responded with one word: "No."

In a statement issued Wednesday night, Session said he "never met with any Russian officials to discuss issues of the campaign. I have no idea what this allegation is about. It is false."

Justice officials said Sessions met with Kislyak on Sept. 8 in his capacity as a member of the armed services panel rather than in his role as a Trump campaign surrogate.

"He was asked during the hearing about communications between Russia and the Trump campaign — not about meetings he took as a senator and a member of the Armed Services Committee," Flores said.

She added that Sessions last year had more than 25 conversations with foreign ambassadors as a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, including the British, Korean, Japanese, Polish, Indian, Chinese, Canadian, Australian and German ambassadors, in addition to Kislyak.

In the case of the September meeting, one department official who came to the defense of the attorney general said, "There's just not strong recollection of what was said."

The Russian ambassador did not respond to requests for comment about his contacts with Sessions.

The Washington Post contacted all 26 members of the 2016 Senate Armed Services Committee to see whether any lawmakers besides Sessions met with Kislyak in 2016. Of the 20 lawmakers who responded, every senator, including Chairman John McCain (R-Ariz.), said they did not meet with the Russian ambassador last year. The other lawmakers on the panel did not respond as of Wednesday evening.

"Members of the committee have not been beating a path to Kislyak's door," a senior Senate Armed Services Committee staffer said, citing tensions in relations with Moscow. Besides Sessions, the staffer added, "There haven't been a ton of members who are looking to meet with Kislyak for their committee duties."

Last month, The Post reported that Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn had discussed U.S. sanctions with Kislyak during the month before Trump took office, contrary to public assertions by Mike Pence, the vice president-elect, and other top Trump officials. Flynn was forced to resign the following week.

*[National security adviser Flynn discussed sanctions with Russian ambassador, despite denials, officials say]*

When asked to comment on Sessions's contacts with Kislyak, Franken said in a statement to The Post on Wednesday: "If it's true that Attorney General Sessions met with the Russian ambassador in the midst of the campaign, then I am very troubled that his response to my questioning during his confirmation hearing was, at best, misleading."

Franken added: "It is now clearer than ever that the attorney general cannot, in good faith, oversee an investigation at the Department of Justice and the FBI of the Trump-Russia connection, and he must recuse himself immediately."

Several Democratic members of the House on Wednesday night called on Sessions to resign from his post.

*[Democrats call for Sessions's resignation and special prosecutor]*

"After lying under oath to Congress about his own communications with the Russians, the Attorney General must resign," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said in a statement, adding that "Sessions is not fit to serve as the top law enforcement officer of our country."

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), a senior member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said on Twitter late Wednesday that "we need a special counsel to investigate Trump associates' ties to Russia."

Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) said at a CNN town hall Wednesday night that if the substance of Sessions's conversations with the Russian ambassador proved to be improper or suspect, he too would join the call for Sessions to go.

"If there is something there and it goes up the chain of investigation, it is clear to me that Jeff Sessions, who is my dear friend, cannot make that decision about Trump," Graham said — although he stressed he Sessions's contacts with the Russian ambassador could have been "innocent."

"But if there's something there that the FBI thinks is criminal in nature, then for sure you need a special prosecutor. If that day ever comes, I'll be the first one to say it needs to be somebody other than Jeff."

Current and former U.S. officials say they see Kislyak as a diplomat, not an intelligence operative. But they were not sure to what extent, if any, Kislyak was aware of or involved in the covert Russian election campaign.

Steven Hall, former head of Russia operations at the CIA, said that Russia would have been keenly interested in cultivating a relationship with Sessions because of his role on key congressional committees and as an early adviser to Trump.

Sessions's membership on the Armed Services Committee would have made him a priority for the Russian ambassador. "The fact that he had already placed himself at least ideologically behind Trump would have been an added bonus for Kislyak," Hall said.

Michael McFaul, a Stanford University professor who until 2014 served as U.S. ambassador to Russia, said he was not surprised that Kislyak would seek a meeting with Sessions. "The weird part is to conceal it," he said. "That was at the height of all the discussions of what Russia was doing during the election."

Two months before the September meeting, Sessions attended a Heritage Foundation event in July on the sidelines of the Republican National Convention that was attended by about 50 ambassadors. When the event was over, a small group of ambassadors approached Sessions as he was leaving the podium, and Kislyak was among

them, the Justice Department official said.

*[FBI once planned to pay former British spy who authored controversial Trump dossier]*

Sessions then spoke individually to some of the ambassadors, including Kislyak, the official said. In the informal exchanges, the ambassadors expressed appreciation for his remarks and some of them invited him to events they were sponsoring, said the official, citing a former Sessions staffer who was at the event.

Democratic lawmakers, including senior members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, have demanded in recent weeks that Sessions recuse himself from the government's inquiry into possible ties between Trump associates and Russia.

Last week, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), a senior member of the House Judiciary Committee, became one of the few Republican representatives to state publicly the need for an independent investigation.

Sessions's public position on Russia has evolved over time.

In an interview with RealClear World on the sidelines of the German Marshall Fund's Brussels Forum in March 2015, Sessions said the United States and Europe "have to unify" against Russia.

More than a year later, he spoke about fostering a stronger relationship with the Kremlin. In a July 2016 interview with CNN's "State of the Union," Sessions praised Trump's plan to build better relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Donald Trump is right. We need to figure out a way to end this cycle of hostility that's putting this country at risk, costing us billions of dollars in defense, and creating hostilities," Sessions told CNN.

Asked whether he viewed Putin as a good or bad leader, Sessions told CNN: "We have a lot of bad leaders around the world that operate in ways we would never tolerate in the United States. But the question is, can we have a more peaceful, effective relationship with Russia? Utilizing interests that are similar in a realistic way to make this world a safer place and get off this dangerous hostility with Russia? I think it's possible."

Julie Tate, Robert Costa and Karoun Demirjian contributed to this report.

## Trump's plan to slash foreign aid comes as famine threat is surging (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/kevin.sief>  
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NAIROBI — President Trump has proposed large cuts to foreign aid at a time of acute need across Africa and the Middle East, with four countries approaching famine and 20 million people nearing starvation, according to the United Nations.

It is the first time in recent memory that so many large-scale hunger crises have occurred simultaneously, and humanitarian groups say they do not have the resources to respond effectively. The United Nations has requested \$4.4 billion by March to "avert a catastrophe," Secretary General António Guterres said last week. It has so far received only a tiny fraction of that request.

The details of Trump's budget proposal have not been released, and large cuts to foreign assistance will face stiff opposition from Congress. So far, U.S. funding for the hunger crises has come out of a budget approved last year under President Barack Obama. But the famines or near-famines in parts of Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria and Yemen underscore the reliance on continued U.S. assistance to save some of the world's most desperate people.

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In Nigeria, millions have been displaced and isolated by Boko Haram insurgents. In Somalia, a historic drought has left a huge portion of the country without access to regular food, as al-Shabab militants block the movement of humanitarian groups. In South Sudan, a three-year-old civil war has forced millions of people from their homes and farms. In Yemen, a civil war along with aerial attacks by a Saudi-led coalition have caused another sweeping hunger crisis.

In 2016, the United States

contributed about 28 percent of the foreign aid in those four countries, according to the United Nations.

Everything you ever wanted to know about the U.S. foreign assistance budget

"Nobody can replace the U.S. in terms of funding," said Yves Daccord, the director general of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who said of the current crises: "I don't remember ever seeing such a mix of conflict, drought and extreme hunger."

American aid officials said they were still trying to discern what the White House was planning to allocate to humanitarian assistance. Even though foreign aid is typically around 1 percent of the government's budget, that is enough to make the United States by far the world's largest donor. Last year, the United States contributed \$6.4 billion in humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations, more than a quarter of global funding.

"We remain committed to a U.S. foreign policy that advances the security, prosperity and values of the American people," said a spokesman for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), who added that he was not authorized to speak on the record.

But asked whether the United States planned to contribute to the new U.N. appeal for hunger relief, the USAID official said, "We have no new funding to announce at this time."

Early reports said Trump planned to propose 37 percent cuts to the State Department and USAID budgets. Many experts said they expected that those cuts would exclude U.S. contributions to security assistance.

"That leaves a much smaller component, which takes us directly to cuts in humanitarian assistance," said Scott Morris, a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development.

The four hunger crises pose an enormous challenge for the humanitarian community, which is now torn among those emergencies.

The last time a famine was declared in Africa was in Somalia in 2011. Nearly 260,000 people died, and aid groups later determined that they had waited too long to act. Famine is only declared when at least 30 percent of a population is acutely malnourished, and two adults or four children per every 10,000 people are dying each day.

Humanitarian groups have tried to apply the lessons from the 2011 disaster by moving quickly at the signs of deepening food crises. But the number of countries at risk of famine simultaneously makes a swift, thorough response to each of them very difficult.

"The donors are struggling left, right and center with their own allocations," said Silke Pietzsch, the technical director for Action Against Hunger. "There are just too many fires to take care of."

The United Nations was, by its own admission, late to recognize the scale of the crisis in northeastern Nigeria. Last year, when aid workers from Doctors Without Borders began traveling to parts of the country that had been blocked by Boko Haram fighters, they found soaring malnutrition rates and scores of people dying of preventable illnesses. Now, huge swaths of the region are still inaccessible to aid workers.

"No one can go 15 miles outside of the local government capitals," said Yannick Pouchalan, the country director for Action Against Hunger. "There are still many people without any access to humanitarian assistance."

