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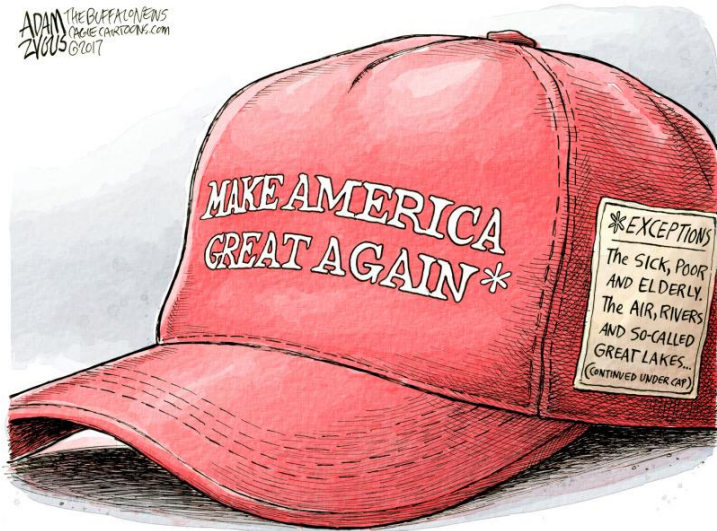
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RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

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FRANCE - EUROPE

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

France's Political Upstart Tested in Election Debate

William Horobin
March 20, 2017

8:25 p.m. ET

PARIS—French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron sparred with rivals Monday during the election campaign's first televised debate, in a test of whether the political upstart can hang on to his status as the favorite to win May's election.

In the showdown between the five candidates leading the polls, Mr. Macron confronted seasoned politicians including his two main rivals, National Front leader Marine Le Pen and conservative candidate and former Prime Minister François Fillon.

The candidates clashed on taxation and labor laws, as well as campaign financing and Muslim dress. Mr. Macron sought to fend off criticism of his relative inexperience by

saying his rivals represented a political old guard.

"We are in the business of real democratic renewal," Mr. Macron said of his upstart political movement En Marche.

The televised debate was an opportunity for the leading candidates to attempt to change the course of a turbulent election campaign that has hobbled France's mainstream parties.

Incumbent Socialist President François Hollande in December chose not to run as his popularity sank to record lows for a French leader. Mr. Fillon, once the clear favorite to become the next president, has dropped to third in the polls after a criminal investigation into allegations that he employed his family in fake jobs. Mr. Fillon has repeatedly denied the allegations.

Mr. Macron, who has set out a centrist election program, has benefited the most from Mr. Fillon's slide. While Ms. Le Pen is expected to win the first round in France's two-round election, polls suggest she would be defeated by Mr. Macron in the second-round runoff.

In a live television debate that lasted over three hours, there was very little confrontation for the first hour. Mr. Macron first clashed with Ms. Le Pen when she said he was in favor of the head-to-foot Burkini swimwear that the National Front says endangers France's secular rules.

"You are falling into the trap of dividing our society," Mr. Macron said.

Mr. Macron was also tested by Socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, who questioned how the leader of En Marche had financed his campaign. He asked Mr. Macron to prove that the party wasn't financed

by rich executives from pharmaceutical or oil companies.

"I commit to being beholden to nobody," Mr. Macron said.

Mr. Fillon took aim at Mr. Macron's economic policy, where the two candidates' proposals overlap in some areas. Mr. Fillon said he would enact deeper tax cuts for the wealthy and abolish the 35-hour workweek, and Mr. Macron would only loosen it with workarounds for some sectors. The conservative criticized Mr. Macron for cutting local authority taxes while refusing to reduce wealth taxes.

"That's the policy of Mr. Macron: a bit on the left, a bit on the right," Mr. Fillon said.

"My choice is effectiveness and justice, that's the difference," Mr. Macron replied.

The
Washington
Post

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

By James McAuley

ST. CLOUD, France — He is a convicted Holocaust denier but also the patriarch of the party that could soon triumph in France's presidential election.

These days, Jean-Marie Le Pen, now 88, struggles to walk. But his ideology is on the move: In a once unimaginable scenario, the National Front — the party he co-founded in 1972 and passed on to his daughter, Marine, in 2011 — could win nearly 40 percent of the vote in the French election this spring, possibly even more. Regardless of the outcome, he says, the battle is already won.

As populist fervor soars in Europe and the United States, politicians and analysts have struggled to explain what has been labeled a dramatic new challenge to the established order. But the National Front is anything but new, and the populist proposals that draw headlines today — returning to the nation-state, expelling immigrants and limiting globalization — are things Le Pen has preached for decades. Now, people are listening.

By James McAuley "After all, they can say, 'Le Pen was right,'" he said recently, reclining on a divan in Montretout, the 11-room mansion he owns in this leafy Paris suburb. "Public opinion — the voters, the citizens — has realized that the ideas we defend are not 'extremist,' as our adversaries say, but that they conform to the truth."

But conforming to the truth has never quite been the mission of Jean-Marie Le Pen, and this, analysts say, is precisely the power of the revolution he started in the 1970s. He may be a godfather of Europe's radical and populist right, but for many, his principal contribution to political life has been the establishment of an alternate reality where facts are always fluid.

"He is a precursor of post-truth, of 'alternative facts,' of fake news," said Michel Wieviorka, an expert on the history of Le Pen's party and the author of "The National Front: Between Extremism, Populism and Democracy." "That is his project."

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

For decades, Le Pen was dogged by allegations that he had tortured Arabs as a young lieutenant in

France's 1954-1962 war against its breakaway colony Algeria. He still vigorously denies the accusations, despite testimony by several people who said they were his victims.

Most notoriously, he has also been accused of what experts call "soft-core denial" of the Holocaust, the darkest chapter in the history of modern Europe. French authorities willingly collaborated in the Nazi genocide and assisted in deporting some 76,000 Jews to their deaths in concentration camps.

In 1987, Le Pen, speaking in an interview, referred to the gas chambers as a "detail in the history of World War II." In 1996, he told a news conference in Germany: "If you take a 1,000-page book on World War II, the concentration camps take up only two pages and the gas chambers 10 to 15 lines. This is what one calls a detail."

Since then, he has been convicted of Holocaust denial in French courts and fined tens of thousands of euros — penalties that have failed to discourage him from repeating the idea that the systematic extermination of 6 million Jews and others was somehow a trivial affair.

Such an insistence reflects more than simple ignorance of history, experts say.

"He knows the full significance of what happened," said Deborah Lipstadt, a historian at Emory University and an expert on Holocaust denial. "It's a way of saying, 'Those Jews are always complaining.' It's a way of spreading hostility, animosity and prejudice. That's why I call it anti-Semitism."

Unlike most of Europe's current far-right leaders, Le Pen experienced World War II as a teenager. For decades after the war, French leaders played down or denied the extent of their country's complicity with the Nazis. Eventually they apologized — but Le Pen never did. Before founding the National Front, he ran a record label that produced albums heralding Nazi war marches and celebrating the poetry of French intellectuals who had collaborated with the Germans.

These days, Le Pen makes no secret of his admiration of President Trump, although he says he has no contact with his administration.

"If I were Marine Le Pen," he said, "I would run exactly the same

campaign as Trump, showing the rejection of the establishment, which I believe is majoritarian in France.”

In the interview in his study at Montretout — which in French means “showing all” — Le Pen said he has never regretted calling the gas chambers a “detail.” He then proceeded to mock the outrage he has elicited over the years.

“I regret the persecution of which I was the object, unjustly,” he said.

“When someone criticizes, I say, how would you say it otherwise? What can we say? Is there a truth?”

This line of defense, for Lipstadt, symbolizes the threat posed by deniers.

“This is what Holocaust deniers are trying to do: They take a lie and dress it up as an opinion to be debated,” she said. “But there are objective facts. Not everything is open to debate.”

[European Parliament lifts Marine Le Pen's immunity for tweeting gruesome images of violence]

When National Front voters go to the polls, they will vote for Marine Le Pen, not for Jean-Marie Le Pen. And the younger Le Pen, 48, has run a campaign that has largely sought to erase her father from the party's public image.

According to the narrative circulated by Marine Le Pen and her aides,

she severed ties with her father after April 2015, when he gave an interview in Rivarol, an extreme right-wing journal, once again calling the gas chambers “a minor detail in the history of World War II” and defending Philippe Pétain, the leader of France's Vichy government, which collaborated with the Nazis between 1940 and 1942. Jean-Marie Le Pen suddenly found himself expelled from his own party.

Marine Le Pen could not be reached for comment.

But a National Front official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, insisted that Marine Le Pen's party is not at all the party her father created and nurtured on the political fringe for decades. “The National Front of Marine Le Pen is not a movement that rejects the Shoah or recycles Mr. Le Pen's ambiguity on the question,” the official said, using an alternate term for the Holocaust.

[France asks, can an anti-Semitic tweet ever be considered a mockery of anti-Semitism?]

In recent days, however, Benoît Loeuillet, a regional National Front official in the South of France, was exposed on camera, in a documentary on the party, denying the Holocaust in starker terms than those used publicly by Jean-Marie Le Pen.

“I don't think there were that many deaths. There weren't 6 million,” he was quoted as saying. “There weren't mass murders as it's been said.”

Loeuillet was summarily dismissed from the party, but critics pointed out that he was fired only when his words were made public.

Jewish groups have also accused Marine Le Pen's campaign of a subtle anti-Semitism, pointing to statements such as her insistence that French Jews should not be allowed to simultaneously hold Israeli citizenship and her condemnation of her principal political opponent, former investment banker Emmanuel Macron, as an emissary of the “Rothschild bank” and “international finance” — echoing anti-Semitic propaganda that has tied major financial groups to Jews.

For his part, Jean-Marie Le Pen does not see such a fundamental difference between his daughter's vision and his own.

“I think she's loyal first of all to herself,” he said with a chuckle. “But objectively, I believe she's more or less faithful to the line I defended and that I followed in all cases.”

In recent years, Marine Le Pen has stopped at nothing to repudiate her father and his world.

“Montretout, it's not my story,” she told reporters in January 2015 of the

family estate in St. Cloud, where she spent nearly 30 years, from childhood through adulthood.

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But the aging warden of Montretout — a mansion in a gated community outside Paris, decorated with statues of Joan of Arc and a fireplace panel depicting the head of Jesus — is still paying many of her campaign expenses.

Despite the current candidate's talk of an “estrangement” from her father, the political lending firm he controls, Cotelec, akin to a super PAC, lent her 6 million euros this year when a Russian bank withdrew on its pledge.

Speaking about his daughter's attempts to “de-demonize” their party — and thus hide his imprint — the patriarch laughed.

“The biggest objection to this strategy was that she implicitly admitted that I was the devil,” he said. “When in fact I resemble an angel.”

**The
New York
Times**

UBS and Its French Unit to Face Trial in Tax Investigation

Chad Bray

LONDON — UBS said on Monday that the Swiss bank and its French subsidiary would face trial in a long-running investigation into whether it helped French clients hide funds from the country's national tax administration.

The announcement followed reports in the French media that UBS had rejected a proposed settlement. French prosecutors had sought a fine of 1.1 billion euros, or about \$1.2 billion, in the case.

“We will now have the possibility to respond in detail in a court of law,” UBS said in a statement on Monday. “UBS has made clear that the bank

disagrees with the allegations, assumptions and legal interpretations being made. We will continue to strongly defend ourselves and look forward to a fair proceeding.”

A French trial would be the latest legal headache for UBS, which reached a settlement with authorities in the United States in 2009 and German tax authorities nearly three years ago. The bank also is facing a similar inquiry in Belgium, accusations it has described as “unfounded.”

Tax authorities in the United States and in Europe in recent years have aggressively pursued individuals who seek to avoid paying taxes, as

well as the institutions that assist them.

In France, UBS was placed under formal investigation in 2014 and ordered to post bail of more than \$1 billion over suspected money laundering and tax fraud.

In February 2016, judges in France concluded their inquiry into whether the bank helped French clients hide funds from the country's national tax administration from 2004 to 2012.

On Monday, UBS said that the investigative judges had issued an order formally referring the case to trial.

Because of Switzerland's strict banking privacy laws, assets hidden

in the country have been a target of tax authorities, with several Swiss banks reaching deals with American authorities and others in recent years.

UBS agreed in 2009 to disclose client names and to pay \$780 million in a settlement with the United States Justice Department, in which it avoided criminal prosecution in a tax evasion inquiry.

And in 2014, UBS agreed to pay €300 million to settle an investigation by the German tax authorities related to clients' failure to disclose assets held in Swiss accounts.

**The
Washington
Post**

Britain to trigger Article 50 on March 29, signaling start of E.U. departure

<https://www.facebook.com/griff.witte>

LONDON — Britain's government said Monday that it will deliver a letter to the European Union next week giving formal notice of its

plans to leave the bloc, a widely anticipated step that makes good on last year's Brexit vote.

The triggering of Article 50, the never-before-used mechanism for a country to leave the European

Union, will set off a two-year negotiation in which the United Kingdom and its 27 erstwhile partners will have to agree on the terms of divorce.

“We are on the threshold of the most important negotiation for this country for a generation,” said David Davis, Britain's Brexit secretary. “The government is clear in its aims: a deal that works for every nation and region of the U.K. and indeed for all

of Europe — a new, positive partnership between the U.K. and our friends and allies in the European Union.”

Prime Minister Theresa May has vowed for months that the country will trigger Article 50 by the end of March. But Monday’s announcement of the date — March 29 — was the first official confirmation of the exact timing.

Britain’s Parliament gave its final approval last week to May’s Brexit plans, and the prime minister had at one point been expected to trigger Article 50 then.

Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon threw a wrench into those plans last Monday by announcing a push for a new referendum on independence from the United Kingdom, which also includes England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scottish move seemed to catch Downing Street off guard, and it may have contributed to a decision to push Article 50 notification back to the final week of March.

May heads into the E.U. negotiations with her premiership, Britain’s economy and even the United Kingdom’s viability as a unified country all on the line. She

came to power soon after the Brexit referendum in June and has repeatedly said that she will deliver on voters’ narrow decision to make Britain the first country to leave the E.U.

On Monday, she departed on the first stage of a “listening tour” that will take her across Britain in the lead-up to the March 29 move. Her first stop was Wales, and she was expected to visit sites in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England in the coming days.

Although Britain as a whole voted 52 to 48 percent in favor of leaving, majorities in both Scotland and Northern Ireland favored staying in the E.U. Sturgeon has charged that Scottish voters are being taken out of the bloc against their will, and she said last week that she wants a referendum on independence — a rerun of a September 2014 vote, in which a majority of Scottish voters opted to stay in the United Kingdom — between the autumn of 2018 and the spring of 2019.

May has sharply criticized that call. She said over the weekend that “now is not the time” for a Scottish vote. But she has not

threatened to veto another referendum.

Britain’s exit negotiations are expected to be exceptionally tricky, with the country aiming to leave Europe’s single market and customs union but hoping to retain preferential access to both through a new trade agreement.

May has signaled that she will prioritize Britain’s ability to control immigration from E.U. countries, a critical element driving pro-Brexit sentiment. European leaders have drawn a tough line, signaling that they will not allow Britain to enjoy the benefits of E.U. membership but not bear the responsibilities.

Once Britain has delivered its Article 50 letter to European Council President Donald Tusk in Brussels, E.U. leaders are expected to reply with a letter setting out the bloc’s negotiating stance.

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If Britain and the rest of the E.U. cannot agree to terms by the spring

of 2019, they will have to extend the negotiations or Britain will simply fall out of the bloc without an agreement on its future relations with its biggest trading partner — a scenario known as “dirty Brexit.”

May is hoping that she will be able to run for reelection in the spring of 2020 on a platform of having delivered on the public’s will. But economists and government officials have warned that Britain’s exit is likely to be turbulent, and some within the prime minister’s ruling Conservative Party have urged her to call for an early election this spring.

The call would take advantage of polls showing May’s Tories well ahead of the opposition Labour Party, which has been beset by internal strife under left-wing leader Jeremy Corbyn. May has a narrow majority in the House of Commons, and a vote this spring probably would allow her to broaden it significantly.

But she has repeatedly ruled out an early vote, and her spokesman told British journalists on Monday that there is “not going to be one.”



U.K. to Start ‘Brexit’ on March 29 by Invoking Article 50

Stephen Castle

LONDON — The British government said on Monday that it intended to formally notify the European Union on March 29 of its intention to leave the bloc, putting the country on track to complete a withdrawal by early 2019.

David Davis, the cabinet minister responsible for negotiating the exit, said that Britain would send notice next week to start a two-year negotiated exit, commonly referred to as “Brexit,” under Article 50 of the European Union’s treaty.

Shortly after the announcement, Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, said in a post on Twitter that he would present draft guidelines for the British withdrawal to the other 27 member states within 48 hours of Britain formally giving its notice.

Prime Minister Theresa May, who had promised to begin the process of negotiating a withdrawal by the end of March, is apparently hoping that the end of the negotiations will conclude before the next elections to the European Parliament in summer 2019 and the next general election in Britain, expected to take place in 2020.

After Britons voted in a referendum last year to leave the European Union, the government was taken to court in a battle about whether Mrs. May could invoke Article 50 without the approval of Parliament.

Although she lost the legal fight and had to consult Parliament, she eventually won the political argument. Amendments to give Parliament a final say over any withdrawal agreement and to protect the status of the three million citizens from other European countries living in Britain were

ultimately rejected, giving Mrs. May a freer hand to negotiate.

That, however, is arguably the easiest part. Mrs. May now moves on to what promises to be a hideously complex process of disentangling Britain from more than four decades of European integration, and there are concerns that it will be impossible to complete the negotiations within two years.

Mrs. May has prioritized the desire to control immigration and to reject the authority of the European Court of Justice, effectively ruling out membership in the European Union’s customs union and in its single market in goods and many services.

She has also threatened to walk away from the negotiating table with no agreement if she cannot get the favorable trade deal with the bloc that she wants.

As she negotiates with Continental Europe, Mrs. May also faces political dangers at home, most notably in Scotland, where the first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, is seeking another referendum on Scottish independence.

Mr. Davis, in his statement, said that he was aiming for “a deal that works for every nation and region of the U.K. and indeed for all of Europe — a new, positive partnership between the U.K. and our friends and allies in the European Union.”

The leader of the Liberal Democrats, Tim Farron, offered a very different perspective. He accused the government of “embarking on an extreme and divisive Brexit,” adding that Mrs. May “has rushed this through without a plan, and without a clue.”



U.K. Leader Now Faces Toughest Brexit Test Yet

Jenny Gross

Updated March 20, 2017 10:20 p.m. ET

LONDON—After a veteran fellow Conservative lawmaker was caught on camera in July referring to Theresa May as a “bloody difficult

woman,” she embraced the epithet, saying the next man to find that out would be the European Commission chief.

“If standing up for what you believe to be right makes you ‘bloody difficult,’ then so be it,”

Mrs. May said in a fall interview with a London radio station.

Britain’s second female prime minister is about to put that assertion to the test after the government announced it would trigger on March 29 the two-year window for negotiations with the

European Commission and her EU counterparts for Britain’s exit from the European Union.

Relatively unknown internationally when she came to office last July, Mrs. May, 60 years old, has earned a reputation as a steady, studied operator who holds her cards close

to her vest. She heads into divorce talks advocating a tough approach.

That has helped make her more popular than the leaders of the U.K.'s other main political parties—with 48% of Britons saying she would make the best prime minister, according to a YouGov PLC poll published last week, which put backing for opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn at 14%.

The issue is whether her uncompromising style and her background as an immigration- and security-focused home secretary will give her the expertise she needs for delicate diplomacy on matters of trade and finance with European leaders such as Angela Merkel.

Mrs. May has said she wants to conclude the best trade deal possible with the EU while reclaiming Britain's ability to curb immigration from the bloc. EU leaders, for their part, see the degree of permitted labor mobility as a factor to be weighed in negotiating any new pact.

At home, Mrs. May has faced complaints from Parliament that she has given lawmakers little say on the direction of Brexit. Still, they have only put speed bumps in her way. Both houses of the legislature on March 13 approved a bill giving Mrs. May the authority to start talks.

If the U.K. and the EU can't agree on the terms of a new relationship, Britain would face the same EU tariffs as other countries trading with the bloc—a scenario some business executives have warned could severely damage

the British economy.

Downing Street declined to comment for this article.

Crispin Blunt, a Conservative lawmaker and Brexit backer, said Mrs. May's tendency to take firm positions and not budge, even if they appear to ruffle feathers, bodes well.

"Whereas some have an anxiety to please and would want to do a deal so people have a warmer relationship with them, of international leaders, Theresa is at the lower end of that spectrum," said Mr. Blunt, who has known Mrs. May since 1997, when they were newly elected members of Parliament.

Her style contrasts sharply with her Conservative predecessor, the affable and smooth David Cameron, whom some party lawmakers criticized as not pushing for a more ambitious deal in Britain's renegotiation with the EU last year.

In Britain, Mrs. May has been portrayed by some in the media as a lonely figure in Brussels, but she is well regarded among her EU peers, who see her as well-prepared, businesslike and able to listen as well as talk.

"She is someone that it is difficult not to respect," a senior EU diplomat said. "She is passionate with what she believes, but she respects the different approach and she is ready to discuss."

Like Ms. Merkel, whom she temperamentally resembles, she is

the daughter of a clergyman who worked her way up through the male-dominated world of conservative politics. Elected to Parliament in 1997, she made a name for herself during a 2002 speech to a Conservative conference when she said the party needed to soften its image and tack from its focus of centralizing government, implying a turn from the ideology of Margaret Thatcher.

Mr. Cameron named her home secretary in 2010, a high-profile position she held longer than anyone else. But she faced criticism for not meeting a promise to get net immigration below 100,000 a year.

Nigel Farage, the former head of the UK Independence Party, who was at the forefront of the drive to leave the EU, said Mrs. May's Brexit outline was "wonderfully reassuring." But whether she delivers on those promises is another matter, he said, given her "abysmal" record on cutting immigration. "I have a sense that 2017 is going to be a very frustrating year for Brexit voters."

Mrs. May has tended to operate through a small group of advisers whose background is in security and migration, rather than economics, said Vince Cable, a former Liberal Democrat cabinet minister who worked with Mrs. May from 2010 until 2015.

"She works very hard on her brief; she's very thorough, meticulous, all those things," Mr. Cable said. "But the corollary is you sometimes wonder whether she has the big

picture, or is able to be flexible in a big, strategic kind of way."

The danger for Mrs. May is that she has built up expectations that the U.K. will be able to leave the single market, which allows the U.K. to trade within the EU tariff-free, and customs union, whose members share a common tariff schedule, relatively painlessly, when in reality the divorce could be messy, Mr. Cable said.

She keeps a tight grip on her team. On March 7, she fired Lord Michael Heseltine, former deputy prime minister, from his longtime role as a government adviser after he voted in favor of an amendment to the exit bill. In her first few months in office, she repeatedly distanced herself from comments by her top three Brexit ministers about leaving the EU. In recent months, they haven't deviated from the government line.

A former adviser of Mr. Cameron, Craig Oliver, wrote in his memoir that Mr. Cameron felt let down that Mrs. May last year stayed largely on the sidelines of the campaign to keep Britain in the EU, a move that drew criticism from both sides of the Brexit debate.

Mrs. May isn't known for her ability to charm or her natural warmth. "But what's she got is respect, which is probably more valuable," said Mr. Blunt, the Conservative lawmaker.

—Laurence Norman in Brussels contributed to this article.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.K. to Trigger Article 50 on March 29, Starting Formal Brexit Process

Jenny Gross

Updated March 20, 2017 3:57 p.m. ET

LONDON—Britain on March 29 will formally trigger negotiations to remove itself from the European Union, opening a two-year window for talks set to disentangle decades of close ties and redefine Britain's relationship with some of its closest allies.

Britain's ambassador to the EU, Tim Barrow, told the office of European Council President Donald Tusk on Monday morning that Britain would trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, the formal withdrawal mechanism, a week from Wednesday, said James Slack, a spokesman for Prime Minister Theresa May.

Mrs. May has said she would trigger the U.K.'s exit by the end of this month, but the exact date had been left open amid months of wrangling in Parliament and the courts.

Negotiations are now likely to begin in earnest in early summer.

"We are on the threshold of the most important negotiation for this country for a generation," said David Davis, Britain's Brexit minister. "The government is clear in its aims: a deal that works for every nation and region of the U.K. and indeed for all of Europe—a new, positive partnership between the U.K. and our friends and allies in the European Union."

Mrs. May's letter will pave the way for Britain to leave by March 2019, putting her at the center of EU politics as antiestablishment and euroskeptic movements challenge the bloc. EU leaders are grappling with whether the bloc should continue its deep political and economic integration or put a brake on broader ambitions for unity.

