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With Help from France's Elite, Le Pen Tries to Steer Far-Right Party Into Mainstream (UNE)

Stacy Meichtry and William Horobin

Updated March 27, 2017 3:09 p.m. ET

PARIS—For more than a year, French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, representing the once-ostracized National Front, met with influential bankers, corporate executives and government officials to get advice on the radical changes vowed by her campaign. Now the group is helping plan what she hopes will be her first 100 days in office.

Ms. Le Pen has dubbed these members of France's elite "Les Horaces," a reference to the poet who penned verses for the first Roman emperor. It's a measure of her rise that she has lured talent and expertise from parts of the same establishment she rails against.

Under Ms. Le Pen, National Front's goal is to move from a xenophobic protest movement founded by her father into a mainstream party espousing economic nationalism. That effort centers on tapping a long-submerged vein of Gaullist traditionalism, which regards the European Union and euro as infringements on French national sovereignty.

Believers, including members of the country's leadership class, are eager to help Ms. Le Pen prepare for the practicalities of governance—and are willing to accept her incendiary campaign rhetoric and a result that would threaten the concept of a united Europe.

Ms. Le Pen, 48 years old, has called the euro a "knife in the ribs" of France that allows the EU to inflict "its views, its inept directives and its millions of migrants." She wants higher taxes on foreign workers and a lower retirement age. Ms. Le Pen blames the common currency for France's chronically high unemployment and has said she would bring back the franc if elected.

That could be a devastating blow to the EU, which already is wrestling with the exit of the United Kingdom. If France also pulls out of the eurozone, the 60-year, post-World War II effort to safeguard against future conflicts by deepening

economic and political integration might crumble.

Polls suggest Ms. Le Pen will make it through the first round of voting April 23. Her support runs deep in working-class France, where slow economic growth and joblessness have fueled mounting anger over globalization.

Winning the second-round runoff in May looks harder because supporters of candidates knocked out in the first round are likely to coalesce against her.

In recent head-to-head polls, Ms. Le Pen trailed conservative candidate and former Prime Minister François Fillon and Emmanuel Macron, a pro-EU centrist who was a French economy minister. Even if she loses, though, the growth of Ms. Le Pen's ardent following means she is likely to help keep shaping French and European politics.

Most political and business leaders in France support the eurozone and are backing other candidates in the presidential election. In contrast, the tight circle of advisers to Ms. Le Pen generally holds views reminiscent of the 1960s, when President Charles de Gaulle pushed for an independent nuclear strike force, called Force de Frappe, and withdrew French forces from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's unified command.

These elites also adhere to a French tradition of the economy being steered largely by the state rather than market forces.

Her recruitment of elites is a delicate matter that began years before Ms. Le Pen formed Les Horaces. The National Front keeps many of their identities confidential to shield the group from public attention, according to aides to Ms. Le Pen. She declined to comment for this article.

Many elites worry that their bosses, friends, social connections and others would disapprove of them helping Ms. Le Pen, despite her efforts to distance National Front from its past reputation for anti-Semitism.

That some Horaces are employed by large, publicly traded firms also

makes it hard for them to overtly ally with Ms. Le Pen, who has described the election as "a referendum against the lies of the self-proclaimed elites."

Nearly all the Horaces have remained in their jobs while clandestinely lending assistance to her. "They're what you call shadow advisers, and they want to remain as such," said Jean Messiha, a Horace who recently took a leave of absence as a senior Defense Ministry official to join Ms. Le Pen's campaign.

The elite makeover of National Front began during the aftermath of the financial crisis, while Ms. Le Pen's father was still running the party.

Jean-Marie Le Pen, 88, ran for president five times but made it to the runoff only in 2002. His extreme anti-immigrant rhetoric created a niche for National Front in European politics but hamstrung his appeal to a broader electorate.

A shift began in 2008, when he called for the end of "euro-globalism" and an "anticrisis shield," but the party lacked a brain trust that could articulate an economic alternative.

"Before, you didn't really need a macroeconomic program," said Wallerand de Saint-Just, who joined National Front in the 1980s. "We could just chirp about it here and there."

As National Front's heir apparent, Ms. Le Pen set out to change that. First, she needed advisers who could reformulate the party's platform. That included recasting the National Front's opposition to immigration—the party's longstanding *raison d'être*—as part of a new economic credo.

She blamed the EU for exposing France to new waves of immigrants and faulted the euro for hollowing out the country's manufacturing base by making French labor and goods too costly. She said a nation's jobs and entitlements should go to its own citizens.

In 2009, Ms. Le Pen met Florian Philippot, an Interior Ministry official whose soft-spoken polish was a study in contrasts with her plain,

raspy voice. He is a graduate of the École Nationale d'Administration, the academy for France's ruling elite that trained President François Hollande and Mr. Macron.

What Mr. Philippot and Ms. Le Pen had in common were the ambition to govern and disdain for the euro. "It was love at first sight, intellectually," she told a French television network about their introduction.

She quickly made him her right-hand man for party strategy and communication but kept their ties secret. Mr. Philippot's mother died in October 2009 without knowing, and he didn't tell his father for years.

He told a television interviewer that he didn't want his father to worry. He didn't respond to requests to comment for this article.

Mr. Philippot gradually went public with his ties to Ms. Le Pen, initially granting interviews to French newspapers using aliases, according to "Philippot 1er," a new book by journalists Astrid de Villaines and Marie Labat.

In late 2011, Mr. Philippot left his Interior Ministry post to work on Ms. Le Pen's 2012 presidential campaign.

Ms. Le Pen teamed up Mr. Philippot with Bernard Monot, an economist at state-owned financing institution Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations.

Mr. Monot was working clandestinely for National Front, publishing articles under the pen name Nicolas Pavillon while writing new doctrines to turn the page on the party's past position as a promoter of free markets.

The result was Ms. Le Pen's campaign platform. It called for France to abandon the euro, which "condemns France to a slow death," she argued.

Only by ditching the common currency could France stave off the bitter austerity measures sweeping other parts of Europe, the campaign platform urged. The document also outlined a road map back to the franc: capital controls and closing banks to prevent a run on deposits.

The change in focus shocked some National Front old-timers. "It was always the same reaction: 'Oh, la la! Oh, la la!'" Mr. Saint-Just said. "We even reproached [Mr. Philippot], saying there were way too many numbers, too much complexity."

In 2012, Ms. Le Pen got about 18% of the presidential votes, behind Mr. Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy. Her third-place finish pulled in more fresh blood from among France's elite.

Guy Deballe, a Frenchman of Central African origins who once was a Socialist Party activist, switched to National Front because he saw Mr. Philippot and others as a symbol of the party's shift toward an anti-globalization stance that envisaged a bigger role for the state in France's economy.

"The new face and Philippot's professionalism showed what was already happening on the inside," said Mr. Deballe.

Some National Front loyalists thought the party was straying too far from the beliefs of its base. In 2013, Ms. Le Pen refused to attend a march against the legalization of gay marriage. Her absence was seen by party hard-liners as an act of deference to Mr. Philippot, who is openly gay.

Instead, they rallied behind her niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who marched at the protest. When Ms. Le Pen gathered senior leaders of the party for a closed-door meeting in February 2016 to lay out plans for her

presidential run on an anti-euro platform, her niece objected.

"The euro is not the alpha and the omega," said Ms. Maréchal-Le Pen, 27, a French parliament member, according to a person who was in the room. Her aunt, flanked by Mr. Philippot, stood firm. Aides to Ms. Maréchal-Le Pen's didn't respond to requests for comment.

Mr. Philippot's rise strained Ms. Le Pen's relationship with her father. In 2015, Jean-Marie Le Pen repeated his assertion that Nazi gas chambers were a "detail of history." He also told a right-wing paper that Marshal Philippe Pétain, a French military leader convicted of treason for collaborating with Germany in occupied France, wasn't a traitor.

The remarks threatened to unravel Ms. Le Pen's efforts to move past National Front's anti-Semitic history. So she convened a committee of senior party leaders, including Mr. Philippot. They suspended her father's membership in the party and stripped him of the title of honorary chairman.

Mr. Le Pen successfully sued to be reinstated in the party. In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* at the time of the clash, he partly blamed Mr. Philippot for the estrangement with his daughter. Mr. Le Pen said Mr. Philippot "is exercising more and more influence over Marine."

The sidelining of Mr. Le Pen accelerated what party insiders described as Mr. Philippot's efforts to "de-demonize" National Front for

this year's French presidential election.

Campaign posters were emblazoned with Ms. Le Pen's first name—but not her last name. National Front's tricolor flame symbol, appropriated from Italian neo-fascists decades ago, was replaced by a solitary blue rose.

The changes have helped the party find a new following among younger voters who aren't part of its traditional base of older people.

Davy Rodriguez, 23, joined the National Front in 2015, drawn by its anti-euro, anti-globalization stance. He quit the far-left *Parti de Gauche* and helped start a National Front student group at the elite Sciences Po.

"I wouldn't have joined the National Front when Jean-Marie Le Pen was president," Mr. Rodriguez said.

In late 2015, Ms. Le Pen decided to accelerate her outreach to the elites by creating the Horaces.

One of the earliest people to join the Horaces was Mr. Messiha, another *École Nationale d'Administration* graduate. The Egyptian-born civil servant met Ms. Le Pen a year earlier, introducing himself as "pure French by naturalization."

For months, Mr. Messiha kept his membership confidential while continuing his job at the Defense Ministry as a deputy director in charge of logistics. Late last year, Mr. Messiha took a leave of absence so he could officially join

Ms. Le Pen's campaign and talk more openly about his role.

Mr. Messiha said public exposure of other Horaces would subject them to unwelcome scrutiny from their employers, including some of France's biggest banks and companies. Other Horaces are judges, prosecutors and prefects, according to Mr. Messiha, who wouldn't identify any of them by name.

Ms. Le Pen has held monthly plenary sessions to discuss policy and induct new members into the group, he added. Aides to the presidential candidate said she has divided the Horaces into working groups. One is looking at how France can exit the U.S.-led NATO. Another is examining the mechanics of pulling France out of the eurozone.

In late January, Ms. Le Pen gathered about 90 Horaces at a restaurant in Paris to thank them for their work, according to Mr. Messiha. He predicted that important members of the group will run her government if she wins.

"I'm counting on you until my victory, and all the more afterwards," she said.

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The New York Times

Strikes Shut Down French Guiana, With Effects Resonating in Paris

Aurelien Breeden

"French Guiana has always had a rather unfortunate reputation as an economic backwater whose general neglect by French officials is only periodically interrupted by outbreaks of political protest and acts of violence by various local groups demanding greater economic investment in the region," Mr. Toth wrote in an email.

One of France's five overseas departments, the territory uses the euro, but the economy is heavily dependent on imports and on subsidies. In 2009, the overseas departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique, both islands in the Caribbean, were paralyzed for over a month by similar strikes, which sometimes turned violent.

"One gets the impression that the government doesn't perceive that the population is fed up," Antoine Karam, a Socialist who represents French Guiana in the Senate, the upper house of the French

Parliament, told the BFM TV news channel on Monday.

"We are not treated the same way as the French in the Hexagon," Mr. Karam said, referring to mainland France. He also noted that the proportion of inhabitants without access to drinking water or electricity was much higher in French Guiana than it was on the mainland.

Gross domestic product per capita in the territory is less than half what it is on the mainland, and unemployment, more than 20 percent, is about double.

Crime is also a major concern. One group of protesters, who wear balaclavas and call themselves the Collective of 500 Brothers, has been behind many of the demonstrations calling for greater security.

Mr. Cazeneuve, the prime minister, said that solutions would not be found "amid disorder," but he acknowledged the widespread

sentiment that the territory had been neglected.

"There is still much to do to develop French Guiana," Mr. Cazeneuve said from Paris. "In the French Republic, each citizen must be able to benefit from the support and solidarity of the state."

Mr. Cazeneuve announced several measures, including the construction of a new penitentiary to relieve prison crowding. Over the weekend, the French authorities had already announced police reinforcements and increased funds for the hospital in Cayenne, the territory's capital.

The protests have illuminated the deep economic, social and sometimes racial divide between mainland France and its overseas territories, which are the remnants of the French colonial empire.

Lines formed at stores and gas stations over the weekend as people rushed to stock up on goods before the strike, which a group of 37

unions voted on Saturday to carry out for an unlimited period of time.

With four weeks to go before the first round of the French presidential elections, the unrest has become a focal point of the campaign, and candidates across the spectrum spoke profusely about a region of France that usually gets little attention from politicians and the news media outside of electoral seasons.

François Fillon, the embattled center-right candidate, said last week that the crisis was the "consequence of the failed policies of François Hollande," the Socialist president. Marine Le Pen, the head of the far-right National Front party, told Europe 1 radio on Monday that French Guiana was "swamped by illegal immigration," and she accused the government of "averting its eyes."

Ericka Bareigts, the minister for France's overseas territories, responded on the BFM TV news

channel by saying that "Ms. Le Pen discovers the overseas territories every five years and then comes to lecture us." In his statement, Mr. Cazeneuve also hit back at what he called "demagoguery and electoralism."

At a rally in Rennes on Sunday, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leftist candidate in the presidential election, called for better access to health and education services.

Other candidates have been tripped up by past or new statements illustrating how France's overseas territories are only marginally discussed in regular political debate.

The independent candidate Emmanuel Macron, who is predicted by polls to beat Ms. Le Pen in the second round of voting in May, was widely mocked on social media for referring to French Guiana as an "island" — which, unlike many other French overseas territories, it is not.

His campaign later attempted to justify his use of the word by saying that he was referring to the "Île de Cayenne," or "Isle of Cayenne," a term used to designate the area surrounding the capital.

Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, a right-wing presidential candidate, was also in the news for statements he made in

2014 suggesting that the authorities create a detention center in Cayenne for jihadists, to "isolate these raving lunatics." (On Monday, he apologized for the comments.)

Miranda Frances Spieler, a historian at the American University of Paris and the author of a book on French Guiana, said that the territory's legal structure as an overseas territory made it ill-suited to address local challenges like immigration and kept it dependent on the French state.

"The people of French Guiana are trapped in an administrative and legal structure that on the one hand guarantees them French-style

institutions and benefits and on the other assures that local people will never be able to prosper there," Ms. Spieler said in an email.

"The economic problems that now confront France have led to a decline in the quality of local public services in French Guiana and local people cannot make up the difference because they are poor," she said. "For structural reasons, the postcolonial economy of French Guiana can never prosper on its own."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Mackintosh : Forget Trump v. Congress. The Real Political Danger's Still in Europe

James Mackintosh

Politics has been a big driver of markets, but investors may be worrying about the wrong politics. Squabbling over health care hurts the chance of a big U.S. tax cut, and the neurotic can find plenty to fear in the French presidential election. Much less attention has been paid to the biggest political threat on the horizon for investors: Italy.

Italian elections are events investors have learned to disregard after 44 governments in 50 years. The next election might be different, thanks to the potential for a nasty three-way feedback loop between populist politics, the European Central Bank and the bond market.

To see how it could go wrong, think about things from the point of view of holders of Italian government bonds. Their ever-present worry is a repeat of 2011, when a standoff between a populist Italian prime minister and the rest of Europe pushed 10-year yields above 7% (they are now at just 2.37%, even after more than doubling since last summer).

Reassurance comes from the ECB, which is buying €60 billion (\$65 billion) of eurozone bonds every month. It has also pledged to buy an unlimited amount in a crisis, via an untested backstop that requires the country in trouble to sign up to

International Monetary Fund oversight.

Unfortunately, both are in doubt. The ECB is widely expected to "taper" its bond-buying early next year—just as the Italian election is due. The election, which must be held by May, makes the crisis backstop worthless, as inviting in the IMF would surely scuttle the governing Democratic Party's chances and boost Beppe Grillo's 5 Star Movement, which wants a vote on leaving the euro.

"It's an environment in which the rug of QE is being pulled out from under the Italian economy," said Andrew Bosomworth, head of portfolio management in Germany for Pacific Investment Management Co.

An ECB taper could be the trigger for rising bond yields, which help populists in the polls, scaring investors and pushing yields higher still.

The reward for holding Italian 10-year bonds amounts to 2 percentage points extra on top of safe German yields. It is impossible to put a probability on the risk of a self-fulfilling spiral of decline, but given how bad it could get, that seems too little reward.

There are four main sources of hope for Italian bonds: Economic, financial, political and monetary. Italy's economic output per person

has shrunk since the euro was created in 1999, a worse performance even than Greece, according to IMF data. However, it has looked a bit perkier recently, and labor reforms have made some progress. Stronger growth makes it easier to service the government debt pile.

The pile is easier to handle, too. For bonds that have been bought by the central bank, Italy is basically paying interest to itself.

Italian politics might work out. 5 Star is leading in the polls but is unlikely to win by enough to form a government if they stick to their refusal to work with other parties. If they do take power, it will still be hard to leave the euro, as last year's failed attempt to make a much more minor change to the constitution showed.

Finally there is the politics of the central bank. Call it "ItExit" or just say "ciao," either way the euro is toast if Italy leaves, and the ECB would vanish too. Central bankers in Frankfurt have shown they will do anything to avoid that outcome.

Unfortunately, these reassuring arguments don't work well in the face of a panic. Debt is sustainable only until bond yields rise so much that it is unsustainable. Like a bank run, panic can become self-fulfilling, because higher yields become a

reason to sell, not a reason to buy. After the Brexit vote and Donald Trump's surprise election win, investors have become cautious about political prospects, too, making them more likely to overestimate 5 Star's chances. Relying on the ECB to step in eventually, as it did in 2012, isn't much of a case for buying bonds now, as we can be sure that the central bank will only break its rules in a deep crisis.

Laurence Boone, chief economist at Axa Group, thinks the fragility of the eurozone means there will be a "very slow tapering" by the ECB to avoid a surge in yields triggering problems.

Another option would be a taper with added flexibility about which bonds are bought, abandoning the current fixed allocations between countries, so Italian purchases continue and German buying winds down.

Another crisis is still not the most likely outcome. A shaky Italian coalition and a little economic improvement could push Italy's date with destiny back another few years.