USAID has been the largest provider of assistance in the crisis, Pouchalan said.

"If that aid stops, it means we won't reach the people in need," he said.

None of the crises are strictly about a lack of food aid or humanitarian funding.

"These are man-made crises in need of political solutions," Pietzsch said.

In South Sudan, where two counties are already in the midst of famine, continued clashes between government and opposition forces have restricted the access of aid workers and kept people from farming on their land. The United Nations and other humanitarian groups have frequently been targeted by armed groups affiliated with both sides of the conflict. During fighting in July, government forces stole 4,500 metric tons of food from a World Food Program compound in Juba, the capital, enough to feed more than 200,000 people.

More than 1 million children in the country are malnourished and could die without a rapid intervention, according to UNICEF.

The United States has given more than \$2.1 billion to South Sudan since the start of the conflict in December 2013. USAID claims that American food donations reach 1.3 million people every month and have "saved lives and helped to avert famine for three consecutive years," according to a State Department statement last week.

Yet as the situation there worsens and food prices continue to rise as a result of an unusually bad harvest across much of Africa, the need for humanitarian assistance is expected to grow. In South Sudan, 700,000 people are already in "phase four" of the hunger crisis, the last stage before famine.

In Somalia, Save the Children has warned that the country has reached a "tipping point" and could quickly enter a famine "far worse than the 2011 famine."

Of the four crises, Somalia's is the most clearly linked to drought conditions, but insecurity caused by al-Shabab militants frequently keeps humanitarian workers from reaching civilians.

## What Booming Markets Are Telling Us About the Global Economy (UNE)

Neil Irwin

But the pivot since Election Day is huge. The Standard & Poor's 500 index is up 12 percent since Nov. 8, the London FTSE 100 index reached a new high Wednesday, and other global markets have grown nicely in that span. Ten-year

Treasury bonds now yield 2.45 percent, up from 1.85 percent on Election Day, suggesting investors believe higher growth and inflation are more probable than had seemed likely just four months ago.

Much of the buoyant optimism on Wall Street is driven by investors'

expectations of corporate tax cuts and deregulation under the Trump administration. But there is also some real improvement in the economic data underneath the shifts, reflecting economic forces that have been underway for years. And this resetting of expectations is

evident in market data beyond the always erratic stock market.

On Wednesday, that took the form of a new survey of manufacturing supply managers that showed the factory sector is expanding at a breakneck pace. As recently as August, that same index from the

Institute for Supply Management was contracting. Those numbers followed positive readings on retail sales, industrial production and the job market.

For years, a theory that the major world economies were stuck in a pit of "secular stagnation" had gained hold — the idea that low economic growth, low inflation, low interest rates and weak productivity growth were all reinforcing one another in a vicious cycle.

There's hardly enough evidence to toss that theory aside, but there are many reasons to think things are now looking up.

For example, bond market prices now suggest that investors foresee consumer price inflation in the United States at 2.03 percent a year over the coming decade — consistent with the 2 percent inflation the Fed aims for. It only recently reached that level, however, after being as low as 1.2 percent in February 2016. And it's

not just the United States. Similar measures of inflation expectations have risen in Germany, Britain and other advanced economies.

For a window into the changing mind-set of investors, consider some news around the Fed this week. Tuesday afternoon, William C. Dudley, the president of the New York Fed, said in an interview that it would be fair to assume that the central bank would raise interest rates sooner rather than later, given the improving economy.

"There's no question that animal spirits have been unleashed a bit post the election," Mr. Dudley told CNN.

Fed watchers interpreted that to mean that an interest-rate increase could be on the way in mid-March, just three months after the last increase in December. Yet that did nothing to slow the 1.4 percent gain in the Standard & Poor's 500 on Wednesday, and may even have

contributed to it, as a sign of the Fed's confidence in the economy.

A year ago, hints that the Fed would move quickly with rates would have sent markets into a tailspin. As 2016 began, Fed leaders were expecting to raise rates four times in that year, plans that helped send the stock market plummeting and measures of economic pessimism soaring. Then they backed off and only raised rates once.

Since a stock market rally began on Election Day, there has been plenty of discussion about a Trump effect. And no doubt a big part of the improvement has resulted from expectations that the new president's policies will help corporate bottom lines (and that some of the risks of his trade agenda won't materialize).

But it's worth keeping in mind that a so-called Trump bump arrives as the economy is closing in on its full productive capacity. It is getting to the point where a cycle of rising

wages and higher inflation necessitates higher interest rates. That, in turn, reflects policies from the Obama administration and the Fed that long predate Mr. Trump's election.

Conventional economic theory predicts that if a government tries to increase deficits at a time of full employment, the results will be some mix of higher inflation and higher interest rates, crowding out investment.

So if tax cuts, more military spending and other Trumpian policies add to deficits at a time the economy is already running at full blast, rising prices and rising rates are exactly what we would expect to see.

## ETATS-UNIS

**The  
New York  
Times**

Haberman

Glenn Thrush  
and Maggie

"It was not a reset speech," the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, told reporters on Wednesday, as Mr. Trump's team basked in its best news cycle since he took office 41 days ago.

Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker and a Trump ally and adviser, said, "The thing people don't get about Trump is how quickly he learns — he moves fast — so he's going to be using different approaches."

"He started out with a set of attitudes and assumptions, and he's gradually learning which ones are worth keeping and which ones he needs to throw out," Mr. Gingrich said. "On Tuesday he rose to the occasion because he knew the country was watching. That doesn't mean next Tuesday he won't have a 20,000-person rally where he strikes a different tone."

Striking that presidential tone, as Mr. Trump did on Tuesday, was an important political move for a commander in chief facing historically low approval numbers and skepticism from fellow Republicans.

## In Speech, Trump Tests a New Tactic: Toning It Down (UNE)

Republican Senate and House members were cheered by the president's optimistic message. But in private, they are becoming increasingly anxious about the administration's reluctance to present a detailed plan on how to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, as well as offer a more specific budget document than a brief outline circulated last week, a \$1 trillion infrastructure package that is still in the theoretical stage, and an as-yet vague proposal to cut corporate taxes.

Some Republican senators noted in private that nationalist edges on illegal immigration still cut through the speech, despite all the cushioning of the language.

Democrats were even less charitable.

"Come on; there was no pivot, and there isn't going to be one," said Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York, the minority leader. "The speech wasn't as harsh as some other ones, but it was basically the same things he's been saying all along. It had the same terrible policies on immigration and other issues."

The speech on Tuesday, current and former Trump staff members said, was conceived as a bookend to the Inaugural Address, which was intended to be short and businesslike — to project the new president's impatience in enacting his "America First" agenda that included quickly killing the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal and beefing up border security.

Aware that Mr. Trump would be speaking to the largest television audience since his inaugural, his messaging team — led by his chief strategist, Stephen K. Bannon; his top policy adviser, Stephen Miller; and the speechwriter Vince Haley, with input from his counselor Kellyanne Conway, his spokeswoman Hope Hicks and a handful of others — took pains to soften his often incendiary language.

And they were pleased with the contrast between his slashing, improvisational speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference last Friday and his dignified delivery on Tuesday — all of which showcased Mr. Trump's political range, according to one person close to the team. Mr. Trump also resisted

any instincts he may have had to ad-lib.

But Mr. Trump faces weeks of significant governing challenges that might soon overshadow the success of the speech and the weeklong schedule of follow-up events around the country by him and Vice President Mike Pence.

Two people briefed on how Tuesday's speech to Congress was crafted said the lack of details was an intentionally evasive maneuver, using phrases that allowed different groups to read in what they wanted. It buys the president more time to change the narrative that his White House is short-staffed and in disarray.

But none of a dozen people in Mr. Trump's orbit said they had expected him to sustain the tone of measured magnanimity in the speech.

Inside the White House, the success of the address — three-quarters of respondents polled by CBS approved of Mr. Trump's message — was greeted with relief after weeks of controversy over the president's reported ties with Russia, the botched rollout of his immigration executive order and the resignation of his

national security adviser, Michael T. Flynn.

The question of when, or whether, Mr. Trump will ever move away from his brash, in-your-face style to a more sedate and conventional approach has been dogging the former real estate developer since the earliest days of his presidential campaign.

There have been nearly as many false pivots as real crises: Mr. Trump was expected to adopt a kinder-gentler attitude after an "Access Hollywood" recording of him making lewd comments about women surfaced last fall, but after a short statement of

contrition he went back on the attack.

The moment that came closest to Tuesday night's change of tone came on election night when Mr. Trump called for unity and an end to a vicious political war he had so vigorously pursued.

"It's time for America to bind the wounds of division — have to get together," the stunned winner told his supporters at a Manhattan ballroom that night. "To all Republicans and Democrats and independents across this nation, I say it is time for us to come together as one united people. It's time."

But over the next few months, Mr. Trump often adopted a harsher and darker tone in interviews, speeches (often off the cuff) and on Twitter.

He cannot afford that approach now, as he moves into the tougher, more public process of trying to push a legislative program through Congress.

On Wednesday, Mr. Trump — who loves to linger in front of the cameras before ceremonial White House events — hustled the news media out of the Roosevelt Room after 30 seconds to begin his first real nuts-and-bolts negotiating session with Hill Republicans, including Speaker

Paul D. Ryan and Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader.

"We are here to start the process," a solemn-faced Mr. Trump said. "It begins as of now."