Lawmakers and EU negotiators will be watching Mrs. May's speech to Parliament next week for further

clues about the approach Britain will take when it goes to the bargaining table and for indications of how flexible Mrs. May's team may be.

The negotiations will be some of the most complex either side has undertaken, and the two sides publicly remain far apart on some central issues. Downing Street didn't say whether the letter would give more details on Britain's negotiating positions.

British voters decided to leave the bloc in June, but the country's Supreme Court ruled in January that Mrs. May needed parliamentary approval to trigger Article 50, casting doubt on her timeline. She got the go-ahead from lawmakers last week.

"Finally, finally the negotiations can begin," said French Finance Minister Michel Sapin. "After the Brexit vote, which we have to respect, it took quite some time. I believe the U.K. needed some time to prepare, but

finally we can enter negotiations and I hope we can do it constructively on both sides."

Mr. Tusk said he would set out a response to the Article 50 letter by March 31.

EU officials said the late-March trigger would delay the start of real negotiations between the U.K. and the rest of the EU, meaning they may not begin until early summer. That is because there is now too little time to convene the 27 other EU heads of government for a meeting in early April as Mr. Tusk had originally planned, they said.

That meeting will be key as it would settle the guidelines for the talks—setting out which issues will be dealt with in the divorce negotiations and in what order. After that, the EU will need another few weeks to turn those guidelines into a formal negotiating mandate for Michel Barnier, who will lead the day-to-day talks for the bloc.

An EU official said no specific date had been set for the meeting of the bloc's other leaders. "But we expect to need approximately four to six weeks to prepare and consult with EU 27 member states."

Mrs. May, who took office after the Brexit vote, has said the U.K. wants a clear break from the bloc, leaving the single market for goods and services to take control over immigration from the EU. But she says she wants the best possible trade deal with the EU that the U.K. can get.

EU officials say Britain owes it €55 billion (\$59 billion) to €60 billion to cover budget commitments already

made, future pension liabilities and other items. When Mrs. May's government published a government report outlining its objectives, it skirted over the exit bill and other key issues, which are expected to dominate negotiations over Britain's divorce terms.

EU policy makers have said Britain must recognize it must settle outstanding commitments early on in the talks if discussions are going to move on to address Britain's future trade and economic relationship with the bloc.

Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the chairman of the eurozone finance ministers group, said he hopes to see

"realism" in the Article 50 notification. "Realism over the price it will cost, realism over the complexity and the time needed, which so far we have missed quite a lot from the part of the British government. But we will see," he said.

Mrs. May, whose Conservative Party holds a thin majority in Parliament, must tread carefully as she embarks on negotiations. Some in Parliament say her positions are too hard-line. She also faces political pressure from Scotland, where the governing party is calling for a second referendum on independence from the U.K. This

has raised the prospect that the U.K. could itself split apart as it is unraveling its ties to the EU. The majority of people in Scotland voted to remain in the EU.

The spokesman said Mrs. May didn't have plans to hold an early general election, addressing rumors that she planned to call one in the coming months to increase her majority in Parliament.

—Laurence Norman and Valentina Pop in Brussels contributed to this article.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Brexit Causes Bubbly to Lose Some of its Sparkle in Britain

Saabira Chaudhuri

Updated March 20, 2017 12:38 p.m. ET

LONDON—Brexit is taking the fizz out of the U.K. Champagne market—one of the bubbly French wine's most important.

Champagne exports to the U.K. dropped in 2016 by 14% in euro-denominated revenue, while sales by volume fell 8.7%, according to new data from the trade association Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne.

The steep slide was due to Britain's June 23 vote to leave the European Union, which has sent the pound down 12.5% against the euro—and pushed up prices of bubbly for Britons.

Despite its relatively small population, Britain punches above its weight when it comes to Champagne consumption. It is the French wine's second-biggest export market by revenue, behind the U.S., and the biggest export market by volume.

The fall in shipments to a close-to-home market has pushed

Champagne vintners to look further afield for growth, particularly toward the U.S., China and India, according to Jean-Marie Barillère, co-chairman of the association.

Champagne shipments to the U.S. rose 4.9% by revenue and 6.3% by volume last year. While the U.S. market is larger than Britain by sales—€540.1 million (\$580 million) to the U.K.'s €440.4 million in 2016—Britons imported about 50% more of the stuff. France sent 31 million bottles to the U.K., compared with 22 million to the U.S. Executives say Americans typically are brand-conscious, choosing to buy more expensive Champagnes than their European counterparts.

There is plenty of room to grow in the U.S., the association said. On average, makers in 2016 supplied two bottles per person in France, a bottle for every person in Switzerland and half a bottle for every Briton—but just seven-hundredths of a bottle for every American—less than half a glass.

U.S. customers turn to the drink to mark celebratory occasions, rather than for the more regular consumption seen in some European markets.

"Champagne is for a celebration day, not for conviviality or relaxation like the evenings you have in Europe," Mr. Barillère said. "There's a lot to do there to raise consumption."

Big Champagne makers are sharpening their focus on the U.S. market in an attempt to push pricier offerings.

Pernod Ricard SA in November named athlete Usain Bolt the "chief entertainment officer" for its Champagne brand Maison Mumm, with the long-term goal of making Mumm the country's top Champagne. Pernod Ricard's Champagne brands accounted for 4.3% of the global market in 2015, according to Euromonitor, well behind rival LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SA's 24.4% share.

Some U.S. restaurants and bars are shifting to serving Champagne in wine glasses rather than flutes, to encourage people to drink it throughout a meal rather than just before or after it, according to Jennifer Hall, a representative for the U.S. Champagne Bureau.

Ariel Arce, owner of the Champagne bar Riddling Widow in New York's

Greenwich Village, said serving Champagne in wine glasses helps it aerate, but also makes drinking it less intimidating.

Ms. Arce keeps costs low at her bar, which fits 16 people, serving lower-priced Champagne at \$75 to \$90 a bottle.

"It's kind of a scary product for the average consumer because of how expensive it is," Ms. Arce said. "We have small spaces with very little overheads that strip away [the] glitz and glamour that comes with a glass of Champagne and focus on how to make it fun."

The French remain the biggest consumers of Champagne, but volumes there declined 2.5% in 2016 as terror attacks kept tourists at bay, Mr. Barillère said. Belgium, another big market, saw volumes drop 9.5% on the back of a rise in import taxes. Overall, Champagne shipments globally dropped 2.1% by volume and 0.6% by value in 2016 from 2015.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Labor Reforms Threaten to Derail Greek Talks

Nektaria Stamouli and Valentina Pop

March 20, 2017 2:11 p.m. ET

BRUSSELS—Eurozone finance ministers discussed the impasse in Greece's talks with creditors on Monday, but no breakthrough emerged on the latest conflict that threatens to derail a bailout deal: workers' rights.

The International Monetary Fund is insisting on further deregulation of Greece's labor market and rejects any reversal of earlier labor

overhauls as a condition of rejoining the troubled Greek bailout program as a lender. Greece's government wants to restore union powers to negotiate wages for sectors of the economy—a cause dear to the ruling left-wing Syriza party.

Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Dutch finance minister who presides over the meetings, said afterward that talks will intensify in Brussels in the coming days and weeks but that there was no promise an agreement would be reached by the time the ministers next meet on April 7.

The clash of ideologies between the IMF's free-market orthodoxy and Syriza's attachment to European left tradition is jeopardizing the agreements that Greece and Europe need to finally escape the country's eight-year debt crisis.

Agreement on labor, fiscal and other policies between Athens, the IMF and European institutions is seen by all participants as the first step to set Greece on a recovery path. The second step, a deal in principle between the IMF and eurozone creditors led by Germany to restructure Greece's debt in 2018,

would allow the IMF to resume lending to Greece after a three-year hiatus, while also unlocking fresh rescue loans from the eurozone.

A debt-restructuring deal would also allow the European Central Bank to include Greece in its bond-purchasing program, known as quantitative easing—a step that could help Greece's struggling banks and boost investor confidence in Greece's prospects.

Greek officials including Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos argue that this sequence of events is badly needed in coming months if

Greece's economy is to return to growth in 2017, allowing the country to return to bond markets again and ending its long, painful era of bailouts.

However, the sequence depends on first reaching agreement on economic policies. The dispute over labor rules has thus gained an importance that goes beyond the specifics of wage-bargaining regulations.

Talks in Athens in recent weeks between the government and creditors' representatives and eurozone reached an impasse,

leading to the departure of the IMF and eurozone teams. Greek leaders are hoping to take their case above the heads of IMF technocrats and appeal to senior European politicians—a ploy that Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has tried repeatedly in the past with little success.

Monday's meeting of finance ministers, known as the Eurogroup, wasn't expected to give Greece the concessions it is seeking. The Eurogroup has repeatedly rebuffed Greek attempts to bypass talks with technocrats and obtain what Athens

officials call a "political" deal that takes account of Mr. Tsipras's domestic difficulties.

Germany, the eurozone's dominant power, wants Greece to agree to policy details with the IMF, so that the Washington-based fund gives Greece a new loan program, which Berlin views as vital for the credibility of the Greek bailout.

"At the last Eurogroup we had a common understanding about it, but apparently it is still difficult for the Greek government and the international institutions to translate that into concrete measures,"

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble told reporters on his way into Monday's meeting.

Greek officials are debating whether Mr. Tsipras should try to find a solution with other EU leaders at a summit in Rome on Saturday to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the treaties that launched European integration. Other EU leaders are unlikely to want to haggle over Greek labor laws at the ceremonial gathering.

The New York Times

How a Sleepy German Suburb Explains Europe's Rising Far-Right Movements

Amanda Taub

Mahmoud Ceylan, whose cousin owns the restaurant, stood behind the counter. Right-wing parties sometimes accuse Turkish immigrants like him of being unable to assimilate in German society. Asked whether he'd experienced any harassment, he snorted.

It happened all the time, he said. People would say things to him on the train and on the street.

"People look at you and they don't know you've been here almost 25 years," he said. "They don't know you work."

But asked about the Alternative for Germany, he shrugged. Though the party's rise had shocked much of Europe, to Mr. Ceylan it was the Germany he already knew.

As we spoke, a middle-aged customer who had been chatting volubly at the counter, Jakob Raff, grew quiet. He leaned over to offer a warning: "There are right-wingers here," he said. "You should be careful asking such questions."

The Halo Effect

Buch, on the surface, appears to be an unlikely source of anti-immigrant anger.

For one: There are few migrants here. While many nearby parts of Berlin are tremendously diverse, filled with refugees and other immigrants from all over the world, Buch has remained overwhelmingly white, despite the presence of a

small refugee center in the middle of town.

Social scientists call this the "halo effect": a phenomenon, repeated across Europe, in which people are most likely to vote for far-right politicians if they live close to diverse areas, but not actually within them.

Jens Rydgren and Patrick Ruth, sociologists at the University of Stockholm, wrote in 2011 that people in such communities may be close enough to immigrants to feel they are under threat, but still too far to have the kinds of regular, friendly interactions that would dispel their fears.

Eric Kaufmann, a political scientist at Birkbeck College in London, has found that rising diversity can push the "halo" outward. East London was a center of far-right activity in the 1970s, but as neighborhoods there became more diverse, far-right support fell and rose in the whiter suburbs just beyond them.

Buch, too, seems to fit that pattern. Despite the arrival of some refugees, there are so few Muslims that the supermarket does not even stock halal meats. But it lies in a district that borders Wedding, one of the most diverse parts of Berlin.

Buch's white residents, according to this theory, are fearful not because their lives or jobs have been upended by migration, but because they perceive this as happening in areas like Wedding and worry they could be next.

A Negative Identity

Across town, down a road lined with communist-era apartment blocks, I arrived at the church building where Cornelia Reuter and her husband, Hagen Kühne, live and work as pastors.

Ms. Reuter said some of her parishioners were preoccupied with fears that more refugees would be sent to Buch.

She and her husband traced this fear, in part, to a deeper problem: Many within their community, they said, long for a clear sense of identity and belonging, but struggle to find one.

After World War II, celebrating or even defining German identity became taboo, often seen as a step toward the nationalism that allowed the rise of the Nazis. The attitude shifted somewhat with the 2006 World Cup, where the German hosts unabashedly flew their flag and celebrated national pride.

But there is still enough of a void that leaves people with an "inner emptiness," Ms. Reuter said. This gap in self-definition has left them no way to express their identity except by what they are not — what is sometimes termed a "negative identity."

"You can say 'I'm not a Muslim,' but most people can't say 'I am a Christian,'" or otherwise articulate a positive identity, she explained. "There is an emptiness. And I think that's a societywide thing. It's not

just one group. It's a very wide problem."

Taking Control

Germany's identity taboo is not new. But recent events may have made it suddenly feel more painful.

Immo Fritsche, a political scientist at the University of Leipzig, has found that when people feel they have lost control, they seek a strong identity that will make them feel part of a powerful group.

Identifying with something powerful and capable of bringing about change, like a strong nation, becomes very attractive, he said.

Ms. Reuter said that many people in Buch did feel a sense of lost control. The refugee crisis was perceived as a sign that Germany's borders had become lawless. And the presence of the local refugee center, though home to just a few hundred people, brought a sense of heightened stakes.

Many of her elderly parishioners, she said, had told her that they couldn't believe what young people today had to contend with. "And these are people who grew up during World War II! Who were bombed, and experienced the war!"

But they felt lucky to have experienced a kind of agency and identity that young people today were denied, she said.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Germany Fires Back at U.S. Critique of Its Trade Surplus

Tom Fairless and Nina Adam

Monday defended the nation's giant foreign surpluses, pushing back against the new U.S. administration's criticism of German trade policy.

The two-pronged defense follows on the heels of a contentious meeting of Group of 20 finance officials in Germany, where frictions between the U.S. and other advanced countries over trade emerged.

Germany's central bank argued in a report Monday that the nation's current-account surplus—a broad measure of its foreign trade and investment balance—was likely to fall sharply this year, and warned it

Updated March 20, 2017 6:15 p.m. ET

FRANKFURT—Germany's top economic officials on

shouldn't be curbed using political tools.

Separately, a group of top economists who advise the federal government rejected international criticism and pointed the finger back at America's giant trade deficits.

"Problems can arise on both sides—surpluses and deficits," said Jochen Andritzky, secretary-general at Germany's Council of Economic Experts, a group of five so-called Wise Men—one current member of which is a woman—who advise Berlin on economic policy. "It usually becomes a problem if the balance is tilted to one side over the long term, and the U.S. has been running a deficit for several decades now."

Germany posted a world-record current-account surplus last year of \$297 billion, versus \$245 billion for second-place China, according to the German economic institute Ifo.

The mammoth figure reflects Germans' propensity to save rather than consume, a mirror image of the U.S.'s large trade deficits and low saving rates. It means Germany is accumulating foreign assets, while the U.S. deficit shows it is borrowing heavily from abroad.

The Trump administration has been sharply critical of the trading practices of countries such as China and Germany, which it accuses of

exploiting global trading relationships at America's expense. Global financial officials meeting in Baden-Baden on Saturday abandoned longstanding commitments to free and open trade following pressure from U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

The European Union's chief trade official, Cecilia Malmström, said Monday the Trump administration was sending "worrying signals" on trade. "We do not agree with those who think the answer is to raise barriers," Ms. Malmström said in a speech in Toronto during a trip to Canada, with which the EU reached a trade pact in the fall. She said the bloc's free-trade talks with the U.S. were in a "deep freeze."

Germany's persistent surpluses have come under attack from the European Commission, the European Union's executive arm, which has urged Berlin to curb them by reforming its cosseted services sector and investing more in national infrastructure.

The Bundesbank stressed, however, that Germany's foreign surplus is already shrinking, from 8.75% of gross domestic product in the first quarter of last year to 7.5% in the fourth quarter. The Wise Men forecast that the current-account surplus would shrink further to 7.1% of GDP by 2018.

"There is some reason to believe that Germany's current-account surplus might have passed its zenith and will shrink markedly in the current year," the central bank said.

It argued that the surpluses were "the result of numerous, mainly private economic decisions both domestically and overseas," meaning that they "can hardly be steered sensibly using political tools." Many Germans think it is reasonable for their aging society to want to save.

Still, the Bundesbank did call for research into policy changes that could encourage more private investment in Germany, which would help reduce the surpluses.

Germany's Wise Men took a similar tack. They blamed the surplus on temporary factors such as lower oil prices, on the nation's aging population, and on the easy-money policies of the European Central Bank.

The euro has lost around a quarter of its value against the dollar over the last three years as a result of policies of the ECB, which has launched a series of massive stimulus programs aimed at supporting growth and inflation. Peter Navarro, the head of U.S. President Donald Trump's National Trade Council, told the Financial Times in January that the euro's low

valuation gave Germany an advantage over its main trading partners.

Germany's Wise Men hit back on Monday, calling such comments "totally misguided." America's "extraordinary privilege" of being able to print dollars, the global reserve currency, has allowed its government to finance persistently large deficits, Mr. Andritzky said.

A big increase in government spending—and government indebtedness—could even have a "destabilizing effect" on Germany and the broader eurozone, they added.

The surplus "does not signal a macroeconomic imbalance," they said in their latest report on Germany's economy.

Like the Bundesbank, the economists called on Berlin to do more to enhance Germany's attractiveness to investors, pointing out that greater investment would help lower the current account surplus.

—Paul Vieira and David George-Cosh contributed to this article.

INTERNATIONAL

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

Ghobashy

March 20, 2017 8:49 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The U.S. pledged Monday to speed up its support to Iraq in the fight against Islamic State, Iraq's prime minister said following a White House meeting with President Donald Trump.

"We have been given assurances that the support will not only continue but accelerate," Haider al-Abadi said at an event at the U.S. Institute of Peace, a Washington-based think tank.

Mr. Abadi spoke shortly after he left a meeting with Mr. Trump and other senior officials, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, senior presidential adviser Jared Kushner and national security adviser Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster.

Iraq Says U.S. Pledges to Speed Support in Fight Against Islamic State

Felicia Schwartz and Tamer El-Ghobashy

His consultations came as the Trump administration is evaluating its approach to confronting Islamic State and other extremist groups in the Middle East and reviewing options that may include sending more troops to help advise local forces. It has already loosened some battlefield rules, including by giving some commanders more authority on the ground.

"We will figure something out. I mean we have to get rid of ISIS. We're going to get rid of ISIS," Mr. Trump said at the start of his meeting with Mr. Abadi.

The White House said after the meeting that the two leaders discussed military cooperation in the fight against Islamic State, also known as Daesh, the Arabic acronym for the extremist group.

"Although ISIS/Da'esh remains a dangerous enemy, we are confident it will be defeated," the White House

said in what it described as a joint statement. "As Iraqi forces consolidate gains against ISIS/Da'esh, the two leaders agreed that the United States and Iraq will pursue a long-term partnership to decisively root out terrorism from Iraq and strengthen the Iraqi military and other key institutions."

The officials also discussed strengthening economic ties as Iraq prepares for the end of the campaign against Islamic State and the U.S. said it supported Iraq's efforts to strengthen regional ties. Mr. Abadi is expected to join a meeting in Washington later this week of officials of more than 65 nations in the coalition against the extremist group.

Iraqi government forces meanwhile continued to make halting advances Monday against Islamic State in western Mosul, where they are engaged in fierce street fighting in

the most complicated section of Iraq's second-largest city.

Federal police and counterterrorism forces in recent days have entered Mosul's Old City, a densely populated district made up of narrow streets and alleyways where militants have dug in with the thousands of civilians still inside the city, senior officers said.

The fighting has taken a dramatic toll on the civilians. The United Nations warned Sunday that residents are facing worsening food and water shortages as the battle rages close by—making staying in the city just as risky as fleeing.

Mr. Abadi said he hadn't seen the Trump administration's full plan to combat the extremist group in Iraq and Syria, but he was confident its strategy would be effective.

"I know there's a plan," he said. "We have our own plan."

He said Mr. Trump and his team told him they want to be “more engaged in fighting terrorism” compared with the administration of former President Barack Obama.

“I can sense a difference in terms of being head-to-head with terrorism. I think they are prepared to do more to fight terrorism,” Mr. Abadi said, adding that he didn’t interpret that to mean “military confrontation.” He didn’t elaborate.

**The
New York
Times**

Gordon

“I think this administration wants to be more engaged in fighting terrorism,” Mr. Abadi added. “I sense a difference in terms of being head-to-head with terrorism.”

Neither American nor Iraqi officials, however, explained what economic support might be provided by the United States and the international community to help rebuild Iraqi cities that have been damaged during the conflict.

Nor did they explain what the American role might be after Iraqi forces retake Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city, and evict Islamic State militants from other towns.

There is broad recognition among Iraqi and American security experts that there will be a continued need to train Iraqi forces, and perhaps even conduct commando operations, if the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, loses its so-called caliphate because any surviving militants are expected to maintain their yearslong drumbeat of terrorist bombings.

Mr. Trump hinted at the need for future American presence in Iraq by criticizing his predecessor, former President Barack Obama, for failing to negotiate an agreement that would have enabled American forces to stay. American ground troops withdrew from Iraq in 2011, as required under a security

**The
New York
Times**

The two defectors, who live in an undisclosed location abroad, made their case on Monday to small group of human rights experts and reporters in a private meeting at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and in a brief interview afterward. Neither photographs nor recordings of the session were allowed, to help protect their identity. They and their extended family are

Mr. Abadi said public opinion in the U.S. wouldn’t support sending troops in large numbers, and terrorism cannot be defeated by military force alone.

“Committing troops is one thing, fighting terrorism is another,” he said.

Ahead of the meetings Monday, U.S. officials said the Trump administration aimed to pledge

agreement brokered in 2008 by President George W. Bush.

“Certainly, we shouldn’t have left. We should never ever have left,” Mr. Trump said. “A vacuum was created, and we discussed what happened.”

Mr. Abadi volunteered little on the matter, which remains a delicate issue in Iraq and, especially, with its neighbor Iran. Asked if he had been briefed on the strategy the Trump administration is working on to defeat the Islamic State, the prime minister said that “I haven’t seen a full plan.”

James Jeffrey, a former American ambassador to Baghdad, said the coming destruction of the Islamic State, as a caliphate and fighting force, would make the administration confront difficult questions about how deeply to get involved in Iraq’s reconstruction and stabilization, and what additional political reforms might be needed to ensure that the country’s politics do not become a breeding ground for the rise of another militant group.

“The main reason we’re engaging with Iraq is combating ISIS, in the short run,” Mr. Jeffrey said in an interview. “But underneath that is the question, ‘How are we going to relate to Iraq?’”

That was also addressed in a letter to Mr. Trump from more than a dozen senators, including Bob Corker, Republican of Tennessee,

presumed to be at risk from the Syrian government and its agents.

Caesar has supporters in Congress, but whether he will be able to make inroads with the Trump administration is far from clear. The defectors spoke Monday with Michael Ratney, who has served as the United States’ envoy on the Syria crisis, and they are scheduled to meet this week with senior aides at the National Security Council.

But no meeting has been set with Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, Mr. Trump’s

support to Mr. Abadi and discuss the road ahead as the coalition continues to make progress against Islamic State.

“The important thing for us was that we see an administration and a president who see and appreciate what we’re doing,” Mr. Abadi said after his meeting with Mr. Trump, where he was joined by about a dozen Iraqi officials.

who leads the Foreign Relations Committee.

“Iraq’s challenges will not be solved when ISIS is defeated on the battlefield,” wrote the senators, who argued that bringing stability to Iraq would require more power-sharing with the Sunnis and progress in resolving tensions with the Kurds. “If Prime Minister al-Abadi commits to lead Iraq along these lines, he should have our full support in this endeavor.”

Some senior members of Mr. Trump’s administration, including Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and H. R. McMaster, the national security adviser, served in Iraq.

They joined the White House meeting along with other ranking officials, including Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson and Jared Kushner, the president’s senior adviser.

Mr. Abadi brought his foreign, defense and oil ministers. Fuad Hussein, a senior official from the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq, was also present, in a gesture of comity to the Kurds.

The session was held virtually 14 years to the day after Mr. Bush announced the start of the United States-led invasion of Iraq, which Mr. Trump initially supported but later opposed. Mr. Abadi spoke in classical Arabic at the start of his White House meeting. After reciting a section from the Quran, he

national security adviser, or with the top echelons of the State Department or Pentagon.

In a retrospective moment, the two defectors said they did not regret taking enormous risks to spirit the photos out of Syria — even though they had discovered that the international community was better at expressing outrage than agreeing on measures to quell the fighting and to press for a more inclusive government that did not include Mr. Assad.