But it doesn't take that many bondholders deciding the risks are too great for the problems to spiral. For now investors are focusing elsewhere. When attention turns back to Italy, watch out.



Gilbert : Euro-Zone Growth Pessimists Will Be Proved Wrong (Again)

Mark Gilbert

Economists have spent the past six months upgrading their forecasts for how fast the euro zone economy can grow this year. Even so, they are gloomier than they should be.

For this year, economists surveyed by Bloomberg expect euro zone growth to reach 1.6 percent, a

consensus that's improved three times in the past six months. The average forecast for next year, however, has flatlined for most of that period, and was only recently nudged higher:

Playing Catch-Up

How the consensus forecasts of economists for annual euro zone growth have developed over time

Source: ECFC function on the Bloomberg terminal

We've seen this movie before. Last year, the average forecast of economists was for the euro zone to post a growth rate of a bit more than

1.5 percent; instead, gross domestic product expanded by 1.7 percent. The economy displayed a similar out-performance in 2015, with an average forecast for the year of 1.4 percent outpaced by a growth rate of 2 percent.

So why does the consensus remain so pessimistic? Europe's political backdrop is mostly to blame for

making things seem bleaker than they really are. In 2015, the prospect of Greece tumbling out of the euro sparked jitters that spread to the bond markets of Italy and Spain. Last year, Britain's vote to leave the European Union undermined confidence in the region's economic prospects, while political rumblings in Italy cost Matteo Renzi his job as prime minister.

This year, the outside chance that Marine Le Pen might win the French presidential election and make good on her threat to take one of the euro's founding members out of the single-currency project has cast a pall over the region.

Ignore the politics and focus on the data, however, and the strength of the underlying economy in the euro zone comes into focus. German

business confidence is at its highest level since mid-2011, accord to the Munich-based Ifo institute's latest business climate index. The various Purchasing Managers Index surveys compiled by Markit Economics for the euro region as a whole also suggest an improving outlook, with the composite index at a near six-year high in March:

Heading Higher

Purchasing Manager Index surveys for the euro zone

Source: Markit Economics via Bloomberg

Currency traders seem to be shifting their bets in light of the improved euro zone outlook. Traders are the least bearish they've been on the euro's prospects against the dollar for the past three years, according

to figures compiled by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission:

Source: Bloomberg

And investors are starting to take a liking again to European equities, maybe realizing they were overly pessimistic about Europe (and overly optimistic about Donald Trump and the so-called deflation trade). In the past month, the Stoxx Europe 600 index has outperformed the Standard & Poor's 500 by more than 3 percent on a total return basis in local currencies.

So what will it take for economists to revise their 2017 and 2018 forecasts for the euro zone economy higher? Getting through the next election cycle unscathed should help. The strong weekend showing by Angela

Merkel's Christian Democratic Union in local elections will be further reassurance. France's two-stage election, with the first round scheduled for April 23 and the second vote to be held on May 7, remains an obstacle. But provided the opinion polls are correct in putting Le Pen's support in the second ballot at about 40 percent, behind Emmanuel Macron with about 60 percent, the dissipation of "Frexit" worries could be the trigger for a renewed bout of forecast revisions.

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

The New York Times High-Ranking Syrian Officials Could Face Reckoning in Landmark Spain Case

Nick Cumming-Bruce

Defendants may find themselves taken into custody if they travel abroad. Their assets could be seized in other countries.

"It starts a process of accountability," said Stephen J. Rapp, former United States ambassador at large for the Office of Global Criminal Justice and now a nonresident fellow at The Hague Institute for Global Justice, who helped to file the case. "We could have international arrest warrants in a month or two against these individuals."

The defendants include Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa, a former foreign minister; Ali Mamlouk, head of the National Security Bureau; Gen. Jamil Hassan, head of air force intelligence, one of Mr. Assad's most feared organizations; and senior officers running the prison where Abdul was detained and killed.

The case "will specifically allow the courts to investigate the torture and execution of thousands of civilians in the illegal detention centers" operated by Mr. Assad's government, according to lawyers in London and Madrid with the Guernica 37 International Justice Chambers, a legal advocacy group that represents Abdul's sister.

"Very few defenses apply" to the charge of state terrorism, said Almudena Bernabeu, a partner in Guernica 37 who has prosecuted senior El Salvadoran officers and

other officials implicated in crimes. "There is a big presumption of guilt."

The case reflects accelerating efforts in Europe to bypass the political obstacles that have thwarted access to other international justice remedies for crimes committed in Syria's war.

Russia, a key ally of Mr. Assad, has made clear that it will use its veto power at the United Nations Security Council to block Syria's referral to the International Criminal Court. China has vowed to follow suit.

European prosecutors have started more than 20 cases against individuals for war crimes, but all have focused on low-ranking perpetrators from opposition armed groups or jihadist forces. The case in Spain targets the Syrian government and high-ranking officials.

Judge Eloy Velasco ruled that Spain's national court had jurisdiction to hear the case because the plaintiff is a Spanish citizen, and that under international law, relatives of people who have disappeared or died from crimes committed elsewhere are also victims.

Ms. Bernabeu called the judge's ruling "a landmark decision not only for the victims' fight for justice but also for the requirements to investigate and prosecute international crimes in national courts when other international institutions such as the International Criminal Court have proven unable to do so."

Germany's federal prosecutor has agreed to hear witness testimony in a case filed in March by the Berlin-based European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights and two Syrian lawyers, Anwar al-Bunni and Mazen Darwish, which accuses six high-ranking Syrian officials of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The center has not publicly identified the officials, and it is unclear when, or if, that case will advance to a court.

Guernica 37 lawyers are also preparing a case relating to the death of Abbas Khan, a 32-year-old British doctor who had traveled to Syria to treat war casualties and died in a Damascus prison in December 2013. Syrian officials said he had hanged himself in his cell days before the government had promised to release him.

The case undertaken in Spain began when a WhatsApp message appeared on Amal's phone during her lunch break showing a photo of Abdul's face taken after his death, Ms. Bernabeu said.

Abdul's photo was among the 55,000 images brought out of Syria in 2014 by a former police photographer known by the pseudonym Caesar, documenting the deaths of more than 6,700 people in Mr. Assad's prisons.

The Syrian Association for Missing and Conscience Detainees, an activist group, posted about 3,000 of the Caesar photographs on Facebook in March 2015. Abdul's son, who has escaped to Turkey,

spotted what he believed was his father's face and sent it to his aunt in Madrid.

Confirming that Abdul was the man in the photograph was not easy, Ms. Bernabeu said. His face and body were emaciated, with burn marks. His limbs appeared to have been broken.

Abdul's identity was confirmed by his widow during an emotional Skype call in which Ms. Bernabeu showed her the Caesar images, and she identified surgery scars.

Syrian activists have welcomed the Spain case but remain frustrated that Mr. Assad and his subordinates have yet to answer to an international tribunal.

"The realistic chance of arresting any of them and bringing them to trial is very slim," said Mohammad al-Abdallah, a former detainee who is now executive director of the Syria Justice and Accountability Center in The Hague.

Others still saw progress.

The Spain case is "not a panacea by any means, but in a conflict that has been without any positive symbols, this is potentially positive," said Cameron Hudson, director of the Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide in Washington.

He said the case could show that "there is an end that we can get to that would involve some measure of justice and accountability."

No Evidence Linking London Attacker to Islamic State or al Qaeda, Police Say

Jenny Gross and Wiktor Szary in London and Summer Said in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Updated March 27, 2017 9:21 p.m. ET

LONDON—There is no evidence to suggest that the attacker who killed four people near Parliament last week had links to Islamic State or al Qaeda or that the people around him were aware of his plans, police said Monday.

The 52-year-old Khalid Masood, who killed three people with his car on a central London bridge before fatally stabbing a policeman outside Parliament, clearly had “an interest in jihad,” but authorities are still trying to pin down why he carried out the assault, Neil Basu, deputy assistant commissioner for London’s Metropolitan Police, said.

“His attack method appears to be based on low-sophistication, low-tech, low-cost techniques copied from other attacks, and echo the rhetoric of IS leaders in terms of methodology and attacking police and civilians, but at this stage I have no evidence he discussed this with others,” Mr. Basu said.

Masood, born Adrian Elms, left few hints about what led him to carry out the act of terror.

He moved from place to place in recent years and had been jailed for violent crimes, most recently in 2003, but hadn’t been monitored by intelligence officials, who deemed him only a peripheral figure.

Intelligence officials believe he converted to Islam in prison, but Mr. Basu said there is no evidence that he was radicalized while incarcerated. He changed his name in 2005, police said.

Masood’s mother, Janet Ajao, said Monday in her first public comments that she was “shocked, saddened and numbed” by her son’s actions. “I wish to make it absolutely clear, so there can be no doubt, I do not condone his actions nor support the beliefs he held that led to him committing this atrocity,” she said.

Islamic State had claimed responsibility for the attack, saying in a statement on its affiliated Amaq news agency that it was a response to U.S.-led coalition strikes against the extremist group. The group has often claimed responsibility for such attacks.

Masood, who grew up in southeastern England, converted to Islam some time during jail stints between 2000 and 2003. He went to Saudi Arabia as an English teacher from November 2005 to November

2006 and again from April 2008 to April 2009, where a Saudi official said he drew little notice and didn’t appear on security services’ radar.

In recent years, he appeared to have moved among places that have had problems with Islamist extremism, including Birmingham and Luton.

Mr. Masood worked at the English Language Adventure School in Luton between 2010 and 2012, his former boss, Farasat Latif, said. They spoke frequently, but he appeared to be largely apolitical and said he had embraced Islam because he was trying to move past his earlier criminal life.

A group affiliated with Anjem Choudary, a radical Islamist preacher who was found guilty last year of supporting Islamic State, had a stall about a half-mile from the office.

“Most Muslims would not give an ear to any of that, but as a new Muslim you don’t take anything for granted, so he asked me who these guys were, and I told him they were extremists,” he said. “During our time together there was nothing that would ever suggest that he was on that path.”

Neighbors in Birmingham and Luton have described him as being a largely normal neighbor, whose interactions with them focused on lawn-mowing and the weather.

Authorities have combed through documents and interviewed people close to Masood to determine whether he was working with others or had ties to extremist groups. Since the attack, officers have carried out 15 searches at addresses. Twelve people have been arrested—the latest a 30-year-old man in Birmingham on Sunday—with nine released with no further action.

“I know when, where and how Masood committed his atrocities, but now I need to know why,” Mr. Basu said. “Most importantly, so do the victims and families.”

Among the victims was an American visiting from Utah with his wife to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. In a statement Monday, Kurt Cochran’s family members remembered him as an “amazing individual” and said they had “felt the love of so many people during these past several days.”

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LONDON — British police said Monday that they have found no evidence that London attacker Khalid Masood was linked to the Islamic State, despite a claim by the militant group that he was its “soldier.”

The 52-year-old “clearly had an interest in jihad,” Neil Basu, deputy assistant commissioner of London’s Metropolitan Police, told the BBC. But, Basu said, there was “no evidence or information” that he discussed with others his plans to carry out the attack Wednesday outside Parliament.

Four people were killed and dozens were wounded when Masood drove a rental car through a throng of civilians on Westminster Bridge and then assaulted a police officer with a knife at the gates of Parliament. Masood’s vehicle hit speeds of 76 mph as he drove along the bridge’s sidewalk, and the entire incident lasted just 82 seconds.

No evidence London attacker was linked to Islamic State, police say

Masood was shot dead by security forces after he fatally stabbed the officer, Keith Palmer.

The Islamic State claimed Masood as one of its own the next day in a statement to Amaq, a news agency affiliated with the group.

Basu said investigators have found no evidence to substantiate that claim but acknowledged that the group had influenced Masood.

“His methods appear to be based on low-sophistication, low-tech, low-cost techniques copied from other attacks and echo the rhetoric of [Islamic State] leaders in terms of methodology,” he said.

[London attacker lived among them. Now Birmingham Muslims are worried.]

Police said Saturday that they believe Masood had acted without assistance from others and that his motives may never be fully known. Nine people arrested in the case have been released without charge, while two remain in custody.

Masood was using the online messaging service WhatsApp just minutes before he began his rampage. British officials have in recent days stepped up demands that technology companies enable intelligence services to access encrypted messages, with Home Secretary Amber Rudd saying there must be “no place for terrorists to hide.”

Basu on Monday dismissed as “speculation” reports that Masood had been radicalized while in prison. Masood had a track record of criminal convictions for assault and gun possession but was not on any lists of known extremists. The Saudi Embassy said over the weekend that he had made three visits to the kingdom, where he worked as an English teacher.

“I know when, where and how Masood committed his atrocities, but now I need to know why,” Basu said. “Most importantly, so do the victims and families.”

[I immediately recognized him: What we know about the London attacker]

His comments came as Masood’s mother spoke out for the first time since the killings, saying in a statement that she was “shocked, saddened and numbed” by her son’s actions.

Today’s WorldView

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“I wish to make it absolutely clear, so there can be no doubt, I do not condone his actions nor support the beliefs he held that led to him committing this atrocity,” said Janet Ajao, who lives in Wales.

The family of one of the victims also spoke out Monday. Relatives of American tourist Kurt Cochran, who was 54, said they bore no ill will toward anyone after Cochran was killed while walking along the bridge with his wife, Melissa. She suffered a broken leg and rib.

The couple were on the final day of a European vacation to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary.

"His whole life was an example of focusing on the positive," said Melissa Cochran's brother, Clint

Payne. "Not pretending that negative things don't exist, but not

living our life in the negative — that's what we choose to do."

INTERNATIONAL

**The
New York
Times**

At Site of Deaths, Our Reporters Find Cost of U.S.-ISIS Battle (UNE)

Tim Arango

MOSUL, Iraq — Dozens of Iraqi civilians, some of them still alive and calling out for help, were buried for days under the rubble of their homes in western Mosul after American-led airstrikes flattened almost an entire city block.

At the site on Sunday, more than a week after the bombing runs, reporters for The New York Times saw weary survivors trying to find bodies in the wreckage. Iraqi officials said the final death toll could reach 200 or more, potentially making it one of the worst civilian tolls ever in an American military strike in Iraq.

The fighting against the Islamic State here has grown more urgent, with Iraqi officers saying the American-led coalition has been quicker to strike urban targets from the air with less time to weigh the risks for civilians. They say the change reflects a renewed push by the American military under the Trump administration to speed up the battle for Mosul.

American military officials insist there have been no changes to its rules of engagement that lessen the risk for civilians. They say the reports of greater civilian casualties have come at a time of more intense operations both by Iraqi forces in Mosul and by forces fighting the Islamic State in Syria. Starting with the surge into Mosul in December, they say, American military advisers have been given more authority to call in some airstrikes that do not have to be approved through headquarters.

Coalition Airstrikes Raising Concerns About Civilian Deaths

Recent airstrikes from U.S.-led coalition forces in Syria and Iraq have raised concerns about whether the United States military has become less selective in its targeting.

By MEGAN SPECIA and YARA BISHARA on March 27, 2017. Photo by Felipe Dana/Associated Press. Watch in Times Video »

Right now, the battle for Mosul is in its most dangerous phase for civilians, with the fight reaching into

the twisting alleys and densely populated areas of the old city. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are pinned down here in tight quarters with Islamic State fighters who do not care if they live or die.

At the same time, more American Special Operations troops, some dressed in black uniforms and driving black vehicles — the colors of their Iraqi counterparts — are closer to the front lines. That way, in theory, the targeting of Islamic State fighters should become more precise for the coalition. Another 200 American soldiers, from the 82nd Airborne Division, are heading to Iraq to support that battle over the next few days.

Many Iraqi commanders welcome the more aggressive American role, saying that coalition officers were too risk averse under the Obama administration. Iraqis also say fighting for the dense, urban spaces of western Mosul requires more airpower, even if that means more civilians will die.

When those decisions turn tragic, it looks like this: a panorama of destruction in the neighborhood of Mosul Jidideh so vast one resident compared the destruction to that of Hiroshima, Japan, where the United States dropped an atomic bomb in World War II. There was a charred arm, wrapped in a piece of red fabric, poking from the rubble; rescue workers in red jump suits who wore face masks to avoid the stench, some with rifles slung over their shoulders, searched the wreckage for bodies.

Mosul, Iraq

1

One of the survivors, Omar Adnan, stood near his destroyed home on Sunday and held up a white sheet of paper with 27 names of his extended family members, either dead or missing, written in blue ink.

Nearby were two men. One of them, Ashraf Mohammed, said, "I lost all of my family except this guy, my brother."

The civilian deaths have not been limited to the battle for Mosul, which is about 220 miles north of Baghdad. Across large areas of

Syria and Iraq, more American ground troops are being committed to the fight, and more American airstrikes are being ordered. In Syria, the battle has intensified in large part around Raqqa, the Islamic State's declared capital. The campaigns in both countries intend to deprive the Islamic State of its biggest cities, while keeping pressure on the group across its holdings.

Allegations of civilian casualties in both countries from American-led airstrikes have increased so much in recent months that, for the first time, the number of coalition strikes affecting civilians has surpassed those carried out by Russia in Syria, according to Airwars, a monitoring organization based in London that tracks international airstrikes and their effect on civilians.

Rising Civilian Deaths in Iraq

At least 1,353 civilians have been killed by American-led coalition airstrikes in Iraq, according to estimates by Airwars, a nonprofit group that monitors and assesses reports of civilian deaths from coalition airstrikes in Syria and Iraq.

The group said the increase in reported civilian deaths began under President Barack Obama and accelerated after President Trump took office in January.

American officials have confirmed that the coalition conducted airstrikes in Mosul Jidideh on March 17 and that they are investigating whether it was to blame for the dozens of deaths there. They insist that they are doing everything they can to protect civilian lives while pushing the fight in Mosul.

Jim Mattis, the Defense secretary, told reporters at the Pentagon on Monday that military leaders "are keenly aware that every battlefield where an enemy hides behind women and children" could lead to civilian casualties. "We go out of our way to always do everything humanly possible to reduce loss of life or injury among innocent people," he said.