Correction: March 1, 2017

An earlier version of this article misstated the name of an event President Trump spoke at. It is the Conservative Political Action Conference, not the Conservative Political Action Committee.

**The  
New York  
Times**

## Editorial : Now, About That Role as Commander in Chief ...

President Trump's first address to Congress checked nearly all the domestic policy boxes that dominated his public statements during the campaign and his few short weeks in the White House — jobs, immigration, taxes, medical care. But there was one gaping omission: foreign policy. Here was his moment to assert understanding of the foreign policy threats and opportunities facing the country, and his vision of his role as commander in chief with a wider understanding of America's role in the world. He failed to grasp it.

He boasted about plans to throw billions more dollars at the Pentagon, without a word about how this will advance national security. He spoke at length about his plans to bar and expel immigrants he regards as dangerous, but far less about the very real threats from the Islamic State and other extremist groups. There was no coherent idea about major continuing challenges in Afghanistan and Syria. In fact, the words Afghanistan and Syria — as well as North Korea (with its growing nuclear arsenal) — never crossed his lips. China and Iran got passing

mention; climate change — a major global challenge — zero.

So how did he deploy his energies and display his concern? Chiefly by recognizing the widow of Senior Chief Petty Officer William Owens, a member of the Navy SEALs who was killed in January in a botched raid in Yemen, which Mr. Trump blamed on "the generals."

Thus ensued several agonizing minutes as Carryn Owens struggled gamely to keep her composure while the audience gave her a standing ovation to which Mr. Trump added a grotesque coda, announcing that Chief Owens would be "very happy because I think he just broke a record" by drawing sustained applause.

None of this could erase the fact that Chief Owens's father had earlier demanded an investigation into what he called a "stupid mission" and refused to meet Mr. Trump. Or that Mr. Trump, asked about Mr. Owens's criticism on "Fox & Friends," refused to accept responsibility, as most commanders in chief would do, and instead blamed the military commanders for the operation.

Alarming, Mr. Trump appears to have no plans or strategy in parts of the world where American troops are actively engaged. In Afghanistan, where the United States has been at war for 15 years, 8,400 American troops are now on active duty, and officers there are asking for a few thousand more. American forces are playing a crucial role in helping Iraqi troops recapture Mosul from ISIS and are assisting Kurdish and Arab forces in Syria to retake Raqqa, capital of ISIS' self-declared caliphate. Mr. Trump said he had asked for a plan "to demolish and destroy" ISIS, and on Monday the Pentagon presented him with new options, including deploying a few hundred more troops in both countries.

If Mr. Trump has ideas about how to deal with an increasingly aggressive Russia, which the Pentagon considers America's No. 1 threat, or China, which has become more assertive in the South China Sea, he did not divulge them. One plausible possibility is that Mr. Trump's murky ties to Russia, which intelligence agencies say hacked the Democrats in an effort to skew the election on his behalf, has crippled his ability to even talk about Russia's illegal

annexation of Crimea and its destabilizing behavior in Ukraine, Syria and Europe.

It was thus a momentary relief when Mr. Trump said, "We strongly support NATO," backing off his earlier ambivalence toward the alliance. But he then trivialized the moment by insisting that his push for the allies to increase military spending had produced instant results and "the money is pouring in." (That isn't the way NATO operates, and there isn't any money pouring in anywhere.)

Presidential speeches are not as a rule detailed action plans, but a chance to illuminate priorities. On foreign policy, Mr. Trump has been hampered by his inexperience, narrow, protectionist impulses, and an erratic managing style that has made it hard to attract a capable staff. He has kept the focus on domestic issues, where he and his supporters seem more comfortable. As to America's role in the world and its multiple challenges, he seems clueless and, at best, insecure.



## Ghitis : The ridiculous gushing over Trump's speech

Frida Ghitis

(CNN)Watching reaction to President Donald Trump's speech to Congress on Tuesday night, the phrase that kept coming to mind was one made popular by former President George W. Bush, "the soft bigotry of low expectations."

Bush was bemoaning our habit of accepting underachievement

when we expect as much from certain groups or people. But it's not a stretch to say that those who praised Trump for his speech didn't do it because he did a good job, but because we have come to fear -- to expect -- a horror show when we hear from this President.

And so a day after Trump's Tuesday speech to Congress, it seems

pundits everywhere are proclaiming

that he had suddenly become "presidential."

Hardly.

If anything, he barely, just barely, cleared an incredibly low bar.

In fact, if any other president had given the same speech -- filled, as it was, with inaccuracies, false

claims, and statements directly contradicting what he said only hours earlier -- the performance would have been lambasted from every corner.

There were, to be sure, very moving moments during the President's address. And there is no denying that Trump kept the level of his accustomed outrageous pronouncements to a



surprising minimum. That is the faintest of compliments.

The

lengthy applause

in tribute to Navy Seal William "Ryan" Owens -- killed during a raid in Yemen last month -- and to his distraught, tearful widow, Carryn Owens, was a wrenching, heartfelt homage to a fallen hero. It was not, let's be clear, in any way praise for the President. I find it mind-boggling that CNN's

Van Jones declared

that at that moment Trump "became President of the United States."

It is grotesque to claim that the moment reflected Trump's triumph. His administration has done nothing but exploit Owens' death, in order to cover up the disastrous raid. Ryan's father, Bill Owens,

blames the President

for what he called a "stupid mission." The elder Owens has admonished Trump, "Don't hide behind my son's death." But that is exactly

what the White House has been doing

from the very beginning, and Trump cynically did it again during his speech.

Even more shamefully, in a Fox News interview Monday, the President pinned the death on his generals. "They wanted to do (the raid)"

he told

Fox News. "And they lost Ryan."

With this President, the buck stops somewhere else, unless there's something for which to

take credit. Then it's all him, as when he listed the companies he falsely claims have decided to invest in the United States and increase hiring, supposedly thanks to his efforts.

Most of those business decisions were made before the election. Still, large companies are happy to hear Trump praise them, so everyone wins, except the truth.

It was good to hear Trump start his remarks with a condemnation of the rash of bomb threats against Jewish community centers and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries, as well as the shooting in Kansas City. It is, indeed,

presidential to say

, as Trump did, "We are a country that stands united in condemning hate and evil in all its forms."

It is so presidential, it is so basic, that it should be unremarkable that he said it. But it is remarkable, because Trump has

equivocated

on the issue repeatedly. In fact, only hours before the speech, at a White House meeting with state attorneys general, Trump

reportedly

-- bafflingly -- appeared to suggest that the attacks might have been carried out "to make others look bad," according to one of the AGs in attendance, and that in terms of the threats, "the reverse can be true."

Indeed, if Trump genuinely condemns hatred, his plan to create an agency dedicated to highlighting crimes committed by undocumented immigrants is the most vile prescription imaginable for stoking prejudice and hatred.

The "Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement Office," with the snappy acronym VOICE, is populist crowd-riling at its worst. It will likely lead to more hate crimes and vigilantism.

No wonder there was an audible gasp in the audience when he announced it.

Research shows that

in fact undocumented immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than the rest of the population.

What was utterly un-presidential in the speech is something that should never become acceptable, even though

it is now routine

in the Trump era: misstatements, manipulations of the truth, and downright falsehoods uttered by the President of the United States. For this he receives praise?

includes

44 million retirees, 13 million students, and millions more who have no interest in getting a job. The real unemployment rate stands at just 4.8 percent, a historically low figure delivered by Trump's predecessor, President Barack Obama.

Trump spoke of the scourge of "wide open" borders, "for anyone to cross -- and for drugs to pour in at a now unprecedented rate." But the fact is that illegal immigration across the border with Mexico has been declining, and is now at the

lowest levels since 1972.

And when he boasted of imposing an excellent-sounding lifetime ban on lobbying for foreign governments,

he failed to mention

that ban applies only to lobbying an employee's own agency, and may in fact be weaker than restrictions imposed by the Bush and Obama administrations.

Trump reassured allies of America's commitments, which he should have done as a candidate and reiterated at every chance. That was another moment, like his condemnation of hate crimes, made remarkable only by Trump's previous equivocation on the subject -- he has at times said the exact opposite. Trump then claimed that increased NATO members' contributions are the result of his tough talk, a

highly debatable

point.

His reassurances to allies, while welcome, came coated in a troubling pronouncement that sounded deceptively innocuous. "America respects the right of all nations to chart their own path," he said. Those were soothing words for Russia's neighbors, worried about Moscow's aggressive expansionism. But Trump immediately added, "My job is not to represent the world," which must have sent a cold chill through Ukraine and America's Baltic allies.

Yes, Trump delivered his speech calmly, like a "normal" president. And his words were less outrageous than in the past. That is progress. The high marks he received are more a sign that the country desperately yearns to have a good president, than evidence that Trump's speech was genuinely worthy of praise.

NATIONAL  
REVIEW  
ONLINE

## Editorial : Trump Trumps Trump

Following the conventional wisdom on the Trump presidency is a little like taking a mind-altering drug while riding a roller-coaster. You know that you are being hurled up and down and around in a succession of dizzying revolutions, but somehow it doesn't seem quite as normal an experience as that.