Mr. Trump also noted progress in the military campaign.

“Mosul is moving along,” he said. “A lot of things are different than they were just five or six weeks ago.”

—Ben Kesling contributed to this article.

stressed the desire for more cooperation with the United States.

But the Iraqi prime minister, who lived in exile in Britain during Saddam Hussein’s years in power, switched to fluent English in his appearance at the Institute of Peace, where he sought to assure his audience that Iraq would not be unduly influenced by Iran.

“Iraq is not under the influence of any other country,” he said. “We are looking after our own interests.”

An unintended moment of levity came when the Iraqi leader was asked about proposals that Nineveh Province be turned into a semiautonomous region after Mosul is retaken. The idea has been promoted by province’s former governor, but the notion of giving that degree of autonomy to a largely Sunni but ethnically diverse region has drawn opposition from Shiite-led Baghdad.

“We have to build bridges with others and work with others to be more secure,” he said. “Otherwise, what do you do? You build walls.”

The room erupted into laughter, and Mr. Abadi grinned, as well.

Iraq’s future will be on the agenda again this week when Mr. Tillerson convenes a 68-nation gathering of the coalition that is fighting the Islamic State. Mr. Abadi is staying in Washington to attend that session.

For years, Caesar explained, his duties as a police photographer required him to document bodies that were often battered beyond recognition, a gruesome procedure mandated by the Syrian government. Determined to expose the torture and killing to the world, he smuggled thumb drives with the digital photos in his shoes and socks as he passed through government checkpoints.

Nor was the government the only worry, he said. For a while, the

opposition Free Syrian Army had controlled much of his neighborhood, and Caesar had been afraid that he would be in danger if the rebels found out he worked for the police. He handled that risk by making a fake civilian ID.

By the end of 2013, he said, he had enough photos to document the murder and torture of more than 11,000 people and was ready to flee and make the evidence known. Caesar said his greatest worry was that the government would retaliate against his extended family.

"My life is not more valuable than the many who are being killed inside

the country," he said. "I died a hundred times a day. Looking at those bodies broke my heart."

Navigating American policy on Syria has not been easy for the two defectors. While Mr. Obama declared that the Assad regime had lost the legitimacy to lead the nation and authorized a covert program to assist Syrian rebels, he was reluctant to take more direct action to compel the Syrian president to hand over power.

The Trump administration has neither spoken out forcefully on the Syria crisis nor promised fresh action, beyond a pledge to establish

safe zones to try to stem the flow of Syrian refugees.

Mr. Trump indicated during the campaign that he has little interest in confronting Mr. Assad and has flirted with the idea of partnering with Russia, one of the Syrian government's main backers, to press the military campaign against the Islamic State. At the same time, however, Mr. Trump's vow to establish safe zones has given the defectors something of an opening.

Establishing safe zones in the northern and southern parts of the country would do much to mitigate

the suffering of the Syrians who oppose Mr. Assad, Sami said.

American lawmakers, meanwhile, have been promoting legislation that would impose sanctions on anyone who provides financing or does business with the Assad government, which has also given the defectors a measure of hope. The legislation also calls for an assessment of how to set up safe zones or no-fly zones, and for an investigation of war crimes.

"The United States does not need to send troops," Sami said. "It could sanction the Central Bank of Syria."



Using Special Forces Against Terrorism, Trump Seeks to Avoid Big Ground Wars (UNE)

Eric Schmitt

That concern gives weight to arguments for greater reliance on special operators as the Trump administration for now eschews larger deployments of conventional troops and proposes deep cuts in foreign aid and State Department budgets.

The global reach of special operators is widening. During the peak of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, nearly 13,000 Special Operations forces were deployed on missions across the globe, but a large majority were assigned to those two countries. Now, more than half of the 8,600 elite troops overseas are posted outside the Middle East or South Asia, operating in 97 countries, according to the Special Operations Command.

Still, about one-third of the 6,000 American troops currently in Iraq and Syria are special operators, many of whom are advising local troops and militias on the front lines. About a quarter of the 8,400 American troops in Afghanistan are special operators.

In Africa, about one-third of the nearly 6,000 overall troops are Special Operations forces. The only permanent American installation on the continent is Camp Lemonnier, a

sprawling base of 4,000 United States service members and civilians in Djibouti that serves as a hub for counterterrorism operations and training. The United States Air Force flies surveillance drones from small bases in Niger and Cameroon.

Elsewhere in Africa, the roles of special operators are varied, and their ranks are small, typically measured in the low dozens for specific missions. Between 200 and 300 Navy SEALs and other special operators work with African allies to hunt shadowy Shabab terrorists in Somalia. As many as 100 Special Forces soldiers help African troops pursue the notorious leader of the Lord's Resistance Army, Joseph Kony. And Navy SEALs are training Nigerian commandos for action in the oil-rich delta.

The United States is building a \$50 million drone base in Agadez, Niger, that is likely to open sometime next year to monitor Islamic State insurgents in a vast area on the southern flank of the Sahara that stretches from Senegal to Chad.

Mr. Trump's tough talk on terrorism has been well received here in Chad, where American Special Operations and military instructors from several Western nations finished an annual three-week

counterterrorism training exercise last week.

U.S. Troops and Equipment in Africa

The countries in Africa where the United States has the most troops, and the cooperative security locations, where military equipment is stored.

Many African soldiers and security forces said they would welcome an even larger United States military presence to help combat myriad extremist threats. "Of course we'd like more," said Hassan Zakari Mahamadou, a police commissioner from Niger. "U.S. forces enhance us."

The Pentagon has allocated about \$250 million over two years to help train the armies and security forces of North, Central and West African countries.

But American aid and training alone — along with occasional secret unilateral strikes — will not be enough to defeat groups like Al Qaeda, Boko Haram and the Islamic State, officials say.

"We could knock off all the ISIL and Boko Haram this afternoon," Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, the leader of the military's Africa Command,

told the Senate this month, using an acronym for the Islamic State. "But by the end week, so to speak, those ranks would be filled."

Here on the outskirts of the Chadian capital, N'Djamena, last week, four flat-bottomed boats with mounted machine guns roared down the Chari River. The boats pulled up along the riverbank, just opposite neighboring Cameroon, and disgorged rifle-toting Chadian Special Antiterrorism Group forces and their American trainers.

In a hail of gunfire, shooting blanks, they stormed the thatched huts of a suspected Boko Haram bomb maker; seized laptops, cellphones and other material inside for clues on terrorist operations; and dashed back to the river, fending off a mock ambush on the way. Piling back into their boats under covering fire, the Chadian commandos sped off in a drill that American and Chadian officers often play out for real in the nearby Lake Chad Basin area.

"Extremism is like a cancer," said Brig. Gen. Zakaria Ngobongue, a senior Chadian officer who has trained in France and at Hurlburt Field, Fla., and was helping oversee the exercise. "We need to continue to fight it."



Editorial : Beyond the 'puppet' question, what is Trump's game plan for Russia?

The Times Editorial Board

Russia has loomed large in public discussion of Donald Trump's administration in its first two months, but not, unfortunately, because the president has articulated any distinctive new approach to relations

with that huge (and hugely important) nation.

Rather, Russia has owed its prominence to suspicions about illicit involvement in Trump's 2016 campaign and the broader issue of whether the president is too close to Russia. Or, as Hillary Clinton memorably put it in one of her

debates with Trump, whether the 45th president of the United States is Vladimir Putin's puppet.

Congress and the FBI will eventually complete their investigations of alleged Russian interference in last year's election and whether anyone in the Trump campaign was complicit in that activity. (On

Monday, FBI Director James B. Comey confirmed for the first time that the bureau is investigating "whether there was any coordination" between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government.)

However that question is resolved, this nation will still have much to do to clarify significant issues in its relationship with Russia.

Under Putin's increasingly autocratic rule, a country humbled by the collapse of the Soviet Union has rebuilt and streamlined its military, annexed part of a neighboring nation, Ukraine, and intervened to preserve the hold on power of its client, Syrian President Bashar Assad. Russian military forces have intimidated the Baltic states that are now members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and Russian intelligence agencies have engaged in a disinformation campaign in Europe that mirrors their dissemination of "fake news" about the U.S. presidential campaign. The United States has alleged that Russia has deployed a land-based cruise missile in violation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. And Russia has been accused of harassing — and even killing — political dissidents.

Some in the U.S. Congress seem to be agitating for a return to the Cold War, with a policy designed to contain the influence of Russia in the same way the United States and its allies contained the Soviet Union. Such a containment policy might involve a further westward expansion of NATO — perhaps even to include Ukraine. There have been suggestions that the United States needs to break out of the constraints imposed by nuclear arms agreements with Russia. That view was echoed, oddly enough, by President Trump, who recently complained that the 2010 New START treaty

capping the number of U.S. and Russian nuclear warheads was a "one-sided deal."

Russia has its defenders — or at least its explainers. They note that it has legitimate concerns about the expansion of Western influence into areas in which it historically has exercised influence — including Ukraine. After all, Russia has fought devastating wars on its borders — with the French in the 19th century and Hitler's Germany in the 20th, among others. They also argue that the United States should be willing to explore the possibility of cooperation with Russia on matters such as the defeat of Islamic State, controlling nuclear proliferation and promoting a political settlement in Syria. In exchange for such cooperation, they add, the United States should be willing to forgo criticism of Russia's domestic policies. As a candidate, Trump sometimes seemed to endorse that view.

As they decide how to deal with Russia, the president and his advisors — who include seasoned students of the U.S.-Russia relationship such as national security advisor Gen. H.R. McMaster and Secretary of Defense James Mattis — should aim for a balanced policy. It should be one that protects the interests of the United States and its allies, but also recognizes that Russia has legitimate geopolitical interests that must be considered.

The United States should keep lines of communication open, and that starting point for any dialogue between the United States and

Russia is the solidarity of the NATO alliance. Ordinarily that wouldn't have to be noted, but Trump gave Russia false hope during the campaign by calling the alliance "obsolete."

Since he took office, Trump and his Cabinet officials have reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to the principle of collective defense and have made it clear that it applies equally to states that joined the alliance after the breakup of the Soviet Union — including the former Soviet states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Likewise, the United States and its allies must continue to impose sanctions on Russia to punish it for interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea. But that doesn't rule out exploring new diplomatic approaches to resolving tensions in that country between pro-Western nationalists and Russian-speaking separatists — possibly including assurances that Ukraine wouldn't soon seek membership in NATO.

Reducing nuclear weapons and preventing their proliferation also must remain a cornerstone of relations with Russia. Trump has no reason to repudiate — in fact, he should consider negotiating an extension of — the New START treaty, while insisting on Russian compliance with that agreement and the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Finally, the Trump administration, like its predecessors, must decide whether it is the role of the United States to promote democracy within Russia — and to what extent. The

United States obviously should call attention to violations of civil and human rights wherever they occur, as the State Department does in its annual human rights reports. Members of Congress, likewise, are free to denounce Putin (as GOP Sen. John McCain of Arizona did) as a "murderer and a thug." But it may be counterproductive for the president of the United States to use such language or for the U.S. government to involve itself in opposition political movements in Russia.

In an essay for the Center for the National Interest, Thomas Graham, a Russian expert, has called for "a new equilibrium, that is, a balance of cooperation and competition with Russia that reduces the risk of great-power conflict, manages geopolitical rivalry and constrains transnational threats." Under such an approach, the United States might address Russian concerns — about Ukraine joining NATO, for example — while reassuring U.S. allies.

One obstacle to such a policy, of course, is that Russia might not be interested in any measure of cooperation. The other is that the perception that Trump is "Putin's puppet" might make it difficult for the president to pursue common policies that might be in both countries' interest. How persistent that perception will be will depend on the outcome of the current investigations — and, of course, Trump's own words and actions.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Viswanatha

Updated March 20, 2017 4:47 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—Federal Bureau of Investigation Director James Comey said publicly for the first time Monday that the agency is investigating whether members of Donald Trump's 2016 campaign collaborated with the Russian government to influence the presidential election.

The Capitol Hill announcement by Mr. Comey divulged an active FBI investigation, a rare step by the head of the nation's largest law-enforcement agency, and all the more extraordinary given that it directly affects the current president.

Mr. Comey also used his appearance before the House Intelligence Committee to debunk an

Comey Confirms FBI Probe of Trump-Russia Links (UNE)

Shane Harris and Aruna

allegation contained in Twitter messages by Mr. Trump, saying he has "no information" that supports the GOP president's claims that his Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama, wiretapped him during the campaign.

Both Mr. Trump and his staff dismissed the Russian collusion allegations, with the president tweeting early Monday that the "Democrats made up and pushed the Russian story as an excuse for running a terrible campaign."

- Donald Trump's Bumpy Early Weeks Slow His Agenda

Halfway through President Trump's first 100 days in office, controversies and GOP legislative infighting are making it hard for the White House to build momentum toward some of its ambitious agenda items.

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- Conservative House Republicans Say They Have Votes to Block Health Bill

Conservative House Republicans said they have enough votes to block the GOP's legislation to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, as House leaders proposed changes to the bill in an effort to draw support.

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- At Neil Gorsuch Hearing, Parties Strike Different Notes

Confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch opened Monday with clashing visions of the Constitution and the political events that have kept the vacancy open for more than a year.

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- Team Trump Meets a Messy World

In fits and starts, the Trump administration is trying to show it values traditional allies and alliances, despite the president's rhetoric suggesting the contrary. Good thing, because America's allies and alliances are under exceptional stress, Gerald F. Seib writes.

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- Sonny Perdue Would Hold Sway Over Food Assistance

Sonny Perdue, who as agriculture secretary would play a key role in shaping and implementing U.S. food assistance, has experience with such programs as a former governor of Georgia.

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TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

The disclosures, though, marked a clear setback for Mr. Trump, and Republicans complained that Mr. Comey's confirmation of an investigation left a cloud of suspicion over the White House.

"The longer this hangs out here, the bigger the cloud is," Rep. Devin Nunes (R., Calif.), the intelligence committee's chairman, said as the hearing wrapped up. "There is a big, gray cloud that you've put over people who have very important work to do to lead this country. The faster you can get to the bottom of this, it's going to be better for all Americans."

Mr. Comey said he couldn't estimate how long the investigation would take.

The disclosure puts Mr. Comey back in the middle of a political firestorm, as he was during the 2016 presidential campaign for speaking publicly about an FBI investigation into Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's email use.

On Monday, the FBI director provided no new detail of possible ties between associates of Mr. Trump and the Russian government. Mr. Comey declined to comment when asked about specific details that have appeared in news reports.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer said the FBI probe would amount to nothing. "It's fine to look, but at the end of the day they're going to come to the same conclusion that everybody else has had," Mr. Spicer said.

Mr. Spicer also said Mr. Trump wouldn't withdraw his accusation

that Trump Tower was wiretapped at the direction of Mr. Obama, despite Mr. Comey's denial.

At the hearing, Mr. Comey appeared reluctant to confirm the existence of the investigation, and explained his rationale for doing so in an opening statement to the committee.

"Our practice is not to confirm the existence of ongoing investigations, especially those investigations that involve classified matters," he said. "But in unusual circumstances," Mr. Comey continued, "where it is in the public interest, it may be appropriate to do so....This is one of those circumstances."

Throughout the campaign and since he took office, Mr. Trump has been dogged by questions about the nature of his ties to Russia and his vociferous praise for Vladimir Putin, the country's president. The hearing, which lasted more than five hours, offered little in the way of answers.

But the hearing made clear that the Trump-Russia investigation will be a highly partisan affair.

Democratic members focused on the alleged ties between Mr. Trump and Russia, including his business dealings.

Republicans, however, used their time to demand the FBI investigate the source of leaks about the agency's investigation, which they said likely emanated from former officials in Mr. Obama's administration and current officials at intelligence agencies who have access to classified information.

The Wall Street Journal and other news outlets have reported that several of Mr. Trump's associates or advisers are being investigated by the FBI and other U.S. agencies,

including former campaign manager Paul Manafort, former national security adviser Mike Flynn, former foreign-policy adviser Carter Page and Republican political operative and Trump consultant Roger Stone.

Mr. Page viewed the hearing as a positive development.

"I was highly encouraged by today's initial steps toward illuminating the truth surrounding what actually happened last year," said Mr. Page, who had worked as a foreign-policy adviser to the Trump campaign, in an email. Mr. Page blamed "leakers and liars in Washington" for spreading a false narrative about his interactions with Russian officials.

Mr. Manafort repeated past denials of any involvement in the alleged Russian election hacking or release of Democratic emails to the antisecrecy website WikiLeaks.

"Despite the constant scrutiny and innuendo, there are no facts or evidence supporting these allegations, nor will there be," Mr. Manafort said in a statement. "I am disappointed that anyone would give credence to allegations made by individuals with clear political motives in a blatant attempt to discredit me and the legitimacy of the election of President Trump."

Mr. Stone didn't respond to a request for comment, but has previously denied any connection with Russia.

Mr. Flynn resigned under pressure after failing to inform Vice President Mike Pence about the nature of his conversations with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. A month before Mr. Trump was inaugurated, Mr. Flynn and the ambassador discussed the potential lifting of U.S. sanctions on Russia, according to

people who are familiar with transcripts of their phone conversations.

Democrats left empty-handed in their quest Monday to dislodge new details from the FBI chief about the alleged Russian connections. But that didn't stop them from reading into the record a host of statements about Mr. Trump's alleged collusion with Russians.

Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the committee's ranking Democrat, said the committee's investigation was vital to warding off future interference by Russia. "Only by understanding what the Russians did can we inoculate ourselves from further Russian interference that we know is coming," he said.

Both Mr. Comey and Adm. Mike Rogers, the director of the National Security Agency, predicted that Russian meddling would be a feature of future elections because the Kremlin perceived its intervention was successful.

Adm. Rogers agreed with one Democratic lawmaker's contention that it was "ridiculous" to suggest that the British intelligence service helped Mr. Obama get information about Mr. Trump's campaign, an allegation that the White House press secretary alluded to by reading a media report about it during a press briefing last week. Mr. Trump stood by his press secretary's decision to cite that media report.

—Siobhan Hughes and Peter Nicholas contributed to this article.



Fishman : We Built the Russia Sanctions to Last

Edward Fishman
March 20, 2017

7:00 p.m. ET

Western sanctions on Russia have always seemed on the brink of collapse. Business interests have opposed them, and perspectives on Russia within the European Union—which requires unanimity to make foreign-policy decisions—have been anything but uniform. Skeptics claimed the West has only a passing interest in Ukraine, whereas Ukraine's geopolitical disposition is of crucial importance to Russia. The implication was that Moscow could surely wait out Washington and Brussels.

Yet here we are: Sanctions remain in place three years after the West first imposed them and two months after the inauguration of President

Trump. And there are few signs that is about to change.

In an otherwise awkward press conference last Friday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Trump sounded harmonious notes on Ukraine policy. Mr. Trump praised Mrs. Merkel's "leadership" on conflict resolution in Ukraine, and Mrs. Merkel noted that she was "very gratified to know that the American administration and also the president, personally, commits himself to the Minsk process." That suggests Mr. Trump assured Mrs. Merkel he will stand by the existing policy of maintaining sanctions until Russia pulls back from eastern Ukraine.

As one of the diplomats involved in creating the sanctions, I am not surprised they have endured. We

designed them to be sustainable—to apply meaningful pressure on Russia without risking a short-term economic crisis or overly burdening any one constituency in the U.S. or Europe. And good communication has prevented minor disagreements between Washington and European capitals from snowballing into threats to trans-Atlantic unity.

Why have sanctions proved so resilient? For starters, the EU has shown remarkable leadership and solidarity. Although semiannual decisions on whether to renew sanctions have caused jitters, the outcomes were never seriously in doubt. Despite frequent anti-sanctions rhetoric, no EU leader has challenged them head-on, and the EU's biggest player—Mrs. Merkel's Germany—has been a consistent supporter.

Even though any single EU member could veto sanctions, potential spoilers such as Russia-friendly Greece and Hungary have never posed a practical threat. That's because a motion to break unanimity by a small country could cause a constitutional crisis in the EU. Many EU states might even refuse to implement a veto, undermining the legal and normative solidarity of the union writ large. None of the would-be spoilers are interested in accelerating the deterioration of the EU, so the veto option has never made sense.

Another reason sanctions have endured is that they haven't harmed the U.S. or European economy in any serious way. Western sanctions on Rosneft, the world's largest publicly traded oil producer by output, did not push oil prices

upward, even as they froze some of the company's major development projects. The same is true for sanctions against Russia's six largest banks, which squeezed their finances but did not lead to broader contagion.

Because blowback was so limited, "sanctions fatigue" was turned on its head. Instead of becoming harder to stomach over time, sanctions faced their most intense business opposition in the beginning. As American and European companies have found alternative markets, living with Russia sanctions has become progressively easier for them.

A third reason for the durability of sanctions is that the U.S. and EU quickly settled on criteria for lifting them. In March 2015, all 28 EU

leaders agreed that the core economic sanctions were "clearly linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements," the peace accords to resolve the Ukraine conflict. The Group of Seven leaders echoed the sentiment in June 2015.

This benchmark greatly simplified the EU's semiannual decisions to renew sanctions. As long as Russia and its proxies continued to control parts of eastern Ukraine, there was no justification to undo sanctions. Only new rollback criteria endorsed by all EU leaders could alter this dynamic.

It is fair to ask whether the rise of Donald Trump has changed this equation. It isn't far-fetched to assume Mr. Trump might try to

cancel sanctions or that his rhetoric will erode cohesion in the EU.

The president does have the authority to end U.S. sanctions unilaterally. Unlike in the Iran context, Congress has been a paper tiger on Russia, frequently denouncing the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine but passing no significant laws that enhance or even codify existing sanctions. And in Europe, Mr. Trump's "America first" rhetoric will only increase suspicions—hitherto groundless—that the U.S. is using sanctions to strengthen the competitive positions of American companies.

But it now seems doubtful that trans-Atlantic sanctions will end in the way most frequently envisioned: with the EU throwing in the towel. The irony of the present moment is that the

EU—so often dismissed as "soft" on Russia—has emerged as the West's bulwark. Even German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, one of Europe's most vocal critics of sanctions, is encouraging Washington to hold firm.

Brussels' unity on this critical issue should stand as a lesson that the EU is hardly feckless; it is a tremendous boon to American foreign policy. It may be frustrating to corral a bloc of more than two dozen European states, but when the EU settles on a policy, it can be a potent and steadfast force.

Mr. Fishman, a nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council, served at the State Department, 2013-17.

The Washington Post **Robinson : Will the FBI's trail lead to Russia?**

The FBI is investigating whether persons involved with President Trump's campaign collaborated with Russian officials to help Trump win the election. Let that sink in for a moment. Then take a deep breath, exhale and try to imagine where this might lead.

FBI Director James B. Comey confirmed Monday what we suspected: an active probe of Russia's election meddling, which includes "investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government, and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia's efforts."

Hours earlier, Trump had fired up his Twitter account in a vain attempt to make the whole thing go away. He began his tweet by saying, "The Democrats made up and pushed the Russian story as an excuse for running a terrible campaign."

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That was a lie, perhaps designed to reassure the president's loyal supporters, perhaps to salve his own bruised ego. "The Democrats" didn't make up anything. The intelligence community has reached the conclusion

that the Russian government actively tried to meddle in the election — initially, perhaps, to weaken confidence in our political process, but later to boost Trump's chances of winning.

To this end, according to the intelligence assessment, the Russians hacked into the Internet communications of prominent Democrats and party institutions — including the Democratic National Committee — and orchestrated a series of leaks timed to do maximum political damage to Hillary Clinton.

It is bad enough to have to wonder whether Trump's narrow margin of victory might have resulted from a boost provided by Russian President Vladimir Putin. It is much worse to think that anyone connected with the Trump campaign might have known about this interference by an adversarial foreign power and failed to sound the alarm — or, perhaps, even collaborated in the dark operation.

Trump pretends this is all sour grapes over Clinton's loss, but it's not; she didn't win, and Democrats have moved on. It's about what Comey called a Russian attempt to "undermine our democracy" by helping one candidate at the expense of another.

Trump also tries to change the subject by making wild and unsupported allegations, such as his ridiculous charge that then-President Barack Obama ordered

wiretapping of Trump Tower during the campaign. Comey and National Security Agency Director Michael S. Rogers both testified they had no information to support Trump's claim.

Comey added that "no president" could unilaterally order such surveillance. And Rogers flatly denied the Trump administration's absurd fallback claim that Obama somehow arranged for British intelligence to do the snooping for him.