The east side of Mosul, a city of 1.8 million that is Iraq's second largest,

was mostly secured by Iraqi forces in January. Much of it remained intact, and everyday life resumed. But on the west, the fight has become more brutal, with sections that look like moonscapes.

Maj. Gen. Maan al-Saadi, an Iraqi special forces commander, said his men had called in the American airstrikes that caused the civilian deaths, adding of the victims, "We feel sad for them."

But he called the episode an unfortunate outcome in a nasty war. He said that Iraqi forces had lost thousands of men fighting the Islamic State, and that to lose so many civilians in a single attack "in return for liberating the entire city of Mosul — I think it is a normal thing."

"This is a war, and mistakes can happen, and there can be losses," he said. "But we are fighting the most dangerous terrorist organization in the world, with huge, unprecedented support from the international coalition."

Gen. Ali Jamil, an intelligence officer with the Iraqi special forces, said he had been fighting the Islamic State for more than two years with the support of American air power.

"I have not seen such a quick response with high coordination from the coalition as I am seeing now," he said. Before, when Iraqis requested airstrikes, he said, "there used to be a delay, or no response sometimes, on the excuse of checking the location or looking for civilians."

On Sunday, a bulldozer pushed debris so rescuers could reach bodies. When one body was found, a man nearby identified it as that of his nephew, and another man wrote the name down in a leather-bound notebook. The body was then zipped up in a blue plastic bag and placed inside a garage alongside others. Many of the dead had already been buried in the gardens of homes that were only partially destroyed.

Residents who were in the neighborhood during the fighting suggested that there had been every reason to believe the area was filled with civilians at the time of

the airstrikes — especially because the Iraqi government and its American allies had dropped leaflets asking civilians to remain in their homes rather than risk fleeing into the middle of the battle.

But the battle has come to them now.

As the fight for this west Mosul neighborhood raged 10 days ago, Islamic State fighters were dashing between homes across courtyards and passing through holes punched in concrete walls that allowed them to move their positions without showing themselves on the streets. Advancing Iraqi soldiers, who called in the airstrikes, were in earshot of civilians.

"They were very close," said Mubishar Thanoon, a resident in his late 30s, standing on Sunday at the bedside of his brother, who was wounded in the attack, at a hospital in Erbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region. "I was hearing their voices. They knew exactly that we were there."

Another man, Ziad Suleyman, 27, said he could see an Iraqi special

forces sniper on a nearby building, who was wearing a baseball cap and ear muffs and communicated with him using hand signals. "He was waving to me," said Mr. Suleyman, also at the Erbil hospital, where he was visiting a wounded relative. "I was seeing him, he was seeing us."

Residents and Iraqi officers said that Islamic State fighters, some speaking Russian, according to residents, had taken sniper positions on the rooftops of homes, pinning down some advancing Iraqi forces. Hundreds of residents, trying to escape indiscriminate artillery and rocket fire and fearful of airstrikes, took refuge in basements.

It was there that they died, from airstrikes targeting the snipers that caused entire buildings to collapse, survivors recounted.

"Not all of the houses had Daesh on the roof," said Ali Abdulghani, a resident of the neighborhood, using another name for Islamic State fighters. "Why, just because of one Daesh, kill everyone?"

American military officials have said that their investigation so far has found that one building collapsed days after the strikes in the neighborhood, raising the possibility that the Islamic State blew up the building after the bombing runs, killing many civilians.

In interviews, survivors and local residents dismissed that, saying airstrikes brought the buildings down. Survivors and Iraqi officers said that fighting raged in the neighborhood for days after the strikes, delaying the arrival of rescuers.

A few among the lucky are now lying, injured but alive, in hospital beds in Erbil, about 50 miles east of Mosul.

Mr. Thanoon's brother, Ali, was one of them. He survived days under the wreckage, emerging with a broken arm and many cuts and bruises. He recalled lying under the rubble never thinking he would die there, and speaking to another man nearby, who did not survive.

"It was a conversation between two dying men," he said.

He said he had hid in a basement not because Islamic State fighters forced him to, but because of the "terror and fear" of artillery and airstrikes.

"For me and my family, we thought this was the safest place," he said.

When asked what happened to his family, Ali's brother quickly changed the subject.

A few moments later, in the hallway outside the room, Mr. Thanoon confided that he had not yet told his brother, who he said was delirious from his ordeal and from painkillers, that his family — his two wives, four daughters, two sons and two grandchildren — had all been killed.

Correction: March 27, 2017

An earlier version of this article misspelled the family name of a resident of Mosul who was quoted about Islamic State snipers in the city. He is Ali Abdulghani, not Abdulghani.



Editorial : A U.S. airstrike may have killed hundreds in Mosul. That's no way to win a war.

UNTIL NOW there has been a stark contrast between the tactics of the U.S.-backed military campaign to recapture Mosul, Iraq, from the Islamic State and those of Russian and Syrian government forces attacking rebels in neighboring Syria. The latter has featured deliberate bombing of civilian targets, including hospitals, food stores and aid convoys, at the cost of thousands of lives. In Mosul, meanwhile, Iraqi counterterrorism forces have sustained heavy casualties in street fighting while limiting the use of artillery and airstrikes to avoid civilian deaths, winning praise from humanitarian groups.

A U.S. airstrike that may have killed scores or even hundreds of people in Mosul on March 17 may now tarnish that record. Iraqi civil defense officials are saying the attack targeted a building in Mosul's al-Jadida neighborhood where many people were crowded in a basement; the remains of more than 100 had been recovered by Sunday.

On Saturday, the Pentagon confirmed that the coalition had targeted Islamic State fighters "at the location corresponding to the allegations of civilian casualties" and said a formal inquiry was underway.

Confusion still surrounds the incident: Iraqi military authorities are saying the casualties were caused by booby traps the Islamic State had planted in the house, or by a suicide car bomb that detonated nearby. There's no question that the jihadists are using civilians as shields, forcing them to stay in homes that are used as firing positions. It is nevertheless vital that U.S. authorities determine as quickly as possible whether an American or coalition bomb caused the civilian deaths, and, if so, accept responsibility.

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It's equally important that U.S. and Iraqi forces minimize further civilian casualties as they reclaim the remaining, densely populated areas of Mosul still held by the Islamic State. Once the fight is over, the Shiite-led Iraqi government will face the stiff political challenge of stabilizing a multiethnic city that includes hundreds of thousands of Sunnis; that will be all the more difficult if the pro-government forces have inflicted heavy casualties.

U.S. commanders appear to understand the stakes. Gen. Joseph Votel, leader of U.S. Central Command, issued a statement saying "the death of innocent civilians in Mosul is a terrible tragedy" and that the coalition "will continue to take extraordinary measures to avoid harming civilians." U.S. spokesmen say the rules of engagement governing airstrikes, which are tailored to avoid civilian deaths, have not changed.

Outside observers nevertheless are speculating that the advent of the Trump administration has loosened

restraints on U.S. attacks in the Middle East. A controversial Jan. 29 raid in Yemen, approved by President Trump, killed up to a dozen civilians, according to Mr. Votel. A U.S. airstrike in Syria's Aleppo province on March 16 is under investigation amid allegations that it killed scores of civilians gathered in a mosque; the Pentagon described the target as an al-Qaeda gathering.

President Barack Obama was frequently criticized, with some reason, for micromanaging military strike decisions and exercising excessive caution. Mr. Trump, on the other hand, has talked loosely about heavily bombing Islamic State-held areas and has stepped up direct U.S. involvement in the fighting. Defeating the Islamic State more quickly through the greater use of U.S. force is a worthy goal. But doing so at the cost of higher civilian casualties would be a serious mistake.



Erdogan's International Network of Muslim Cleric Spies

Paul Hockenos

BERLIN — This month, relations between Turkey and the two countries home to the bulk of Turkey's European diaspora,

Germany and the Netherlands, publicly exploded in a fit of acrimony and insults. But the dispute was playing out on two levels, only one of which was immediately apparent.

As impossible as it was to ignore Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's repeated accusations of "Nazi practices" by Europe, it was easy to overlook the history of

mutual tension leading up to that outburst — including Erdogan's own long-running subversion of Islamic religious institutions catering to diaspora Turks in Europe.

On the surface, the fight was over the Erdogan government's efforts to campaign in Europe ahead of a pivotal referendum vote next month aimed at remaking Turkey as a centralized presidential state. For the first time ever, German and Dutch officials banned Turkish government ministers from making stops in their respective countries to lobby for votes, claiming that Europe's democratic systems shouldn't be used as vehicles to aid in Erdogan's power grab (though it seemed more than a coincidence that the governments of both European countries were about to face re-election themselves). Erdogan responded by making his Nazi accusations and threatening to annul Turkey's refugee deal with the EU that is said to have slowed refugee inflow into continental Europe.

That tensions reached such heights so quickly reflects the way nationalist populism can be mutually complementary across international borders. But it also reflects a longer-standing problem specific to Turkey and Europe — namely, the Turkish government's conviction that diaspora Turks everywhere in the world owe their first allegiance to Turkey. Erdogan doesn't just want Turkish expats' votes; he wants their unwavering loyalty, and, to the consternation of European governments, he has proved willing to go to extreme lengths to secure it.

That includes speaking engagement by Turkish politicians and Turkish-language propaganda, and instances where the two overlap. (In an interview with a German-Turkish newspaper in 2011, Erdogan declared that "forced integration" requiring immigrants to suppress their culture and language violated international law. It wasn't the first time Erdogan used language that Europeans felt crossed a line: A year earlier, in Cologne, Germany, he'd said, "Assimilation is a crime against humanity.") But Erdogan's efforts also include more subtle tactics, including shaping the religious life of Turks residing in Europe to serve his government's political goals by using state-paid imams as spies.

The Sehlik Camii mosque, in Berlin's immigrant-heavy district of Neukölln, is a case in point. Until mid-July last year, it had been the site of a cautious but thoroughly progressive experiment. The mosque's young imam, Ender Cetin, a native Neuköllner of Turkish descent, began opening up his house of worship to non-Muslim visitors: for example, holding open-house Saturdays. He began engaging in public dialogue with Jewish rabbis and Christian priests.

The Sehlik Camii mosque, Berlin's largest Islamic house of worship, basked in media attention for these efforts, viewed as it was by integration proponents as an exemplary initiative to cut the yawning gap between Germany's Muslims and other Germans. But Cetin was not alone: He was part of a new generation of Muslim clerics across Germany who sought to better weave the Turkish Muslim community into the fabric of mainstream Germany. These young priests made it their business to pick up solid German or, like Cetin, hailed from Germany's Turkish community and were born and raised here, then trained in Turkey. They reached out to the German media and ventured into German public schools to teach religion classes for Muslim pupils; a few even broached ultra-sensitive topics, such as homosexuality.

But this religious glasnost came to an abrupt halt this past summer, in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt in Turkey. The scuppered putsch prompted a crackdown across Turkey and reached into Germany, as well as other European countries with diaspora Turks.

Cetin and his allies found themselves facing the wrath of Diyanet, Turkey's directorate for religious affairs. Diyanet is Turkey's official Islamic authority and the paymaster of about 900 mosques in Germany — and many more across Western Europe. The directorate was created in 1924 with the aim of keeping Islam in check in secular, republican Turkey; in the era of Erdogan, critics say, it has become a political tool to further the interests of his Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP). Diyanet's budget covers the salaries of all of Turkey's "export imams" active in Western Europe, every one of whom is a Turkish civil servant.

In the wake of the coup attempt, the Diyanet headquarters in Ankara — one of the Turkish state's most powerful institutions — yanked tight the leash. Cetin and others, including the entire Sehlik Camii governing board, were unceremoniously disposed of — accused of being followers of Fethullah Gulen, the mysterious exile whom Erdogan has blamed for the coup. A note on the mosque's entrance gate read: "Gulen supporters unwelcome." The brief experiment at Sehlik Camii and other Diyanet-funded parishes was snuffed out, and the faithful returned to the well-worn path of Islam they were on before; an Islam more oriented to the culture of Turkey than Western Europe — and more loyal to the party of Erdogan than any other.

The lives of many Turkish migrants, particularly older ones of first or second generation, still revolve around the insular world of the mosque parish and the Turkish community.

The lives of many Turkish migrants, particularly older ones of first or second generation, still revolve around the insular world of the mosque parish and the Turkish community. A broad spectrum of Turkish-language newspapers and broadcast media, from the left to the far-right, are available in Germany. But most popular among those with Turkish passports, observers estimate, are probably Ankara's official state news channels, which meticulously follow the AKP line. According to Haci-Halil Uslucan, a migration specialist at the University of Duisburg-Essen, "The Turkish media received in Germany is roughly 80 to 90 percent government-friendly, manipulative, and unilateral." Observers say the regime's propaganda has an even bigger impact in the diaspora: Unlike their countrymen in the homeland, the diaspora Turks don't have the reality of everyday life in Turkey to contrast with the exaggerated reports.

The long arm of Ankara also reaches beyond its borders via the network of Diyanet imams and mosques in Europe, which is managed by the Cologne-based Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB) — the largest Muslim organization in Germany with branch offices across the country. The mosques' function — at least until recently — has not been expressly political, nor are Turkey's imams as a whole in the service of either Erdogan or the AKP. (There are also, in addition to Diyanet-financed mosques, independent, self-financed Turkish mosques in Germany.) But the missions of the AKP and Diyanet-funded mosques abroad dovetail ever more frequently, as the case of the Sehlik Camii imam and a mosque-based espionage scandal in Germany last year vividly illustrate.

As the Turkish population in Germany — much of it with roots in poor, rural, and religious eastern Anatolia — swelled beginning in the 1960s, when the first Turkish *gastarbeiter*, or guest workers, arrived in West Germany to handle the grunt work of the booming postwar economy, makeshift mosques began to pop up in migrant districts of Germany's inner cities, usually in the form of small prayer rooms in multistory walk-ups. There were at the time — and remain today — few sources of imams for the Anatolian workers other than Diyanet. DITIB came to life in the early 1980s in order to supply the

flock with leadership and often purports to speak in the name of the Turkish community today, a fact that troubles many leftist and liberal-minded Turks in Germany.

The condition of Turks in Germany became an urgent concern in the 1980s and 1990s, when Germans belatedly took notice of the burgeoning Turkish community in their midst — and of its youngest generations filling up the classrooms of urban secondary schools. Study after study showed that Turkish children performed poorly in German schools, that Germany's new underclass was disproportionately immigrant — and, unsurprisingly, that the Turkish community in Germany identified with Turkey and its traditions over Germany and its ways.

Observers underscored the discrimination against and exclusion of the Turkish community in Germany as the reason for the migrants' condition. The guest workers were never meant to stay in Germany, even though 3 million eventually did so. But experts also zoomed in the use of imported imams as part of the problem — a contributing factor to Europe's broader failures to integrate. Few of the holy men learned proper German, and their stints of four years abroad were hardly enough to understand the day-to-day lives and problems of their migrant flocks, whose lives were rooted in Germany, dealing with the German authorities, schools, employers, and neighbors. In one measure of how out of touch they were (and remain): The Friday sermons delivered weekly at the houses of worship are a one-to-one facsimile of those written by the Diyanet higher-ups in Ankara, which are delivered weekly across Turkey.

But as Erdogan has grown increasingly autocratic, Diyanet has begun to look more like a tool of the regime — and DITIB a vehicle of the conservative AKP philosophy. DITIB has become "an extended arm of the Turkish president, Erdogan," Islam expert Susanne Schröter told *Die Zeit*. "Through it, the Islamic AKP ideology extends to the classrooms."

The changed role of Diyanet and DITIB came under harsh scrutiny in Germany last year in the aftermath of the attempted coup.

The changed role of Diyanet and DITIB came under harsh scrutiny in Germany last year in the aftermath of the attempted coup. Not only were reform-minded imams like Ender Cetin ousted, but preachers loyal to Erdogan were also caught red-handed by German intelligence services submitting lists of

suspected Gulen supporters to Turkish authorities.

The German authorities charged 16 clerics with illegal "secret service collaboration" and searched mosques and apartments, confiscating computers and reams of paperwork. One German parliamentarian with Turkish heritage called DITIB a "political proxy of Erdogan" and demanded the German government cease cooperation with it. Equally compelling evidence of activity on behalf of Ankara existed in Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. According to Turkish

media, Diyanet employed imams in 38 countries to gather intelligence on suspected Gulen followers. In Germany, DITIB issued a statement categorically denying the charges of espionage and protesting the searches.

The German weekly *Der Spiegel*, which broke the story, claimed that the imams' reports at their disposal underscored how far Erdogan's power reaches into German society. One of Erdogan's objectives, charged *Der Spiegel*, was to divide the Turkish community abroad between friends and foes of the regime. It concluded: "DITIB is an

important part of the web of the Turkish president in terms of Turkish citizens abroad. Erdogan considers DITIB an instrument to expand his rule in Turkey."

On April 16, the day of the referendum, there will be voting stations in 57 countries hosting the Turkish diaspora. Germany will have voting booths in 13 cities, located in the embassy and consulates — almost twice as many as during the 2015 elections. There is no polling on how Turkish nationals abroad might vote. In addition to AKP-front lobby groups organizing for Erdogan, opposition groups are

campaigning against it. "Erdogan has most probably profited from the ban on Turkish government politicians," said the Berlin-based Turkish journalist Ahmet Kulahci, which is, according to Kulahci, exactly what he intended. Indeed, caught between the politics of two worlds, Europe's Turkish migrants might well be the decisive factor in a pivotal vote that could confirm or reject the swing to authoritarian solutions in Europe and beyond.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.S. Boosts Military Backing for Saudi-Led Coalition in Yemen

Gordon Lubold and Jay Solomon

March 27, 2017 5:59 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Trump administration has significantly increased military support for Sunni Arab states fighting al Qaeda and Iranian-backed militias in Yemen, said U.S. and Arab officials, drawing the U.S. deeper into the two-year civil war there.

American support now includes greater intelligence and logistical support for the militaries of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, these officials said.

The Trump administration also is moving to resume the sale of precision-guided weapons to Saudi Arabia, which were frozen during the final months of the Obama administration due to concerns about the rising numbers of civilian fatalities in Yemen.