In the twelve or so hours after the State of the Union, the air was thick with the sound of second thoughts on the Trump presidency: The president had been "presidential." He had spoken well, reading the teleprompter accurately, and not

deviating into self-justifying asides. He had denounced bigotry and anti-Semitism. He had followed Nixon to China on immigration reform, hallelujah. His familiar themes of patriotic unity and rebuilding America were expressed in lighter and more optimistic language than in his "dark" and "divisive" Inaugural, with its grim talk of "carnage." His tribute to the widow of the slain Navy SEAL had been an inspiring moment in an inspiring speech. And so on, and so on, and so on.

I don't think anyone described the president as "the New Trump," but it came pretty close

to that. And this favorable impression was then reinforced by reports of polls that showed that the voters, maybe having listened to the pundits, liked it, too. One such poll showed that almost four out of every five Americans approved of the speech to varying degrees.

Politically speaking, that's important. If the president is thought to be an impressive figure within the mainstream of presidents, so to speak, and to enjoy wide popular support, he will be in a better position to push through his political agenda.

Probably for that reason, pundits started having second thoughts about the second thoughts at around lunch time on the same day. They weren't always the same pundits, of course. Some were responding critically to the first round of pundits who had had approving second thoughts; others were putting a more skeptical gloss on their own earlier-in-the-day approval. But the general effect was to explain that Trump's speech had not been nearly as successful as the initial set of reactions had suggested. Not by any means. In fact, parts of it, like the curate's egg, had been downright disgusting,

So what had produced this illusion of success? The answer that bubbled up from the collective subconscious of the punditocracy was that Trump had *seemed* to give a good speech because he was being compared favorably, indeed indulgently, to *Trump* who, as everyone knows, is impulsive, scatter-brained, given to plucking figures from the air or his last night's television viewing, vulgar, credulous, hostile to every form of self-discipline, including logic, and wholly incapable of giving a good speech or a polished performance.

Accordingly, when we thought we saw him reading from the teleprompter accurately, or delivering powerful words with panache and amusing ones with a twinkle, or paying a touching tribute to the widow of a Navy SEAL, or making a coherent case for lower business taxation, these were illusions produced by our relief that he had not actually fallen off the stage, hit Speaker Ryan, lost his trousers, or spoken in tongues.

Now, some items in this indictment are true. Trump is impulsive, quick to anger, and sometimes inaccurate. And as Rich Lowry observed, one wondered why he had not paid minor tributes to the zeitgeist such as denouncing "bigotry" before. But the picture as a whole is false — not only in the broad sense that Trump has had successful business and media careers but also in the narrower one that, as he showed in the campaign, he is a confident and accomplished public speaker. His skill is closer to that of a stand-up comic than to FDR's or Reagan's, but he can wow an audience with the best of them — see in particular his riff on winning — and he presented America with a set of arguments that shaped a new and formidable coalition of voters.

His oratorical skills compare very favorably with those of most of his GOP primary rivals, let alone Mrs. Clinton, who can barely recite a list of poll-tested partisan platitudes with any conviction. It was silly of the pundits to suppose that this actual Trump would be unable to master the more formal skills of rhetoric required for an address to

Congress. And, in the event, he triumphed over both halves of a divided audience in the Chamber, winning over the Republicans with a mix of his ideas and theirs, and leaving the Democrats looking stranded and uncertain outside a new mainstream of patriotic politics.

Does that new mainstream flow from the Chamber through Middle America? Such pastoral visions have danced deceptively before the eyes of Republicans before. But they have always met an insurmountable obstacle: The media was hostile to the GOP and friendly to the Democrats, and it subtly shepherded its audiences onto the Left bank. Republicans and conservatives bitched about this, but in the end, they accepted the professionals' advice that more would be lost than gained by open hostility to the media. Media bias grew less and less covert as a result. And Trump, not being given to over-subtlety, said so. That has prompted the media to be openly hostile to Trump — and to those Republicans sympathetic to him — to the point where many reporters frankly argue that they have a duty to abandon impartiality where he is concerned, treating him as, in effect, an unconvicted criminal.

Many reporters frankly argue that they have a duty to abandon impartiality where he is concerned, treating him as, in effect, an unconvicted criminal.

That hostility has produced three effects. The first is that it has driven coverage that as a regular thing places the worse possible interpretation on Trump's motives in any and all stories. Thus, his use of the word "carnage" to describe the social reality in America's worst urban areas is treated as "dark" and "divisive," although it has been the common coin of liberal social commentary on urban decay and violence since the riots of the late 1960s, and although Trump used it to pledge help to the people trapped in such situations. His remark that "they lost him," about the death of the Navy SEAL, is seen as an attempt to shift blame from himself onto the senior military when, as Hugh Hewitt has argued, it is far more likely to be an expression of

sympathy for warriors who have lost one of their own. That hostile interpretation is then further abused to suggest that the president's motive in hailing Ryan Owens's widow was heartlessly hypocritical.

And of course we are still waiting for any serious evidence to support the widespread journalistic speculation that Trump was in collusion with the Kremlin to "hack" the U.S. election in order to pursue a pro-Russian foreign policy. Well, Trump has been elected now, but he isn't pursuing a pro-Russian foreign policy. Quite the reverse. As Walter Russell Mead has pointed out, on the five most important measures to favorability to Russia, Trump is pursuing a firmly anti-Russian policy while, on the same measures, it was Obama who until January had been pursuing the pro-Russian policy that his journalistic admirers were blaming on Trump.

Maybe I should add that shrewd and informed Kremlinologists such as David Satter (a regular NRO contributor) and David Remnick of the *New Yorker* have concluded that the motive behind such Kremlin interference as there was in the U.S. election was in general to suggest that American democracy is a hypocritical farce and in particular to undermine Mrs. Clinton, whom the Russians, like everyone else, expected to be the next president of the United States.

The picture of Trump that emerges from this biased coverage is so implausibly negative that when the real (and fallible) Trump appears, as he did in Tuesday night's speech, he seems to be a fairly decent fellow and a commanding leader.

The second effect of this partial and hostile journalism is that the picture of Trump that emerges from this biased coverage is so implausibly negative that when the real (and fallible) Trump appears, as he did with Tuesday night's speech, he naturally seems to be a fairly decent fellow and a commanding leader. But the standard of comparison that so flatters him is not his own impulsive personality but the

implausibly negative image of him shaped by the media.

The third effect is to weaken the media as an adjudicator of political issues. Though the Republicans never won the media impartiality they needed to talk persuasively to the voters, the open hostility and bias of the elite press have now given them what they wanted: Most of the public sees the press as belonging to one side of politics and distrusts it accordingly. Trump's row with "the fourth estate" — scorned by some establishment Republicans — has sharpened this perception. And as Lee Smith points out in a recent *Tablet* article, this weakening is also the result of a serious decline in the quality and skills of journalism as it struggles to combine the political partisanship of the star-struck Obama years with traditional rules.

I had been stopped short by this opening sentence of a political report when I came across it in the *Washington Post*:

Just two days after President Trump provoked widespread consternation by seeming to imply, incorrectly, that immigrants had perpetrated a recent spate of violence in Sweden, riots broke out in a predominantly immigrant neighborhood in the northern suburbs of the country's capital, Stockholm.

It took editorializing a tad too far even for an opinion column like the one I'm writing now. And *incorrectly*? What was that doing in a news report? In the lede, too? And what was cause and what effect in this wandering back and forth? But it was Lee Smith who noticed the most fascinating implication of its syntax — and made me laugh out loud when he did so. What this ungainly sentence is saying is earth-shaking: *Donald Trump can foresee the future!*

Well, that would explain a lot that has happened this week. Otherwise, there are still a great many things that could go wrong for the Trump presidency — if his enemies were not so determined to make them go right.



## White House eyes plan to cut EPA staff by one-fifth, eliminating key programs (UNE)

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

The White House has proposed deep cuts to the Environmental

Protection Agency's budget that would reduce the agency's staff by

one-fifth in the first year and eliminate dozens of programs,

according to details of a plan reviewed by The Washington Post.

While administration officials had already indicated that they intended to increase defense spending at the expense of other discretionary funding, the plan spells out exactly how this new approach will affect long-standing federal programs that have a direct impact on Americans' everyday lives.

"The administration's 2018 budget blueprint will prioritize rebuilding the military and making critical investments in the nation's security," the document says. "It will also identify the savings and efficiencies needed to keep the nation on a responsible fiscal path."

The funding level proposed, which the document says "highlights the trade-offs and choices inherent in pursuing these goals," could have a significant impact on the agency. Its annual budget would drop from \$8.2 billion a year to \$6.1 billion. And because much of that funding already goes to states and localities in the form of grants, such cuts could have an even more significant effect on the EPA's core functions.

Though President Trump professes to care strongly about clean air and clean water, almost no other federal department or agency is as much in the crosshairs at the moment. As a candidate, he vowed to get rid of the EPA "in almost every form," leaving only "little tidbits" intact. The man he chose to lead the agency, former Oklahoma attorney general Scott Pruitt, sued it more than a dozen times in recent years, challenging its legal authority to regulate such things as mercury pollution, smog and carbon emissions from power plants.

The plan reflects those past sentiments. As proposed, the EPA's staff would be slashed from its current level of 15,000 to 12,000. Grants to states, as well as its air and water programs, would be cut by 30 percent. The massive Chesapeake Bay cleanup project would receive only \$5 million in the next fiscal year, down from its current \$73 million.

In addition, 38 separate programs would be eliminated entirely. Grants to clean up brownfields, or abandoned industrial sites, would be gone. Also zeroed out: the radon program, climate change initiatives and funding for Alaskan native villages.