Throughout the hearing, Republicans sought to focus on leaks of classified information that found their way onto the front pages of The Post and the New York Times. At one point, Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.) pressed Comey on whether a journalist who published such material wasn't guilty of committing a felony. Comey didn't bite, apparently disinclined to threaten reporters with long prison terms.

The real issue, of course, is the information itself. Michael Flynn had to resign as Trump's national security adviser after it was revealed that he had lied about his conversations with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. Despite what he told Congress during his confirmation hearing, Attorney General Jeff Sessions had meetings with Kislyak, as did several other Trump campaign advisers. There are numerous allegations of other contacts, which

have yet to be discounted or confirmed.

Meanwhile, Trump's rhetoric about Putin and Russia has been anomalously gentle. He does not hesitate to blast German Chancellor Angela Merkel, a staunch ally, for not spending enough on defense; he goes out of his way to bash our neighbor Mexico; and he even managed to get into a needless row with the prime minister of Australia. Yet he has consistently conveyed his admiration for Putin's leadership and expressed a desire for a warmer U.S.-Russia relationship.

An FBI investigation, it seems to me, would necessarily have to look into the president's business relationships with Russians tied to the Putin regime. In 2008, Donald Trump Jr. said publicly that "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of our assets" and that "we see a lot of money pouring in from Russia." The president now denies significant business involvement with Russians. Which is true?

If the FBI trains scrutiny on such Trump campaign figures as Paul Manafort and Roger Stone, what will they find? And why does the subject of Russia so reliably send Trump into a Twitter rage?

This trail may lead somewhere or it may lead nowhere. But now it will be followed to the end.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : **Comey Doesn't Say Much**

March 20, 2017
7:19 p.m. ET 135

Well, that wasn't very helpful. FBI director James Comey took his latest star turn before the House Intelligence Committee on Monday

and didn't disclose much of anything new about Russian meddling in the presidential election or wiretaps of Trump Tower.

Mr. Comey did confirm what four bipartisan leaders of the House and Senate intelligence committees said last week—that the FBI has "no

COMMENTS

information" to support President Trump's assertion that Barack Obama ordered a wiretap of Trump Tower. He also acknowledged that the FBI is investigating Russia's electoral meddling and any connection to the Trump campaign, which everyone also knew.

In other words, Mr. Comey was his usual political self, handing out the headline that Democrats wanted about Mr. Trump's false accusation but offering little to educate the public about what really happened.

Mr. Comey also refused to answer whether the FBI has evidence of collusion between Trump officials

and Russia. He kept mum even though former Obama director of national intelligence James Clapper, former acting Obama CIA director Michael Morell, and House Intelligence Chairman Devin Nunes have said publicly that they have seen no such evidence.

While there's no evidence for Mr. Trump's typically over-the-top claim of Trump Tower wiretapping, we do know that some parts of the U.S. government listened to and then leaked word about conversations that former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn had with Russia's ambassador to the U.S.

Yet Mr. Comey pre-empted questions about the instigators or methods of this surveillance, including whether there was a FISA court order on Mr. Flynn or other campaign officials. Mr. Comey said he couldn't comment on a pending investigation, which would be more credible if he hadn't been so voluble during the election campaign.

The point of the House-Senate Intelligence probes should be to learn and then disclose to Americans what happened on both questions: What the Russians did with whom, and whether and why the Obama Administration

eavesdropped on the Trump campaign?

If Mr. Comey won't help, our hope is that the intelligence committees will go further than they usually do in declassifying relevant details. The public needs to know if there was political canoodling with a foreign government and whether the Obama Administration used cloak-and-dagger methods for partisan purposes.

Appeared in the Mar. 21, 2017, print edition.

**The
Washington
Post**

FBI Director Comey confirms probe of possible coordination between Kremlin and Trump campaign (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/ellennaka shimapost/>

FBI Director James B. Comey acknowledged Monday that his agency is conducting an investigation into possible coordination between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign in a counterintelligence probe that could reach all the way to the White House and may last for months.

The extraordinary disclosure came near the beginning of a sprawling, 5½ -hour public hearing before the House Intelligence Committee in which Comey also said there is "no information" that supports President Trump's claims that his predecessor ordered surveillance of Trump Tower during the election campaign.

Comey repeatedly refused to answer whether specific individuals close to the president had fallen under suspicion of criminal wrongdoing, "so we don't wind up smearing people" who may not be charged with a crime.

The FBI traditionally does not disclose the existence of an investigation, "but in unusual circumstances, where it is in the public interest," Comey said, "it may be appropriate to do so."

Comey also said he was authorized by the Justice Department to confirm the existence of the wide-ranging probe into Russian interference in the electoral process. He drew fire last year after he notified Congress 11 days before the presidential election — and against the department's strong advice not to — that the FBI had reopened an examination of Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server.

(Reuters)

House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) urged FBI

Director James Comey to disclose "quickly" any evidence he had linking the Trump White House to Russia at a hearing, March 20. Rep. Devin Nunes urges FBI Director James Comey to disclose "quickly" any evidence he has linking the Trump White House to Russia (Photo: Matt McClain/The Washington Post/Reuters)

That move, Democrats charged, hurt Clinton as she was heading into the home stretch of her campaign. Now, the tables are turned.

Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), the committee chairman, urged Comey to reveal if and when the bureau has information clearing any of its targets, and to do so as quickly as possible.

"There's a big gray cloud that you've now put over people who have very important work to do to lead this country, and so the faster that you can get to the bottom of this, it's going to be better for all Americans," Nunes said.

Comey said that the investigation began in late July and that for a counterintelligence probe, "that's a fairly short period of time."

The hearing came amid the controversy fired up by Trump more than two weeks ago when he tweeted, without providing evidence, that President Barack Obama had ordered his phones tapped at Trump Tower.

"I have no information that supports those tweets," Comey said. "We have looked carefully inside the FBI," and agents found nothing to support those claims.

He added that the Justice Department had asked him to tell the committee that the agency has no such information, either.

(Reuters)

FBI Director James B. Comey said at a House Intelligence Committee hearing that he has no information that Trump Tower was wiretapped by former president Barack Obama. FBI Director James B. Comey says he has no information that Trump Tower was wiretapped by former president Barack Obama. (Photo: Matt McClain/The Washington Post/Reuters)

Under questioning from the top Democrat on the panel, Rep. Adam B. Schiff (Calif.), Comey said no president could order such surveillance.

Remarkably, Trump's presidential Twitter account continued to fire away throughout the widely watched hearing, live-tweeting comments and assertions that lawmakers then referred to and used to question Comey and National Security Agency Director Michael S. Rogers.

[Full transcript: FBI Director James Comey testifies on Russian interference in 2016 election]

Comey and Rogers both predicted that Russian intelligence agencies will continue to seek to meddle in U.S. political campaigns, because they consider their work in the 2016 presidential race to have been successful.

In an influence campaign that the U.S. intelligence community in January said was ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin, hackers working for Russian spy agencies penetrated the computers of the Democratic National Committee in 2015 and 2016, as well as the email accounts of Democratic officials. The material was relayed to WikiLeaks, the intelligence community reported, and the anti-secrecy group launched a series of damaging email releases that began just before the Democratic National Convention last summer and continued through the

fall. The Russians' goal was not only to undermine the legitimacy of the election process but also to harm Clinton's campaign and boost Trump's chances of winning, the intelligence community concluded.

"They'll be back in 2020. They may be back in 2018," Comey said. "One of the lessons they may draw from this is that they were successful, introducing chaos and discord" into the electoral process.

Rogers agreed: "I fully expect they will maintain this level of activity." And, he said, Moscow is conducting a similar "active measures" campaign in Europe, where France and Germany are holding elections this year.

The panel's Democrats focused on possible contacts between Trump associates and Russian officials. Schiff outlined a series of events that took place last July and August that he said appear to be "pivotal" to the question of whether there was improper contact.

He ticked off a list of more than a dozen incidents, including former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page's trip to Moscow and alleged meeting with Igor Sechin, a Putin confidant and chief executive of the energy company Rosneft; and Trump political adviser Roger Stone's boasts about his connections to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and Stone's prediction that the emails of Clinton campaign adviser John Podesta would be published.

"Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated and nothing more than an entirely unhappy coincidence? Yes, it is possible," Schiff said. "But it is also possible, may be more than possible, that they are not coincidental, not disconnected and not unrelated. ... We simply don't

know, not yet, and we owe it to the country to find out."

At the White House, press secretary Sean Spicer stressed that an investigation into possible collusion between Russian officials and Trump associates doesn't mean that there was any.

"Investigating it and having proof of it are two different things," Spicer said. "I think it's fine to look into it, but at the end of the day they're going to come to the same conclusion that everybody else has had." Said Spicer: "There's no evidence of a Trump-Russian collusion."

The committee Republicans, meanwhile, seemed most exercised by leaks to the media. Information shared with the press has resulted in stories since the election on the intelligence community's conclusion about Moscow's desire to see Trump win, and on contacts Trump administration officials or close associates had with Russian officials.

One story in particular that apparently upset the Republicans was a Feb. 9 piece by The Washington Post reporting that

Trump's then-national security adviser, Michael Flynn, discussed the subject of sanctions with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, in the month before Trump took office. The Post reported that the discussions were observed under routine, court-approved monitoring of Kislyak's calls. Flynn, who had denied to Vice President Pence that he had spoken about sanctions, was forced to resign.

Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.) suggested that the leaks were political. He asked Comey whether the intelligence community had shared such information with Obama or his attorney general, Loretta E. Lynch.

Comey — who had acknowledged that in general, senior officials, including Lynch, would have access to such information — said he would not comment on his conversations with Obama or Trump.

As the hearing was going on, Trump's presidential Twitter account — in an apparent dig at Comey and carrying the suggestion that Obama administration officials were behind the leaks — posted the tweet: "FBI Director Comey refuses to deny he

briefed President Obama on calls made by Michael Flynn to Russia."

[Comey: Please don't draw conclusions from my no-comments. Trump: Nah, I'm good.]

At another point, the account tweeted out, "The NSA and FBI tell Congress that Russia did not influence electoral process."

Rep. Jim Himes (D-Conn.), noting that the tweet had gone out to 16.1 million Americans, asked Comey, "Is that accurate?"

"We've offered no opinion ... on potential impact because it's not something we looked at," Comey said.

Nunes sought an admission from the officials that the leaks were illegal under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, the law that governs foreign intelligence-gathering on U.S. soil or U.S. persons overseas.

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"Yes," Comey answered. "In addition to being a breach of our trust with the FISA court."

Rep. Thomas J. Rooney (R-Fla.) pressed Rogers to clarify under what circumstances it would be legitimate for Americans caught on tape speaking with people under surveillance to have their identities disclosed publicly.

Rogers stressed that the identities of U.S. persons picked up through "incidental collection" — in which investigating agents hear the words of people conversing with the targets of a wiretap — are disclosed only on a "valid, need-to-know" basis, and usually only when there is criminal activity or a potential threat to the United States at play.

Comey confirmed that individuals within the NSA, the CIA, the FBI, the Justice Department and others — including personnel in the White House, in some situations — could have requested the unmasking of the names of U.S. persons. But he stressed that only the collecting agency, whether it's the FBI, the NSA or the CIA, can unmask the identities of people.

The New York Times F.B.I. Is Investigating Trump's Russia Ties, Comey Confirms (UNE)

Matt Apuzzo, Matthew Rosenberg and Emmarie Huettelman

WASHINGTON — The F.B.I. director, James B. Comey, took the extraordinary step on Monday of announcing that the agency is investigating whether members of President Trump's campaign colluded with Russia to influence the 2016 election.

Mr. Comey's testimony before the House Intelligence Committee created a treacherous political moment for Mr. Trump, who has insisted that "Russia is fake news" that was cooked up by his political opponents to undermine his presidency. Mr. Comey placed a criminal investigation at the doorstep of the White House and said officers would pursue it "no matter how long that takes."

Joined by Adm. Michael S. Rogers, the director of the National Security Agency, Mr. Comey also dismissed Mr. Trump's claim that he was wiretapped by his predecessor during the campaign, a sensational accusation that has served as a distraction in the public debate over Russian election interference. Taken together, the two provided the most definitive statement yet that Mr. Trump's accusation was false.

The New York Times and other news organizations have reported the existence of the investigation into the Trump campaign and its relationship with Russia, but the White House dismissed those reports as politically motivated and rallied political allies to rebut them. Mr. Comey's testimony on Monday was the first public acknowledgment of the case. The F.B.I. discloses its investigations only in rare circumstances, when officials believe it is in the public interest.

"This is one of those circumstances," Mr. Comey said.

Mr. Comey said the F.B.I. was "investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government, and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia's efforts."

Counterintelligence investigations are among the F.B.I.'s most difficult and time-consuming cases, meaning an investigation could hang over the Trump administration for years even though such inquiries rarely lead to criminal charges.

Trump and the Russians: Links? No Links? Depends On Whom You Ask

James B. Comey, the director of the F.B.I., said the agency was investigating whether members of

the Trump campaign colluded with Russia to influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Republicans and Democrats put their own spin on his statements.

By SHANE O'NEILL and SUSAN JOAN ARCHER. Photo by Eric Thayer for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

American intelligence agencies concluded in January that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia personally ordered a covert effort to hurt Hillary Clinton's chances and aid Mr. Trump. That included hacking political targets, including the Democratic National Committee, and releasing embarrassing emails through the website WikiLeaks.

The White House dismissed most of Mr. Comey's testimony, saying there was no coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia and so there was nothing to investigate. Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, said the more pressing issue was who disclosed classified information about Mr. Trump's advisers to journalists, suggesting that they might have been former members of the Obama administration.

American officials have said that they have so far found no proof of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia, but current and former officials say they have

uncovered evidence that Mr. Trump's associates were in repeated contact with Russian officials — including people linked to Russian intelligence.

Roger J. Stone Jr., a longtime adviser to Mr. Trump, has acknowledged communicating with Guccifer 2.0, an online persona believed to be a front for Russian intelligence officials involved in disseminating hacked Democratic emails. Mr. Stone has denied that there was anything improper about the contact, and he was one of many, including political operatives and journalists, to communicate with the hackers.

Last July, the month that WikiLeaks began releasing the hacked emails, Carter Page, a foreign policy adviser to Mr. Trump, visited Moscow for a speaking engagement. Mr. Page has declined to say whom he met there, but he has said they were mostly scholars.

Michael T. Flynn, a Trump campaign adviser who went on to be his national security adviser, was paid more than \$65,000 by companies linked to Russia in 2015, including an American branch of a cybersecurity firm believed to have connections to Russia's intelligence services, according to congressional investigators. Mr. Flynn was forced to resign after misrepresenting his

conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States.

He said it under oath. What the head of the F.B.I. said on Monday about Trump and Russia, and Trump and a wiretap.

Mr. Comey said Russia used a murky network of government officials, oligarchs, business leaders and others close to Mr. Putin to gather intelligence. But he repeatedly sidestepped specific questions about Mr. Trump's advisers, and acknowledged that American citizens sometimes did not realize they were talking to foreign agents. He said the existence of an investigation did not mean the F.B.I. would ever prove wrongdoing.

Nevertheless, Democrats repeatedly highlighted the Trump campaign's Russian connections as they painted Mr. Trump as a candidate who adopted pro-Russia views and courted Russian interests.

"Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated and nothing more than an entirely unhappy coincidence?" said Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the intelligence committee's top Democrat. "Yes, it is possible. But it is also possible, maybe more than

possible, that they are not coincidental, not disconnected and not unrelated."

Mr. Comey, testifying for more than five hours, said there was no evidence that Russian hackers had changed any votes in the election. The statement was quickly spun by the White House, which posted that clip of Mr. Comey's testimony on Twitter.

But later in the hearing, when Mr. Comey was read the tweet by Representative Jim Himes, Democrat of Connecticut, the F.B.I. director made it clear that that was not what he had said.

"We've offered no opinion, have no view, have no information on potential impact because it's not something we looked at," Mr. Comey said, clarifying that the intelligence community is examining what Russia did to interfere with the election, not the effect of that interference.

Mr. Comey did not say when he expected his investigation to end or whether he planned to make the results public, prompting Republicans to complain that prolonging it would keep a cloud over the White House.

"The longer this hangs out there, the bigger the cloud," said Representative Devin Nunes of California, the Republican chairman of the Intelligence Committee. "If you have evidence, especially as it relates to people working in the White House or in the administration, that is information we really should know."

Mr. Trump began the day with Twitter posts denying any collusion with Russia and criticizing leaks of classified information about the investigation. By midday, the White House was citing Mr. Comey's testimony to suggest that members of the Obama administration had coordinated leaks against Mr. Trump.

Republicans on the Intelligence Committee made similar allegations, using their questions to Mr. Comey to criticize the news coverage about the Russia investigation and chastise government officials who speak anonymously to journalists. Mr. Nunes said he was particularly concerned about the anonymous sources who revealed to journalists that some of Mr. Trump's associates were being investigated.

The White House has insisted that there is nothing left to investigate

about Russia and has instead asked Congress to look into Mr. Trump's claims that he was wiretapped by President Barack Obama. Mr. Trump made those allegations in a flurry of Twitter posts early this month.

The White House has stood by his accusation, even in the face of conclusions from all corners of the government that it is false. On Tuesday, Mr. Comey, who had asked the Justice Department if it would make a public statement refuting Mr. Trump's claim, summarily dismissed it.

"I have no information that supports those tweets, and we have looked carefully inside the F.B.I.," Mr. Comey said, adding that the Justice Department also had no evidence.

Those assurances seemed unlikely to change the White House's position.

Asked Monday whether, in light of Mr. Comey's testimony, the president stood by his assertion that he was wiretapped, Mr. Spicer said that he did.

The New York Times Editorial : **Comey's Haunting News on Trump and Russia**

The acknowledgment by James Comey, the F.B.I. director, on Monday that the bureau is investigating possible connections between President Trump's campaign and Russia's efforts to sabotage Hillary Clinton's chances is a breathtaking admission. While there has been a growing body of circumstantial evidence of such links, Mr. Comey's public confirmation ought to mark a turning point in how inquiries into Russia's role in the election should be handled.

The top priority now must be to ensure that the F.B.I.'s investigation, which could result in criminal prosecutions, is shielded from meddling by the Trump administration, which has shown a proclivity to lie, mislead and obfuscate with startling audacity. Testifying before the House Intelligence Committee, Mr. Comey said the bureau is conducting its investigation in an "open-minded, independent way" and vowed to "follow the facts wherever they lead."

There is no reason to doubt Mr. Comey's commitment. But it is far

from certain that senior officials at the Department of Justice, who normally decide whether there is enough evidence to file criminal charges in politically sensitive cases, will be able to avoid White House interference. Before Monday's hearing began, Mr. Trump issued a remarkable set of tweets calling the possibility of collusion with Russia "fake news" and urging Congress and the F.B.I. to drop the matter and instead focus on finding who had been leaking information to the press.

These brazen warning shots from the president do enormous damage to public confidence in the F.B.I.'s investigation. The credibility of the Justice Department in handling the Russian matter was already deeply compromised after Attorney General Jeff Sessions arrived in the job refusing to recuse himself from any investigation. He was forced to step aside only after it was revealed that, contrary to what he told senators under oath, he had met with the Russian ambassador to Washington twice during the campaign. Even with his recusal, it would still be his deputies and staff directing and managing any potential prosecution

— which raises serious questions of conflict.

Mitigating this credibility crisis requires appointing an independent prosecutor, who would not take orders from the administration. If Mr. Trump's assertion that there was no collusion between his campaign officials and the Russian government is true, he should want this matter to be fully investigated as quickly and as transparently as possible.

Appointing a special prosecutor would show that Mr. Sessions is willing to have an impartial examination of his actions as a surrogate for Mr. Trump last year — which he has assured the public were entirely appropriate.

The decision to bring in a special counsel may fall on Rod Rosenstein, a career federal prosecutor who has been nominated to be deputy attorney general. Lawmakers from both parties should strongly encourage him to make that sensible and necessary decision.

As the F.B.I. investigation continues, a series of overlapping congressional inquiries into Russian activities to influence the election

are advancing in a predictably muddled, partisan way. Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee are working to produce a detailed timeline showing all the reported contacts between people close to the Trump campaign and the Russian government during the campaign. Most Republicans want to keep the focus on leaks of classified information.

This matter requires a broader investigation run by a collaborative, bipartisan team of statesmen. The ideal format would be a select committee that has subpoena power and a mandate to issue a comprehensive report of its findings. The goal must be to make American political parties and democratic institutions less vulnerable to efforts to distort the electoral process as the Russians appear to have carried out. Failing to learn and heed the lessons of last year's campaign would be an abdication of a shared responsibility to safeguard American democracy.

Milbank : Republicans read Trump's cue cards on Russia and wiretapping

This would be a good time to do something about the red menace of Vladimir Putin's Russia. Instead, we're talking about the Red Raiders of Texas Tech.

FBI Director James B. Comey, testifying Monday about his agency's investigation into Russia's attempt to tilt the 2016 election to Donald Trump, explained why it was "a fairly easy judgment" that Trump was Putin's favored candidate: "Putin hated Secretary Clinton so much that the flip side of that coin was he had a clear preference for the person running against the person he hated so much."

But Rep. K. Michael Conaway (R-Tex.), a senior member of the House Intelligence Committee, was having none of it. "Yeah, that logic might work on Saturday afternoon when my wife's Red Raiders are playing the Texas Longhorns." Conaway doubted such reasoning "all the rest of the time."

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So, Putin wanted Hillary Clinton to lose but didn't want Trump? Maybe he was for Gary Johnson?

Comey tried to be patient. "Whoever the Red Raiders are playing, you want the Red Raiders to win," he explained. "By definition, you want their opponent to lose."

North Korea Has Doubled Size of Uranium-Enrichment Facility, IAEA Chief Says

Jay Solomon

March 20, 2017 5:44 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—North Korea has doubled the size of its facility for enriching uranium in recent years, according to the United Nations' top nuclear inspector, who voiced doubt that a diplomatic agreement can end leader Kim Jong Un's weapons programs.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal on Monday, Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, described North Korea as rapidly advancing its capacity to produce nuclear weapons on two fronts: the production of plutonium at its Yongbyon nuclear facility and the enrichment of uranium.

Conaway was fourth and long. He scrambled to formulate another question, then punted: "Well, let me finish up then."

Comey's testimony confirmed what was widely suspected: The FBI is investigating whether the president's campaign colluded with a powerful American adversary in an attempt to swing the election. But instead of being shaken from complacency and uniting to make sure this never happens again, the Republican majority on the House Intelligence Committee mounted a reflexive defense of Trump.

The partisan response made it plain that there will be no serious congressional investigation of the Russia election outrage, nor any major repercussions for Russia. We were attacked by Russia — about this there is no doubt — and we're too paralyzed by politics to respond.

Trump, whose claim that President Barack Obama wiretapped Trump Tower was dismissed by Comey on Monday, continued to fire his weapons of mass distraction Monday morning, tweeting about ties between Clinton and Russia and claiming "the real story" is who leaked classified information.

This is to be expected from Trump. The disheartening part was that most Republicans on the panel, which is supposed to investigate Trump, instead slavishly echoed his excuses.

Chairman Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) underscored that there was no "evidence that Russia cyber actors

changed vote tallies." (There was also no allegation that they had.) He also pronounced himself "extremely concerned about the widespread illegal leaks" (much more so than the potentially illegal actions that the leaks exposed).

Reading from Trump's cue card, Nunes asked Comey to regard as "serious" the alleged Clinton campaign ties to Russia. In one exchange that sounded more sandbox than hearing room, Nunes asserted that "it's ridiculous for anyone to say that the Russians prefer Republicans over Democrats." The chairman urged Comey to tell his investigators not to believe "that somehow the Republican Party watered down its platform" on Russia.

Rep. Thomas J. Rooney (R-Fla.) pronounced himself concerned about the "unmasking of Gen. Flynn's identity," which denied him "the constitutional protections that we all enjoy." (The "unmasking" of the former Trump national security adviser was in the service of demonstrating that he spoke falsely about his contacts with Russia.)

Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.), who led a multiyear Benghazi investigation packed with innuendo and damaging leaks, repeatedly denounced the "felonious dissemination" of secrets, supposedly by the Obama administration, and the "hearsay" that is impugning the Trump team.

Comey may have handed Trump the presidency with his announcement

just before the election that he was reopening the Clinton email investigation. But he redeemed himself somewhat Monday with a lyrical defense of "our wonderful, often messy, but free and fair democratic system." Said Comey: "When there's something from a foreign state to disrupt that, it's very serious. It threatens what is America."

The Russians, Comey warned, "will be back" to disrupt future elections. "And one of the lessons they may draw from this is that they were successful because they introduced chaos and division and discord and sowed doubt about the nature of this amazing country of ours and our democratic process."