"We have a commitment...that they will increase this cooperation," said Saudi Gen. Ahmad al-Asiri, spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, who visited Washington this month with Saudi Arabia's defense minister, Prince Mohammed bin Salman. "If there was a hiccup last year, this was an abnormality."

The U.S. is predominantly interested in providing support for Gulf nations to fight al Qaeda militants inside Yemen, who are seen as posing a direct threat to the American homeland, according to U.S. officials.

But Arab military officials have lauded the increased U.S. cooperation as pivotal to their own effort to push back against what they call Iranian expansionism in the Persian Gulf region.

While Washington's immediate focus is on fighting al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP, the support for Gulf countries in Yemen

also risks dragging the U.S. more directly into the country's civil war, which has left more than 15,000 people dead. The U.S. support also creates a counterbalance to Iranian influence there, and could put the U.S. in more direct conflict with Tehran.

Yemen's Houthi insurgents, who receive military and financial support from Iran, according to U.S. and Arab officials, drove the government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi from Yemen's capital in 2015. Iran has denied supplying arms to the Houthis.

Houthi fighters have shown an increased willingness to target U.S. naval vessels operating in the Persian Gulf, viewing them as aiding Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. in denying the flow of supplies into Yemen, particularly the Red Sea port of Hodeida.

U.S. officials have voiced growing concern about the flow of commercial traffic through the waters off Yemen, in particular, the Bab-el-Mandeb waterway, between the Arabian peninsula and Djibouti. The U.S. Navy has warned about mines that Houthis, with help from Iranian advisers, have placed in the waters there. U.S. officials worry that those mines may slip off their moorings and drift into international waters, possibly threatening U.S. naval vessels as well as commercial ships.

"The risk to the Bab-el-Mandeb depends in many ways upon whether our operations against al Qaeda get conflated with the Saudi-led coalition's war against the Houthis," said Eric Pelofsky, who was senior director for North Africa and Yemen at the National Security Council under former President Barack Obama.

Senior U.S. defense officials said much of the Trump administration's Yemen strategy is now tied to its military alliance with the U.A.E. The

two countries historically have been allies, but cooperation has intensified in recent months.

"Iran must not be allowed to create a Hezbollah-like proxy in Yemen through the Houthis," said Yousef Al Otaiba, the U.A.E.'s ambassador to the U.S., who called U.S. support to fight the Houthis and AQAP a "welcome development."

The enhanced assistance has included a larger U.S. role in operational planning, aircraft refueling, intelligence sharing and providing American drones for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

In coming weeks, the U.S.-U.A.E. partnership is likely to grow deeper as the U.S. pledges more support and as defense officials learn more about how to target militants with AQAP.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has requested White House approval to allow the U.S. to provide support to the Saudi and Emirati governments for their operations in Yemen, to include a plan by U.A.E. forces to drive Houthi rebels out of Hodeida, U.S. officials said. That proposed operation was first reported by The Washington Post. The U.S. also wants to provide nonlethal aid and other equipment as well, another U.S. official said.

The American relationship with the U.A.E. has grown stronger under Mr. Mattis, a former Marine general who officials say has long been a fan of the professionalism, discipline and focus of the Emirati forces, particularly in the fight in Yemen. U.S. officials often refer warmly to the U.A.E.

"We love them; they are 'Little Sparta,'" said one official, referring to the warrior city-state in ancient Greece.

As strong as those forces are, they still require hand-holding, said one

U.S. military official. But another official said the discipline of the Emiratis was on display when they took the fight to AQAP in Mukalla, a coastal city in central Yemen last year.

"They were an Arab force who had skin in the game, they were getting into firefights, they were bleeding and not cowering, against the enemies of our country" said another U.S. official. "The U.S. looks at this and says, how could we not partner with them?"

The shift comes at a time when the U.S. is trying to get "back into the game" in Yemen, according to another U.S. official, after American counterterrorism operations there were curtailed in 2015 in the wake of the collapse of the Yemeni government.

The U.S. and U.A.E. worked closely together during a Jan. 29 U.S.-led ground raid that led to the death of American Navy SEAL, Chief Petty Officer William "Ryan" Owens.

The new chapter of the relationship between the two countries was teed up by the Obama administration, said a former U.S. official, but the Trump White House is pushing it further.

"I know we're getting much better intel and cooperation in general," according to a senior Arab official, referring to the U.S.-U.A.E. relationship, particularly in Yemen, where there are shared interests.

As evidence, the official said decisions are made much faster now and Mr. Mattis has a "broad lane" to make decisions with partners in Yemen.

"We all agree the endgame is a political solution," the Arab official said of the situation in Yemen. "But we can't reach that if we don't have a tactical military advantage."

March 27, 2017 6:58 p.m. ET

Only a few years ago America's policy makers were wringing their hands about "peak oil" and dependence on imported fuels. Now headlines feature the return of oil gluts. What happened? Saudi Arabia undertook a "stress test" of America's oil-and-gas industry that produced unintended consequences.

We're witnessing the first signs of a new normal in oil markets. Call it Shale 2.0, characterized by a potent combination: eager and liquid capital markets funding hundreds of experienced (now-lean) small to midsize companies that can respond to modest upticks in price with a velocity unseen in oil markets in eons—all using shale technology that is shockingly better than before and poised to keep improving.

This year sees the U.S. not only filling storage tanks to the brim but also exporting more than a million barrels of crude oil a day. Exports are at the highest level in American history, twice the previous crude export peak in 1958. The U.S. is exporting more oil than five of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' 13 members.

The stress test that brought this about began two years ago, when Saudi Arabia decided it would try to tame American shale oil and gas production. The technology of hydraulic fracturing, which began to emerge barely over a decade ago, led to the fastest

and largest increase in hydrocarbon production in history.

Oil prices started to collapse in 2014 because American shale businesses oversupplied markets. The Saudis responded by increasing production, which drove prices even lower. Their theory was that this would wreak havoc on small and midsize petroleum upstarts in states from Texas and Oklahoma to Pennsylvania and North Dakota.

The fall from the \$120-a-barrel stratosphere to under \$30 did take a toll on producers everywhere. Businesses reduced investments and staffing, and many went bankrupt. It also deprived OPEC member states—and Russia, it bears noting—of hundreds of billions of dollars in revenues, forcing them to tap sovereign-wealth funds and cut domestic budgets.

Something else happened. Little noticed outside the petroleum cognoscenti, shale technologies kept getting better. The productivity—output per shale drilling rig—has been rising by more than 20% a year. That means every 3½ years the average rig produces twice as much oil or gas. No other energy technology of any kind is improving at that rate. Put another way, the cost to produce shale oil keeps falling.

As a result, with an assist from the recent modest increase in oil prices, shale investors and drillers are returning. Bad as that is for OPEC, the really frightening prospect is that software tools and techniques will

now start to invade the shale domain, one of the least-computerized industrial sectors. "The cloud" will be just as much of an economic accelerant for shale as it has been for other complex and distributed industries.

Established tech companies such as Microsoft, IBM, Teradata and Splunk see the opportunity. The digital oilfield is also the animating logic of the huge merger of oil services giant Baker Hughes with General Electric's "industrial internet" and oil-and-gas business. Even more portentous, a new ecosystem of tech startups is chasing the prize of unlocking value in petabytes of untapped shale data.

Venture capitalists like to talk about "unmet needs" in "big markets." Oil is the world's biggest market in a traded commodity, and America's shale market went from near zero to \$150 billion in a decade, largely without help from software.

For the Saudis and other oil oligarchs, the worrisome feature of Shale 2.0 is that software enhances the most remarkable feature of shale production: velocity. The thousands of small to midsize shale operators and investors make rapid individual decisions, each involving a tiny fraction of capital per decision compared with the supermajors. This fluid, chaotic, very American entrepreneurial environment operates in private markets, largely on private land, and can expand or pull back with a volume and velocity unseen in oil markets in a century.

Of course the U.S. still imports oil (for now), but net imports have declined by half. America is now the world's biggest natural-gas producer and has become a net exporter. Other places can gush hydrocarbons into markets. But they're all slow-moving, in some cases monopolistic, leviathans. As Ed Morse, Citi's head of global commodities, recently observed, OPEC "has lost its clout."

With all the hype over energy alternatives, one might conclude that hydrocarbons don't matter much. You can be sure that neither Russia nor OPEC thinks that. Nor does the Energy Information Administration or the International Energy Agency, whose forecasts see hydrocarbon demand rising for decades regardless of subsidies for alternatives.

It's hard to imagine a more potent combination than huge markets, willing investors and galloping software technology. It's entirely feasible for America to become a far bigger oil exporter, even one of the biggest. Such is the power of shale and software. It's not what the Saudis had in mind when they launched that stress test.

Mr. Mills is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

Appeared in the Mar. 28, 2017, print edition.

Mills: Saudi Arabia Puts U.S. Energy Producers to a Test—and They Ace It

Asa Fitch and Benoit Faucon

Updated March 27, 2017 11:04 p.m. ET

After years shunning Iran, Western businesses are bursting through the country's doors—but U.S. companies are noticeably absent.

Dozens of development projects and deals have been hammered out since Iran's nuclear accord with world powers in 2015 lifted a range of sanctions. Among them, France's Peugeot and Renault SA are building cars. The U.K.'s Vodafone Group PLC is teaming up with an Iranian firm to build up network infrastructure. Major oil companies including Royal Dutch Shell PLC have signed provisional agreements to develop energy resources. And

infrastructure giants, including Germany's Siemens AG, have entered into agreements for large projects.

Chicago-based Boeing Co. last year got the go-ahead to sell 80 aircraft valued at \$16.6 billion to Iran. But for the most part, deals involving U.S. businesses are few and far between.

Two of the world's biggest auto makers, Ford Motor Co. and General Motors Co., have steered clear of Iran since the nuclear accord. A Ford spokeswoman said the company was complying with U.S. law and didn't have any business with Iran. GM is focusing "on other markets, and other opportunities," spokesman Tony Cervone said.

Peugeot has taken notice. Its Middle East chief, Jean-Christophe Quémard, said Peugeot's early entry has left U.S. rivals in the dust. "This is our opportunity to accelerate," he said last month.

U.S. companies are at risk of losing lucrative deals to early movers into a promising market of 80 million people, analysts say, setting off skirmishes among European and Asian companies eager to gain an edge on more-cautious U.S. competitors. But as latecomers, U.S. companies likely won't face a learning curve in dealing with the political risks and the bureaucratic difficulties in Iran.

Apple Inc. explored entering the country after the Obama administration allowed the export of

personal-communications devices in 2013, according to people familiar with the matter. But the company decided against it because of banking and legal problems, the people said. Apple declined to comment.

U.S. companies usually need special permission from the Treasury Department to do business with Iran. Further complicating matters for U.S. companies: President Donald Trump during his campaign threatened to rip up Iran's nuclear deal, and he hit the country with new sanctions shortly after taking office. On Sunday, Iran imposed its own sanctions on 15 U.S. companies, mainly defense firms.

Foreign Investors Flock to Iran as U.S. Firms Watch on the Sidelines (UNE)

The nuclear deal removed a range of U.S., European Union and United Nations sanctions in 2016 that had held back Iranian energy exports and put the brakes on foreign investment. In exchange, Tehran agreed to curbs on its nuclear program. But while food, medicine and agricultural products are exempted from U.S. restrictions, U.S. products are available in Iran often only through foreign subsidiaries or third-party importers.

Peugeot, officially known as Groupe PSA SA, is aiming to hit annual production of 200,000 cars in Iran by next year in conjunction with its partner Iran Khodro, after the two signed a €400 million (\$432 million) joint-venture agreement in June. Already, the pace of both Peugeot's and Renault's car sales in Iran has more than doubled. In February, Renault sold 15,230 vehicles in Iran, up 175% from a year earlier.

Asian companies, mainly Chinese ones, have had a growing presence in Iran even as the country was under sanctions. Some have stepped up activities since the nuclear deal, including China National Petroleum Corp., which joined France's Total SA in a preliminary agreement to develop a major Iranian gas field in November.

On a recent visit in Tehran's biggest hotels, lobbies were full of foreigners huddling with prospective Iranian partners. A packed automotive conference in February drew top executives from Peugeot, Renault and Citroën. The same day, the Swedish prime

minister was visiting a Scania truck factory west of the capital after the company's deal to supply Iran with 1,350 buses.

Iran has caught the attention of a broad spectrum of investors beyond autos, with foreign companies selling everything from gas-powered turbines to mining technologies in the country.

Government-approved foreign direct investment shot up to more than \$11 billion last year, official figures show, from \$1.26 billion in 2015. Pedram Soltani, the vice president of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, said more than 200 foreign business delegations have visited Iran since the nuclear deal took effect.

"We see what's happening in the U.S. and Mr. Trump's comments," said Ghadir Ghiafe, an Iranian steel-industry executive who is exploring partnerships with South American and European companies. "Our businessmen don't pay much attention to it."

Foreign companies still face daunting obstacles to doing business in Iran. Iran placed 131st out of 176 countries for corruption in a ranking by Transparency International last year. It also has major economic problems, including high unemployment and a banking system saddled with bad loans.

Large international banks remain reluctant to re-establish links with Iran despite the nuclear deal. That reluctance has made transfers of money into and out of Iran a challenge.

Western banks such as Standard Chartered PLC, BNP Paribas SA and Credit Suisse Group AG have generally refused to handle transactions to Iran for fear of being fined for running afoul of banking sanctions that remain. Chinese and smaller European banks have attempted to step into the breach, even though many companies remain concerned about the regulatory environment.

Some smaller European asset managers have teamed with partners in Iran to launch stock and private-equity funds pitched to foreign investors. Charlemagne Capital, for example, a U.K.-based manager that specializes in emerging and frontier markets, joined Iran's Turquoise Capital last April to launch Iran-focused funds. American brokers and asset managers have stayed away from the market, however.

Some large multinationals—including infrastructure giants and major oil companies—are keeping a close eye on the U.S. and its new president, in case sanctions snap back into place. Shell, Total SA and OMV AG of Austria have signed memorandums of understanding for deals in Iran but have yet to complete terms.

Last month, Total Chief Executive Patrick Pouyanné said the company would wait for clarity from the Trump administration before completing a \$4.8 billion investment in the country's South Pars offshore gas field.

But many foreign companies are finding the country's growth hard to ignore.

The International Monetary Fund recently estimated the economy grew 7.4% in the first half of the Iranian fiscal year that ended this month, rebounding from a decline in the previous year. Meanwhile, a surge in demand has pushed consumer spending in Tehran to \$5,240 per capita so far in 2017, up about 11% compared with 2016, according to Planet Retail, a London research firm.

The upshot is even if there is demand to buy American, much of Iran's market is left to European and Asian companies.

"The market is now more diverse with Chinese cars and we realize how important it is to have satisfied customers," said Mohsen Karimi, a sales manager at Iran Khodro, a domestic auto manufacturer that has a partnership with Peugeot. Khodro had sold out its stock of cars this past year, and was now behind delivery targets for advance sales, Mr. Karimi added.

Like many Tehran residents, Alireza Aniseh wanted his first car to stand out in a streetscape filled with boxy Iranian models. The 24-year-old said he is leaning toward buying a Toyota Corolla or Camry, but his dream is owning a Ford Focus.

The Washington Post

Richard Cohen : Is Israel losing its soul?

On what seems a regular basis, the United Nations takes a poke at Israel — for its settlements policy, its treatment of Palestinians and, once, in the 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism, merely for existing. Altogether, the United Nations and its agencies have condemned Israel so many times that, on one of those proportional maps, tiny Israel would loom over Saudi Arabia, with its beheadings and ban on women driving. This, in itself, calls for a resolution.

Recently, a report prepared for a U.N. agency returned to the racism theme and called Israel an "apartheid regime." It was an insulting choice of words, since apartheid harkens back to white-supremacist rule in South Africa. That government was so obsessed with race that it created its own categories — white; black; colored, for mixed-race persons; and one for people of Indian/Asian extraction.

The word "apartheid" clearly does not apply to Israel. Its founding document, the Israeli Declaration of Independence of 1948, is admirably liberal. It ensures "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex." And true to its word, Israel grants its Arab minority the vote, seats its representatives in the Knesset and, years ago, had a female prime minister, the formidable Golda Meir. The United States, as the November debacle proved, is not yet there.

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

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I am intellectually and emotionally pro-Israel. It is the only miracle about which I am not the least bit cynical — the creation of a nation and a culture where a century or so ago none existed. Even the

language is new. In the riveting Netflix series "Fauda," Israelis make adulterous love in a language once used mostly for prayer. Theodor Herzl, the creator of secular Zionism, could not have envisioned such a thing. (Anyway, he preferred German.)

But the word "apartheid" looms like thunderheads on the horizon. Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank means the continued oppression of its Palestinian residents. If Israel annexes additional sections of the West Bank, then additional Palestinians will be oppressed. The occupation has not only gnawed at Israel's image worldwide, it has weakened Israel's democracy itself. A new law bars entry into Israel of anyone who supports the international boycotts of Israel.

Some of those movements — BDS is the shorthand for boycott, divestment and sanctions — would apply to anything produced

anywhere in Israel. But some prominent American Jews support a limited version of BDS. They would boycott only products made in the West Bank settlements unrecognized by international law. One such advocate is Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a staunch Zionist, liberal and feminist (she was a founder of Ms. magazine). She supports a settlement boycott.

"If that makes me an enemy of the state, so be it," she wrote in a recent op-ed for the Israeli newspaper Haaretz.

She also rues the direction Israel is going. Israel has legalized the creation of additional West Bank settlements, built roads that only Jewish Israelis may use and, while recoiling from the word "apartheid," adopted some of its techniques. For many Palestinians, freedom of movement is impossible.

Once upon a time, Zionism was embraced by the left. The British Labour Party nearly a dozen times

called for the creation of Israel and, in the United States, Democrats outdid Republicans in support of Israel. Now, though, the Labour Party is hostile to Israel and the Democratic Party here is drifting that way. Support for Israel has become a right-wing affectation — along with small government, lower taxes and opposition to abortion. Meir, that old Milwaukee socialist,

would be appalled.