The agency's Office of Research and Development could lose up to 42 percent of its budget, according to an individual apprised of the administration's plans. And the document eliminates funding altogether for the office's

"contribution to the U.S. Global Change Research Program," a climate initiative that President George H.W. Bush launched in 1989.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference on Feb. 25 in Oxon Hill, Md. (The Washington Post)

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference on Feb. 25 in Oxon Hill, Md. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference on Feb. 25 in Oxon Hill, Md. (The Washington Post)

The staffing reductions, which could be accomplished through a buyout offer as well as layoffs, were among several changes to which the EPA staff was asked to react by the close of business Wednesday. Multiple individuals briefed on the plan confirmed the request by the Office of Management and Budget, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The document acknowledges that the cuts "will create many challenges" but suggests that "by looking ahead and focusing on clean water, clean air and other core responsibilities, rather than activities that are not required by law, EPA will be able to effectively achieve its mission."

*[Trump to propose 10 percent spike in defense spending, major cuts to other agencies]*

Any cuts would have to be codified through the congressional appropriations process and would probably face resistance from some lawmakers. Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho), a former chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on interior, environment and related agencies, said he did not think Congress would approve such a steep drop in funding.

"There's not that much in the EPA, for crying out loud," he said, noting that Republicans had already reduced the agency's budget dramatically in recent years.

Jennifer Hing, a spokeswoman for the House Appropriations Committee, declined to comment Wednesday on the cuts targeted but said in an email that the panel "will carefully look at the budget proposal once it is sent to Congress."

The EPA also would not comment on the budget proposal. But its new administrator cautioned this week that the particulars of the budget remain in flux.

"I am concerned about the grants that have been targeted, especially around water infrastructure, and those very important state revolving funds," Pruitt told the publication E&E News after Trump's address to Congress on Tuesday. He said he already had spoken with OMB Director Mick Mulvaney about the agency's funding.

"What's important for us is to educate OMB on what the priorities of the agency are, from water infrastructure to Superfund, providing some of those tangible benefits to our citizens," he said, "while at the same time making sure that we reallocate, re-prioritize in our agency to do regulatory reform to get back within the bounds of Congress."

*[Pruitt to EPA employees: 'We don't have to choose' between jobs and the environment]*

It is unclear whether Pruitt's appeal would produce any changes: The document states that any requests from agencies to increase or reallocate funds must be accompanied by budgetary offsets. Those could include "alternative funding cuts, balance cancellations or viable user fees."

It instructs agency officials to "make sure any appeal is consistent with campaigns or other policy statements."

Agencies must submit any alternative budget proposals to OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs by Friday, the document states, and OMB will convene a meeting April 15 to discuss the "initial draft of the workforce reduction plan."

As details of the blueprint emerged, environmental advocates and the EPA's most recent administrator blasted the White House proposal.

"This budget is a fantasy if the administration believes it will preserve EPA's mission to protect public health," Gina McCarthy, who served as the agency's leader from 2013 through the end of the Obama administration, said in a statement Wednesday.

"It ignores the need to invest in science and to implement the law," she said. "It ignores the lessons of history that led to EPA's creation 46 years ago. And it ignores the American people calling for its continued support."

S. William Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, said in an email that the proposed budget would devastate critical federal financial support for communities across the country.

"These cuts, if enacted by Congress, will rip the heart and soul out of the national air pollution control program and jeopardize the health and welfare of tens of millions of people around the country," Becker said.

The instructions to the EPA signal how the new administration plans to delegate many responsibilities to the states even as it decreases the money they will receive from the federal government.

The document directs the agency to get states "to assume more active enforcement roles" when it comes to federal environmental standards. In addition, it says, the agency should curtail its compliance-monitoring activities.

"Basically, the direction is to reduce enforcement, which is already pretty strained," said Eric Shaeffer, head of the Environmental Integrity Project, an advocacy group, and a former head of the EPA's Office of Regulatory Enforcement. He noted that state programs are often "woefully underfunded" and at the mercy of state politics and pressure from large companies.

Environmental justice activists are particularly alarmed at what they may face with the new administration.

The document states that it supports the idea of environmental justice, but it would eliminate that EPA office and "assumes any future EJ specific policy work can be transferred to the Office of Policy."

On the South Side of Chicago, the neighborhood where Cheryl Johnson lives is known as "the toxic doughnut" because of the 200 leaking underground storage tanks and 50 landfills there.

The EPA office has given People for Community Recovery, for which Johnson is the executive director, and other organizations money to conduct technical assessment of local facilities and provide training to educate residents. And, Johnson added, it also has provided a place where residents could appeal to force local polluters to come into compliance with federal standards.

Losing that resource "would devastate a community like mine," she said. It would be "like putting us in a chamber, to be disposed of."

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## Editorial : Trump's opportunity to do the right thing on immigration reform

MORE THAN once, President Trump has enticed Democrats and some moderate Republicans — and risked infuriating hard-liners in his base — by expressing an openness to overhauling the nation's dysfunctional immigration system. He did so again in a session at the White House with television news anchors Tuesday, saying he'd consider a compromise that included legal status for millions of undocumented immigrants, and then wondering aloud whether he should float the idea to Congress in his speech that night. He did not — but if he really wishes to bring about the "unity" and "renewal of the American spirit" he spoke of in his address, he should.

It is a fool's game to guess whether the president will ultimately legalize or deport more of the nation's 11 million undocumented immigrants; he himself may have no firm idea what he intends. But if he wants to soothe this festering political and social wound, he

is well positioned to do it. Having established himself as a hard-liner on illegal immigration and proposed tough new measures to stop it, he might well persuade fellow Republicans to accept a compromise on the millions of noncriminal immigrants already in the country.

A good place to start would be the question of what to do about "dreamers," the 2 million or so undocumented immigrants brought to this country as children. There Mr. Trump has been more consistent. After initially suggesting he would scrap the Obama administration's program granting them temporary protection from deportation, the new president has repeatedly expressed sympathy for the dreamers' plight, making clear he is disinclined to target them for removal and telling the news anchors he would be open to forging a pathway to citizenship for them.

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Fair enough, but will he have the courage of his apparent convictions? The test is whether he acts to dispel the uncertainty hanging over the heads of roughly 750,000 dreamers whose age, duration of residence in the United States and verified clean record enabled them to register for the program, known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which provides work permits and temporary protection from removal. Registrants, who submit their names, addresses and other information, are now justifiably fearful that the government may use that data to track them down once their two-year DACA protections lapse. Hundreds of thousands of other eligible youngsters are unlikely to enroll given that peril.

Dreamers represent a pool of talent, brains and ambition that the United States should want to cultivate. Some 3,700 students in the University of California system are undocumented immigrants, and tens of thousands of dreamers are enrolled at other post-secondary institutions across the country. What possible benefit is there in deporting a promising cohort that is American in all but birth certificate?

With the stroke of a pen, Mr. Trump could extend the existing program, enabling dreamers to continue working, studying and living productive lives. He could go further by proposing permanent legal status or a path to citizenship for immigrants who, in many cases, have little memory of any country but the United States. That would lend weight to the president's oft-stated assertions of his compassion.

## Revised Trump immigration order, delayed after speech, will not ban citizens from Iraq

<http://www.facebook.com/matt.zapo.tosky>

President Trump's new executive order on immigration will not include a blanket ban on citizens from Iraq, among a host of other revisions meant to allay legal and diplomatic concerns, people familiar with the matter said.

The White House late Tuesday scrapped plans for Trump to sign a revised travel ban Wednesday afternoon, a person familiar with the matter said, marking the third time the administration has put off the matter since the president said that dangerous people might enter the country without a prohibition in place.

But when it is signed, people familiar with the matter said, the order is still expected to include a host of significant changes. The order will exempt current visa holders and legal permanent residents, and it will not impose a blanket ban on those from Iraq, where U.S. forces are working with the Iraqis to battle the Islamic State. It will not include an exception for religious minorities, which critics had pointed to as evidence it was meant to discriminate against Muslims. And it will not go into effect immediately when it is signed, people familiar with the matter said.

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The people said the situation remains fluid and changes remain possible. Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq and Syria, said he, too, had heard Iraq would not be included in the revised order, though he also had heard the opposite. Asked if he had concerns about Iraq's possible inclusion in the new executive order, he praised the country as "our partner and ally."

"They are protecting us here, and we're fighting this enemy that threatens all of our countries together," Townsend said. Earlier, he had said the Iraqis' reaction to the first ban was "pretty level-headed and sophisticated," and that the security forces with whom he dealt — while "relieved when the executive order was suspended" — remained focused on their mission.

"Now they're waiting to see how that may play out here in the future," Townsend said of the new executive order.

The decision to delay signing the order came as people on Twitter

and elsewhere heaped praise on Trump for his speech Tuesday night to a joint session of Congress. A CNN-ORC poll, for example, showed that 7 in 10 people who watched said the address made them feel more optimistic about the direction of the country, and about two-thirds said the president has the right priorities for the nation. The pool of those who watched the speech was about eight points more Republican than the total population.

It was not immediately clear why the White House canceled plans to ink the new executive order, although CNN reported that a White House official did not deny that optics were part of the calculus. "We want the [executive order] to have its own 'moment,'" an official told the network. A White House spokesman did not immediately return messages seeking comment for this article.

*[New travel ban will exempt current visa holders, sources say]*

Trump's original executive order, now frozen by the courts, had temporarily barred citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries — Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya and Yemen — and all refugees from entering the United States. When it was implemented, the State

Department provisionally revoked tens of thousands of visas, and some people who were in transit when it took effect were detained or deported once they reached U.S. airports.