The chairman seemed more concerned about the political threat. Nunes told Comey flatly that "we don't have any evidence" of wrongdoing by Trump and his associates and asked the FBI director to hurry the investigation. "There is a big gray cloud that you have put over people who have very important work to do to lead this country," Nunes said.

But the FBI director didn't put the cloud there. The Russians did. And if Nunes would consider country before party, he'd recognize that the cloud isn't over Trump's White House; it's over all of us.

Mr. Amano played a leading role in negotiating the landmark nuclear agreement reached between world powers and Iran in 2015 to scale back Tehran's nuclear program.

The Japanese diplomat, who was tapped this month to serve a third term as the IAEA's chief, played down the chances for a similar diplomatic approach with Mr. Kim and his military government.

"This is a highly political issue. A political agreement is essential," Mr. Amano said, but added. "We can't be optimistic. The situation is very bad. We don't have the reason to be optimistic."

Comparing North Korea to Iran, he said: "The situation is very different.

Easy comparisons should be avoided."

Japan, a historic adversary of North Korea, is along with South Korea the country most directly threatened by Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic-missile advances.

North Korea expelled the IAEA's weapons inspectors in 2009 as negotiations with the Obama administration over the nuclear issue collapsed.

Since that time, the Vienna-based organization has continued to monitor Pyongyang's nuclear advancements at Yongbyon and other facilities through satellite imagery and other intelligence sources. Mr. Amano said the IAEA maintains a permanent unit to track

North Korea and is prepared for the day when its inspectors might be able to return.

North Korea initially pursued nuclear weapons through the production and separation of plutonium at Yongbyon, according to U.S. and IAEA officials.

In 2010, Pyongyang confirmed to a visiting U.S. nuclear scientist, Stanford University's Siegfried Hecker, what American intelligence services had suspected: The country had developed a separate infrastructure to enrich uranium for weapons use.

Mr. Amano said Monday that the IAEA has since detected through satellite imagery that Pyongyang has doubled the size of this facility

at Yongbyon where the enrichment is believed to be taking place.

The IAEA's chief wouldn't speculate on how many atomic bombs the agency believes North Korea has amassed in its weapons arsenal. U.S. and Chinese officials, citing the dual plutonium and uranium infrastructure, believe it can be as high as 40.

"The situation is very bad...It has gone into a new phase," Mr. Amano said about North Korea's overall program. "All of the indications point to the fact that North Korea is making progress, as they declared."

North Korean officials have publicly stated in recent months that the country is seeking to develop a much more powerful hydrogen bomb. North Korea successfully tested two nuclear devices last year and frequently conducts missile launches as it pushes to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile.

The Trump administration dispatched Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to Asia last week, where he discussed the North Korea threat with Japan, South Korea and China.

Mr. Tillerson, during the trip, raised the specter of U.S. military strikes to cripple North Korea's nuclear and ballistic-missile programs. He rebuffed Chinese offers to facilitate a direct dialogue with Kim Jong Un's government to defuse the crisis.

Mr. Tillerson met with President Donald Trump on Monday to discuss his Asia trip, U.S. officials said. "I can't say that we found any solutions, but we're continuing those conversations," said State Department spokesman Mark Toner.

Mr. Amano voiced skepticism that a diplomatic agreement could be reached with Pyongyang in the near future, though he stressed he supported one.

The U.S. administrations of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama all pursued diplomatic agreements with Pyongyang, only to be frustrated by what they claimed was North Korean cheating and backtracking.

"It is very difficult to foresee the future outcome," Mr. Amano said.

The IAEA remains deeply concerned about North Korea's willingness to sell its nuclear capabilities.

The agency believes North Korea built a plutonium-producing nuclear reactor in Syria that Israeli warplanes destroyed in 2007. A recent U.N. report detailed what it said was an attempt last year by a North Korean operative to sell lithium-6 to international buyers. The material can be used to miniaturize a nuclear warhead.

The IAEA's chief said Iran has so far implemented the nuclear agreement it reached with the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany, in 2015. But he said the IAEA has faced challenges in its job of keeping Tehran in line.

Iran agreed under the deal to substantially roll back its uranium-enrichment program and reduce its production of other materials that can be used in a nuclear-weapons program.

Mr. Amano said Iran has been close to breaching its commitments twice

over the past year through its production of heavy water, a material used in plutonium-producing reactors. Iran would have been in violation of a 130-metric-ton cap on its stockpile had buyers in the U.S. and other countries not stepped in to buy the material.

Iran maintains its capacity to produce 16 metric tons of heavy water a year, Mr. Amano said, and he suggested it risked being in breach of its commitments in the future.

"If Iran keeps producing, it's a matter of time until they come to the threshold again," he said.

The Trump administration has suggested it might try to renegotiate the terms of the nuclear agreement with Iran. Mr. Amano, appearing at an event later Monday at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, said that he didn't think a broad renegotiation could happen but that some of the deal's terms could be strengthened.



North Korea's Test of Rocket Engine Shows 'Meaningful Progress,' South Says

Choe Sang-Hun

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's latest test of a rocket engine showed that the country was making "meaningful progress" in trying to build more powerful rockets and missiles, South Korean officials said on Monday.

North Korea said on Sunday that it had conducted a ground jet test of a newly developed high-thrust missile engine, which its leader, Kim Jong-un, called "a great event of historic significance." Using the characteristic bombast of such announcements, he said that the test heralded "a new birth" of the country's rocket industry and that "the whole world will soon witness what eventful significance the great victory won today carries."

The North's rival, South Korea, acknowledged on Monday that the test represented a breakthrough. Lee Jin-woo, a spokesman at the Defense Ministry, said it showed that the North was developing a more sophisticated rocket engine. The model that the North tested included a cluster consisting of a main engine and four vernier

thrusters — smaller engines used to adjust the craft's velocity and stability.

"Through this test, it is found that engine function has made meaningful progress," Mr. Lee said during a news briefing, without divulging further details.

He declined to say whether the engine was for a rocket used to place a satellite into orbit or for an intercontinental ballistic missile, or ICBM, which the North has been threatening to test-flight any time. Mr. Lee said more analysis was needed to answer that question.

Mr. Kim has called for his country to develop and launch "a variety of more working satellites" using "carrier rockets of bigger capacity."

The country has also renovated and expanded the gantry tower and other facilities at the launch site to accommodate more powerful rockets.

The United Nations Security Council has banned the country from satellite launchings, considering its satellite program a cover for

developing an intercontinental ballistic missile.

The test of the rocket engine took place at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground in Tongchang-ri, in northwestern North Korea, where the country fired a carrier rocket in February of last year to place its Kwangmyongsong, or Shining Star, satellite into orbit.

After that launch, South Korean defense officials said that the Unha rocket used in the launch, if successfully reconfigured as a missile, could fly more than 7,400 miles with a warhead of 1,100 to 1,300 pounds — far enough to reach most of the United States.

In September, North Korea conducted the ground test of what it called a new long-range rocket engine in Tongchang-ri, days after it conducted its fifth underground nuclear test.

Although the North has never test-flown an ICBM, it has recently demonstrated significant progress in its missile programs. Last month, it launched a new type of intermediate-range ballistic missile

that it said could carry a nuclear payload.

That missile, the Pukguksong-2, uses a solid-fuel technology that American experts say will make it easier for the country to hide its arsenal in its numerous tunnels and deploy its missiles.

Since Mr. Kim took power in 2011, North Korea has launched 46 ballistic missiles, including 24 last year, violating resolutions by the United Nations Security Council that ban the country from developing or testing such weapons, according to South Korean officials. In his New Year's Day speech, Mr. Kim said his country was in the "final stage" of preparing for its first ICBM test.

In Seoul, the South Korean capital, on Friday, Rex W. Tillerson, the United States' secretary of state, said that two decades of international efforts to end the North's nuclear weapons and missile programs had failed. He warned that all options should be on the table to stop them, including possible pre-emptive military action.



Chang : How Not to Negotiate With North Korea

Gordon G. Chang
There's one way,

and only one way, to disarm Pyongyang. Washington needs to

show Beijing it's serious about protecting the American homeland.

"The most important principle we have identified," said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on

Saturday referring to North Korea, "is that no matter what happens, we have to stay committed to diplomatic means as a way to seek a peaceful settlement."

Do we? Washington over the course of decades has been seeking peaceful settlements with Pyongyang, talking, negotiating, and conversing directly and indirectly in every conceivable format, formal and informal, bilateral and multilateral. Discussions have been held at the United Nations, in the capitals of the participants, and in neutral venues around the world.

Yet every agreement with the Kims has fallen apart for one reason or another, sometime from misunderstanding but more often due to the regime's duplicity. Nothing has worked, at least for America.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who met with Minister Wang, is losing patience, even though he has been on the job for only six weeks. As he refreshingly said on Thursday during his visit to Tokyo, "The diplomatic and other efforts of the past 20 years to bring North Korea to a point of denuclearization have failed."

Make that 30 years, and the statement is even more correct. Washington has been negotiating with the Kim family, in one way or another, since the 1980s.

There have been moments when success appeared close at hand. Three of them—one each from the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations—are notable. First, the Clinton administration signed the Agreed Framework, a grand-bargain-type deal, in Geneva in October 1994.

Pursuant to this arrangement—Clinton officials did not call it a treaty to avoid the necessity of Senate ratification—North Korea froze its nuclear reactor in Yongbyon and "related facilities" in return for proliferation-proof light-water reactors. Pyongyang agreed to remain a part of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the global pact, and accept international monitoring. Moreover, both sides agreed to reduce barriers to trade and investment, open liaison offices in each other's capital, "move toward full normalization of political and economic relations," and commit to reaching a deal on the "peaceful uses of nuclear energy."

Second, there was an arrangement dubbed "Framework Two," a statement of principles that, in broad outline, resembled the 1994 agreement in that both contemplated the supply of light-water reactors to the North for electricity-generation purposes. This September 2005 bargain, a product of the now-dormant Six-Party Talks, also contained Pyongyang's commitment to disarm and promises of across-the-board cooperation.

Third, the Obama administration negotiated the Leap Day Deal, another unsigned arrangement, in February 2012. In a pair of brief statements, which were not identical, Washington and Pyongyang made various promises, the most important of which was a moratorium on North Korean missile launches and nuclear tests.

None of these deals lasted long. The 1994 Agreed Framework eventually collapsed for various reasons, mostly because the North Koreans, while agreeing to freeze their plutonium facilities at the Yongbyon site, were secretly enriching uranium to weapons-grade at other locations.

Framework Two fell apart quickly because there was no real agreement, something highlighted by the differing interpretations issued by all six parties to the arrangement. Moreover, North Korea was never really committed to the deal. The day after the announcement of Framework Two, Pyongyang publicly demanded reactors before turning over its weapons, a schedule not within the contemplation of the five other parties. On the day after that, the North's Korean Central News Agency threatened nuclear war with America.

And the Leap Day Deal? Sixteen days after the exchange of statements constituting the arrangement, which included the moratorium on missile launches, Pyongyang announced plans to send a satellite into orbit, scuttling the entire agreement.

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These three agreements, spanning three decades and three American administrations, all failed. If there is a common denominator, it is that

none of the three Kims involved—Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and current ruler Kim Jong Un—could deal in good faith.

Today the regime appears to be even more insecure than usual. Since late January, the minister of state security was demoted; five of his senior subordinates were executed by anti-aircraft fire; the elder half-brother of Kim Jong Un was assassinated with VX, a chemical nerve agent; and the general in charge of the country's missile forces was absent from the Feb. 12 launch of the intermediate-range missile, indicating turmoil at the top of the North Korean military.

The Chinese foreign minister may think negotiation with Pyongyang is a good idea, but it's not clear there is anybody for America to negotiate with. As Tillerson said on Friday, "We do not believe the conditions are right to engage in any talks at this time."

Over the last three decades, there may have been only one moment when a deal with North Korea was remotely possible. That was in the second term of the Bush administration, when the Treasury Department in 2005 froze \$25 million belonging to the North and cut off its links to the global financial system by designating a front bank in Macau a "primary money laundering concern" under the Patriot Act.

Then, a shaken Kim Jong Il—he needed the locked-up cash for his "gift politics," the buying of regime elements with luxury goods—looked like it might be willing to come to some accommodation on its weapons programs in order to reconnect lifelines to the global banking system. Unfortunately, the Bush White House, at China's incessant urging, unfroze North Korea's funds in 2007.

Pyongyang, predictably, pocketed the concession and promptly walked away from the Six-Party Talks. As *The Wall Street Journal* stated in an editorial Friday, "Bush-era diplomats Condoleezza Rice and Christopher Hill have a lot to answer for after they persuaded President Bush to give up a pressure campaign against the North that was showing signs of success."

And that is one lesson Washington should remember: Never let up pressure on North Korea until it completely and irrevocably disarms. Today, many say the U.S. is

"sanctioned out," in other words, that there is no more pressure that it can apply to an already isolated Kim regime. That's not true for two reasons.

First, the current sanctions regime on North Korea is not as strict as the U.S. has maintained on other bad actors.

Second, Washington can pressure China to pressure North Korea. What leverage does the Trump administration possess on the so-called owner of the 21st century? Washington can sanction Chinese banks, especially Bank of China, that have participated in the North's illicit commerce.

And now is the best time to threaten this. The Chinese economy is fragile, not growing at the claimed 6.7 percent pace and facing a debt crisis, and it may only take the threat against Chinese banks to move Beijing to cooperate.

Trump's Treasury Department would rock global markets if it unplugged Chinese financial institutions from their dollar accounts in New York, but it would show Beijing for the first time since 1994 that Washington was serious about protecting the American homeland. It is hard to convince Chinese leaders to act when U.S. presidents have not made North Korea their first priority. Moreover, that bold move would have the added benefit of crippling Pyongyang's sanctions-busting network of front companies and agents.

China, which accounts for more than 90 percent of the North's foreign trade, still has the ability to push Pyongyang in better directions. Beijing might not be able to change Kim Jong Un's mind, but it can, by starving regime elements of cash, convince them that their support of the Kimster's weapons programs is not in their long-term interests.

Imposing severe costs on China to get it to influence North Korea is the only tactic Washington has not tried over the course of decades. It may not succeed in jumpstarting negotiations, but all the other policy approaches are virtually guaranteed to fail.

"The threat of North Korea is imminent," Tillerson told the *Independent Journal Review* last week as he traveled to Beijing from Seoul. He's right, and it's about time Washington acts like it in fact is.



Editorial : Modi's Inclusive Vision for India Is at Risk

The Editors

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent victory in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous and politically

important state, seemed a welcome affirmation of his pro-development message. It's now at risk of

becoming a triumph for narrow-mindedness.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party didn't name a candidate for chief minister during the Uttar Pradesh campaign, instead making the vote a referendum on the popularity of Modi and his program. The party has now assigned the post to Yogi Adityanath, a five-term legislator from the state's Gorakhpur district. Some profiles describe Adityanath as a "firebrand Hindu cleric"; other commentators are less charitable. Among other things, he's been accused of overseeing a Hindu vigilante group, and he faces a slew of criminal charges relating to intimidation of Muslims, including rioting and attempted murder.

Modi's decision might be explained on purely practical grounds. Adityanath was reportedly the overwhelming favorite among BJP

legislators. His majoritarian message cuts across caste lines in Uttar Pradesh, uniting a big swath of the Hindu population; the hope is that he can help Modi's re-election chances in 2019. Supporters have said Adityanath should be given a chance to govern. In his first press conference, he pledged to focus on improving the lot of all the state's 200 million citizens.

For Modi, however, this represents an ill-advised gamble. Uttar Pradesh can hardly afford more years of slipshod governance. The state is among India's most benighted, ranking near the bottom in virtually all development indicators. Nearly 30 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Almost half of the state's children are stunted. Its youth unemployment rate is

near 15 percent. The state ranks next-to-last in investment potential. Meanwhile, nothing in Adityanath's nearly 20-year record as a legislator suggests he has any solutions to offer: Gorakhpur remains one of India's most backward districts.

If Adityanath governs as he campaigned -- as a demagogue -- Modi's own reform agenda may suffer. Much of that national program depends on the states, where BJP-led governments have more freedom than Modi does in New Delhi to implement controversial land and labor reforms. Weak leadership in Uttar Pradesh would undercut those efforts. And as Modi learned early on, communal controversies can easily muddy and distract attention from his pro-growth message. In the last three years,

various far-fetched claims and misguided campaigns by Hindu right-wingers have created consternation abroad. An investment-hungry India should be projecting a different image.

In assembling his landslide victory in 2014, Modi's most effective move was to appeal to the aspirations -- for education, development and jobs -- that unite all Indians. Adityanath's appointment risks betraying that inclusive and optimistic vision.

To contact the senior editor responsible for Bloomberg View's editorials: David Shipley at davidshipley@bloomberg.net.

**The
Washington
Post**

U.S.-Mexico security cooperation is at a historic high. Will that change under Trump?

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

MEXICO CITY — Every airplane passenger who arrives in Mexico is vetted against U.S. criminal and national security databases, a daily dose of intelligence sharing aimed at finding fugitives and suspected terrorists.

In the Mexico City airport, plainclothes U.S. border officers work alongside their Mexican counterparts to investigate suspicious travelers bound for the United States. In Brownsville, Tex., U.S. customs agents remotely watch X-ray scans of train cargo from the Mexican side of the border.

For much of their history, the United States and Mexico had a wary relationship and security cooperation was limited. It wasn't until 1996 that Mexico began extraditing its citizens accused of crimes to the United States. But over the past two decades, as their economies have become more interdependent, the countries have developed an extraordinary level of collaboration in addressing terrorist threats and capturing dangerous criminals.

Today, that partnership is at risk. The Trump administration has threatened to ramp up deportations of illegal immigrants, scrap the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and make Mexico pay for a border wall. The Mexican economy minister, Ildefonso Guajardo, told a Canadian newspaper last month that if relations deteriorate, "the incentives for the Mexican people to keep on cooperating" on security issues "will be diminished."

"Many different agencies and many different players are now in a holding position," said a senior Mexican official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to be candid. "That is not good."

[Trump's taunts are stirring a level of nationalism Mexico hasn't seen in years]

While existing programs have not stopped, the Mexican government is reviewing how security cooperation could change in the event that President Trump pushes forward with policies that harm this country, according to Mexican officials.

"Now is a moment to question our drug and migration policy" with the United States, said Gabriela Cuevas, an opposition senator who is president of the Foreign Relations Commission. "We know that the United States is important. But it seems the U.S. government doesn't understand that Mexico is important. I think Mexico should have a Plan B."

While Mexico relies heavily on the United States for things such as trade and investment, its contributions to its northern neighbor also are significant, especially in security. For example, under pressure from the White House, Mexico has cracked down in recent years on Central American migrants bound for the United States, deporting hundreds of thousands of them.

Cuevas said that Mexico could choose to scale back that cooperation. It could also force U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration officials "to leave our country immediately" if relations deteriorate, she said. That could hurt the fight to prevent heroin from flowing into the

United States, in the midst of an addiction epidemic.

"The cooperation continues to be good, but we could lose many things," Cuevas said.

Some law enforcement exchanges have already been postponed. The heads of Mexico's army, Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos, and its navy, Adm. Vidal Francisco Soberón, called off a planned trip to meet Defense Secretary Jim Mattis shortly after President Enrique Peña Nieto canceled a visit to Washington in January in a dispute over the proposed border wall.

Mexicans do not want to appear to be "going out of their way to embrace the Americans at a time when people in Mexico are feeling under attack," said Eric Olson, a Mexico expert at the Wilson Center in Washington. The Mexican military leaders later met with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in Mexico City.

A mixed relationship

For most of the past two centuries, Mexico and the United States have had a complex, mutually suspicious relationship. The border line was established in 1848 after a war in which Mexico lost half its territory to the United States. After World War II, Mexico refused to sign a military assistance agreement with the United States even as other Latin American countries did.

But over the past two decades, as trade between Mexico and the United States boomed, law enforcement cooperation also intensified.

On the American side, the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks drove interest in securing the border. Under Mexico's

previous president, Felipe Calderón, a stepped-up offensive against drug cartels led to a closer working relationship with DEA officers and intelligence agencies.

[U.S. role at a crossroads in Mexico's intelligence war on the cartels]

Every day, U.S. and Mexican officials are in contact about security issues such as money laundering, child pornography, human trafficking and drug running. Mexican customs agents are stationed inside the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) national targeting center for cargo in Herndon, Va., while U.S. immigration and customs officers train their Mexican counterparts on gathering biometrics, managing checkpoints and questioning U.S.-bound migrants in Tapachula, on Mexico's southern frontier.

"It became a really quite warm and cooperative relationship," Gil Kerlikowske, who stepped down as commissioner of CBP earlier this year, said in an interview.

Every year, a couple hundred criminals and fugitives fleeing the United States are captured in Mexico and turned over to U.S. authorities. Last year, Mexico extradited 79 people to the United States, compared with 12 in 2000. Just before President Barack Obama left office, the U.S. government got the top criminal prize from Mexico, when the country sent drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán to face an American court.

In recent years, Mexican authorities have given U.S. authorities access to suspicious travelers from Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Libya and elsewhere.

Mexico also has detained and sent home hundreds of thousands of Central American migrants. If that cooperation were not in place, "it would have a dramatic impact on the flow of migrants to the southwest border" of the United States, said Alan Bersin, who served as a top Department of Homeland Security official in the Obama administration.

"Were the United States to continue along the lines of the president's grossly insulting tone and substance," Bersin said, referring to Trump, "or if there were an attempt to redraw fundamentally the

economic framework that has grown trade from \$80 billion annually to nearly \$700 billion, there's no reason the United States should expect Mexico to continue the cooperation we've received on security."

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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Much in the relationship depends on whether the Trump administration

pursues trade policies that harm Mexico, which sends most of its exports to the United States. Trump has argued that NAFTA was not a good deal for American workers and should be renegotiated.

Some former U.S. officials worry that, if bilateral ties worsen, Mexico might cut back on extraditing drug suspects and stop helping on issues such as fighting poppy cultivation. More than 90 percent of U.S. heroin comes from Mexico. The Obama White House was in "pretty advanced conversations" with Mexico on plans to increase

cooperation on eradicating poppy plants and helping farmers to cultivate alternative crops, said Mark Feierstein, the former senior director for Latin America on the National Security Council.

"That's a concern now," he said. "We do need Mexico's cooperation on it. Mexico has the option of saying, 'Not our problem. You're the consuming country.'"

Gabriela Martinez contributed to this report.

Bloomberg

Editorial : Trump's Reckless Threat to World Trade

The Editors

Presumably at the insistence of the U.S. administration, the latest statement from the Group of 20 big economies conspicuously dropped the standard promise to "avoid all forms of protectionism." It's worth pausing to understand why that promise was ever worth making, and honoring.

The reason is surely not that governments always keep their word. For years they've been backsliding on their ritual commitment to keep markets open - and partly for that reason, the prospects for world trade were already looking poor. But those prospects will be so much worse if governments, led by the U.S., now come to regard protection as a policy to be openly embraced.

In the recovery from the recent global recession, the volume of world trade has grown more slowly

than it should. During the past four years, especially, the slowdown has been pronounced. Disentangling the causes isn't easy. Weak investment demand due to the unusual severity of the slump is one factor. But trade policy is another. Since 2012, protectionism has been quietly ratcheting up.

As always, traditional measures such as state aid, export incentives and public procurement are being used to protect domestic producers. In addition, governments everywhere have been using new local-content requirements to discriminate against foreign competitors. According to one analysis, the U.S. has led this post-2008 trend, even with an avowedly pro-trade administration in charge.

QuickTake Free Trade and Its Foes

It's a cliché of trade policy that you need to keep moving to stand still, and the experience of the past few

years proves the point. Without big new agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership -- strongly championed by former President Barack Obama, but rejected by Congress -- international competition gets nibbled away. Instead of this mildly debilitating process of attrition, President Donald Trump now contemplates a frontal assault on liberal trade.

Although the basic case for free trade has gone out of academic fashion lately, it remains as strong and simple as ever. Competition is the wellspring of prosperity -- and liberal trade promotes competition. Forcing producers to innovate, specialize and compete makes economies more efficient. Inhibit that process, and in the end, in the aggregate, people are worse off.

"In the aggregate" does matter: Trade involves winners and losers -- as do, by the way, technological

progress and purely domestic competition. In all cases, the wisest remedy is to support the workers who suffer the costs of this dislocation, especially with help for retraining and relocation. The faster an economy grows, the more easily resources for such programs can be found. The alternative is a vicious circle of diminished competition, subpar growth and stagnant living standards.