I leave it to Jared Kushner to come up with a swift solution to the century-old Jewish-Arab struggle. Lives are at stake and positions have hardened. Israel pulled out of Gaza and was thanked with rocket attacks. The Palestinian leadership is split, feckless and often inept. For its part, Israel has drifted to the right, content to let the clock tick.

The United Nations' obsession with Israel obscures the far more dangerous erosion of support for the Jewish state in places where it once was fervently embraced. It permits too many Israel supporters to dismiss legitimate criticism as anti-Semitic babbling or to focus on the astounding failings of the Palestinians and not on the rightward drift of Israel in response. A law that stifles dissidence, that

bars lovers of Israel from Israel itself, is not only repugnant on the face of it, but also additional evidence that occupation of the West Bank is corroding Israeli democracy. Israel may win the West Bank and lose its soul.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Editorial : Pay for Slay in Palestine

Republicans in Congress want to stop the flow of hundreds of millions of dollars a year in U.S. aid to a state sponsor of terrorism: the Palestinian Authority. That's the same PA that the U.S. and Israel have long supported as a partner for peace. But the PA is no such thing, so this is a chance to bring policy into line with moral and strategic realities.

The effort highlights a scandal hiding in plain sight: PA officials tell foreign audiences that they oppose terrorism, yet they pay generous rewards to Palestinians who carry out bombings, stabbings and other attacks against innocents in Israel. These payments are codified in Palestinian law, which dictates that the deadlier an attack, the richer the reward. Payments equaled \$315 million last year, or 8% of the PA budget.

Beneficiaries include the family of Bashar Masalha, who last year stabbed 11 people near Tel Aviv and killed 28-year-old Taylor Force, a U.S. Army veteran visiting Israel on a break from business school. Police killed Masalha, but his relatives now receive monthly payments equal to several times the average Palestinian wage. With special offices and more than 500 civil servants dedicated to disbursing these funds, the PA's message is clear: Terrorism pays.

The U.S. has effectively endorsed this message by sending billions of dollars to the PA while overlooking its pay-for-slay policy. But now the Taylor Force Act promises to cut more than \$200 million in annual economic aid to the PA unless it stops paying terrorists. "We're not going to invest in a group of people that have laws like this. It's just not a good investment," says Sen. Lindsey Graham, a co-sponsor.

The legislation faces hurdles because some Democrats and Israelis argue that cutting aid could cause the PA to collapse, inviting chaos and a possible takeover of the West Bank by Hamas, which already controls the Gaza Strip. By this logic the PA is the devil we know, and its support for small-scale terrorism must be balanced against its cooperation with Israel in combating threats from Hamas and Islamic State.

These are real concerns, but the PA and its defenders have a long history of threatening collapse to avoid reform. This is one reason 81-year-old PA President Mahmoud Abbas is in the 13th year of a four-year term, still rewarding terrorism. It's also why Israeli security veterans increasingly support action against the PA.

"Pressuring the PA to end its 'murder for hire' policy is accompanied by political and

security risks, but moral rectitude often entails facing dangers," former Israeli army chief Moshe Ya'alon and military intelligence chief Amos Yadlin wrote this month. Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman recently designated the Palestinian National Fund, which disburses the PA's blood money, as a terrorist organization.

President Trump hasn't commented on the Taylor Force Act, but Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats co-sponsored the original bill in the Senate last year. A White House endorsement would be timely as Mr. Trump has invited Mr. Abbas to Washington "in the near future." Whenever that meeting happens, ending the PA's bureaucracy of terror should be atop the agenda.

The New York Times

Kershner

Killing of a Hamas Leader Could Signal a New Conflict With Israel

Majd Al Waheidi and Isabel

The assassination of Mr. Fuqaha could herald a new kind of shadow war between bitter foes — a message from Israel to Hamas's new, hard-line leader, Yehya Sinwar. Or Mr. Fuqaha's death could be an ominous sign of internecine rivalries among Palestinian factions and even within Hamas under Mr. Sinwar, who carries a reputation as a harsh enforcer of loyalty in the group.

Mr. Fuqaha and Mr. Sinwar shared a cell for a year in an Israeli prison, Mr. Fuqaha's widow, Nahed Assida, said in an interview on Monday. "They were close friends," Ms. Assida said.

She added that Mr. Fuqaha had received threats from Israelis on a weekly basis, and that the couple knew he was a marked man. "We expected him to be assassinated by an Israeli rocket that would hit our home in the next war, something of this sort," she said. "Not this ugly crime."

The assassin, or assassins, who killed Mr. Fuqaha shot him point-blank using a weapon fitted with a silencer, according to Hazem Kassem, a Hamas spokesman. This, he said, was one of several "Mossad fingerprints" pointing to Israel as the perpetrator.

Israel has carried out assassinations of Hamas leaders in Gaza in the past, usually by airstrikes. Hamas has typically responded by firing rockets into Israel. Hamas officials said that only Israel had anything to gain from the assassination, and that they would choose the right time and place to take revenge.

Israel has not confirmed or denied involvement, preferring to maintain ambiguity. Some former Israeli officials and experts have suggested that Hamas's rival, the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority, or Egypt could also have had an interest in Mr. Fuqaha's demise — or even Hamas itself.

"Hamas is accusing us, but it could be Hamas," Danny Yatom, a former Mossad chief, told Israel Radio. If Israel was behind the killing, he

said, "it is possible we are witness to a preventive strike and not an elimination," suggesting that Mr. Fuqaha may have been planning an attack in the West Bank or Israel.

Gaza's Interior Ministry has taken the extraordinary measure of closing border crossings with Egypt and Israel to anyone except for patients needing medical treatment, the families of prisoners in Israeli jails or ministers in the Palestinian government.

Mr. Fuqaha lived in the Tel al-Hawa neighborhood in Gaza City, where members of the Qassam Brigades searched cars around the apartment building on the night of the assassination. The authorities also closed Gaza's small port on the Mediterranean coast, barring fishermen from setting sail, as there was speculation that the assassin, or assassins, may have escaped by sea.

On Monday, dozens of police motorcycles surrounded the building and barred reporters from gaining access. The Palestinian attorney general, Ismail Jaber, announced a

ban on the publication of any details relating to the investigation. People in the neighborhood said Hamas security forces had searched all the apartments in the building and had taken the male residents in for questioning.

Thousands participated in Mr. Fuqaha's funeral on Saturday, which was also attended by top Hamas leaders, including Mr. Sinwar.

Mr. Fuqaha, who was 38, was from Tubas in the West Bank. In a statement issued after his death, the Qassam Brigades said he was a leader with "a great role in planning and supervising a number of heroic anti-occupation operations" against Israel.

He was convicted and sentenced to nine life terms in prison by Israel for his role in planning a suicide bombing that ripped through a bus in the Galilee in 2002, at the height of the second Palestinian intifada, killing six civilians and three Israeli soldiers. He was released in 2011, along with Mr. Sinwar and 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier

who was captured during a 2006 cross-border raid and was held by Hamas in Gaza for five years.

Israel barred Mr. Fuqaha from returning to the Israeli-occupied West Bank, so on his release he moved to Gaza, where he joined Hamas's remote "West Bank command." Israel withdrew its forces and settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

"Mazen always said that Gaza was the safest place for him," Ms. Assida, his widow, said. "He did not want security and bodyguards."

She was sitting in a women's mourning tent in Katiba Square in central Gaza as hundreds came to pay their respects. Dozens of children gathered around dressed in Qassam outfits and carrying toy guns.

On the day her husband was killed, Ms. Assida said, they had taken their 4-year-old son, Mohammed, and 18-month-old daughter, Sama, to the beach. After they returned home, Ms. Assida was getting the children ready for bed in their fifth-floor apartment. She said she had not worried when Mr. Fuqaha did

not immediately come home after going to park his car. She assumed that he was talking to neighbors.

She said of her children, "I will teach them resistance: Islam, jihad, power and expelling the Jews from Jerusalem."

"If they grow up and the Israeli occupation is still there," she said, "I will be happy to sacrifice them to die for Palestine."

Ms. Assida said that Israeli soldiers would break into her family's home in the northern West Bank city of Nablus, threatening to kill her

husband if he did not stop his activities.

In June 2014, she said, someone called her family's home phone and told Mr. Fuqaha: "We will kill your family. We will kill your kids."

She said she also remembered another call when Mr. Fuqaha had told an Israeli who was threatening him, "If you are a man, come to Gaza."



Netanyahu praises Trump administration in address shown at AIPAC conference

By Carol Morello

The Israeli prime minister addressed the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual conference by video saying he was confident that the U.S.-Israeli alliance will grow under President Trump. Benjamin Netanyahu's full speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual conference (Reuters)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday lauded the Trump administration for its staunch support of Israel in the United Nations and continued military aid, saying that militant Islam is a common enemy of both nations.

In a video feed from Jerusalem to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Netanyahu said the Trump administration is backing the Jewish state in word and policy.

"You see that expressed in seeing Ambassador [Nikki] Haley standing up for what's right and the truth at the United Nations," he said of the U.S. envoy who frequently accuses the United Nations of institutional bias against Israel.

[U.S. diplomat accuses U.N. of bias against Israel]

"You see it in the budget request submitted by President Trump," he added, referring to the proposed slashing of most foreign aid except

for that provided to Israel. "It leaves military aid to Israel fully funded even as the fiscal belt is pulled tighter."

Netanyahu made no reference to settlements in the West Bank, which the United States wants Israel to limit. But he congratulated the newly confirmed U.S. ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, a friend of his who is a longtime supporter of settlements.

"David, I look forward to welcoming you warmly to Israel, and especially to Jerusalem," he said, in an oblique reference to the administration's stated aim to relocating the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Moving the mission would place the United States in a singular position and anger Palestinians who want part of the city as the capital of an independent state.

As the pro-Israel lobby's conference got underway in Washington, a crowd of hundreds, many of them young Jewish American activists, protested in opposition to AIPAC's support of the Israeli government's stance on settlements.

In his remarks, Netanyahu said, "Israel is committed to working with President Trump to achieve peace with the Palestinians and all our Arab neighbors."

But he urged the Palestinian Authority to stop teaching children to hate Israel, to stop paying the families of terrorists and to recognize the Jewish state.

"My hand is extended to all our neighbors in peace," he added.

Netanyahu did not mention the Iran nuclear deal negotiated by the Obama administration and five other world powers over his government's fierce opposition. But he briefly reiterated that the Israeli policy is to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons and to counter its aggression in the region.

He lingered on what he called the mutual goal of the United States and Israel to defeat militant Islam, which he called a battle between modernity and medievalism.

"We won't let them drag humanity away from the promise of a bright future, to the misery of a dark past," he said.

Checkpoint newsletter

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Vice President Pence and Haley were the highest-ranking Trump administration officials to speak at the conference. Sitting presidents

have often but not always addressed the gathering.

Haley drew several rounds of sustained applause and a standing ovation for brief remarks Monday in which she said she will not tolerate the rote criticism of Israel that she said has become commonplace at the United Nations.

"The days of Israel-bashing are over," Haley said. "We have a lot of things to talk about," in the Middle East and elsewhere, she added. "There are a lot of threats to peace and security. But you're not going to take our No. 1 democratic friend in the Middle East and beat up on them."

Haley claimed some early successes. She noted that U.S. objections sank the appointment of a senior Palestinian statesman, Salaam Fayyad, to a U.N. post, and that she had successfully lobbied for the retraction of a U.N. report likening Israel's treatment of Palestinians to apartheid.

"So anyone who says you can't get anything done at the U.N.," she said, "they need to know there's a new sheriff in town."



Russian Opposition Leader Alexei Navalny Receives Jail Term

Nathan Hodge

Updated March 27, 2017 8:12 a.m. ET

MOSCOW—A Moscow court sentenced Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to a brief jail term for violating public order, one day after he mobilized anticorruption demonstrations that brought thousands into the streets across Russia.

Mr. Navalny was detained Sunday during an unsanctioned rally in central Moscow that led to a confrontation with riot police. The Tverskoy District Court in Moscow on Monday fined Mr. Navalny 20,000 rubles (\$352) for organizing the demonstration and resisting police and ordered him to remain in custody for 15 days, Russia's official court-reporting agency said.

During his court appearance, Mr. Navalny and his lawyer denied wrongdoing, arguing that city authorities hadn't offered an alternative venue in a timely manner, according to the court report. Mr. Navalny also mocked the court proceedings, posting a selfie on Twitter with the caption: "The time will come when we will judge them"—meaning the country's ruling elite—"only honestly."

Police officials said they detained around 500 demonstrators in the Moscow protests, and estimated a crowd of between 7,000 and 8,000 people. But unofficial observers put the turnout much higher, and Ovdinfo.org, an advocacy group that collects reports from detainees, their family members and lawyers, said more than 1,000 people had been detained in Moscow demonstrations.

State-dominated media largely ignored the demonstrations, but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov broke official silence on the matter Monday.

The Kremlin, Mr. Peskov said, "respects the right to express a civil position....But we cannot show the same respect to those who knowingly mislead people, as was done yesterday and the day before, to provoke illegal actions."

Marchers organized rallies through social-media pages throughout Russia, with demonstrations in cities

across the country, from Vladivostok on the Pacific Coast to the exclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea. Many marchers were galvanized by a film posted online by Mr. Navalny and his Anticorruption Foundation that claims high-level corruption involving Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, claims the Kremlin has dismissed as baseless.

During Monday's proceedings, Mr. Navalny asked the court to call Mr. Medvedev as a witness, saying his actions had prompted the protest, according to the court report.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Medvedev declined to comment Monday.

Mr. Navalny has vowed to challenge Russian President Vladimir Putin in elections planned for next year. But he is barred from running for public office following his conviction this year on an embezzlement charge, a decision he said was politically motivated and designed to keep him out of politics.

The arrests in Moscow and elsewhere prompted criticism from the U.S. and European governments.

"The German government [has] taken note of the detention of hundreds of peaceful protesters in Moscow and elsewhere with incomprehension and concern," said Steffen Seibert, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman.

Mr. Seibert said freedom of speech and the right to demonstrate "is of great importance for Russian democracy."

—Andrea Thomas in Berlin contributed to this article.

The New York Times Senate Committee to Question Jared Kushner Over Meetings With Russians (UNE)

Jo Becker, Matthew Rosenberg and Maggie Haberman

A White House spokeswoman, Hope Hicks, confirmed those meetings, saying in an interview that nothing of consequence occurred and portraying them as routine diplomatic encounters that went nowhere. But Mr. Gorkov, who previously served as deputy chairman of the board at Sberbank, Russia's largest state-owned bank, said in a statement issued by his bank that he met with Mr. Kushner in his capacity as the then-chief executive of Kushner Companies, his family's sprawling real estate empire.

Members of presidential transition teams routinely meet with foreign officials, and there is nothing inherently improper about sitting down with the Russian ambassador. Part of Mr. Kushner's role during the campaign and the transition was to serve as a chief conduit to foreign governments and officials, and Ms. Hicks said he met with dozens of officials from a wide range of countries.

She added that Mr. Kushner was willing to talk to Senate investigators about the meetings with Mr. Kislyak and the banker, saying, "He isn't trying to hide anything and wants to be transparent."

Still, meetings between Trump associates and Russian officials or others linked to Mr. Putin are now of heightened interest as several congressional committees and F.B.I. investigators try to determine the scope of the Russian intervention in the election and links between Russians and anyone around Mr. Trump.

The Senate panel's decision to question Mr. Kushner would make him the closest person to the president to be called upon in any of the investigations, and the only one currently serving in the White House. The officials who initially

described that Senate inquiry to The New York Times did so on the condition of anonymity in order to speak candidly about Mr. Trump's son-in-law.

The F.B.I. declined to comment. There are no indications that Mr. Kushner is a focus of its investigation, and Ms. Hicks said he had not been questioned by the bureau.

Mr. Kislyak's contacts with Trump administration officials have proved problematic: Mr. Flynn was fired for misleading Vice President Mike Pence about the nature of the conversations he had with the Russian envoy, claiming he had not discussed the sanctions against Russia when communications intercepts showed he had.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions was forced to recuse himself from any Russian inquiries led by the Justice Department after he failed to disclose at his Senate confirmation hearing that he had met with Mr. Kislyak during the campaign.

The meetings Mr. Kushner arranged with Mr. Kislyak all took place in December, during the transition, Ms. Hicks said. Mr. Kushner attended the initial meeting with Mr. Kislyak to explore whether a channel could be set up between the Russian government and the incoming administration to improve relations between the United States and Russia, Ms. Hicks said. They also discussed how the United States and Russia could cooperate on issues in the Middle East, an area Mr. Kushner has been deputized to take the lead on, she said.

Mr. Kislyak asked for a second meeting to "deliver a message," Ms. Hicks said. Mr. Kushner sent Avraham Berkowitz, a White House aide and longtime associate. At that session, Mr. Kislyak told Mr. Berkowitz that he wanted Mr. Kushner to meet Mr. Gorkov, the Russian banker, Ms. Hicks said.

Mr. Gorkov is a graduate of the academy of Federal Security Service of Russia, a training ground for Russian intelligence and security forces. And as the head of Vnesheconombank, Mr. Gorkov presides over a bank whose supervisory board is controlled by members of Mr. Putin's government, including Prime Minister Dimitri A. Medvedev. It has been used to bail out oligarchs favored by Mr. Putin, as well as to help fund pet projects like the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Around the time the Russian ambassador asked that Mr. Kushner meet with Mr. Gorkov, American intelligence agencies were concluding that Russian spies, acting on the orders of Mr. Putin, had sought to sway the election by hacking political targets, like the Democratic National Committee, and passing stolen emails to WikiLeaks.

Mr. Kushner had not yet stepped aside as chief executive of Kushner Companies, which was trying to attract investment for the company's crown jewel, an overleveraged Manhattan office tower on Fifth Avenue. The company was in the midst of negotiations to redevelop the building with Anbang Insurance Group, a Chinese company with ties to the Beijing government.

Senate investigators plan to ask Mr. Kushner if he discussed ways to secure additional financing for the building during his meeting with the Russian banker, a government official said. Ms. Hicks said that no such business was discussed at the half-hour session, during which Mr. Gorkov expressed a desire for an open dialogue. Nor did the issue of the American sanctions against Russian entities like Vnesheconombank arise, she added. "It really wasn't much of a conversation," she said.