Although courts have disagreed, the president has insisted that the ban is necessary for national security reasons. He wrote on Twitter that, because a federal judge in Washington state had ordered it frozen, "many very bad and dangerous people may be pouring into our country." He also suggested that if something were to happen, the court system would be to blame.

Since then, the Justice Department has asked courts to delay litigation while a new order is drafted, and the White House has repeatedly put off doing that. The president said on Feb. 10, a Friday, that he was considering writing a new order and that he probably would take some action the following Monday or Tuesday. He did not write a new order by then, and on Feb. 16, a Thursday, he said he would do so the following week.

Again, he did not, and a senior administration official said on Feb. 22 that the order would be delayed another week, as officials worked to make sure it would be implemented smoothly. The



president was slated to sign the order Wednesday, but now, it seems, it will have to wait again. How long is unclear.

The delays and the removal of Iraq from the list of blocked countries could undermine the administration's argument about the necessity of the ban. In arguing that the ban should not be frozen, the Justice Department had asserted that the seven countries, including Iraq, covered by the order were identified by Congress and the previous administration as having problems with terror.

Judges and others had already been skeptical of the argument that the administration needed to impose a ban for

national security reasons. U.S. District Judge Leonie M. Brinkema said at a court hearing there was "startling evidence" from national security professionals that the order "may be counterproductive to its stated goal" of keeping the nation safe. A recent Department of Homeland Security report concluded citizenship is an "unreliable" threat indicator and that people from the seven countries affected by the ban have rarely been implicated in U.S.-based terrorism.

Of 82 people "who died in the pursuit of or were convicted of any terrorism-related federal offense" since March 2011, that report said, more than half were U.S.-born

citizens, and just two were from Iraq. The president said Tuesday night that the "vast majority" of people convicted for terrorism-related offenses since 9/11 came here from outside the United States.

The Justice Department said in a statement Wednesday that it had won convictions "against over 500 defendants for terrorism or terrorism-related charges in federal courts," and a "review of that information revealed that a substantial majority of those convicted were born in foreign countries." A department spokeswoman declined to provide the raw data.

The administration already has faced criticism for pointing to terror

attacks that the ban could not have prevented as evidence of its necessity, and critics noted it omitted Saudi Arabia, which is where most of the Sept. 11 hijackers came from. Now Justice Department lawyers might be pressed to justify why people from Iraq can enter the United States, when those from other countries with the same designation cannot.

Karen DeYoung contributed to this report.

**The  
New York  
Times**

## Republican Unity on Health Care Is Elusive, Despite Trump's Support (UNE)

Thomas Kaplan and Robert Pear

House Republican leaders would offer to help people buy insurance on the free market with a tax credit that, for some low-income households, could exceed the amount they owe in federal income taxes.

Some of the most conservative Republicans say the tax credit should not be more than the amount of taxes consumers owe. If the government makes payments to people with little or no tax liability, they say, that would amount to a new entitlement program, replacing one kind of government largess from President Barack Obama with another from Mr. Trump.

"Coming in as a Republican president with a new federal entitlement program?" asked Representative Dave Brat, a conservative Republican from Virginia. "That's your first big move? You would have politicians bidding up the cost, adding to the financial problems of other entitlement programs like Medicare and Social Security."

### If Obamacare Is Out, Where's Trumpcare?

With President Trump in office, the goal of repealing the Affordable Care Act is finally within reach for Republicans. Margot Sanger-Katz explains why repealing and replacing Obamacare may not be easy.

By SHANE O'NEILL and DAVE HORN on February 10, 2017. Photo by Stephen Crowley/The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

After the president's speech, aides to the House speaker, Paul D. Ryan, crowed that they had the full

backing of Mr. Trump for their health care plan.

But Mr. Trump was decidedly vague. He backed tax credits to buy insurance, but he did not clearly resolve the disagreement between Mr. Ryan and the most conservative Republicans.

"We should help Americans purchase their own coverage through the use of tax credits and expanded health savings accounts," Mr. Trump told a joint session of Congress.

The details of the tax credit could make a substantial difference to consumers. If a family is eligible for a \$3,000 tax credit to buy insurance and owes \$1,000 in federal income taxes, should it get only \$1,000? Or should it get the full \$3,000?

Most tax breaks reduce the amount owed to the government. A refundable tax credit can also result in payments from the government: If the credit exceeds a person's tax liability, the government pays him or her the excess.

"I think refundable tax credits are just another word for subsidies," said Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky.

Defenders of refundable tax credits say they are needed to make insurance affordable to people who pay little or no taxes.

"Otherwise, they're useless," said Representative Chris Collins of New York, one of Mr. Trump's top supporters in Congress. "What good's a tax credit for folks who don't pay taxes?"

In fact, for those who cannot pitch in much of their own income, even a refundable tax credit is not likely to be enough to pay for a health

insurance policy, Democrats say. That is one reason the Republican alternative is not likely to cover as many people as the Affordable Care Act.

At the meeting on Wednesday, several Republican senators expressed concern that the tax credit proposed by House leaders would be available even to people with high incomes who did not need federal assistance.

Earlier, Representative Kevin Brady, Republican of Texas and head of the Ways and Means Committee, said the credit would be a way to provide more equity in the tax code by creating a tax break for people who buy insurance on their own, similar to the break already available to people who get insurance through the workplace.

He predicted that Republicans would overcome their divisions.

"Rather than using his speech to divide Republicans," Mr. Brady said, "it's really an opportunity for us to sit down and work through what remaining differences there are, and I'm confident we can."

Mr. Brady and another architect of the House plan, Representative Greg Walden of Oregon, the chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, huddled with Republican senators on Wednesday. But lawmakers left the meeting with many unanswered questions and were not ready to endorse the House plan.

The fractures among Republicans have been on display in the past few days. On Monday night, three senators — Mr. Paul, Mike Lee of Utah and Ted Cruz of Texas — posted on Twitter in support of what they called #FullRepeal.

"If we fail to honor our commitment to repeal Obamacare, I believe the consequences would be, quite rightly, catastrophic," Mr. Cruz said on Wednesday.

The leaders of two groups of House conservatives, the Republican Study Committee and the House Freedom Caucus, also came out against a draft of the health care legislation that became public during last week's congressional recess. The groups have more than enough members to thwart House leaders' plan if they are determined to do so.

Senator James Lankford, Republican of Oklahoma, likened the leadership's tax-credit proposal to the earned-income tax credit, which supplements the wages of low-income workers. There has been "a tremendous amount of improper payments" in that program, he said.

Other Republican skeptics include Senators Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. "There are other ways you can address that segment of the population," Mr. Tillis said of the working poor with little or no income tax liability.

Some Republicans are also concerned about the possibility of requiring workers to pay taxes on the value of employer-sponsored coverage exceeding certain thresholds. Employers and labor unions strenuously oppose such a move, which would affect people in the most expensive health plans and is similar in purpose to a provision of the existing law. Both measures are designed to curb overuse of health care and to help pay for the broader measures.

"I don't think it'd go over very good in the Senate," Senator Charles E. Grassley, Republican of Iowa, said last week.

Then there is the issue of Medicaid. Lawmakers from states that expanded Medicaid under the

Affordable Care Act face pressure back home — in some cases, from Republican governors — to oppose sharp cuts to the generous federal funding that those states are receiving.

Senator Lisa Murkowski, Republican of Alaska, which has expanded eligibility for Medicaid under the health care law, said she wanted to be sure that her state could retain the expansion if its legislature wanted to do so.

"Alaska should have that option," she said.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Trump's words on Obamacare stir up intraparty feud

<https://www.facebook.com/kelsey.snell.3>

President Trump ascended the bulliest of pulpits Tuesday to address a joint session of Congress. It turns out it was his fellow Republicans who needed some bullying — specifically, on their plans to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

The leader of the Republican Party took some tentative steps in his address to the joint congressional session toward a position in the Obamacare fight looming over Capitol Hill. But the president's words sparked as much debate as they quashed.

The federal government, Trump said, "should help Americans purchase their own coverage, through the use of tax credits and expanded health savings accounts."

By specifically mentioning "tax credits," Trump appeared to side with House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) in a key intraparty debate over what the ACA's replacement ought to look like. Influential conservatives in the House and Senate have balked at offering refundable tax credits to help Americans buy insurance, advocating instead for a less expensive tax deduction.

Ryan's staff and House GOP leaders immediately claimed Tuesday that Trump had moved to settle the dispute.

(Zoeann Murphy/The Washington Post)

The Washington Post's John Wagner describes highlights from President Trump's first joint address to Congress on Tuesday. The Washington Post's John Wagner describes highlights from President Trump's first joint address to Congress on Tuesday. (Zoeann Murphy/The Washington Post)

"This was a clear sign that President Trump is working in sync with us in the House and Senate and wants to make sure we get this done quickly," said Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.), the House majority whip. "We've laid out

a lot of specifics, and I think you saw the president embrace and endorse a lot of those key components tonight."

But on Wednesday, as key House committee chairmen briefed Republican senators on their health-care plans, there was still significant unrest.

Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), chairman of the House Freedom Caucus and an outspoken critic of refundable tax credits, said Trump's remarks did not constitute an endorsement of the Ryan plan.

"I didn't interpret it to mean that it was advanced or refundable," he said, referring to the nature of the tax credits.