Changes in rhetoric are one thing, changes in policy quite another -- but if deeds follow words, the world is in trouble. If Trump leads governments toward a new era of outright protectionism, he will do untold damage both to the U.S. and to the wider global economy.

To contact the senior editor responsible for Bloomberg View's editorials: David Shipley at davidshipley@bloomberg.net.

The Washington Post

Gerson : The American presidency is shrinking before the world's eyes

of this moment — or the (both disturbed and eager) global scrutiny now being given to the American president.

Aggression is growing along the westward reach of Russian influence and the southern boundary of Chinese influence. Intercontinental nuclear capacity may soon be in the hands of a mental pubescent in North Korea. In the Middle East, a hostile alliance of Russia and Shiite powers is ascendant; radical Sunnis have a territorial foothold and inspire strikes in Western cities; America's traditional Sunni friends and allies feel devalued or abandoned; perhaps 500,000 Syrians are dead and millions of refugees suffer in conditions that incubate anger. Cyberterrorism and cyberespionage are exploiting and weaponizing our

own technological dependence. Add to this a massive famine in East Africa, threatening the lives of 20 million people, and the picture of chaos is complete — until the next crisis breaks.

It is in this context that the diplomatic bloopers reel of the past few days has been played — the casual association of British intelligence with alleged surveillance at Trump Tower; the presidential tweets undermining Secretary of State Rex Tillerson during his Asia trip; and the rude and childish treatment given the German chancellor. When President Trump and Angela Merkel sat together in the Oval Office, we were seeing the leader of the free world — and that guy pouting in public.

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Every new administration has a shakeout period. But this assumes an ability to learn from mistakes. And this would require admitting mistakes. The spectacle of an American president blaming a Fox News commentator for a major diplomatic incident was another milestone in the miniaturization of the presidency.

An interested foreigner (friend or foe) must be a student of Trump's temperament, which is just as bad as advertised. He is inexperienced, uninformed, easily provoked and supremely confident in his own judgment. His advantage is the choice of some serious, experienced advisers, including Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, national security adviser H.R. McMaster and deputy national security adviser Dina Powell. But success in their

jobs depends on Trump's listening skills.

Mere incompetence would be bad enough. But foreigners trying to understand the United States must now study (of all things) the intellectual influences of White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon. His vision of a Western alliance of ethno-nationalist, right-wing populists against globalists, multiculturalists, Islamists and (fill in the blank with your preferred minority) is the administration's most vivid and rhetorically ascendant foreign policy viewpoint. How does this affect the alliances of the previous dispensation? That is the background against which Trump's peevishness is being viewed.

Foreigners see a president who has blamed his predecessor, in banana-republic style, of a serious crime, for which FBI Director James B. Comey testified Monday there is no

evidence. They see an administration whose campaign activities are being actively investigated by the executive branch and Congress. If close Trump associates are directly connected to Russian hacking, foreigners will see the president engulfed in an impeachment crisis — the only constitutional mechanism that would remove the taint of larceny from the 2016 election.

And foreigners are seeing politics, not national security, in the driver's seat of the administration. Tillerson

was given the job of secretary of state, then denied his choice of deputy for political reasons, then ordered to make a 28 percent cut in the budget for diplomacy and development. Never mind that Tillerson has been left a diminished figure. Never mind that stability operations in Somalia and northern Nigeria — the recruiting grounds of Islamist terrorism — would likely be eliminated under the Trump budget. Never mind that programs to prevent famines would be slashed.

When asked if he was worried about cutting these programs during a famine, Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney responded: "The president said specifically hundreds of times . . . I'm going to spend less money on people overseas and more money on people back home. And that's exactly what we're doing with this budget." The benighted cruelty of such a statement — assuming that the only way to help Americans is to let foreign children die — is remarkable, and typical.

The sum total? Foreigners see a Darwinian, nationalist framework for American foreign policy; a diminished commitment to global engagement; a brewing scandal that could distract and cripple the administration; and a president who often conducts his affairs with peevish ignorance.

Some will look at this spectacle and live in fear; others may see a golden opportunity.

ETATS-UNIS



Ronald A. Cass: Democrats' Gorsuch attacks undermine the law

Smart people often say stupid things. #MistakesHappen. But it takes a certain special orientation to repeat obviously false and ridiculous statements over and over. That's a talent peculiar to politicians.

This talent is frequently on display during Supreme Court confirmation fights. Since the 1970s, every nominee from a Republican president has been attacked, among other things, as hostile to women's rights and civil rights.

That includes Harry Blackmun, John Paul Stevens, Sandra Day O'Connor, Anthony Kennedy and David Souter — justices who often have been as zealous as any in finding, creating and expanding rights for women and minorities. Constantly being wrong, however, doesn't prevent the same trope being trotted out as soon as the next nominee is announced.

Opening statements from Democratic senators during the Supreme Court confirmation hearing for Judge Neil Gorsuch didn't disappoint in absurdly trying to paint the nominee as a tool of corporate America and an enemy of "the little guy."

Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, wasted no time in lashing out before Gorsuch had a chance to utter a single word: "A pattern jumps out at me. . . . You consistently choose corporations and powerful

interests over people."

Likewise, Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., weighed in with more of the same: "I fear confirming you would guarantee more . . . decisions that continue to favor powerful corporate interests over the rights of average Americans."

A newer attack line for liberal critics is that a judicial nominee favors big interests, employers, people with money — anyone in conflict with the little guy. Sen. Ted Kennedy, scion of wealth and privilege, used that line against nominee Sam Alito, a man whose background, family and experience gave him ample affinity with ordinary life and people.

Kennedy's successor, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, has reached for the same trick in attacking Gorsuch. She claims he "has sided with employers who deny wages," "sided with employers who denied retirement benefits to their workers," and "sided with big insurance companies against disabled workers."

Despite the cartoon-version descriptions of a judge who "has sided" with the wrong people, the judge's job isn't to choose David vs. Goliath, to stand up for the little guy, to smack down the big guy.

The way little guys get protected isn't to have a judge who votes on his or her gut sympathies. Instead, it's to have a legal system that functions according to rules,

legitimately enacted by constitutionally appropriate bodies and procedures, enforced in principled, predictable ways by judges who read the law carefully and apply it as written, no matter what the judge feels about the people on either side of the case.

Despots want judges who make decisions based on who is helped or hurt. Making decisions on the basis of principles, fixed in law and knowable in advance, is the exact opposite — and the essence of the rule of law. As Justice Antonin Scalia often said, a judge who's always happy with who wins and loses is doing something wrong.

Beyond having the wrong goal for judging, there's a bit of flimflam in Warren's attack. Of course, among the thousands of cases Gorsuch has voted on, he inevitably has decided *for* employers, and *against* them; *for* corporations, and *against* them; *for* insurance companies, and *against* them. But he hasn't decided consistently or inappropriately for or against anyone, any group, or any class.

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

That's evident in the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary voting Gorsuch a unanimous well-qualified rating, its highest. Having served on that body, I can attest that its members take their task seriously

and look critically at every possible issue that could affect a judge's qualifications. Any hint of impropriety would be inconsistent with the top rating.

The "wrong side" argument also mistakenly assumes that a rule that helps one group necessarily hurts another, big guys or little guys. That is completely wrong. For instance, adherence to fixed, clear rules on contracts helps rich investors such as Warren Buffett — and also helps poor investors whose life savings go into the same sort of funds.

Constant, unsubstantiated and ill-considered assertions of judicial misbehavior have become part of the standard attack on nominees. But the claim that Gorsuch has sided with the wrong sort of litigant is so patently misguided, so obviously wrong and so at odds with the essence of the rule of law, that even aspiring political stars should consider taking it out of the arsenal.

Ronald A. Cass, dean emeritus of Boston University School of Law, is president of Cass & Associates and author of The Rule of Law in America. He is also a former chairman of the Federalist Society's Practice Group on International Law & National Security.

The New York Times Editorial : Neil Gorsuch Faces the Senate

Here's a good question for Judge Neil Gorsuch, who sat before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Monday for the first day of his

confirmation hearings to be a Supreme Court justice: Why are you here?

There's only one honest answer: "I shouldn't be."

Under other circumstances Judge Gorsuch would be a legitimate

nominee by a Republican president. The problem is how he got to this point in the first place.

Judge Gorsuch became President Trump's nominee only after Senate Republicans' outrageous and unprecedented blockade of Merrick Garland, whom President Barack Obama picked to fill the same seat more than a year ago and who by all rights should long ago have been sitting where Judge Gorsuch is now — introducing his family, smiling for the flashbulbs and listening patiently as senators lecture him about the Constitution. But Senate Republicans made sure that would never happen, refusing even to meet with Judge Garland — the chief of the federal appeals court in Washington and one of the most widely respected judges in the country — let alone give him a hearing or a vote.

**The
New York
Times**

Matt
Flegenheimer

He spoke generally of the hard and noble work of judges, perhaps signaling an indirect rebuttal to Mr. Trump's comments, which he called "disheartening" during private meetings with senators last month.

Judge Gorsuch did not mention Judge Garland on Monday. Democrats, still grappling with how aggressively to oppose this nomination, were eager to fill the void.

"I just want to say I'm deeply disappointed that it's under these circumstances that we begin our hearings," Senator Dianne Feinstein of California, the committee's top Democrat, said at the top of her remarks, citing the "unprecedented treatment" of Judge Garland after the death last year of Justice Antonin G. Scalia.

Senator Michael Bennet, Democrat of Colorado — who introduced Judge Gorsuch, his constituent, alongside the state's Republican senator, Cory Gardner — said that while it was "tempting" to deny Judge Gorsuch a hearing as well, "two wrongs never make a right."

Mr. Bennet said he had taken no position on Judge Gorsuch, despite his glowing introduction. Another introductory speaker, Neal K. Katyal, an acting solicitor general under Mr. Obama, endorsed the nominee explicitly, in what Gorsuch

On Monday, they mostly acted as though they did nothing wrong and couldn't understand why Democrats were so upset.

One exception was Senator Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina, who lamented the growing politicization of the confirmation process and warned that "what we're doing is going to destroy the judiciary over time." In that spirit, Mr. Graham admitted that he thought long and hard about whether the Republicans' blockade was justified. It was, he decided, because he was sure Democrats would have behaved the same way if the situation had been reversed.

Mr. Graham is right that both Democrats and Republicans bear

responsibility for the degradation of the process, but their responsibility is not equal. Senate Republicans' behavior last year set a new standard for bad faith. The question, as the constitutional law scholar Peter Shane wrote last week, is "whether there remains any institutional penalty for sabotaging constitutional norms."

The short answer is no. With the Senate remaining in Republican hands, Democrats have no power to block Judge Gorsuch's confirmation. If they attempt to filibuster — which would be an understandable reaction — it's highly likely the Republicans will eliminate that tool, as the Democrats did in 2013 for lower-

court nominations, and Judge Gorsuch will sail through.

Neil Gorsuch may be qualified for the Supreme Court, but there's little doubt that he would be among the most conservative justices in the court's modern history, with negative consequences for workers' rights, women's reproductive freedom, politics uncorrupted by vast sums of dark money, the separation of church and state, the health of the environment and the protection of the most vulnerable members of society. If Judge Gorsuch is confirmed, his views will be driving decisions into the middle of the 21st century.

Gorsuch Tries to Put Himself Above Politics in Confirmation Hearing

allies hope will be a powerful testament to his résumé.

By choosing Judge Gorsuch, Mr. Trump has forced Democrats to reckon with the kind of obstructionism they long lamented from Republicans. In their 10-minute opening statements, Democratic senators made no attempt to quibble with Judge Gorsuch's qualifications or temperament.

While several members have already said they will vote against him, the prospect of an institution-rattling fight has concerned some more moderate Democrats, particularly those who face reelection in states that Mr. Trump won.

If Judge Gorsuch cannot meet the 60-vote threshold needed to overcome a filibuster, Republicans could change longstanding rules and elevate him on a simple majority vote.

Even some criticisms seemed to hint at the likelihood of Judge Gorsuch being seated, one way or another.

"You're going to have your hands full with this president," Senator Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois, said at one point during a discussion of executive branch overreach, seeming at least briefly to assume Judge Gorsuch's confirmation. "He's going to keep you busy."

Leading up to the hearings, Democrats had gotten little traction for their arguments against Judge Gorsuch. Even on Monday, the proceedings were overshadowed at times by a hearing across the Capitol, where the F.B.I. director, James B. Comey, confirmed an investigation into contacts between Russia and members of the president's orbit.

But skeptics of Judge Gorsuch hope to amplify several concerns, turning particular attention to his case history on corporate issues and the rights of employees. Repeatedly, the example of a stranded truck driver was invoked: Judge Gorsuch had written a dissent arguing that a trucking company was permitted to fire a driver for abandoning his cargo for his own safety in subzero temperatures.

The weather was frigid, Mr. Durbin said, but "not as cold as your dissent, Judge Gorsuch."

Ms. Feinstein said it remained to be seen whether Judge Gorsuch could acquit himself as "a reasonable mainstream conservative." Other Democrats argued that Judge Gorsuch was handpicked by conservative groups like the Federalist Society rather than principally by Mr. Trump.

Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, said Judge Gorsuch was "selected by interest groups."

In their own opening remarks, Republicans often sought to accuse

their counterparts of hypocrisy, suggesting they were only now awakening to anxieties over executive authority.

"Some of my colleagues seem to have rediscovered an appreciation for the need to confine each branch of the government to its constitutional sphere," said Senator Charles E. Grassley, Republican of Iowa and the committee's chairman.

Republicans also rejected any claim that the seat belonged to Judge Garland.

Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, said that believing in a purported "great plan to get a Trump nominee on the court" required an expectation that "Trump was going to win to begin with."

"I didn't believe that," said Mr. Graham, who has often criticized Mr. Trump.

Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, extended the argument considerably. This nomination carried "super-legitimacy," he said, because "the American people played a very direct role" in the outcome by electing Mr. Trump amid a fight over an open seat.

Before the election, Mr. Cruz suggested that if Hillary Clinton won, Republicans might seek to preserve the court vacancy indefinitely.

**THE WALL
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COMMENTS

Editorial : Neil Gorsuch, How Would You Vote?

March 20, 2017
7:22 p.m. ET 263

Democrats have come up empty trying to find something scandalous that Neil Gorsuch has said, so now

they're blaming him for what he won't say. To wit, they want him to declare how he would rule in specific areas of the law—questions that every Supreme Court nominee declines to answer.

Vermont Senator Pat Leahy said last week he would "insist on real answers from Judge Gorsuch." At Monday's opening day of Senate hearings, Connecticut Democrat Richard Blumenthal told Judge Gorsuch that while the committee

might ordinarily respect a nominee's reticence on cases, ordinary rules don't apply for President Trump's nominee. "If you fail to be explicit and forthcoming," he said, the committee would have to assume

his views were in line with Mr. Trump's.

That's wildly inappropriate since Judge Gorsuch can't know the facts or the law of future cases that would come before the Court. If he were to speak out extensively on any case at the confirmation hearing, his comments could require his recusal.

Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor didn't have to meet this open-kimono standard. Neither did Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who said at the time of her confirmation hearings in 1993 that "[a] judge sworn to decide impartially can offer no forecasts, no hints; for that would show not only disregard for the specifics of the particular case, it would display disdain for the entire judicial process."

**The
Washington
Post**

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/E-d-OKeefe/147995121918931>

Judge Neil Gorsuch promised to remember the "modest station we judges are meant to occupy in a democracy" if he is elevated to the nation's highest court, as the hearing on his Supreme Court nomination began Monday amidst Democratic doubts about his impartiality and lingering resentment over the circumstances of his selection.

The day followed a familiar confirmation hearing script — glowing assessments from senators of the party whose president made the nomination, vows of scrutiny from senators out of power and a humble, deferential opening statement from the nominee.

But there was a sharp-edged difference as well. Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee made clear they are not over the decision of their Republican colleagues to keep open the seat held by the late Justice Antonin Scalia for President Trump to fill it.

And rarely has there been such a demand that a Supreme Court nominee declare his independence from the president who nominated him.

"You're going to have your hands full with this president. He's going to keep you busy," Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) told Gorsuch.

Republicans intend to move quickly on confirming the 49-year-old Gorsuch, who sits on the Denver-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) said the plan is

Mr. Leahy told nominee Ginsburg at the time that he "certainly" did not want her "to have to lay out a test here in the abstract which might determine what your vote or your test would be in a case you have yet to see that may well come before the Supreme Court." At the 1967 hearings for Thurgood Marshall, then Senator Edward Kennedy called it a "sound legal precedent" that "any nominee to the Supreme Court would have to defer any comments on any matters which are either before the court or very likely to appear before the court."

If Democrats want genuine insight into how Judge Gorsuch would rule, they can always look at his extensive record on the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. Of the 789

for the full Senate to vote on Gorsuch by Easter, so he could be on the court for its final round of oral arguments in late April.

Democrats are outnumbered 52 to 48 in the Senate, and it is unclear how hard they want to fight. They could allow Gorsuch's nomination to proceed on a simple-majority vote, or they could force a procedural vote requiring a 60-vote majority for the confirmation to prevail.

In their round of opening statements, Democrats questioned the process by which Gorsuch received the nomination and presented him with a laundry list of questions they planned to pursue.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (Calif.), the ranking Democrat on the committee, started the day complaining that Republicans blocked consideration of Judge Merrick Garland, President Barack Obama's nominee to replace Scalia after the justice's death 13 months ago.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) decided to block a hearing for Garland, saying that the next president should name the late justice's successor.

"I'm deeply disappointed that it's under these circumstances that we begin our hearings," Feinstein told the committee, saying that Gorsuch was nominated only because of the "unprecedented treatment" of Garland.

In recent days, many Democrats on the judiciary panel said they will wait until the end of the hearings before determining how to proceed, but most signaled on Monday how they plan to proceed on several fronts.

opinions he wrote, only 15 had dissents from other judges. Progressive groups claim Judge Gorsuch will rule against women but that doesn't hold with his record on gender discrimination. According to Harvard Law and Policy Review, employees win fewer than 11% of gender discrimination cases. Judge Gorsuch was more likely to rule in favor of the employees—in some 25% of cases.

The Democrats' Trump disavowal standard is especially disingenuous. They want him to declare his independence from the executive, but in doing so he would be making himself more dependent on Congress for the sake of confirmation. As a judge under Article III of the Constitution, he owes Congress and the White

(Peter Stevenson, Gillian Brockell/The Washington Post)

President Trump has tapped Neil Gorsuch to fill the late Antonin Scalia's seat on the Supreme Court. The Post's Robert Barnes tells you what you need to know. President Trump has tapped Neil Gorsuch to fill the late Antonin Scalia's seat on the Supreme Court. The Post's Robert Barnes tells you what you need to know. (Video: Peter Stevenson, Gillian Brockell/Photo: Jabin Botsford, The Post/The Washington Post)

Feinstein said she will ask Gorsuch to clarify his beliefs on abortion rights and gun rights — two issues on which he's never ruled, but issues that he has mentioned in passing in other legal opinions, she said.

She said she takes issue with Gorsuch's strict interpretations of the Constitution because, "If we were to dogmatically adhere to originalist interpretations, then we would still have segregated schools and bans on interracial marriage. Women wouldn't be entitled to equal protection under the law, and government discrimination against LGBT Americans would be permitted."

Durbin and Sen. Christopher A. Coons (D-Del.) said they would push Gorsuch to clarify his views on religious freedoms.

"Religious freedom must not be the freedom to push our beliefs into the public square," Coons said.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) said she would explore his views on campaign finance laws — another area in which his judicial record is thin.

House only such deference as the Constitution dictates, no more or less.

What's really going on here is that Democrats are grasping for a reason, any reason, to justify a vote against Judge Gorsuch. Their liberal supporters are demanding opposition—you know, "the resistance"—and if they can't find something on the record they'll invent something that isn't on the record.

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And Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said he planned to draw out the nominee on Trump's "vicious" attacks on federal judges. He noted that the committee was meeting to consider his nomination "in the midst of a looming constitutional crisis" as FBI Director James B. Comey was testifying to a House panel that his agency is investigating ties between the Trump campaign and Russian officials.

"The possibility of the Supreme Court needing to enforce a subpoena against the president is no longer idle speculation," Blumenthal said, adding later: "The independence of the judiciary is more important than ever, and your defense of it is critical."

Democrats are also expected to press Gorsuch to explain his tenure at the Justice Department during George W. Bush's presidency, during which he worked on cases related to the detention of terrorism suspects. Durbin noted that Gorsuch helped draft language designed to bolster Bush's claims of executive authority on matters of torture and the treatment of detainees.

"We need to know what you'll do when you're called upon to stand up to this president, or any president, if he claims the power to ignore laws that protect fundamental human rights," Durbin told him.

Durbin also quoted from a February statement by White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, who called Gorsuch "the type of judge that has the vision of Donald Trump."

"I want to hear from you why Mr. Priebus would say that," Durbin told the judge.

Democrats say they will also ask Gorsuch to explain comments he made while teaching a class on ethics and professionalism at the University of Colorado School of Law last April. In a letter sent to committee Democrats, one of his former students, Jennifer Sisk, claimed that during a conversation about work-life balance in the legal profession, Gorsuch asked students if they knew of women who had "used a company to get maternity benefits and then left right after having a baby."

"Judge Gorsuch focused on women having babies, not men expanding their families," Sisk wrote.

White House officials assisting Gorsuch with his nomination denied the accusation and noted that he earned the highest possible score from students on evaluation questions of "instructor respect and professional treatment."

In a letter provided by committee Republicans, another student, Will Hauptman, rebutted Sisk's claims, saying that while Gorsuch "did discuss some of the topics mentioned in the letter, he did not do so in the manner described. The judge frequently asked us to consider the various challenges we would face as new attorneys."

Gorsuch steered clear of controversy in his 13-minute introductory address. He tried to reassure

senators he was a mainstream jurist who was in the majority in 99 percent of the 10 years of cases he decided on the appeals court.

Gorsuch said he has ruled for disabled students, prisoners, undocumented immigrants, the rich and poor, "and against such persons, too."

"But my decisions have never reflected a judgment about the people before me — only my best judgment about the law and facts at issue in each particular case," he said.

The outdoorsy Gorsuch looked tanned and interested in hours of speeches from the senators, taking notes and nodding his head. When Durbin — after complaining about Garland's treatment — said Gorsuch should nonetheless be judged on his own merits, Gorsuch silently mouthed, "Thank you."

There was a touching if awkwardly staged embrace with his wife, Louise, after he professed his love, and he choked up when he remembered his "Uncle Jack," who recently died. Gorsuch's mother was Ann Gorsuch Burford, who had a stormy tenure in Washington as President Ronald Reagan's first head of the Environmental Protection Agency.

"She taught me that headlines are fleeting — courage lasts," Gorsuch said.



The Christian Science Monitor

In Gorsuch hearings, questions of religious liberty and the law

March 21, 2017 Washington—Of all the people to speak on the first day of what promises to be a grueling week of hearings, Judge Neil Gorsuch — the man whose confirmation to the US Supreme Court is being deliberated — was notably concise.

After thanking his family, his law clerks, and his mentors, he grew emotional talking about his late Uncle Jack, an Episcopal priest, and his childhood in Colorado.

"In my childhood it was God and Byron White," he said, referencing the former Supreme Court justice whom he clerked for. "A product of the West, [Justice White] modeled for me judicial courage."

Indeed, "God and Byron White" could be a succinct description for the lines of inquiry Republicans and Democrats can be expected to take when the Senate Judiciary Committee begins questioning Judge Gorsuch Tuesday. As the minority, Democrats can't boycott him the way Senate Republicans

did with Judge Merrick Garland, nominated by former President Obama. Instead they have tasked themselves with probing for weak spots in a nominee who for many legal observers has a close-to-spotless paper trail.

One line of inquiry that Democrats seem intent on pursuing concerns Gorsuch's reputation as a staunch defender of religious liberty.

His broad interpretations of the rights and protections of religious believers — sometimes at the expense of large numbers of other citizens — have been a cornerstone of his jurisprudence during a decade serving on the US Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit.

"That he comes down on side of religious liberty, even when it significantly infringes on the autonomy and liberty interests of large numbers of people, I think that's an interesting area worthy of further explanation," says Sen. Chris Coons (D) of Delaware, a member of the Judiciary Committee, in an exclusive interview with the Monitor.

Gorsuch was promoted by conservative legal activists because of his sterling credentials, a decade of right-of-center rulings and his allegiance to the same brand of constitutional interpretation that Scalia followed. In a sign of the bipartisan support he enjoys, Gorsuch was introduced by the senators from his home state of Colorado, Cory Gardner (R) and Michael F. Bennet (D) — who has not yet signaled whether he plans to vote for the judge — and Neal Katyal, who served as acting U.S. solicitor general for Obama.