Mr. Gorkov, in the statement, went further. He said that bank managers, as part of a new strategy for the institution, met with international financial institutions in Europe, Asia and America to talk about promising trends and sectors. He also met with representatives of "business circles of the U.S., including with the head of Kushner Companies, Jared Kushner."

And in an interview on the state-owned Rossiya 24 TV channel on Dec. 29, the same month that he met with Mr. Kushner, Mr. Gorkov said he hoped that the situation caused by Ukraine sanctions imposed by the Americans against Russian banks like his "would change for the better."

The inquiry into Mr. Kushner's dealings with the ambassador and Mr. Gorkov may further complicate Mr. Trump's efforts to move past the Russia situation. Last week, the F.B.I. director, James B. Comey, confirmed in testimony to Congress that his agency had begun a counterintelligence investigation into Russian interference and whether any associates of the president might have colluded with the Russian government.

Mr. Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, has been under scrutiny in the F.B.I. investigation because of his ties to pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine. In August, he was forced to step down as the chairman of Mr. Trump's campaign amid reports that his name emerged in a secret ledger in Ukraine listing off-the-books payments for consulting work he did for a Russian-backed government there. He has denied any wrongdoing and has said he never worked for the Russian government.

Other Trump associates who have been drawn into the F.B.I. investigation include Roger J. Stone Jr., a longtime Republican operative who has acknowledged contacts

with Guccifer 2.0, the mysterious online figure that is believed to be a front for Russian intelligence officials, and Carter Page, a former foreign policy adviser to the campaign who has done extensive business in Russia. Both have denied doing anything unlawful.

The Senate investigation is proceeding on a separate track from the F.B.I. investigation while drawing on some of the same material, like routine electronic surveillance of the Russian ambassador and his embassy cohort. The committee chairman, Senator Richard M. Burr, Republican of

North Carolina, has told the White House he plans to interview all Trump aides who had contact with Russian officials, according to White House officials. Depending on those interviews, some may be called upon to testify in closed-door sessions.

Mr. Burr and Senator Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat and the committee's vice chairman, said in a statement: "Mr. Kushner has volunteered to be interviewed as part of the committee's investigation into the Russian activities surrounding the 2016 election." They added that their inquiry would

"follow the intelligence wherever it leads."

The extent of Mr. Kushner's interactions with Mr. Kislyak caught some senior members of Mr. Trump's White House team off guard, in part because he did not mention them last month during a debate then consuming the White House: how to handle the disclosures about Mr. Flynn's interactions with the Russian ambassador.

Ms. Hicks said that Mr. Trump had authorized Mr. Kushner to have meetings with foreign officials that

he felt made sense, and to report back to him if those meetings produced anything of note. She said that because in Mr. Kushner's view the meetings were inconsequential, it did not occur to him to mention them to senior staff members earlier.

"There was nothing to get out in front of on this," she said.

The Washington Post

Editorial : The Russian regime's critics are falling dead, but their discontent can't be killed

ON MONDAY, March 20, Denis Voronenkov met a Post journalist in the lobby bar of Kiev's five-star Premier Palace Hotel, along with his wife, seeming to feel he was in danger. "For our personal safety, we can't let them know where we are," he said. Both Mr. Voronenkov and his wife were former members of Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, but defected to Ukraine, where he became an outspoken critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his cronies.

"It's a totally amoral system, and in its anger it may go to extreme measures," he said to the journalist. "There's been a demonization of us. It's hard to say what will happen. The system has lost its mind. They say we are traitors in Russia." Less than 72 hours later, Mr. Voronenkov was shot twice in the head in broad daylight outside the same lobby bar. Ukraine's president, Petro Poroshenko, called it "an act of state

terrorism by Russia," which Mr. Putin's spokesman called "absurd."

The same week, on March 21, Nikolai Gorokhov, a lawyer for the family of whistleblower Sergei Magnitsky, fell from the fourth floor of his apartment building, suffering serious injuries. Mr. Gorokhov was scheduled to appear in court the next day on a matter relating to Mr. Magnitsky, who died in prison from maltreatment in November 2009 after revealing a massive financial fraud by Russian officials.

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These are only the latest in the string of violence and death that has trailed those who criticize Mr. Putin and his regime. Boris Nemtsov, the opposition leader and one-time

deputy prime minister, was assassinated while walking home across a bridge within sight of the Kremlin walls. Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB officer who had become a fierce critic of Mr. Putin, was killed in London with radioactive polonium placed in his tea. The killers — and those who gave them orders — have not been brought to justice. These are the marks of a regime that practices the most brutal retribution and coercion against its critics.

Contrast this with the courage of Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner and potential challenger to Mr. Putin, who has persisted in questioning the honesty of Russia's leaders despite repeated, crude attempts to silence him with trumped-up prosecutions. Recently, he published a report showing that Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has accumulated more than \$1 billion worth of property. On Sunday, tens of thousands of people in more

than 80 Russian cities heeded Mr. Navalny's call for unsanctioned, peaceful protests against corruption. The authorities censored the protests on state-controlled news media and arrested hundreds for the crime of participating in an unapproved rally, including Mr. Navalny.

What the tableau showed most clearly is that, once again, Russian state and society have cleaved. The state is in the hands of Mr. Putin and his cronies, who enrich themselves in power, neutralize their foes and summon the riot police to squelch dissent. Russian society — at least some of it — sees the Putin regime for what it is. On the streets Sunday, their understanding could not be denied and their discontent could not be killed.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Davis Hanson : Russian Farce: Trump Collusion Hysteria Diverts Attention from Surveillance Scandal

The American Left used to lecture the nation about its supposedly paranoid suspicions of Russia. The World War II alliance with Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union had led many leftists to envision a continuing post-war friendship with Russia.

During the subsequent Cold War, American liberals felt that the Right had unnecessarily become paranoid about Soviet Russia, logically culminating in the career of the demagogic Senator Joe McCarthy. Later, in movies such as *Seven Days in May*, *Doctor Strangelove*, and *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*, Hollywood focused on American neuroses as much as Russian hostility for strained relations.

In the great chess rivalry of 1972 known as "The Match of the Century," American liberals favored Russian grandmaster Boris Spassky over fellow countryman Bobby Fischer, who embarrassed them by winning.

In the same manner, Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev was often portrayed in the media as the urbane, suave, and reasonable conciliator, while President Ronald Reagan was depicted as the uncouth disrupter of what could have been improved Russian-American relations.

Senator Ted Kennedy reportedly reached out to Soviet leader Yuri Andropov in 1984 to gain his help in denying Reagan his reelection.

In sum, the American Left always felt that Russia was unduly demonized by the American Right and was a natural friend, if not potential ally, of the United States. That tradition no doubt influenced the decision of the incoming Obama administration to immediately reach out to Vladimir Putin's Russia, despite its recent aggressions in Georgia and steady crackdown on internal dissent, and despite Russia's estrangement from the prior Bush administration.

Obama's Entreaty to the Russians

In March 2012, in a meeting with President Dimitri Medvedev of Russia, President Barack Obama thought his microphone was either off or could not pick up the eerie

assurances that he gave the Russian president:

"On all these issues, but particularly missile defense, this, this can be solved, but it's important for him [Vladimir Putin] to give me space."

Medvedev answered: "Yeah, I understand. I understand your message about space. Space for you . . ."

Obama agreed and elaborated, "This is my last election. After my election, I have more flexibility."

Medvedev finished the hot-mic conversation with, "I understand. I will transmit this information to Vladimir, and I stand with you."

A fair interpretation of this stealthy conversation would run as follows:

'I understand. I will transmit this information to Vladimir, and I stand with you.' — *Medvedev to Obama, March 2012*

Barack Obama naturally wanted to continue a fourth year of his reset and outreach to Vladimir Putin, the same way that he was reaching out to other former American enemies such as the Iranians and the Cubans. Yet Obama was uneasy that his opponent, Mitt Romney, might attack him during his reelection campaign as an appeaser of Putin. Thus, to preempt any such attack, Obama might be forced to appear less flexible (offer less "space") toward Putin than he otherwise would be in a non-election year. In other words, he couldn't publicly assure Putin that he would be "flexible" about implementing missile defense in Eastern Europe ("all these issues") until after he was reelected.

An apprehensive Obama, in his hot-mic moment, was signaling that after his anticipated victory, he would revert to his earlier reset with Putin. And most significantly, Obama wished Putin to appreciate *in advance* the motives for Obama's campaign-year behavior. Or he at least hoped that Putin would not embarrass him by making international moves that would reflect poorly on Obama's reset policy.

Furthermore, Obama did not want his implicit quid pro quo proposal to become part of the public record. Had it been public, it might have been interpreted as a message to Putin that he should empathize with Obama's plight — and that he should interfere with the American election by behaving in a way that would empower Obama's candidacy rather than detract from it.

In the present hysterical climate, substitute the name Trump for Obama, and we would be hearing Democratic demands for impeachment on grounds that Trump was caught secretly whispering to the Russians about compromising vital national-security issues in a quid pro quo meant to affect the outcome of the 2012 election.

The Architects of Russian Outreach

The Obama administration came up with a reset-soft-glove approach to Vladimir's Russia, characterized by Secretary Hillary Clinton's heralded pushing of the red plastic button on March 6, 2009, in Geneva. Reset was couched in overt criticism of George W. Bush, who had supposedly alienated Putin by

reacting too harshly (like a typical cowboy) to Russia's aggression in Georgia.

Over the next few years, the reset policy consisted of, among other things, backtracking on previously agreed-on missile-defense plans in Eastern Europe. In the second presidential debate of 2012, Obama portrayed Romney as being too tough on Russia, to the point of delusion:

A few months ago when you were asked what's the biggest geopolitical threat facing America, you said Russia, not al-Qaeda. You said *Russia*. In the 1980s, they're now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because, you know, the Cold War's been over for 20 years.

The Obama administration invited Russia into the Middle East for the first time in nearly a half-century to help Obama back off from his own redline threats to attack Syria if evidence of WMD usage appeared. Moreover, after the Crimea and eastern Ukraine aggressions, the perception in most of the Western world was that the U.S. was not sufficiently tough with Putin, largely because of its commitment to a prior (though failed) outreach.

So what ended this one-sided reset in 2016?

The estrangement certainly did not coincide entirely with Putin's aggressions on Russia's borders. Nor were Democrats inordinately angry with Putin when he bombed non-al-Qaeda Syrian resistance fighters.

Rather, Democrats' split with Putin grew from the perception that hackers had easily entered the porous e-mail account of Hillary Clinton's campaign guru John Podesta and released his messages to WikiLeaks. This led to general embarrassment for Hillary and the Democrats — and they floated the theory that WikiLeaks and Julian Assange were taking orders from Putin or at least operating with the encouragement of the Kremlin's intelligence services.

Hating Hillary?

After the WikiLeaks mess, the image of Putin was reset again, and now he was said to have ordered the hacking because he hated Hillary Clinton and indeed the Obama administration in general.

That was a bizarre indictment. If Putin were really a conniving realist, he would have much preferred Hillary in the 2016 election — given his success in manipulating the Obama-era reset.

Unlike Trump, Clinton would probably have kept the radical Obama defense cuts and perpetuated the restrictions on domestic energy development that were helping Russia. She probably would have likewise continued Obama's therapeutic approach to foreign policy.

From Russia's point of view, considering their strategic and economic interests, a pliable Obama 2.0 would have been far better than Trump, with his pro-oil-and-gas domestic agenda, his promised defense buildup, and his unpredictable Jacksonian promises to help friends and hurt enemies.

Squaring the Surveillance Circle

The entire Trump-collusion-with-Russia narrative has now descended into incoherence.

For five months, dating back to the heated final stretch of the 2016 election, mainstream media — in particular Obama-administration pet reporters at the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the BBC — ran creepy and occasionally near-obscene stories about "collusion" between the Trump campaign and the Russians. These published rumors were based on "unnamed sources" often identified generically as American intelligence officers inside the FBI, CIA, and NSA.

Soon that narrative went from ominous to hysterical — but only once Hillary inexplicably lost the election. The anonymous allegations of collusion were used to convict the Trump circle of a veritable pre-election partnership with the Russians. The collusion was to be followed, the story went, with a new reset with Putin — this time born not out of naïveté but of lucre and near treason.

We forget that the Democrats' narratives of the purported Trump collusion *also radically changed* to meet changing circumstances.

Before the election, a sure and poorer Trump was pathetically cheating with the Russians to stop the fated winner Clinton.

Then, in the post-election shock and transition, the Russian-interference storyline was repackaged as an excuse for the poorly conducted Clinton campaign that had blown a supposedly big lead and sure victory. "The Russians did it" was preferable to blaming Hillary for not visiting Wisconsin once.

Finally, Trump's Russian connection served as a useful tool to delegitimize an abhorrent incoming Trump administration. And the delegitimizing was made easier by

Obama's eleventh-hour order, days before his departure, to expand the list of federal officials who would have access to sensitive intelligence and surveillance transcripts.

But all such accusations of Trump-Russian complicity, based on admitted leaks from intelligence agencies, required some sort of hard evidence: leaked transcripts of Trump officials clearly outlining shared strategies with the Russians, hard proof of Russian electronic tampering in key swing states, doctored e-mails planted in the Podesta WikiLeaks trove, travel records of Trump people in clandestine meetings with Russian counterparts, or bank records showing cash payoffs.

Bill Clinton and the Clinton Foundation had as many financial dealings with pro-Russian interests as did Trump people.

Yet a hostile media, in collusion with intelligence-agency leakers, has so far provided *no* such proof. John Podesta had as much invested in Russian profiteering as did former Trump aides. Bill Clinton and the Clinton Foundation had as many financial dealings with pro-Russian interests as did Trump people. The ubiquitous Russian ambassador had met as many Democratic grandees as he had Trump associates.

The lack so far of hard proof gradually created a boomerang effect. Attention turned away from what "unnamed sources" had alleged to the question of how unnamed sources had gathered surveillance of the Trump people in the first place — as evidenced by media reports of General Flynn's conversations, of Trump's private talks with foreign leaders, and of allegations of electronic contact between Russian and Trump Tower computers.

In other words, the media and their sources had gambled that congressional overseers, law enforcement, and the public would all overlook surveillance that may have been illegal or only partly legal, and they would also overlook the clearly illegal leaking of such classified information on a candidate and a president-elect — *if* it all resulted in a scandal of the magnitude of the Pentagon Papers or Watergate.

So far such a scandal has not emerged. But Trump's opponents continue to push the Russian narrative not because it is believable but because it exhausts and obfuscates likely illegal surveillance and leaking.

The real scandal is probably not going to be Trump's contacts with

Russians. More likely, it will be the rogue work of a politically driven group of intelligence officers, embedded within the bureaucracy, who, either in freelancing mode, or in Henry II–Thomas Becket fashion (“Who will rid me of this meddlesome priest?”) with Obama-administration officials, began monitoring Team Trump — either directly or more likely through the excuse of inadvertently chancing upon conversations while monitoring supposedly suspicious foreign communications.

Added to this mess is the role of three unsympathetic characters who are on record as either not telling the truth, deliberately obfuscating it, or showing terrible judgement.

Obama CIA director John Brennan, who assumed that role after the still mysterious and abrupt post-election departure of David Petraeus, has a long history of political gymnastics; he has made many a necessary career readjustment to changing Washington politics. He is on record as being deceptive — he failed to reveal that the CIA intercepted Senate communications. He also stated falsely that the drone program had not resulted in a single collateral death. And, in the spirit of Obama’s new Islamic outreach, Brennan strangely suggested that jihad was a sort of personal odyssey rather than a call to use force in spreading Islamic influence. Brennan is also on record as critical of Trump: Trump “should be ashamed of himself,” Brennan said the day after the inauguration, in response to Trump’s speech to CIA staffers gathered in front of the Memorial Wall of Agency heroes.

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has in the past lied to Congress, when he assured that

the NSA did not monitor the communications of American citizens. Likewise, he bizarrely asserted that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was largely a secular organization. And more than 50 CENTCOM officers formally accused Clapper of distorting their reports about the Islamic State. Like Brennan, Clapper has been critical of Trump, asking, “Who benefits from a president-elect trashing the intelligence community?”

During the 2016 election, FBI Director James Comey popped up to assure the nation that while Hillary Clinton had conducted herself unethically, and probably in violation of federal statutes in using her private e-mail server for government business and wiping away correspondence, her transgressions did not rise to the level of indictable offenses. It was as if the investigator Comey, rather than the appropriate federal attorney, was adjudicating the decision to charge a suspect.

Then in the final stretch of the race, Comey resurfaced to assert that “new” evidence had led him to reconsider his exculpation of Clinton. And then, on November 6, 2016, just hours before the nation went to the polls, he appeared a third time in front of cameras to reiterate his original judgment that Hillary’s transgressions did not merit further investigation, much less criminal prosecutions. The media contextualized Comey’s schizophrenia as see-saw reactions either to liberal Obama-administration pressures or to near revolts among the more conservative FBI rank-and-file. Just as likely was Comey’s own neurotic itch to seek public attention and to position himself favorably with a likely new president.

How did Obama’s naïve pro-Putin reset and Clinton-family profiteering transmogrify into wild accusations that others had become even friendlier to such an unsavory character?

Comey’s weird election-era prominence was also apparently fueled by the fact that Attorney General Loretta Lynch was caught in an embarrassing private meeting on the tarmac with Bill Clinton — a meeting during the investigation of his spouse. (The encounter was intended to remain secret, but a local reporter was tipped off.) That unethical encounter had tainted Lynch’s pose of disinterested adjudication, and she accordingly deflected off her prosecutorial responsibilities to Comey. Comey most lately has asked the Justice Department to refute Trump’s claims that he was subject to electronic surveillance by the government during the last days of the Obama administration.

Given the past assertions and political natures of Brennan, Clapper, and Comey, none are very credible in any future testimony they might give about the Trump-Russia narrative or the role U.S. intelligence agencies played in the possibly illegal monitoring of Trump associates. All three men are even less credible when it comes to the illegal leaking of such classified information to media outlets.