Rep. Raúl R. Labrador (R-Idaho), another conservative hard-liner, made a similar point: "He was making sure that he wasn't taking a position on something that he knows we're disagreeing about."

The tax-credit issue has become a flash point between GOP leaders and their conservative flank, rooted in the amount of government spending it would take to achieve adequate health coverage in the ACA's absence.

The Ryan-backed plan would offer a refundable tax credit that would provide the same sum to taxpayers of all income levels, even those who pay little income tax because of their low incomes. It would also be "advanceable" — that is, distributed throughout the year — to spare insurance buyers from having to pay their premiums in full before seeking reimbursement on the following year's tax return.

Conservatives such as Meadows have argued that refundable tax credits are too expensive and constitute a new federal entitlement, while advanceable credits, they say, are too prone to fraud and abuse. But both have been a part of past GOP plans — including Ryan's "Better Way" blueprint and an ACA replacement plan advanced by new Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price when he was a House member, one that many conservatives, including Meadows, co-sponsored.

*[Medicaid exposes rifts within the GOP over the program's future after ACA]*

Rep. Kevin Brady (R-Tex.), chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, and Rep. Greg Walden (R-Ore.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, briefed GOP senators Wednesday afternoon in a bid to build bicameral consensus on the developing House framework.

Ryan and Price spent Wednesday morning talking directly with skeptics of the House approach. Several members said they met directly with Price to discuss the administration's position on key elements like the refundable tax credits and the fate of the ACA's Medicaid expansion.

The takeaway: Tax credits aren't up for debate.

"The president is carrying about 88, 90 percent of the Republican base," Rep. Mark Walker (R-N.C.), chairman of the Republican Study Committee, said Wednesday, two days after issuing a statement opposing refundable tax credits. "Our voters said, 'Let's go and move,' and that's a factor."

Another fault line is what to do with Medicaid, the government's health program for low-income Americans that was expanded to 11 million people as part of Obamacare.

Other key conservatives kept their powder dry Wednesday. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) declined to say whether he would support or oppose a GOP health-care bill that included tax credits.

"I understand that our good friends in the media want to focus on areas of division," Cruz said. "The president laid out general principles of reform, and right now both houses of Congress are debating the specifics of those reforms."

Senate Republicans cannot afford widespread internal dissent. GOP leaders are hoping to use special budget rules to pass repeal by a simple majority vote, and even so, they can lose no more than two of 52 Republican senators.

One Republican, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, has put forth a tax-deduction-based plan that has been

embraced by hard-line House conservatives.

Leaving Wednesday's briefing, Paul said he would not support refundable tax credits: "I'm not in favor of keeping parts of Obamacare."

GOP lawmakers of all ideological stripes said that Trump needs to take a more aggressive role in refereeing the intraparty disputes.

"The president is key to getting anything we do in health care across the finish line, and I look at last night as the beginning of that," said Rep. Patrick J. Tiberi (R-Ohio), chairman of the Ways and Means subcommittee on health.

Rep. Mark Sanford (R-S.C.), who has put forward a tax-deduction-based bill endorsed by the Freedom Caucus, acknowledged that it will be challenging if Trump supports tax credits.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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"It becomes very difficult for Republicans to go a different course, although I would hope that we would," Sanford said Tuesday before Trump spoke. On Wednesday, he, like other conservatives, split hairs: "He didn't say 'refundable'; he said 'tax credits.'"

Trump has shown a willingness to prod and cajole congressional leaders into action, and Tiberi said the White House would only get more willing over the coming weeks to intervene in intraparty squabbles.

Rep. Chris Collins (R-N.Y.), an outspoken Trump ally, said fellow GOP lawmakers will ultimately need to support a consensus plan.

"We as a Republican Party have to get this passed, otherwise next term's midterm elections would not be a pretty sight," he said. "When a good bill finally hits the floor would they really vote against it?"

Ed O'Keefe, Sean Sullivan and Dave Weigel contributed to this report.

## Republicans in Washington Are in Control, but Not in Agreement

Carl Hulse

Conservatives are also showing some unease at sudden indications from Mr. Trump that he might be willing to embrace an immigration overhaul that could lead to legal status for millions of undocumented immigrants. And quick rejection by Republican leaders of many of Mr. Trump's proposed budget cuts as unachievable is not likely to go down well either.

It wasn't supposed to be this way with Republicans in control of Congress and the White House for the first time since 2006. They were certain they would now have the muscle to carry out their agenda. But just as Mr. Trump has discovered that revising the health law is "unbelievably complex," Republicans are finding that being in charge doesn't mean being on the same page — or even reading the same book.

The developing situation is reminiscent of the challenges faced by John A. Boehner, the former speaker, when he tried to corral recalcitrant conservatives to vote for compromise spending and immigration packages. His inability to do so helped break up a major

spending deal, caused a government shutdown and ultimately ended up with the conservatives forcing him out.

Despite his retirement, Mr. Boehner might have helped fuel this latest revolt. Representative Jim Jordan, an Ohio Republican and leader of House conservatives who clashed repeatedly with Mr. Boehner, noted caustically on Tuesday that the former speaker is now predicting that Republicans won't be able to kill the law, and Mr. Jordan seemed eager to prove him wrong.

"This is what we told the voters we were going to do," he said of the straightforward repeal effort.

Conservatives have become increasingly alarmed at discussion of what they deride as "Obamacare Lite" — efforts to keep some of the provisions in place and "repair" the health law rather than kill it outright. They complain that an approach backed by some House health policy writers would impose new taxes on employer-provided health insurance and interfere in a part of the marketplace that is working. And they don't favor a tax credit plan that Mr. Trump endorsed in his speech. They back the more market-driven

approach that Republicans approved in 2015.

But that legislation was crafted when President Obama was in office and was certain to veto any repeal — giving Republicans what amounted to a free shot at the law. Now they and their constituents would have to live with the replacement, and lawmakers fear a potential backlash if it goes awry. Many Republicans may have complained that the crowds at angry town hall meetings over the recent recess were organized by political opponents, but that doesn't mean Republicans aren't paying attention to them.

In the face of that nervousness, Mr. Paul is reminding Republicans that the main reason the party won election victories in 2010, 2014 and now 2016 was the clear promise to end the health care law.

"They didn't tell us to repeal but to keep the Medicaid expansion," Mr. Jordan said.

But just as conservatives are adamant that Republicans repeal the law before replacing it, other more centrist Republicans are threatening to withhold their votes if there is no suitable alternative in place. That division is creating a real

headache for Republican leaders such as Speaker Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin and Senator Mitch McConnell, the majority leader from Kentucky, who have to find something a majority will support.

They say they will eventually reach a solution, but they know they have serious problems at the moment. Mr. McConnell called a special Senate Republican meeting for Wednesday to hear from House committee chairmen on their plans and to try to hash out the sharp internal differences.

"The goal is for the administration, the House and the Senate to be in the same place," Mr. McConnell said. "We're not there yet. There's a lot of discussion about how to craft that, what combination of legislation and regulation will get us to where we want to get."

That is a far cry from confident pledges that the despised health insurance law would quickly be history once Republicans took power. Now conservatives, sensing backsliding among their colleagues, again want to use their numbers to dictate their desired result. Seems just like old times on Capitol Hill.

## Henninger : The Democrats abandon the ship of state, writes @DanHenninger

That scene you saw at the moment President Trump ended his speech to a joint session of Congress was the Democrats abandoning the ship of state.

Like the progressive street demonstrations endured by the country the past four weeks, we may assume Congress's Democratic delegation organized their post-speech bolt to the exits via the famous social-media hashtag #TheResistance.

During the speech's most extraordinary moment, the tribute to Carryn Owens, wife of slain SEAL Ryan Owens, one notable Democrat who refused to stand was Rep. Keith Ellison, who just lost a close race for Democratic National Committee chairman to Obama Labor Secretary Thomas Perez, also a man of the left.

You'd have thought that at the two-thirds point, when Mr. Trump hadn't self-destructed as expected, when instead he was looking less like Alec Baldwin and more like

President Trump, that Chuck Schumer might have pulled out his smartphone to tweet the troops, "Walkout maybe not a good idea." Not this crew. En masse, they went over the side, just as they've refused to attend hearings for cabinet nominees and voted as a bloc against virtually all of them.

Donald Trump extended an olive branch on key legislative issues, and the Democrats gave him the you-know-what. In fact, the party might consider making you-know-what its new logo because Mr. Trump has stolen their mascot, the Democratic donkey.

The donkey was the creation of Democrat Andrew Jackson, whose portrait hangs now in Republican Donald Trump's Oval Office. Jackson's opponents called him a jackass, which he transformed into a badge of honor by putting the jackass on his campaign posters.

Jackson served two terms. Eight years is going to be a long slog for Democrats if indeed they plan to conduct the nation's business with

the Trump White House from various street corners.

There is one other relevant image from the moments after the speech ended: Democratic West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin standing—alone—to shake Mr. Trump's hand.

Last week, progressive activists petitioned Minority Leader Schumer to expel Sen. Manchin from the leadership team as retribution for his vote in favor of Scott Pruitt's nomination to run the Environmental Protection Agency.

Sen. Manchin should admit reality and move across the aisle to join the Republicans. What do the middle-finger Democrats have in common anymore with West Virginia, which Mr. Trump carried by 42 points?

We keep reading that the Democrats' newest coalition of the ascendant—from left to far left—sees the tea party as a model. Presumably that includes the politics of mutually assured destruction.