Republicans cheered Gorsuch on Monday, acknowledging the strong Democratic attacks to come, but noting that the nomination came with broad public support.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) said that Gorsuch's nomination comes with "super-legitimacy" because he was on a list of potential court nominees that Trump touted during his presidential campaign.

"The American people played a very direct role in helping choose this nominee," Cruz added.

Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) dismissed Democratic claims of a grand Republican plan to nominate someone with similar views to Trump.

"If you believe this has been a great plan to get a Trump nominee on the court, then you had to

believe Trump was going to win to begin with," he said.

The frequent Trump critic added: "Obviously, I didn't believe that, saying all the things I said." Some in the room erupted in laughter.

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In another of the day's lighter moments, Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) acknowledged that Gorsuch is still widely unknown by most Americans by recalling how the nominee's name had been misspelled in recent remarks he was reading off a teleprompter.

It was replaced with "Judge Grouch," Flake said.

By the end of this week, "every spell-checker in the country will know your name — and Judge Grouch is about as far as you can get from Judge Gorsuch in terms of your temperament," Flake said.

He then quipped: "That may change by the end of the week as well."

For a country founded as a sanctuary for people fleeing religious persecution and marginalization around the world, "I think [those questions] should be subject to special consideration," he adds. "The balance of faith and freedom, the balance of free exercise rights and autonomy or self-determination rights, are pretty fundamental questions that go back to the foundation of our country."

'The problem of complicity'

Gorsuch has pushed the envelope on this question, not least in perhaps his most noteworthy case from the 10th Circuit: "Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc. v. Sebelius."

The case involved a family-owned company based in Oklahoma City that claimed that a mandate in the Affordable Care Act to provide contraception to its 28,000 employees made it complicit in an act that violated its religious beliefs. The 10th Circuit, with Gorsuch in the majority, sided with the company, and the Supreme Court narrowly upheld the decision 5 to 4.

Along two other judges in the majority, Gorsuch said that he would have gone even further, and that individual business owners under the mandate should be able to make similar claims.

"All of us face the problem of complicity. All of us must answer for ourselves whether and to what degree we are willing to be involved in the wrongdoing of others," he wrote in his opening. "Whether an act of complicity is or isn't 'too attenuated' from the underlying wrong is sometimes itself a matter of faith we must respect."

Conservatives who oppose such ideas as abortion rights, transgender bathroom access, and same-sex marriage often base their objections on religious grounds. And what concerns people like Senator Coons — who is a devout Presbyterian with both law and divinity degrees from Yale — is the interpretation that religious freedom rights outweigh the rights and protections of others.

"One of the things I'm interested in is essentially allowing the complicity concerns of a small family to trump

the liberty concerns of thousands and thousands of people," says Coons.

His judicial privileging of religious freedom has seen Gorsuch produce opinions that would likely appeal to liberals – including a majority opinion he wrote ruling that a Wyoming prison must allow a Native American inmate access to the prison's sweat lodge. But his jurisprudence on religious freedom has endeared Gorsuch to conservatives.

Many conservatives also share Gorsuch's view on public displays of religion, with the judge dissenting from majorities in the 10th Circuit on cases that struck down an Oklahoma county's Ten Commandments display (Gorsuch said the Commandments are not "just religious" and thus don't violate the Constitution), and that ruled the Utah Highway Patrol couldn't erect

12-foot crosses to memorialize fallen officers. (Gorsuch believed that a "reasonable observer" would not think the crosses promoted Christianity.)

In his opening statement at Monday's hearing, Sen. Jeff Flake (R) of Arizona said Gorsuch has "demonstrated support for religious freedom," and then quoted the judge's concurrence in the Hobby Lobby case that religious freedom law "doesn't just apply to protect popular religious beliefs: it does perhaps its most important work in protecting unpopular religious beliefs, vindicating this nation's long-held aspiration to serve as a refuge of religious tolerance."

'Faith has played a big part in our lives'

Besides the observation that he is clearly a man of faith, Gorsuch's own religious leanings aren't that

clear. He was raised Catholic and attended Catholic schools, but now attends a progressive Episcopal church in Boulder, Colo. Comments from family members and friends give the impression of a man who is quietly, but deeply, spiritual.

Coons acknowledges that, and adds that "it's my responsibility to keep an open mind."

"We're both people for whom faith has played a big part in our lives," he says. But "we may reach very different conclusions about what that means for the judicial role in privileging religious freedom over individual autonomy."

"I genuinely enjoyed my [earlier] meetings with Judge Gorsuch," he adds. "He's a very engaging person, but I haven't reached any conclusions yet."

In his statement on Monday, Coons pointed to "disturbing trends in

affronts to religious liberty," including President Trump's campaign promise of a "Muslim ban" and the Justice Department's withdrawal of guidance allowing transgender students to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity.

"I am considering your nomination with an open mind, and I would ask that you would be forthcoming in your responses," he said.

"I believe we must balance our respect for the significance of faith and free exercise with concerns about impacts on other's liberty," he added. "America needs a Supreme Court justice who will protect the Constitution, not one who will countenance faith or fear of some, as a justification for infringing the liberty of many."

POLITICO How the FBI tailing Trump could dog his presidency

By Todd S. Purdum

From Richard Nixon to Bill Clinton, history suggests that it is never a good thing for a president to have the FBI, with its nearly infinite resources and sweeping investigative powers, on his tail.

FBI Director James Comey's promise to the House intelligence committee Monday to "follow the facts wherever they lead" in the bureau's investigation into possible collusion between the Donald Trump's presidential campaign and Russia during last year's election amounted to an ominous guarantee, barely two months into Trump's term, that institutional forces beyond any president's control will force the facts of the case to light, whatever they are.

Story Continued Below

"Comey's admission of an ongoing counterintelligence investigation, with no endpoint in sight, is a big deal," said historian Timothy Naftali, who was the first director of the federally-run Nixon presidential library. "This is not going away."

Moreover, given Trump's demonstrated willingness to attack any adversary – hours before Comey's testimony, he tweeted that the suggestion of collaboration between his campaign and Russia was "fake news" – official acknowledgment of the investigation not only raises sharp new questions about the president's own credibility, but about his willingness to continue undermining

public trust and confidence in the government institutions he leads.

Typically, the mere existence of such an investigation would make any White House hypersensitive about the appearance of attempting to interfere with the FBI or the Justice Department. Bill Clinton's loathing for his FBI director, Louis Freeh, was an open secret in the 1990s (and the feeling was mutual), but it couldn't stop the bureau from doggedly pursuing investigations of Whitewater or the Monica Lewinsky affair. If anything, the reverse was true.

Will the Trump White House, which is installing loyalty monitors in every Cabinet department, feel similarly hamstrung about publicly attacking Comey, whom the president famously hugged at a Blue Room reception shortly after his inauguration, or trying to quash the inquiry? At a minimum, Trump and his aides would do well to recall the most celebrated instance of a president's attempt to block an FBI investigation.

"The obvious example that comes to mind is Watergate, when Richard Nixon famously turned to the CIA to block the FBI's investigation," said the historian Julian Zelizer, a professor at Princeton. That attempt failed spectacularly, of course, but Zelizer added, "This is the kind of investigation that is never good news for an administration," and noted that the current probe has already "consumed much of the president's time and the doors keep opening to bigger potential problems."

Trump has an ambitious agenda that involves the Justice Department, on matters from immigration, to civil rights to border security. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who was one of his earliest and most vocal supporters, had his choice of Cabinet positions. Sessions has announced he would recuse himself from the Russia investigation, but Comey went out of his way to say that the Justice Department had authorized him to take the unusual step of disclosing it.

The disclosure raises questions about how will Trump navigate his dealings with his attorney general and the department to avoid any suggestion of meddling in an ongoing investigation. At least since Watergate, there have been strict protocols covering contacts between the White House and Justice Department about pending investigations – protocols that Trump's chief of staff Reince Priebus may already have violated by speaking with Comey and Assistant FBI Director Andrew McCabe about the Russia inquiry.

It also raises the possibility that Trump will get bogged down in questions about the investigation, which could adversely affect his ability to achieve his policy goals. Even initiatives that have nothing to do with Russia or national security could suffer if a Republican Congress is less inclined to fight for his proposals, and there is also the matter of the time and focus responding to such an inquiry requires from the White House.

Louis Freeh, President Clinton's choice to head the FBI, speaks as the president looks on July 20, 1993, in the Rose Garden of the White House. The two came to dislike each other. | AP Photo

Bill Clinton devoted much of his second term to fending off the Lewinsky investigation and subsequent impeachment proceedings, fueled not only by the zealous special prosecutor Kenneth Starr, but by a hostile FBI. When the Lewinsky probe was gathering steam in 1998 and Starr's lieutenant Bob Bittmann requested 20 FBI agents and ten financial analysts, "We had them the next day," he would recall. Freeh personally let Attorney General Janet Reno know that he opposed the Secret Service's invocation of a "protective function" privilege that would shield its agents from having to testify about any contacts they may have witnessed between Clinton and Lewinsky.

Trump's aides and allies have questioned whether the permanent professional bureaucracy of the federal government amounts to a "deep state," dedicated to undermining his policies. They should be more concerned in the short term amount a new "Deep Throat," like the long- anonymous source who aided the Washington Post's Bob Woodward's coverage of Watergate. The source turned out to be Mark Felt, the No. 3 official at the FBI, a reality that the Nixon White House caught on to just months after the foiled break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters.

"Now why the hell would he do that?" Nixon asked his chief of staff Bob Haldeman on October 19, 1972. A few months later, when Felt's name was floated as a possible successor to FBI Director L. Patrick Gray, who had resigned under fire, Nixon told his attorney general, Richard Kleindienst, "I don't want him. I can't have him."

If Trump can take any comfort from Comey's latest revelation it may be that the FBI director's own credibility was badly damaged last year -- first when he took the unusual step of

announcing that the bureau's investigation into Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server did not warrant prosecution; then when he announced he was revisiting the investigation in light of potential new evidence found on the laptop of Anthony Weiner, the husband of Clinton's aide Huma Abedin; and finally when he declared, just days before the election, that his original conclusion still stood.

Trump has repeatedly shown himself willing to breach the usual niceties of presidential decorum and

discourse. With his White House now officially under siege by an entity empowered to seek subpoenas to compel testimony, it's anybody's guess just how the president or his lieutenants might react. But one thing is certain: The mood in the White House is grim, and probably apt to get worse before it gets better.

In September 1972, as the FBI pursued its Watergate investigation, Nixon had some advice for his White House counsel, John Dean, as reported in John A. Farrell's

forthcoming book, "Richard Nixon: The Life." "This is war," Nixon said. "We're getting a few shots and it will be over, and we'll give them a few shots and it will be over. Don't worry. I wouldn't want to be on the other side right now."

The president had no idea just how wrong he was. But the FBI did.

**The
Washington
Post**

Rucker : President Trump faces his hardest truth: He was wrong

On the 60th day of his presidency came the hardest truth for Donald Trump.

He was wrong.

James B. Comey — the FBI director whom Trump celebrated on the campaign trail as a gutsy and honorable "Crooked Hillary" truth-teller — testified under oath Monday what many Americans had already assumed: Trump had falsely accused his predecessor of wiretapping his headquarters during last year's campaign.

Trump did not merely allege that former president Barack Obama ordered surveillance on Trump Tower, of course. He asserted it as fact, and then reasserted it, and then insisted that forthcoming evidence would prove him right.

But in Monday's remarkable, marathon hearing of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Comey said there was no such evidence. Trump's claim, first made in a series of tweets on March 4 at a moment when associates said he was feeling under siege and stewing over the struggles of his young presidency, remains unfounded.

(Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

Members of the House Intelligence Committee, March 20, heard testimony from FBI Director James Comey and NSA head Michael Rogers. Here are key moments from that hearing. Key moments from the House Intelligence Committee hearing with FBI Director James Comey and NSA head Michael Rogers on alleged Russian meddling in U.S. politics (Video: Sarah Parnass/Photo: Matt McClain/The Washington Post)

Comey did not stop there. He confirmed publicly that the FBI was investigating possible collusion between Trump campaign officials and associates with Russia, part of an extraordinary effort by an

adversary to influence the outcome of the 2016 U.S. election in Trump's favor.

Questions about Russia have hung over Trump for months, but the president always has dismissed them as "fake news." That became much harder Monday after the FBI director proclaimed the Russia probe to be anything but fake.

"There's a smell of treason in the air," presidential historian Douglas Brinkley said. "Imagine if J. Edgar Hoover or any other FBI director would have testified against a sitting president? It would have been a mind-boggling event."

[FBI Director Comey confirms probe of possible coordination between Kremlin and Trump campaign]

For Trump, Comey's testimony punctuates what has been a troubling first two months as president. His approval ratings, which were historically low at his inauguration, have fallen even further. Gallup's tracking poll as of Sunday showed that just 39 percent of Americans approve of Trump's job performance, with 55 percent disapproving.

The Comey episode threatens to damage Trump's credibility not only with voters, but also with lawmakers of his own party whose support he needs to pass the health-care bill this week in the House, the first legislative project of his presidency.

Furthermore, the FBI's far-reaching Russia investigation shows no sign of concluding soon and is all but certain to remain a distraction for the White House, spurring moments of presidential fury and rash tweets and possibly inhibiting the administration's ability to govern.

Some of Trump's defenders said the impact of Comey's testimony could easily be overtaken if the White House is disciplined enough to marshal its agenda, as well as Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch, through Congress.

"All that really matters this week is Gorsuch moving forward and the House passing step one of Obamacare repeal," said Scott Reed, a veteran Republican strategist who works for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "All the rest is noise."

On the Russia issue, Trump and his aides were defiant Monday in the face of Comey's testimony. Before Comey was sworn in at the hearing, Trump tried to set the tone with a series of early-morning tweets decrying the accusations of collusion with Russia as "FAKE NEWS" being pushed by defeated Democrats and arguing that the real scandal is the leaking of sensitive information from within the intelligence community.

"Must find leaker now!" he wrote in one tweet from his personal account.

During Comey's testimony, Trump offered live commentary on his official presidential Twitter account, pushing the argument that Russia did not influence the election.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer picked up the torch in the afternoon, trying in a contentious briefing with reporters to deflect attention from Trump's false wiretapping charges while steadfastly refusing to admit any wrongdoing.

"I think we're going to test the outer limits of the Trump 'fake news' cult," said Rick Wilson, a Republican strategist. "The central contention that Barack Obama wiretapped Donald Trump in Trump Tower was blown out of the water and utterly dismissed."

As always in Trump world, where the guiding ethos is winning at any cost, the worst sin is conceding defeat.

Jennifer Palmieri, who served as communications director on Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign, said Trump's wiretapping situation reminded her of his "death spiral"

after lashing out at a federal judge over his Latino heritage.

"He just cannot let it go," Palmieri said. "Except this time he is getting slapped down by the sitting FBI director. That's a brutal blow to his credibility and a huge opportunity cost. He should be focused on salvaging his health-care bill, not continuing to draw all of America's eyes to the Russia investigation."

A master showman, Trump surely could intuit the theatrical power of Comey trekking to Capitol Hill to testify for several hours about Russia, all broadcast live on national television.

"It just makes it much more vivid," said Peter Wehner, a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center who has worked in the three previous Republican administrations. "It's one thing to read statements from a transcript or a newspaper, and that's not unimportant, but when you see it on video, it carries a punch."

[The Fix: Sean Spicer's laughable effort to distance President Trump from Paul Manafort]

Spicer's defense strategy was in part to distance Trump from the figures under investigation by the FBI for their ties to Russia. In Spicer's telling, Paul Manafort was a virtual nobody, someone who "played a very limited role for a very limited amount of time."

Manafort was actually Trump's campaign chairman and de facto manager for five months last year, from the end of the primaries through the summer convention and the start of the general election season.

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"Watching Sean Spicer twist himself into a pretzel yet again to try to

pretend that Paul Manafort isn't an influential figure is ludicrous," Wehner said. "It's like saying Aaron Rodgers isn't a central figure for the Green Bay Packers."

Brinkley, who has published biographies of such presidents as Gerald Ford, Franklin Roosevelt and Theodore Roosevelt, said of Trump's start, "This is the most

failed first 100 days of any president."

"To be as low as he is in the polls, in the 30s, while the FBI director is on television saying they launched an investigation into your ties with Russia, I don't know how it can get much worse," Brinkley said.

But Trump's supporters have proved largely impervious to the

political winds, at least so far. The president jetted late Monday to Louisville, to rev up another megareally crowd — separating himself from the swamp of Washington by more than 600 miles.

"My gut is that he's bulletproof with his base," said Austin Barbour, a Mississippi-based Republican strategist. "There's just this massive

distrust of Washington, and whether that's fair or not — of Washington, of the intelligence community, of Congress, of the judicial branch — it's just the reality outside of the Beltway."

**The
New York
Times**

Haberman

Mr. Trump's allies have begun to wonder if his need for self-expression, often on social media, will exceed his instinct for self-preservation, with disastrous results both for the president and for a party whose fate is now tightly tied to his.

"The tweets make it much more difficult for us as we try to build a case against these leakers," said Representative Peter T. King, a New York Republican who sits on the Intelligence Committee. "We always have to be answering questions about the tweets — it puts us on defense all the time when we could be building a case for the president."

And Mr. Trump's fixation on fighting is undermining his credibility at a time when he needs to toggle from go-it-alone executive action to collaborative congressional action on ambitious health care, budget and infrastructure legislation.

"I don't always like what the president is saying," the Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, told The Washington Examiner last month. "I do think he frequently, by wading into other matters, takes attention away" from "the very substantial things we're already accomplishing."

A Gallup poll released Monday found Mr. Trump with an abysmal 37 percent approval rating; other recent polls place his popularity in the mid-40s, but even that level is among the lowest ever recorded for a president this early in his first term.

Over the past several weeks, Republicans in Congress and members of their staffs have privately complained that Mr. Trump's Twitter comment on March 4 — the one where he called Barack Obama

Trump's Weary Defenders Face Fresh Worries (UNE)

Glenn Thrush
and Maggie

"sick" and suggested that the former president had ordered a "tapp" on his phone — had done more to undermine anything he's done as president because it called into question his seriousness about governing.

The problem, from the perspective of Mr. Trump's beleaguered political fire brigade, is that the president insists on dealing with crises by creating new ones — so surrogates, repeating talking points the president himself ignores, say they often feel like human shields.

Within the White House, a number of Mr. Trump's advisers — including the press secretary, Sean Spicer, who has himself repeated unsubstantiated claims of British spying on Mr. Trump — have told allies that Mr. Trump's Twitter habits are making their jobs harder, said administration officials interviewed over the past week. Mr. Spicer said he has no problem with his boss's tweeting. "It's just not true. I have not commented on the tweets to anyone including my wife," he said in an email.

Most politicians, perhaps any other politician, would have backed away from the Russia story, and left the defense to surrogates or unexpected validators like Mike Morrell, the former acting director of the C.I.A., who said last week that "there is smoke, but there is no fire at all" in the allegations that the Trump campaign colluded with Russia.

But this president, a proponent of do-it-yourself crisis communications with boundless self-confidence in his capacity to shape the story, seems determined to hug his Russian hand grenade.

Monday morning began not with praise of Jorge Gorsuch — or an exhortation of House Republicans to quickly pass a revamped Obamacare repeal — but with six protective-crouch tweets about the Russia investigation.

"The Democrats made up and pushed the Russian story as an excuse for running a terrible campaign. Big advantage in Electoral College & lost!" Mr. Trump wrote shortly after dawn, using his private Twitter account.

Then, a few minutes later: "The real story that Congress, the FBI and all others should be looking into is the leaking of Classified information. Must find leaker now!"

Trump and the Russians: Links? No Links? Depends On Whom You Ask

James B. Comey, the director of the F.B.I., said the agency was investigating whether members of the Trump campaign colluded with Russia to influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Republicans and Democrats put their own spin on his statements.

By SHANE O'NEILL and SUSAN JOAN ARCHER. Photo by Eric Thayer for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

People close to the president say Mr. Trump's Twitter torrent had less to do with fact, strategy or tactic than a sense of persecution bordering on faith: He simply believes that he was bugged in some way, by someone, and that evidence will soon appear to back him up.

Plus he just likes to mix it up. He fired off his ill-fated Saturday tweet complaining of "tapps" of his phones after railing to aides about how poorly Attorney General Jeff Sessions had responded to reports that he had surreptitiously communicated with the Russians, the way Mr. Trump's former National Security Council adviser, Michael T. Flynn, did.

The president, people close to him have said over the last several weeks, has become increasingly frustrated at his inability to control the narrative of his action-packed presidency, after being able to

dominate the political discourse or divert criticism by launching one of his signature Twitter attacks.

"I think that maybe I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Twitter," Mr. Trump told a sympathetic interviewer, Tucker Carlson of Fox News, last week.

Still, there's some evidence that the president's magic medium is losing its effectiveness, in part because Mr. Trump's Twitter persona seems to have shifted from puckish to paranoid.

Focus groups and polls conducted by two Democratic strategists this month have shown that many voters, even some who support Mr. Trump, have grown weary of his tweets as president. That was also borne out by a Fox News poll last week, showing that a mere 35 percent of Trump voters approve of his Twitter habits, and that only 16 percent of all voters approve of them. Some 32 percent said they "wish he'd be more careful" with his feed.

"His tweeting defines him, and not in a good way," said Geoff Garin, a veteran Democratic pollster. "Voters not only think Trump's use of Twitter is un-presidential, they also see the tone and content of his tweets as an indication that he is lacking in self-control."

Mr. Comey seemed to tacitly agree.

In midafternoon came a tweet from Mr. Trump's official @potus account: "FBI Director Comey refuses to deny he briefed President Obama on calls made by Michael Flynn to Russia."

A dour and disapproving Mr. Comey instantly fact-checked the tweet when it was read out loud to him. "No," he said. "It was not our intention to say that today."



D'Antonio : Trump's self-inflicted humiliation via Twitter

Michael D'Antonio is the author of the book "Never Enough: Donald Trump and

the Pursuit of Success" (St. Martin's Press). The opinions expressed in this commentary are his.

(CNN)Let's all agree that no other person ever elected President would have hurled a charge that his

predecessor wiretapped him. Especially not in a tweet that referred to a former President this

way: "This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!"

But as his supporters like to say, Donald Trump is no ordinary politician and, thus it was he who debased the presidency with wild accusations that Barack Obama organized a criminal conspiracy to wiretap him.

Inevitably, the most powerful man in the world found himself repudiated by the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who told a committee of Congress and a world watching on TV that his agency had found no evidence to support Trump's charge. And, of course, Trump chose to ignore the obvious lesson in this self-inflicted humiliation and, instead, continued to indulge his inner troll.

Trump's new abuse of the presidency, and the American public, actually began hours before a House committee would question director Comey and other security leaders on the controversy. By 6:35 a.m. Monday, Trump was up and at it on Twitter, spraying distractions in short bursts.

"(Former director of national intelligence) James Clapper and others stated that there is no evidence Potus colluded with Russia. This story is FAKE NEWS and everyone knows it!"

"The Democrats made up and pushed the Russian story as an excuse for running a terrible campaign. Big advantage in Electoral College & lost!"

**The
New York
Times**

Leonhardt : All the President's Lies

David Leonhardt

The ninth week of Donald Trump's presidency began with the F.B.I. director calling him a liar.

The director, the very complicated James Comey, didn't use the L-word in his congressional testimony Monday. Comey serves at the pleasure of the president, after all. But his meaning was clear as could be. Trump has repeatedly accused Barack Obama of wiretapping his phones, and Comey explained there is "no information that supports" the claim.

I've previously argued that not every untruth deserves to be branded with the L-word, because it implies intent and somebody can state an untruth without doing so knowingly. George W. Bush didn't lie when he said Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and Obama didn't lie when he said people who liked their current health insurance could keep it. They made careless statements that proved

"What about all of the contact with the Clinton campaign and the Russians? Also, is it true that the DNC would not let the FBI in to look?"

The Russian attempt to meddle in the election and contacts between Russians and Trump associates were on the House committee's agenda. But much of the news the world awaited would come when witnesses were questioned on Trump's allegations about Obama.

Like everyone else who has paid attention to this controversy, an over-anxious Trump knew that Comey was going to shoot down his charges. His early morning tweets represented the ravings of a man who woke up with a bad feeling in his stomach about how the day would go.