Trump’s infamous and clumsy tweet (“just found out that Obama had my ‘wires tapped’ in Trump Tower”) may well prove to be inaccurate — literally. But it could also end up being prescient if revelations show that Obama-appointed officials or their underlings used surveillance on

foreign officials — three years after the NSA got caught tapping Angela Merkel’s cellphone — in order to sweep up Trump communications and then leak them to the media to damage his candidacy and later his transition.

We are left in the end with paradoxes:

How did Obama’s naïve pro-Putin reset and Clinton-family profiteering transmogrify into wild accusations that others had become even friendlier to such an unsavory character?

How did the image of a sacrosanct media speaking the “truth” of Trump’s collusion with Putin rest on the peddling of false narratives — many of them based on likely illegal surveillance and certainly unethical and unlawful dissemination?

And if Trump was unhinged for leveling wild allegations based on mainstream news reports, why were news outlets themselves — and those who quoted them chapter and verse — not unhinged for spreading such suddenly unreliable information?

What is the explanatory sword that cuts this Gordian knot?

Trump supposedly had zero chance of winning. But when he did, facts had to adjust to a bitter actuality — at first perhaps to explain away reality, but quite soon after to alter it by any means necessary.

— *NRO contributor Victor Davis Hanson is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the author, most recently, of The Savior Generals.*

**The
New York
Times**
Kramer

In Protests, Kremlin Fears a Young Generation Stirring (UNE)

Andrew Higgins
and Andrew E.

a tiny minority, which will mean this all ends up in another flop, another failure like before?”

Artyom Troitsky, a Russian journalist and concert promoter who for years has tracked Russian youth culture, said the fact that so many young people took part in the protests in Moscow and elsewhere “is exceptionally important.”

The reason, he said, is that “young people have always been a catalyst for change,” and their presence suggests a break from the lack of political interest they had exhibited in recent years.

This “does not necessarily mean that the tide has turned,” but “something is definitely changing,” he said. “But is it changing on a substantial scale, or is this again just

Aleksei A. Navalny, the anticorruption campaigner and opposition leader who orchestrated the nationwide protests — and who received a 15-day prison sentence on Monday for resisting arrest — said in court that he was surprised at the turnout on Sunday and that he was determined to keep up the pressure by running in next year’s presidential election.

“I think yesterday’s events have shown that there are quite a large number of voters in Russia who support the program of a candidate who speaks for the fight against corruption,” he said.

That Mr. Navalny has little to no chance of winning, and that he is ineligible to compete because of a February conviction on what were widely viewed as politically motivated fraud charges, is taken for granted. But that may not be the point.

Samuel A. Greene, an expert on Russian protest movements at King’s College London, said Mr. Navalny had a chance to thaw Russia’s frozen political horizons and show that a post-Putin era would, at least some day, be possible.

“People — both in the Kremlin and the 80 percent or so who tell pollsters they support Putin — have all been acting for years on the assumption that the ice is very thick

and will never break. What Navalny is trying to do is show that it is not, and will one day crack,” Mr. Greene said. “Once people begin to believe the ice is in fact thin, it doesn’t matter how thick it really is, and everything can change very suddenly.”

More than 13 million people have watched a Russian-language video posted on YouTube early this month by Mr. Navalny detailing alleged corruption by Mr. Putin’s prime minister and close ally, Dmitri A. Medvedev.

Making the prime minister, widely despised by liberals and conservatives alike, the focus of his exposé instead of Mr. Putin was a shrewd move by Mr. Navalny, who has proved far more nimble at

gauging public sentiment and embarrassing the authorities than the marginalized liberal opposition.

That the Kremlin has been vexed by Mr. Navalny is clear from the authorities' response to what, in most countries, would be inconsequential protests that merely disrupted traffic. The police arrested protesters in some cases for nothing more than carrying a rubber duck, a symbol of extravagant money reportedly spent on a duck pond at a government residence.

Dmitri S. Peskov, Mr. Putin's spokesman, accused protest organizers on Monday of leading young Russians — "virtually children," he said — astray with lies and provocations.

Gleb Pavlovsky, a former Kremlin political strategist, called the protesters "Putin's children," the beneficiaries of and now a significant threat to the years of stability and relative prosperity of Mr. Putin's rule.

Many youthful Russians get their information not from state news media, which has ignored Mr. Navalny and his corruption exposés, but from the internet.

"Russia is really stuck in the past," said Ilya Amutov, a 25-year-old technology worker who marched in Moscow on Sunday. Young people, he said, "just want to live like normal, modern people in the rest of

Europe."

In an audio recording posted online that infuriated many young people and drove them to join the protests, a provincial school director can be heard harshly lecturing students before the demonstrations on why they must not attend.

In the past, the Kremlin has been highly skillful at channeling the energy of young Russians away from opposition political activism into a pro-Putin youth movement called Nashi and other patriotic ventures.

But Aleksei A. Chesnakov, the director of the Center for Current Policy and a former Kremlin official who advised the president on domestic politics, said that in recent years the government had largely withdrawn support for pro-Putin youth movements, leaving the authorities without the ability to stage counterprotests and keep young people occupied.

"Now, the government requires police and administrative methods to ensure the opposition doesn't cross the line," he said.

The limits of this approach were on stark display Sunday when the protesters were not retirees or gritty industrial workers of Russian protests past, but iPhone-wielding, takeaway-coffee-carrying urban youths, representing Mr. Putin's long-term challenge.

Mikhail Dmitriev, a former deputy minister of economy and a sociologist, who foresaw this middle-class discontent before it surfaced in 2011 street protests, called it "a political detonator" for the Putin order.

Using sophisticated survey techniques to cut through respondents' fears of political repression, Mr. Dmitriev also predicted after Russia's 2014 military intervention in Ukraine that the resulting patriotic surge would one day calm, allowing latent discontent to revive, particularly in Moscow, where the middle class is concentrated.

As war fervor faded, he wrote in a study of the public mood, "aggression will transfer from foreign enemies to bureaucrats and immigrants." Demand would rise for what he termed "human development," or better education, medicine and other services from the government.

The election of President Trump has also played into this dynamic by depriving Mr. Putin, who scorned President Barack Obama and accused Hillary Clinton of sending "a signal" that set off Russian protesters in 2011-12, of any easy foreign scapegoat for Russia's troubles.

Despite the dynamic in the capital, the vast majority of Russians still cling to the leader they know in Mr.

Putin. His popularity ratings have slipped, but only marginally, now that the nationalist euphoria set off by his 2014 annexation of Crimea has started to wane. A February opinion poll by the Levada Center, a Moscow public research group, found that 84 percent of respondents said they approved of Mr. Putin's work as president, down only slightly from a high of 86 percent in 2015.

Even pro-government analysts conceded that focusing on urban quality-of-life issues in Moscow — which became the Kremlin's main response, along with police crackdowns, to the previous protests in Moscow — might not keep a lid on the discontent.

"The middle class and the youth are not happy," Mr. Chesnakov, the policy institute director, said in a phone interview. "They are not concerned about sidewalks and parks. Sidewalks and parks are good, but the people want the government to listen."

He added: "The middle class is not discontented because it gets nothing, but because it wants something else. The government says, 'Do you want a wider sidewalk?' They say, 'We want a more transparent government.'"

The New York Times House Democrats Ask Devin Nunes to Recuse Himself From Russia Inquiry (UNE)

Matthew Rosenberg and Emmarie Huettelman

"The public cannot have the necessary confidence that matters involving the president's campaign or transition team can be objectively investigated or overseen by the chairman," Mr. Schiff said on Monday night.

Still, Mr. Schiff stopped short of pulling the panel's Democrats out of the investigation. Doing so could jeopardize Democrats' influence over the inquiry and, importantly, their access to intelligence on possible ties between Trump associates and Moscow.

The House Intelligence Committee is running one of the three investigations into Russian interference in the election, and possible ties between Trump associates and Russia. The Senate Intelligence Committee is running its own inquiry, and the F.B.I. has carried out a broad counterintelligence investigation since July.

By most accounts, the Senate and F.B.I. investigations remain on track, unlike the House inquiry, which appears to have increasingly descended into a sideshow since its first public hearing a week ago. That was when James B. Comey, the director of the F.B.I., publicly disclosed the bureau's investigation for the first time. Days later, Mr. Nunes made his first disclosure about Mr. Trump or his associates being caught in American intelligence gathering, prompting critics to argue that he was trying to shift attention and provide an assist to the White House at a crucial moment.

The revelation that Mr. Nunes had viewed intelligence materials on White House grounds the day before bolstering the administration's case fueled damaging speculation that he was acting at the instruction of the president. That could prove fatal to the bipartisan investigation, which has hinged on the ability of Mr. Nunes to conduct a neutral inquiry

while maintaining the trust and cooperation of Mr. Schiff.

Ms. Pelosi echoed Mr. Schiff's call for Mr. Nunes to recuse himself, saying his behavior had "tarnished" his post and urging Speaker Paul D. Ryan to speak out.

"Speaker Ryan must insist that Chairman Nunes at least recuse himself from the Trump-Russia investigation immediately," she said in a statement. "That leadership is long overdue."

In an apparent attempt to change the subject, Mr. Trump on Monday night questioned why the House Intelligence Committee is not looking into connections between Hillary Clinton and Russian officials.

A few minutes later, he posted a second message on Twitter, concluding, "Trump Russia story is a hoax."

The spokesman for Mr. Nunes, Jack Langer, said the congressman met with his source at the White House because he needed access to a secure location where people with

security clearances can legally view classified information. But such facilities can also be found in the Capitol building, and at other locations across Washington.

Senator Mark R. Warner of Virginia, the Democratic vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, called it "more than suspicious" that Mr. Nunes went to the White House complex, pointing out that he would "have to be escorted" while there.

"Who is he meeting with?" Mr. Warner said in an interview with NBC. "Was it a source or somebody from the administration?"

Mr. Langer did not address those concerns on Monday. In a brief statement, he said: "Chairman Nunes met with his source at the White House grounds in order to have proximity to a secure location where he could view the information provided by the source."

He added, "The chairman is extremely concerned by the possible improper unmasking of names of U.S. citizens, and he began looking

into this issue even before President Trump tweeted his assertion that the Trump Tower had been wiretapped."

Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, said on Monday that White House officials had no previous knowledge of Mr. Nunes's visit to the White House grounds, saying the only information he had came from "public reports."

He also said officials were "not concerned" about the prospect that someone within the executive branch had leaked classified information to Mr. Nunes.

Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader, accused Mr. Nunes of weakening not only the committee's tradition of bipartisanship but also Congress

itself. He asked Mr. Ryan to replace Mr. Nunes.

"He has not been cooperating like someone who is interested in getting to the unvarnished truth," Mr. Schumer said.

Acknowledging that the incidental collection from surveillance appeared to be legal, Mr. Nunes last week said his concerns surrounded additional names that may have been improperly "unmasked." Normally, intelligence agencies mask the identities of American citizens who are incidentally present in intercepted communications.

Mr. Schiff said that Mr. Nunes also worried that anyone viewing the distributed reports could decipher whom they were discussing even though the names were masked.

Mr. Nunes repeatedly declined to offer any details about the source of what he characterized as "dozens" of classified intelligence reports, which Mr. Schiff accused him of viewing in a "dead-of-night excursion." Mr. Nunes said only that the information had come to him after the committee's public hearing on Monday.

On Friday, Mr. Nunes declined to say whether that information had come from the White House.

"You can ask me every single name that exists on the planet, and I'm still not going to tell you who our sources are," he told reporters.

Mr. Nunes then defended his decision to bypass Mr. Schiff and go to the White House, saying he felt a "duty" to tell Mr. Trump because of

Democrats' "relentless" political attacks.

"If we would have crossed paths in the hall, maybe I would have said something to him," Mr. Nunes said in an interview. "But what I was trying to do was get to the president as quick as possible."

At that point, Mr. Trump seized on the information, saying he felt "somewhat" vindicated in his wiretapping claim against former President Barack Obama — debunked by the F.B.I. director and the director of the National Security Agency, as well as the heads of the Senate and House investigations, including Mr. Nunes.



The Russia Scandal Has Reached the Trump Family

Max Boot

These have been a choice few days for aficionados of scandal. Washington hasn't seen their like since the heyday of Whitewater, Iran-contra, and Watergate — in other words for nearly two decades. And in many ways "Kremlin-gate," the burgeoning scandal over Team Trump's connections to Russia, is in a class by itself.

When, in the past, has an FBI director ever announced that his agents were investigating allegations that the president and his closest associates — including his senior advisor-cum-son-in-law — were guilty of collusion with a hostile foreign power? Never. Yet that's just what James Comey did on March 20 when he told the House Intelligence Committee that the G-men were looking into "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."

To make the event even more surreal, Comey and his fellow witness, Adm. Michael Rogers of the National Security Agency, all but called their boss, the commander in chief, a liar by publicly dismissing his allegations that former President Barack Obama had wiretapped him. "I have no information that supports those tweets, and we have looked carefully inside the FBI," Comey said. As for Donald Trump's desperate claim that Obama had asked Britain's GCHQ spy agency to wiretap him, Rogers said, "I've seen nothing on the NSA side that we engaged in any such activity nor that anyone ever asked us to engage in such activity."

It is impossible to conceive of J. Edgar Hoover publicly calling out any of the presidents that he served in such a fashion — and yet Comey had good cause to do so, because Trump has shown that he is prepared to smear the reputation of the intelligence community in order to save his own. And while Hoover was always paranoid about "subversives" worming their way into the government, not even he went so far as to hint at a possible conspiracy between the American president and the ruler in Moscow.

Yet the jaw-dropping revelations were just beginning. Two days after the House hearing, on March 22, The Associated Press revealed that in 2005, Paul Manafort, Trump's erstwhile campaign manager, had signed a \$10 million-a-year contract with Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska to "influence politics, business dealings and news coverage inside the United States, Europe and former Soviet republics to benefit President Vladimir Putin's government." This comes on top of Manafort's already disclosed work on behalf of Viktor Yanukovich, the deposed Ukrainian leader who is a close Kremlin ally. White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer's clumsy attempts to distance the president from Manafort — he claimed that Trump's *former campaign manager* played only a "very limited role for a very limited amount of time" — simply served to signal how serious this revelation actually is.

And, of course, Manafort is hardly the only current or former Trump associate with suspiciously close ties to Moscow. We have only recently learned that Michael Flynn, Trump's first national security advisor, made \$68,000 while serving

as a consultant to Russian firms in 2015. Campaign foreign-policy advisor Carter Page maintained close ties with the Kremlin and its state-owned oil companies. Longtime Trump advisor Roger Stone has admitted to communicating with "Guccifer 2.0," the moniker used by Russian intelligence to leak damaging information about Hillary Clinton, and with Julian Assange, the head of WikiLeaks, another Russian front organization. "Trust me, it will soon [be] the Podesta's time in the barrel," Stone tweeted on Aug. 21, 2016, weeks before WikiLeaks began leaking emails stolen from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta.

Even Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, it now emerges, met before the inauguration not just with Russia's ambassador to Washington but also with Sergey Gorkov, who is close to Putin, was trained by Russian intelligence, and runs a state-owned bank that has been placed on a U.S. sanctions list. No one knows what they discussed, but it's possible that Kushner, whose family real estate firm is desperate for foreign financing, was hoping to get an investment from this Russian bank to supplement the hundreds of millions of dollars it has sought from Chinese companies closely connected to the leadership in Beijing. (One wonders how Kushner has time to not only deal with Russia policy — but also to broker peace in the Middle East; advise on relations with China, Mexico, and Canada; and reorganize the whole U.S. government. Clearly Ivanka Trump married a man of prodigious and hitherto unsuspected talents.)

Perhaps there is an innocent explanation for all of these contacts

between Trumpites and Putinites. Perhaps.

Perhaps there is an innocent explanation for all of these contacts between Trumpites and Putinites. Perhaps. But the sheer scale of the communication, and the efforts to conceal it, suggests the possibility of a nefarious connection that extends well beyond Trump's well-known admiration for Putin. If CNN's anonymous sources are to be believed, "The FBI has information that indicates associates of President Donald Trump communicated with suspected Russian operatives to possibly coordinate the release of information damaging to Hillary Clinton's campaign."

There is, to be sure, no proof that has yet been made public of such serious charges. They may well be false. But by now we do know enough to call for an energetic and impartial investigation — and it's doubtful that one will ever emerge from the House and Senate intelligence committees. Rep. Devin Nunes, the California Republican who chairs the House panel, has been particularly compromised not just by his service on Trump's transition team but also by his unbecoming eagerness to act as Trump's defender in this whole sordid business.

On March 22, Nunes went so far as to reveal classified information suggesting that either Trump himself or his aides might have been caught as "incidental" subjects of legally obtained surveillance. Having apparently acquired this information the previous day from an intelligence official in the White House, Nunes did not bother to notify his fellow committee members. Instead, he rushed out to

try to buttress Trump's indefensible allegations of wrongdoing against former President Obama.

Trump predictably claimed vindication, but in fact Nunes's information was hardly exculpatory. In the first place, even Nunes did not allege that Obama did anything wrong or that Trump himself was the target of a wiretap. At most, Trump or his associates were caught chatting with someone else who was a target of lawful surveillance. This is a long, long way removed from "Nixon/Watergate" territory as Trump has tweeted, even if the intelligence community did not do a

good enough job of completely "masking" the identity of the Trump officials. In any case, it is hardly reassuring to know that Trump or his aides were in regular contact with individuals whose communications were targeted as part of a criminal or counterintelligence investigation. Nunes's revelation raises far more questions than it answers: Just which unsavory characters were Trump and/or his aides talking to, and why? What were the motives of the intelligence official who was said to have leaked this information? And why are Nunes and Trump so selective in their outrage about leaking, only objecting when the

resulting information hurts the president?

The only way we will begin to unravel this mystery is with the appointment of a special counsel to lead the Justice Department prosecution and of a bipartisan committee — either a House-Senate select committee or an outside panel like the one that investigated 9/11 — to lead the public inquiry. Such an investigation will either clear Trump's name — or not. Either way, it will provide some relief from the nonstop drip of revelations.