Imperiled Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri, which Mr. Trump carried by 18.5 points and 523,000 votes, expects a primary challenge from the left in 2018. Democratic Senators Jon Tester of Montana, Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota, Bill Nelson of Florida and Joe Donnelly of Indiana, all facing tough re-elections in 2018, must feel like they've been pulled into an alternative universe. And they have. It's called the alt-left.

With Breitbart's Steve Bannon in the White House, we've read umpteen journalistic histories of the alt-right, a phrase some reporters seem to have programmed into a user key.

Well, with established Democratic members of Congress now adopting "resistance" as their basic political model, aren't we due for a similar media dive into the origins of the alt-left?

Keywords would include: the 1930s, the 1960s, Vietnam, Ramparts magazine, the Weather Underground. Which is to say, if the alt-right flirts with white nationalism,

the alt-left always conducts politics at the edge of violence, such as the trashing last month of UC Berkeley. One sign: "Become Ungovernable."

Become ungovernable sounds pretty close to the party's modus operandi for Donald Trump—before he gave that speech.

Congressional Democrats have two options now. Option one is to stay the course of mass resistance. This option assumes that Tuesday evening's *President* Trump will

revert soon to Mr. T, the combative street-fighter.

Maybe, but Hillary Clinton thought Americans would abandon Mr. T, and that failed because too many voters were looking past the personality to get the Trump policies on economic revival. It looks now as if that's exactly what he is going to give them.

If Mr. Trump succeeds, even with only Republican votes, Democrats alienated from the progressive

capture of the party could drift further away. The Trump coalition, which is arguably a political bubble, instead could last a generation.

Option two is get out of the streets and get in the game Mr. Trump offered them in his speech.

There's no telling what the politically eclectic Mr. Trump might concede the Democrats. He'll insist that his tax bill include Ivanka's child-care proposals. The Tax Foundation estimates they'd cause a revenue

loss of \$500 billion. Democrats might ask for a tax to pay for it, like the Obama "Medicare surcharge" on the 1%.

Not to worry. More likely is that the Schumer-Warren Democrats will spend two years listening to the resurrected voice from their past: "Hell no, we won't go."

## POLITICO Wake Up, Republicans: This Could Be the Democrats' Tea Party

By Matt Kibbe

As someone who was intimately involved in supporting Tea Party activists in 2009, I feel like I've entered Bizarro World.

A re-energized wave of liberal activists is crashing down across the nation. Democrats are celebrating disruptive protesters at congressional town hall forums, lauding them as living exemplars of the best traditions of American participatory democracy—flesh-and-blood versions of Norman Rockwell's "Freedom of Speech" painting. "Everywhere, people are marching, protesting, tweeting, [and] speaking out," cheered Hillary Clinton in a new video released by the Democratic National Committee. "Let resistance plus persistence equal progress."

Story Continued Below

For many Republicans, their new roles in this episode are equally upside down. Members of Congress are skipping out on public events, afraid of catching the wrath of angry voters. Several GOP elected officials have alleged that the protesters are not actual constituents, but outside agitators paid by wealthy liberals—people to be ignored, not engaged with. President Donald Trump himself questioned the legitimacy of "so-called angry crowds," tweeting that they are "planned out by liberal activists." Marco Rubio, who first won election to the U.S. Senate in the Tea Party wave of 2010, has defended his own decision to avoid such town halls, arguing that attendees will "heckle and scream at me in front of cameras."

What a difference eight years makes.

Back in 2009, it was impossible to find a single Democratic apparatchik willing to acknowledge the legitimacy of citizen participation in congressional town halls. Representative Lloyd Doggett of Texas dismissed frustrated voters as a "mob ... part of a coordinated, nationwide effort." Then-Speaker of

the House Nancy Pelosi described Tea Party protesters not as grassroots Americans, but as artificial "Astroturf." After a glut of protests at town hall events in August 2009, she even went so far as to co-author a *USA Today* op-ed in which she smeared the demonstrators' tactics as "un-American." Organizing for America, Barack Obama's campaign machine-turned-advocacy group, outrageously labeled Tea Party members "right-wing domestic terrorists who are subverting the American democratic process."

Improbable as it seems, the hysterical reactions from the left about robust citizen participation in the democratic process in 2009 almost make Trump's tweets circa 2017 seem downright reasonable. As Jerry Seinfeld once described it: "Up is down, and down is up."

In 2009, I served as the head of FreedomWorks, where I helped to support and organize Tea Party activists. I know something about town-hall protesters. And I have some tough news for both parties. The Tea Party was real, not "astroturf," we were not a "mob," and we were certainly not "domestic terrorists."

Likewise, the Women's March in January and the current flood of town-hall protests are equally real, and should not be dismissed or diminished. Citizens exercising their power—as long as they don't hurt people or infringe on others' rights—is always a positive thing. Indeed, it's one of the primary tools Americans have to hold the government accountable.

If it looks like chaos, I call it beautiful chaos. We are in the middle of a political paradigm shift that is giving access to knowledge and power back to end users. Citizens have more say today, and social media and other technologies make it easier to educate others about the issues and organize.

Welcome to the new normal in American politics.

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**Today's progressive town-hall protesters** follow in a tradition of disrupting the old top-down status quo—one that stretches back across the political spectrum, ranging from Howard Dean to Ron Paul to the Tea Party, and yes, even Donald Trump.

That said, there are some important differences between Tea Party and today's activists, and I think these distinctions will ultimately undermine the ability of today's protests to evolve into a social movement with real electoral consequences.

First, this movement feels strictly partisan, and many of the groups supporting the protesters have strictly partisan goals. Indivisible, the group bootstrapping a training manual on town hall disruption based on Tea Party tactics, is helmed by Democratic operatives. Several of the authors are, in fact, former staffers of Doggett. Likewise, the Center for American Progress, the Service Employees International Union, and Organizing for Action (President Obama's community-organizing operation formerly known as Organizing for America) are all involved, often with paid community organizers on the ground.

At FreedomWorks, we provided much of the same type of support: training, organizing, and providing logistical backing. Although we were savaged at the time as "Astroturf," these were—and are—legitimate functions. But there is an important difference between advancing partisan political goals and advocating an ideological agenda.

Though my friends on the left may not realize this, they ignore it at their own peril: The Tea Party wasn't a partisan movement, especially in 2009 and 2010. Critics of the Tea Party forget (or ignore) the origins of our frustrations. At the massive Taxpayer March on Washington on September 12, 2009, every single activist I spoke with cited President George W. Bush's Wall Street

bailout as their primary motive for getting involved. They would recite back to me his infamous rationale: "I abandoned free-market principles to save the free-market system." That's what got folks off the couch and organizing. We were ideologues in 2009, and our shared philosophy bound us as a movement.

We targeted Republicans and Democrats with equal zeal, because, as our battle cry made clear at the time, "we had to beat the Republicans before we could beat the Democrats." By contrast, today's protesters seem to be strictly targeting Republican town halls instead of making Democratic members of Congress feel the heat, too.

Second, it's hard to find a focused, unifying set of issues or principles that connect today's Democratic protesters. Most seem motivated solely by Donald Trump's victory in November. But being anti-Trump is not enough: Even if they wanted to, Republicans in Congress can't really do anything about this. Are the disruptions today about the electoral process? Russia? Immigration? Health care? LGBT rights? One of the myriad other issues that seem to be drawing activists out? I can't tell. They will need to find unified principles and a cause.

The Tea Party, almost to a person, was unified on the principles of "individual freedom, fiscal responsibility, and constitutionally limited government." Our policy agenda flowed from that: opposition to bailouts, deficit spending and government control of health care.

Third, if protesters want their cause to reach independents and disaffected Republicans (there are likely plenty), they had better keep it civil and respectful. Tea Partiers certainly got rowdy at the 2009 town halls, but they also came prepared, many having read and shared the contents of the health-care legislation that Pelosi had posted online. Surprising as it may be to some on the left, at FreedomWorks'



gatherings of Tea Party organizers, we were assigning readings about Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, and other successful nonviolent social movements. Violence can kill your cause, and we did our best to police our own community. Fair or not, today's protesters will own the worst behavior associated with their efforts.

Just shouting down members of Congress—or in the case of one recent town hall in Louisiana, booing both the Pledge of Allegiance and the chaplain offering an opening prayer—won't play well with anyone you need to win over. Not all protesters are the same and most are real people with real frustrations, but all protesters will be tarred by the actions of the worst among the group. Try to show a little respect, and it will be more effective.

Republicans are making a big mistake if they dismiss or ignore this movement. Contra the political mythology, the Tea Party was far more independent than Republican, and that translated into a broader coalition when coupled with the existing GOP vote. Today, the same battle rages for the hearts and minds of independents and Republicans uneasy with Trump's rhetoric.

So, a little advice to Republican elected officials: Don't avoid town halls. In fact, schedule more of them, like Representative Justin Amash has done. Listen. Hear your constituents. Defend your positions. Don't abandon the promises you made to voters in the election. If needed, provide for security at the event so that all citizens feel safe. Set up a system where everyone gets a chance to speak and to hear your response. Answer democratic engagement with more democratic engagement.

I realize how difficult this all may be in practice, but I agree with former Democratic Representative Gabby Giffords: "Have some courage. Face your constituents. Hold town halls." Democrats failed that test in 2009 and 2010. Republicans run the risk of making the same mistake in 2017.