Trump's pre-emptive tweets substituted media manipulation for sober leadership at a time of crisis. Only a truly inexperienced politician would fail to anticipate the damage this would do to himself, the presidency, his party, and the nation. Combine Trump's inexperience with a lifelong tendency to indulge in self-destructive behavior (see his many business bankruptcies) and you start to understand how the tweet storm began. Trump cannot resist attempting to shape reality through the media, and he has a level of self-confidence bordering on the delusional.

One can easily imagine the barrage continued as Trump hunkered

false (and they deserved much of the criticism they got).

But the current president of the United States lies. He lies in ways that no American politician ever has before. He has lied about — among many other things — Obama's birthplace, John F. Kennedy's assassination, Sept. 11, the Iraq War, ISIS, NATO, military veterans, Mexican immigrants, Muslim immigrants, anti-Semitic attacks, the unemployment rate, the murder rate, the Electoral College, voter fraud and his groping of women.

He tells so many untruths that it's time to leave behind the textual parsing over which are unwitting and which are deliberate — as well as the condescending notion that most of Trump's supporters enjoy his lies.

Trump sets out to deceive people. As he has put it, "I play to people's fantasies."

before the TV like Nixon (minus the glass of whiskey) to watch the hearings and offer his instant responses. Surrounded by a staff mostly chosen for loyalty rather than competence, Trump commented with the skill of a practiced expert in the art of fake news, ignoring the big story -- Comey and the Justice Department debunked his charges against Obama -- and highlighting cherry-picked bits of testimony.

"NSA Director Rogers tells Congress unmasking individuals endangers national security," the

@POTUS account

tweeted. "FBI Director Comey refuses to deny he briefed President Obama on calls made by Michael Flynn to Russia."

These two points and others offered by the President's staff were of the "dog-bites-man" variety. No controversy attends the issue of briefings given to Obama regarding Flynn, whose deceptions forced his resignation as national security advisor, and no responsible official advocates revealing the identities of people whose names are supposed to be held secret.

The real, not-fake news coming out of the hearing revolves around Comey's statement that "I have no information that supports those (Trump) tweets. We have looked carefully inside the FBI."

"The Department of Justice has asked me to share with you that the answer is the same for the Department of Justice and all its

components," Comey added, "the department has no information that supports those tweets."

In the face of Comey's testimony, Trump's reporting via Twitter is of the sort that would cause TV viewers to change the channel and newspaper readers to cancel their subscriptions. Trump's pre-hearing tweets about his election victory made him look defensive and weak. His responses during the event insulted the intelligence of the American public.

To use one of the President's favorite Twitter terms, it's "sad" to see that he still seems incapable of rising to the demands of the office he now holds. Tweets that accused his predecessor of serious crimes and function as propaganda, damage him and the nation in innumerable ways. They help explain the most recent Gallup poll, which found only 37% of Americans approve of how he's doing his job. No new President has gone so low, so fast, which is something we could say about the man himself.

Where is all of this heading? Trump and his allies got into this mess in large measure by talking out of turn. The President continued to do so by trolling Congress before and during the hearing. Given the power the legislative branch retains to investigate and compel officials to testify, this was probably a seriously bad idea.

Caveat emptor: When Donald Trump says something happened, it should not change anyone's estimation of whether the event actually happened. Maybe it did, maybe it didn't. His claim doesn't change the odds.

Which brings us to Russia.

Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential campaign was an attack on the United States. It's the kind of national-security matter that a president and members of Congress swear to treat with utmost seriousness when they take the oath of office. Yet now it has become the subject of an escalating series of lies by the president and the people who work for him.

As Comey was acknowledging on Monday that the F.B.I. was investigating possible collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign, Trump was lying about it. From both his personal Twitter account and the White House account, he told untruths.

A few hours later, his press secretary, Sean Spicer, went before the cameras and lied about the closeness between Trump and various aides who have documented Russian ties. Do you remember Paul Manafort, the chairman of Trump's campaign, who ran the crucial delegate-counting operation? Spicer said Manafort had a "very limited role" in said campaign.

The big question now is not what Trump and the White House are saying about the Russia story. They will evidently say anything. The questions are what really happened and who can uncover the truth.

The House of Representatives, unfortunately, will not be doing so. I was most saddened during Comey's testimony not by the White House's response, which I've come to expect, but by the Republican House members questioning him. They are members of a branch of government that the Constitution holds as equal to the presidency,

but they acted like Trump staff members, decrying leaks about Russia's attack rather than the attack itself. The Watergate equivalent is claiming that Deep Throat was worse than Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Nixon.

It fell to Adam Schiff, a Democratic representative from Southern California, to lay out the suspicious ties between Trump and Russia (while also hinting he couldn't describe some classified details).



Max Boot : Trump's Worst Enemy Is His Own Big, Lying Mouth

Paul McLeary | 53 mins ago

Those worried about the trajectory of the Trump White House — and these days, who isn't? — could take some comfort from the news last week that two well-respected professionals were joining the National Security Council. Former George W. Bush aide Dina Powell, a fluent Arabic speaker and Goldman Sachs alumna, will become deputy national security advisor, and Nadia Schadlow, an expert on military affairs, will leave the Smith Richardson Foundation to take charge of strategic planning. They are welcome additions to the Axis of Adults that must compete for influence in this administration with the Cabal of Crazies, whose ranks include Stephen Bannon, Stephen Miller, Peter Navarro, and Sebastian Gorka.

The problem is that the cabal counts among its members someone whose influence *trumps*, so to speak, that of National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, or any other appointee. We refer, of course, to the conspirator in chief himself. The series of vintage performances delivered by President Donald Trump last week — and the vehement response they elicited from national security officials testifying Monday before the House Intelligence Committee — reminds us of why the Axis of Adults has a nearly impossible job in keeping this administration from veering into cloud cuckoo-land.

On March 15, Trump journeyed to Nashville, Tennessee, for a campaign-style rally where supporters repeated the old cry of "Lock her up" in reference to Hillary Clinton — a demand that was merely deranged when made during the campaign but that now seems positively sinister when it is associated with the man charged with enforcing the nation's laws. At the rally, Trump reacted to the "terrible" court rulings blocking his revised executive order on

Schiff did so in a calm, nine-minute monologue that's worth watching. He walked through pro-Putin payments to Michael Flynn and through another Trump's aide's advance notice of John Podesta's hacked email and through the mysterious struggle over the Republican Party platform on Ukraine.

"Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated, and nothing more than

immigration. "The order blocked was a watered-down version of the first order ...," he thundered. "Let me tell you something. I think we ought to go back to the first one and go all the way."

It is precisely such presidential pronouncements that provide ammunition to litigants who claim that the executive order is an unconstitutional attempt to ban Muslims. Administration lawyers insist otherwise in court, but their arguments are undermined by their boss, who simply cannot hide his true intent.

Two days later, Trump hosted German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the White House for what looked to be the first date from hell. With cameras rolling, Merkel asked Trump if he wanted to shake hands; he pointedly ignored her. Trump then used their joint news conference to demand not only that Germany and other NATO partners increase their defense spending — a standard trope of past administrations — but that they pay back the United States "vast sums of money from past years" that "they owe" us for defending them from Russian aggression. To make sure that no one missed the message, he followed up with tweets reiterating: "Germany owes...vast sums of money to NATO & the United States must be paid more for the powerful, and very expensive, defense it provides to Germany!"

While he's at it, why not ask France to pay back the cost of D-Day? Or is he afraid that France will retaliate by demanding repayment for its contribution to America's War of Independence? That would certainly take Trump's view of international relations as a protection racket to its logical, if absurd, conclusion.

Trump also could not hide his anti-German animus when it came to trade, saying: "Right now, I would say that the negotiators for Germany have done a far better job than the negotiators for the United States. But hopefully we can even it out." Trump seems oblivious to the fact that over 750,000 Americans

are employed by German-owned companies such as Daimler, T-Mobile, Siemens, Adidas, and even Trader Joe's. He makes it sound as if Germany is committing some heinous offense by selling us lots of stuff we want to buy. Naturally, he had all too little to say about the continuing importance of the German-American alliance that has underpinned prosperity and security on both sides of the Atlantic since 1945.

Comey, as much as liberals may loathe him for his 2016 bungling,

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An anonymous German Foreign Ministry official was subsequently quoted as saying that Trump "uses rudeness to compensate for his weakness, like Putin." An astute observation, that. And when it came to alienating allies, Trump was just getting started.

In desperately trying to support Trump's discredited allegation that President Barack Obama had been spying on him, which has been denied not only by the U.S. intelligence community and the Justice Department but by the bipartisan leadership of the House and Senate intelligence committees, White House spokesman Sean Spicer cited a statement by a Fox News commentator. Former Judge Andrew Napolitano asserted that, rather than spying on Trump directly, Obama had outsourced the dirty work to Britain's communications agency, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). His source? A discredited former CIA officer who has become notorious for peddling false stories that former first lady Michelle Obama gave a speech "railing against whitey" and that former Secretary of State John Kerry "raped some poor Vietnamese women" while in the Navy.

The allegation of British wiretapping was immediately denounced by the normally secretive GCHQ and National Security Agency (NSA), with the British said to be "livid" and "angry" over this "utterly ridiculous" charge. Even Fox News, in the person of anchor Shepard Smith, could not "confirm" this claim. Definitive refutation was provided

Monday by FBI Director James Comey, who testified that while there is credible evidence worth investigating of collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russians, there is no evidence of any wiretapping of Trump. The FBI director all but called the sitting president a liar, creating yet another undesirable first for the Trump administration. Perhaps Trump will now be reduced to claiming that Obama dressed like a cat burglar and personally broke into Trump Tower to plant listening devices without Comey's knowledge.

seems to be one of the few public officials with the ability and willingness to pursue the truth. I dearly hope that Republican members of the Senate are patriotic enough to do so as well.

Our president is a liar, and we need to find out how serious his latest lies are.

Despite the absence of factual support for his position, Trump would not back down. Asked about the allegations by a German reporter on Friday, he said with his typical insouciance: "We said nothing. All we did was quote a certain very talented legal mind who was the one responsible for saying that on television. I didn't make an opinion on it."

Trump even tried to make light of the affair, joking that he and Merkel have "something in common, perhaps," because both had allegedly been wiretapped by Obama. This was a reference to revelations from Edward Snowden — not normally a source cited with approbation by American officials — that the chancellor's cell phone number was on a list monitored by the NSA. Merkel grimaced and did a double take but wisely said nothing about Trump's insulting insinuations that stir up uncomfortable memories in Germany of state surveillance and make it harder for Merkel to maintain a close alliance with the United States.

Trump's allegations against the United Kingdom also wiped out any goodwill remaining from January's summit between the president and Prime Minister Theresa May (they actually held hands) and continued Trump's streak of offending American allies. Among those who have felt Trump's white-hot wrath have been the president of Mexico, who refuses to pay for any border wall, and the prime minister of Australia, who wants the United

States to honor an agreement to take in 1,250 refugees detained by Australia. Oh, and Trump did a drive-by shooting on Sweden to justify his complaint that Muslim immigrants are a bane to society.

It is all the more striking, by comparison, that Trump never says anything remotely critical regarding Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is engaged in flouting international norms and threatening his neighbors. Indeed, Trump's utterly unnecessary spats with key allies play right into Putin's hands, because the Russian despot is intent on dividing the Western alliance. Comey noted Monday that Putin wants to break up the European Union, and Trump seems eager to help. Little wonder that allies' faith in America is

plummeting as rapidly as the White House's credibility. The number of Germans who believe the United States is a trustworthy ally has fallen from 59 percent in November to just 22 percent in February and, based on the present trajectory, may soon go into negative numbers.

The pattern is clear.

Trump is constitutionally incapable of admitting wrongdoing or apologizing for giving offense.

Trump is constitutionally incapable of admitting wrongdoing or apologizing for giving offense. His invariable pattern is to double down and dig in, compounding the original damage. He doesn't care whom he offends. All that matters to the

president and his courtiers is to soothe his fragile ego and maintain his illusory air of infallibility. That's not easy to do given how little he knows and how many "alternative facts" are lodged in his noggin. You would think the commander in chief would rely on the information gathered at great trouble and expense by the U.S. intelligence community, but no. Instead, he relies on Fox News, Infowars, and *Breitbart*, and he doesn't bother with any fact-checking before repeating their crackpot claims. Thus, he almost always blunders when speaking (or tweeting) without a script; it is telling that one of the few highlights of his first two months in office was his ability to read a teleprompter in front of a joint session of Congress.

Here, in sum, is the problem confronting Trump optimists. He can hire well-qualified aides and even defer to them in some areas. He can refrain from adopting some of his crazy campaign brainstorms. (No, he hasn't imposed 45 percent tariffs on China or ordered the murder of terrorists' relatives.) But ultimately he can't stop being himself. And who Trump is — boastful, vain, stubborn, crude, boorish, ignorant, conspiratorial, mean-spirited — is deeply problematic for anyone, whether on his staff or outside of it, hoping that his administration will become more normal.

**The
New York
Times**

What Investigation? G.O.P. Responds to F.B.I. Inquiry by Changing Subject (UNE)

Michael D. Shear

"It does strike me there's been a lot of people talking or at least reporters saying people are talking to them," Mr. Comey said.

Representative Jim Himes, Democrat of Connecticut, nodded toward the importance of plugging leaks, saying that Republicans "will get no argument from this side on the importance of investigating, prosecuting leaks."

But Democrats are determined to try to keep the focus on Mr. Trump, his campaign aides and Russia's meddling in the election. Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the panel, offered a long, detailed description of the publicly available reports of Russian activity and contacts with members of Mr. Trump's campaign.

"Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated and nothing more than an entirely unhappy coincidence?" Mr. Schiff asked. "Yes, it is possible. But it is also possible, maybe more than possible, that they are not coincidental."

Republicans seemed much less interested in the answer.

The effort to change the subject began with Mr. Trump, who said on Twitter early Monday that the "real story" is the "leaking of Classified information." Later, he asked: "What about all of the contact with the Clinton campaign and the Russians?"

At the White House, Sean Spicer, the press secretary, returned to the subject of leaks again and again during his daily briefing for reporters, echoing the Republican lawmakers from the presidential podium.

Mr. Spicer railed against the "illegal leak" of the names of some of Mr. Trump's associates under investigation. And he insisted that news organizations are refusing to cover the real story from Monday's hearing: the need for the federal government to stop national security leaks.

Mr. Spicer also evaded questions about Mr. Trump's associates by repeatedly returning to what he said were Hillary Clinton's ties to Russia, even though Mrs. Clinton's

presidential campaign was hurt by Russian operatives' hacking.

Mr. Spicer accused journalists of ignoring stories alleging that the Democratic National Committee had not provided the F.B.I. access to its hacked servers, a claim Democratic officials deny. Mr. Comey said Monday that the investigators got the information they needed to investigate the hack.

"Why? What were they hiding? What were they concerned of?" Mr. Spicer said. In confusing, rapid-fire fashion, Mr. Spicer noted accusations about "donations that the Clintons received from Russians" and decisions by Mrs. Clinton to sell "tremendous amounts of uranium" to Russia.

"Where's the concern about their efforts on the Hillary Clinton thing?" Mr. Spicer said.

Demands for leak investigations are nothing new in Washington, where the targets of critical stories — regardless of party — are often quick to try to expose the sources of those reports. Mr. Obama's White House was particularly aggressive in seeking the source of leaks,

prosecuting more whistle-blowers than all his predecessors combined.

Mr. Trump, by contrast, appears to have had a significant change of heart regarding leaks since he won the presidential election. During the campaign, Mr. Trump frequently praised WikiLeaks, the website that investigators believe was used by Russian operatives to leak emails from the D.N.C. and Mrs. Clinton's campaign chairman. At one rally in Pennsylvania, Mr. Trump declared, "I love WikiLeaks!"

Now, faced with leaks about the Russia investigation and the dissemination of other information from inside his administration, Mr. Trump appears increasingly frustrated that information is finding its way to reporters.

"Must find leaker now!" he said in a Twitter message Monday morning.

That, in a nutshell, was the message of the day for Republicans. But the strategy of deflection required many more words, repeated over and over for the cameras.

**The
Washington
Post**

Editorial : No, Republicans, the 'real story' is not the leaks

A HOUSE Intelligence Committee hearing Monday produced the remarkable spectacle of FBI Director James B. Comey publicly testifying that there was "no information that supports" tweets by President Trump alleging wiretapping of his New York headquarters on the order of President Barack Obama. It saw National Security Agency Director

Michael S. Rogers agree with the British government that it was "utterly ridiculous" for the White House to suggest that such surveillance had been undertaken by Britain's signals agency. And it produced official confirmation by Mr. Comey that the agency is investigating Russia's interference in the U.S. presidential election, including possible coordination with members of the Trump campaign.

You'd think that all of this would be of surpassing concern for Republican members of Congress. The president who leads their party has been officially reported to have made false statements alleging criminal activity by his predecessor. What's more, his campaign is under scrutiny for possible cooperation with a dedicated and dangerous U.S. adversary in order to subvert American democracy.

Yet to listen to Republican members of the Intelligence Committee, the most pressing problem to arise from Russia's intervention and the FBI's investigation of it is that reports of contacts between Russia's ambassador and Mr. Trump's designated national security adviser were leaked to The Post. The priority of Chairman Devin Nunes (Calif.) and other Republican members, judging from their statements, is not fully uncovering

Russia's actions but finding and punishing those who allowed the public to learn about them.

The Daily 202 newsletter

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Mr. Nunes and Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.) could not have been more zealous in their outrage over the exposure of Michael Flynn, who was forced to resign as national security adviser after reports in The Post exposed his lies about his conversations with Russian

Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. Mr. Flynn accepted nearly \$68,000 in payments from Russian companies, including the state propaganda outlet, before advocating greater cooperation with Moscow during his brief White House stint. Yet Mr. Nunes and Mr. Gowdy would have it that hunting down the sources for the disclosure that Mr. Flynn discussed the lifting of U.S. sanctions with Mr. Kislyak is more urgent than learning the full extent of the contacts he and other Trump aides had with Moscow.

The Republicans seem to be slavishly following the cues of the president, who, while failing to

retract his accusation against Mr. Obama, is seeking to direct attention elsewhere. "The real story that Congress, the FBI and all others should be looking into is the leaking of Classified information," he tweeted Monday morning. Such a diversion, like anything else that distracts attention from Vladimir Putin's support for his election, would be to Mr. Trump's advantage.

Congressional Republicans ought to consider larger national interests. Russia's intervention in the election was not incidental and haphazard, but part of a concerted campaign to disrupt Western democracy. Mr. Putin is even now attempting to

interfere in ongoing election campaigns in France and Germany. Given Mr. Trump's refusal to acknowledge the threat, it is essential that Congress discover the truth about Russia's activities, take steps to defend against similar intrusions in the future and help allies protect themselves.

The first useful step would be to fully inform the public. Instead, Mr. Nunes and his followers appear bent on silencing anyone who would do so.

**The
New York
Times**

Domenech : How Trump Can Fix Health Care

Benjamin Domenech

The House Republican bill, the American Health Care Act, will not deliver on Mr. Trump's promises. It represents a real attempt by Speaker Ryan to overhaul entitlements and send authority for Medicaid to the states. What it does not do is try to deliver health insurance to all Americans, as Mr. Trump pledged: Even with hundreds of billions of dollars of refundable tax credits under the plan, 52 million Americans are projected to be uninsured in 2026, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Mr. Trump won the presidency in part because of some big promises, including a vow to break from conservative orthodoxy on entitlements. If Congress fails to deliver on that promise, Mr. Trump could correct it by going boldly in a direction anathema to many on the right but potentially acceptable to some Democrats: universal coverage for catastrophic care.

Many Americans' greatest fear is that their health care costs will bankrupt them. The quality of care we receive is high — I experienced this myself this month after a cardiac incident left me reading the Republican plan in an emergency

room — but the expense is opaque, and Americans are not wrong to worry about these costs.

By providing catastrophic care for all, President Trump could ensure that everyone has an ultimate backstop against medical bankruptcy, while freeing the states to experiment with options for reform. It would also enable the private sector to offer new insurance products to supplement the basic catastrophic care coverage.

This idea has some support among conservatives. In 2012 Kip Hagopian and Dana Goldman estimated in National Affairs that to insure all 209 million Americans not already covered by public insurance programs would cost about \$2,000 per person, or \$7,200 per family per year — about half the projected \$1.7 trillion cost of Obamacare over the coming decade. Individuals and families could then purchase additional coverage given their particular health needs, but would not be bankrupted by severe illness or accident.

Some on the right may not be comfortable with this plan, given that it would represent a permanent redistributive entitlement. But the House Republican bill also includes

a hugely expensive tax credit. This plan would be a straightforward approach to providing insurance against devastating loss that would also render an incredibly complex system of mandates and rules moot, Mr. Hagopian and Professor Goldman argue. That would include ending the requirement that all plans cover pre-existing conditions; the mandate that all individuals buy health insurance; one-size-fits-all "community rating" pricing; and the requirement that insurance companies sell insurance for the same price to everyone regardless of health status.

"Almost all of the costs of these regulations, as well as the negative cost effects of the intrusions into the market that accompany them, would disappear if this plan were in place," they wrote.

Some on the left may find this kind of plan unacceptable, since universal catastrophic care falls far short of Medicare for all. But Mr. Hagopian and Professor Goldman point out that even catastrophic plans of this sort could cover prenatal care, statin drugs that lower cholesterol and other treatments for chronic illnesses without raising costs for patients.

"If otherwise unaffordable health expenses were covered by insurance and routine health expenses were treated like normal household expenditures, the entire population would be shielded from devastating losses while an efficient consumer market in health care could emerge," they said.

Given the choice between the House Republican plan or one where all Americans are covered, moderate Democrats would be wise to go along with this solution.

It is obviously not a solution that will satisfy true limited-government conservatives. Any universal benefit along these lines comes with costs that would have to be funded via taxes or debt. But it would be a step consistent with President Trump's bold message and it could resolve the current debate on Capitol Hill, now headed in a direction unlikely to satisfy anyone.

President Trump has never shied away from thinking big, and now he has the potential to turn the politics of health care upside down with a populist solution that might go a long way toward solving one of the nation's biggest problems.

**The
Washington
Post**

Editorial : Republicans' arguments against Obamacare are in a death spiral

"OBAMACARE IS not going to last," House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) said Sunday when challenged to explain how he could support a replacement plan that independent experts project would result in millions of people losing health coverage. "There's no way Obamacare could stick another two or three years, let alone 10 years."

This is the last rhetorical refuge for defenders of a shoddy GOP replacement plan: Practically any system would be better than the "collapsing" status quo. "Five states have one plan left, over a third of the counties in America have only one insurer left," Mr. Ryan explained on "Fox News Sunday." "Some are already pulling out, massive premium increases in the future."

Yet a wide swath of independent experts see no real disaster. Just look at the big picture in today's Obamacare marketplaces, says the Kaiser Family Foundation's Larry Levitt: "Marketplace enrollment has largely held steady," he wrote us in an email. "Also, enrollment trended slightly older, but not by a meaningful amount and certainly nothing to suggest that it's spiraling out of control." And that is with a

hostile new administration undermining enrollment this year.

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The Congressional Budget Office, meanwhile, projected last week that "the nongroup market" — that is, the section of the health-care industry

that Obamacare focuses on — “would probably be stable in most areas” under current law. The CBO found the same for Mr. Ryan’s bill. Both plans would see “insurers participating in most areas of the country.”

It is true that “stable” does not mean “perfect.” Some areas of the country, especially sparsely populated, rural regions that have been historically difficult to cover, might continue to have trouble attracting insurers. But some areas of the country would almost certainly struggle to attract insurers under the GOP plan, too, because the tax credits it would give people to buy insurance would be small relative to the price of care in expensive regions. The CBO’s bottom line remains: Under neither Obamacare nor the GOP alternative would there be a catastrophic nationwide death spiral.

There are crucial differences in how each plan would achieve market stability. Obamacare’s subsidy system scales according to income, premium and region, enabling needy insurance buyers — people who are older or sicker or live in a more expensive state — to buy decent-quality plans. The CBO predicted that, combined with the individual mandate, these provisions would keep the number of uninsured about flat, following unprecedented coverage gains in previous years, and, by law, all of those enrollees would have good coverage.

By contrast, the Republican bill would slash subsidy spending and loosen regulations. Though the system might benefit some younger insurance buyers, coaxing more of them into the market, it would also make it much harder for, say, a 60-year-old in a rural county to afford insurance. Insurers certainly would not reach for their business. Fewer people who really need coverage would get it, and the coverage people bought would be skimpier. The plan would save the treasury some money, but not nearly enough to justify the human misery that would result from coverage losses concentrated among the low-income and the aging.

Though Republicans say they will change the bill to become more generous, they have nevertheless painted a fictional account of total policy disaster in order to make their plan look good.