As *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow reminds us, on Nov. 3

the Trump campaign released a television claiming: "Hillary cannot lead a nation while crippled by a criminal investigation." The same is true of Trump: He cannot lead the nation while crippled by Kremlin-gate. It is thus in his own interest to facilitate a credible inquiry that will get to the bottom of this mess as soon as possible. Unless, of course, he has something to hide. In which case, his present conduct, designed to obfuscate and cover up, makes perfect sense.

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : President Putin Under Pressure

When it comes to modern authoritarian leaders, President Vladimir Putin ranks high for ruthlessness and repression. Yet as the Sunday protests in Moscow and other cities proved, he has failed to crush the spirit and courage of Russian citizens who are willing to risk retribution to resist the excesses of his regime.

The anti-government demonstrations were the largest in more than five years, drawing tens of thousands of people into the streets in scores of cities despite a sweeping ban on unsanctioned rallies. The protests called for the resignation of Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev; their proximate cause was a 50-minute video produced by Aleksei Navalny and other opposition allies and viewed more than 13 million times on social media. The video alleged that Mr. Medvedev had received bribes from prominent oligarchs that enabled him to maintain

fancy estates, vineyards and yachts in Russia and overseas. The protests also reflected broader public discontents, including unhappiness with the economy and the government's suppression of peaceful demonstrations.

Protesters knew the risks. In nearly 20 years as president or prime minister, Mr. Putin has worked to crush any serious political opposition, independent media, freedom of expression and human rights in general. He has also been aggressive on the international stage with his annexation of Crimea and military involvement in Syria on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad. Over the past five months, some eight high-profile Russians, including five diplomats, have died, some in suspicious circumstances. Mr. Putin has long been accused of killing journalists and other opponents.

The police response to the protests was predictably brutal. More than 1,000 demonstrators in Moscow

were beaten and arrested, including Mr. Navalny. Although many of those detained were soon released, Mr. Navalny on Monday received a 15-day prison sentence for resisting arrest. He wants to run for president in 2018, and seems to have the charisma and a sufficiently strong message, clearly, to bring people out into the streets.

Without directly attacking Mr. Putin, whose public approval rating remains high, Mr. Navalny has focused on corruption, which is endemic in Russia, and some believe it could be Mr. Putin's Achilles' heel. Nevertheless, the obstacles to unseating Mr. Putin are formidable; indeed, a previous trumped-up conviction may make it difficult for Mr. Navalny to run for office.

Despite President Trump's perplexing fondness for Mr. Putin, the State Department issued a statement condemning the detention of hundreds of "peaceful protesters," including Mr. Navalny, and asserting

that "detaining peaceful protesters, human rights observers, and journalists is an affront to core democratic values." The statement was issued by Mark Toner, the acting spokesman, not Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, which would have had more effect.

Mr. Putin remains firmly in the driver's seat, but Sunday's events should give him pause. Many protesters were young people who reportedly get their news from more independent sources, not state-run media, and apparently are not cowed by the man in the Kremlin. Given Russia's economic, demographic and other challenges, Mr. Putin cannot be certain he can control the future even if he controls the present.

**The
Washington
Post**

Nunes admits meeting with source of Trump surveillance documents on White House grounds (UNE)

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

The chairman of the House Intelligence Committee acknowledged Monday that he had made a secret visit to the White House last week to view intelligence files he then cited as proof of potentially improper spying activity against President Trump, casting new doubt on the independence of a congressional investigation into Russian election interference.

The admission by Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) triggered calls among Democrats for his removal as chairman of the House panel and bipartisan appeals for an independent probe of Kremlin meddling in the 2016 election and

potential connections between Russia and Trump associates.

The committee's ranking Democrat, Adam B. Schiff (Calif.), called late Monday for Nunes to "recuse himself from any further involvement in the Russia investigation" and all "oversight matters pertaining to any incidental collection of the Trump transition," noting Nunes was a member of Trump's transition team.

Nunes has denied any wrongdoing and dismissed calls for him to step down Monday night, saying on Fox News that "I'm sure that the Democrats do want me to quit because they know that I'm effective at getting to the bottom of things."

The development coincided with the disclosure that Trump's son-in-law

and close adviser, Jared Kushner, had privately met in December with the chief executive of a Russian bank being targeted by U.S. sanctions and that Kushner has agreed to discuss such contacts with the Senate Intelligence Committee.

(Reuters)

White House press secretary Sean Spicer on March 27 was asked whether he could say for certain that Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, did not obtain information from the administration that he later used to brief President Trump. "Anything is possible," Spicer replied. White House press secretary Sean Spicer says "anything is possible" when asked if

he can deny that Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) has a source in the government. (Reuters)

Trump administration officials sought to play down the significance of both developments, describing Kushner's contacts as inconsequential and refusing to answer questions about the Nunes visit. "I'm not going to get into who he met with or why he met with them," White House press secretary Sean Spicer said.

Trump, in his response, sought to pressure the House committee, arguing that the panel should be probing Bill and Hillary Clinton's ties to Russia instead of those of his campaign advisers.

In a pair of evening tweets, Trump wrote that the “Trump Russia story is a hoax” and listed a string of financial and other connections the Clintons have had over the years with Russia. He asked why the House Intelligence Committee is not investigating the former president and former secretary of state.

Nunes’s meeting with a source and his review of intelligence material apparently occurred in a secure space for handling classified files within the Eisenhower Executive Office Building adjacent to the White House. Nunes returned to the White House the next day — bypassing colleagues on the House committee — supposedly to brief Trump on what he had learned.

The attempts to keep such matters hidden from public view, however, added to the perception that the Trump administration has failed to be forthcoming about contacts with Russia and is working with allies on Capitol Hill to blunt congressional probes.

The Senate’s top Democrat said that House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) should remove Nunes to salvage that chamber’s investigation of Moscow influence. “If Speaker Ryan wants the House to have a credible investigation, he needs to replace Chairman Nunes,” Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said.

Schiff said: “There was no legitimate justification for bringing that information to the White House instead of the committee. That it was also obtained at the White House makes this departure all the more concerning.”

(Reuters)

House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) apologized to colleagues, March 23, after facing backlash for going to the White House before consulting them about what he said was fresh intelligence about surveillance of the president. Rep. Nunes apologized, March 23, for the way he handled sensitive allegations about U.S. spy agency surveillance of President Trump’s team. (Reuters)

Asked about Nunes’s White House visit, Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) said, “Not good. It’s not a confidence builder.” He said “we’re

rapidly getting” to the point where a select committee or independent commission is needed to conduct the investigation into Russian meddling.

Nunes said in an interview Monday that no one in the Republican leadership had asked him to step aside, and he defended his actions as part of an attempt to investigate potential misconduct by U.S. spy agencies against Trump associates.

“Everybody is worried by process and they should be worried about what I’ve actually said about what I’ve seen,” Nunes said, when asked whether it was proper for him to visit the White House under those circumstances. “Why all the worry about where I saw information? We go to the White House all the time, our job is providing oversight of the executive branch.”

Nunes had previously refused to say how or where he had seen classified files he cited in a hastily arranged news conference last week, saying that he had obtained troubling evidence that U.S. spy agencies “incidentally collected information about U.S. citizens involved in the Trump transition.”

At a time when the White House was struggling to defend Trump’s baseless accusation that he had been wiretapped under orders issued by then-President Barack Obama, the Nunes assertion helped shift public attention and, to some, cast Trump as a victim of espionage abuse.

In reality, Nunes appeared to be referring to legitimate intelligence operations against foreign individuals who were either in contact with Trump associates or mentioned them in conversations that were monitored as part of routine U.S. surveillance. Nunes reiterated Monday that he has seen no evidence of illegality.

Current and former national security officials described Nunes’s trip to the White House complex, apparently late in the evening after he had slipped away from his staff, as highly unusual. Doing so would ordinarily require Nunes and the person he met with to have been cleared in advance and accompanied by an escort — requirements that seemed to

undercut White House claims to have no information about the encounter.

“How incredibly irregular,” said Matt Olsen, who served in the Obama administration as the head of the National Counterterrorism Center and the general counsel at the National Security Agency. “The only explanation you’re left with is that this is all being orchestrated by the White House.”

Nunes again declined to disclose with whom he met, citing the need “to protect people who bring information to the committee, and I’m going to protect my source.” His office said he met the source on the White House grounds.

The House Intelligence Committee is authorized to handle classified information and routinely meets with officials — including whistleblowers — from U.S. spy agencies.

Nunes spokesman Jack Langer said that because of limitations on House computer systems, Nunes could not have used secure facilities at the Capitol to review the files. He added that “the White House grounds was the best location to safeguard the proper chain of custody and classification of these documents.”

Nunes has said that the documents include references to Trump advisers and associates but do not pertain to Russia. In the past few days, former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and former campaign advisers Carter Page and Roger Stone volunteered to make themselves available for interviews with the Senate and House Intelligence committees.

On Monday, officials from the White House and Senate said that Kushner had also offered himself for an interview with the Senate Intelligence Committee, at a date yet to be determined. The development was first reported by the New York Times.

A senior congressional official said Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr (R-N.C.) spoke with the White House counsel “some weeks ago” to warn that the panel would be seeking to speak with administration officials, including Kushner. The White House indicated to the committee over the

weekend that Kushner would be willing to participate.

The White House had previously disclosed that Kushner met with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak at Trump Tower in December, a session also attended by former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who was fired for lying about the nature of his contacts with Kislyak.

On Monday, the White House acknowledged a previously undisclosed meeting between Kushner and Sergey N. Gorkov, chief of Russian government-owned Vnesheconombank. The bank, which handles Russia’s pension funds and deals with development activity for the state, including foreign debts and investments, has been under U.S. sanctions since July 2014, in response to Russia’s intervention in Ukraine.

The bank also has been tied to Russian intelligence services.

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

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In early 2015, one of the bank’s New York-based employees, Evgeny Buryakov, was arrested and accused of being an unregistered spy for Russia’s foreign intelligence service, working with two Russian diplomats who were also secretly acting as spies. According to the U.S. government, they collected information about U.S. sanctions against Russia, and American efforts to develop alternative energy resources.

Buryakov pleaded guilty in March 2016 to conspiring to act as an agent of a foreign government, though he never admitted to being an employee of Russia’s foreign intelligence service.

Spicer defended Kushner’s meetings, saying that he was the “official primary point of contact” with foreign governments and officials during the campaign and transition period.

Robert Costa and Devlin Barrett contributed to this report.



Why Russian protests are making the Kremlin rethink 2018 presidential elections

March 27, 2017 Moscow—By staging significant protest actions in almost 100 Russian cities Sunday, Alexei Navalny has laid down a serious challenge to Vladimir Putin.

The anti-corruption blogger-turned-politician wants to run for president in elections that are barely a year off, and has been conducting himself as if his campaign were already under way. The Kremlin has

the means to prevent him, by invoking a criminal conviction, recently upheld by a regional court, that could bar him from running for office.

It has been standard procedure under Mr. Putin’s brand of “managed democracy” to cull the ballot, using various pretexts, to ensure that independent challengers are kept out and results

are tailored to match the authorities' expectations. That system has mostly worked in the Putin era, though it experienced a tough shock when tens of thousands of people took to the streets to protest alleged fraud in the 2011 Duma (parliament) elections. To continue working, the system requires public acceptance of election results, or at least apathy.

Until now, the overwhelming public perception has been that there is no alternative to Putin, no worthy challenger. Thus his return to the Kremlin next year – should he wish it – has seemed inevitable.

But the size and scope of the nationwide wave of protests may have just upended that view, analysts say, by demonstrating that Mr. Navalny is a serious contender, and that his signature issue of corruption in high places can bring tens of thousands of mostly youthful Russians onto the streets, despite the very real threat of arrest.

"This changes the whole political outlook," says Dmitry Oreshkin, head of the Mercator Group, a Moscow media consultancy. "A new generation has become politically active, mostly people under 25 who

recently became voters. Before this, they actually ignored protests. But Navalny found a language to address them with. It's not the old denunciations of 'Putin's bloody regime,' but just the calm demand for genuine investigations of corruption at the top, or else everyone will understand that the authorities tolerate corruption."

Sunday's march by at least 10,000 protesters was the biggest such demonstration in Moscow in five years. Police detained around 1,000 of them. A Moscow court sentenced Navalny on Monday to 15 days in prison for organizing an unsanctioned rally and "resisting arrest" – a familiar routine for him by now, and one he used to send out defiant tweets to his followers. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described the protests as "a provocation and a lie," and suggested Navalny's young supporters may have been paid to turn out.

The challenge facing the Kremlin now is to either permit Navalny to run against Putin next year, or prohibit him and risk alienating his substantial youthful base and perhaps igniting a fresh wave of

protests. No one thinks Putin, one of the most successful leaders in Russian history whose public approval rating hovers around 80 percent, is likely to lose that contest. But Navalny might do surprisingly well. In 2013, he was allowed to run for mayor of Moscow against Kremlin stalwart Sergei Sobyanin, and he stunned the establishment by winning 27 percent of the votes.

Polls show that Navalny has been steadily gaining in name recognition, though more than half of Russians in a February poll by the independent Levada Center still said they hadn't heard of him. Only 1 percent indicated they would vote for him in that poll, a decline in his support from 5 percent in 2011. Still, that could change if the Kremlin fails to manage his challenge wisely.

Navalny has gained a lot of traction with his charges of corruption at the top. A video prepared by his Anti-Corruption Foundation accusing prime minister and former president Dmitry Medvedev of massive corruption has garnered more than 11 million views.

There are no solid statistics on how great a drain corruption is on the Russian economy, but the

perception of pervasive graft in high places is nearly universal among Russians. "We don't have any recent studies, but the problem of corruption is definitely not diminishing," says Georgi Satarov, a former Kremlin aide who heads the independent InDem Foundation in Moscow.

Unlike Russia's old-line liberal opposition, Navalny is not associated with the disastrous decade of the 1990s, and he is more in tune with the current nationalistic mood of Russians, which makes it difficult for the Kremlin to peg him as a pro-Western "fifth columnist."

"Navalny is acting the way a real opposition leader should," says Alexei Kondakov, a member of the semi-official Council for Foreign and Defense Policy. "His film about Medvedev is directed not so much against Medvedev, who is an unworthy figure, but clearly against Putin."

Mr. Oreshkin says Navalny is now, officially, a danger to the Kremlin. "He's broken the authorities' scheme for the next election: Putin or nothing," he says. "Now it's Putin or Navalny."



House Russia Probe Implodes as Top Dem Calls for Intel Chairman's Recusal

Tim Mak
Kelly Weill

The House investigation has imploded under the huge pressure on Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes. Ranking Democrats now say he must sit out the Russia probe.

The House Intelligence Committee's bipartisan investigation into Russia's influence on America's politics imploded Monday evening.

The probe simply could not withstand the pressure put on it following Republican chairman Devin Nunes's strange behavior over the past week—including briefing the president before his own committee, and a nighttime dash to the White House grounds to review secret documents.

Given his close ties to the Trump team, and his decision to brief the president on his investigation into the surveillance matter before even informing his own committee, Democrats have begun to call for him to go.

"After much consideration, and in light of the Chairman's admission that he met with his source of information at the White House, I believe that the Chairman should

recuse himself from any further involvement in the Russia investigation, as well as any involvement in oversight of matters pertaining to any incidental collection of the Trump transition, as he was also a key member of the transition team," Rep. Adam Schiff, the top Democrat on the committee, said in a statement Monday.

Two of Schiff's fellow Democrats on the committee, Reps. Jackie Speier and Eric Swalwell, have also called for Nunes's recusal. And as the Senate resumed its business Monday afternoon, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer went even further, calling for Nunes to be replaced as the committee's chairman.

Schiff was more of a hold-out though, saying he hoped Nunes could regain the trust necessary for an independent committee. As recently as Sunday, he was dedicated to keeping the investigation alive. The intelligence committees in Congress have a decades-long tradition of bipartisanship and quiet cooperation. And Schiff has a reputation of being anything but a partisan bomb-thrower.

"I am going to do everything I can to get this back on track. And I implore our chairman and the speaker to rededicate themselves to a serious and bipartisan investigation," Schiff said Sunday morning on CBS' *Face the Nation*.

Just one day later, Schiff lost faith in Nunes.

"In the interests of a fair and impartial investigation whose results will be respected by the public, the Chairman's recusal is more than warranted," Schiff said Monday. "This is not a recommendation I make lightly, as the Chairman and I have worked together well for several years; and I take this step with the knowledge of the solemn responsibility we have on the Intelligence Committee to provide oversight on all intelligence matters, not just to conduct the investigation."

The collapse of the House Intelligence Committee's bipartisan probe shifts the spotlight to the Senate Intelligence Committee, which has continued to hold the faith of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. The Senate panel will hold its first open hearings later this week.

Nunes drew scrutiny last week for an unexpected bombshell: He held a sudden press conference to allege some members of the Trump transition team might have been picked up through "incidental collection" during the surveillance of foreign intelligence targets. He then, in a breach of congressional protocol, rushed to the White House to brief the president, even before briefing the committee whose investigation he was leading. He pledged to share that information with his fellow committee members, but as of Monday that still has not occurred.

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Odd circumstances began to emerge about what happened the evening before Nunes's impromptu press conference. Committee sources told *The Daily Beast* that Nunes was riding in an Uber with a senior committee staff member Tuesday evening when he received a phone message and abruptly left. Even his senior aides were left in the dark about what Nunes was doing and where he was going.

CNN then later reported that Nunes had visited the White House grounds that night, before his press conference. In an interview Monday evening, Nunes told the network he was on White House grounds because he needed a secure room to view the documents, and Congress did not have access to those files.

"I had been working this for a long time with many different sources and needed a place that I could

actually finally go, because I knew what I was looking for and I could actually get access to what I needed to see," Nunes said.

After promising not to reveal who gave him this information, Nunes later said it was an "intelligence source." He also insisted nothing strange had occurred, and that there was nothing mysterious about his visit to the White House.

"If I really wanted to, I could have snuck onto the grounds late at night

Callan : It's time for Devin Nunes to step down



Callan : It's time for Devin Nunes to step down

Paul Callan is a CNN legal analyst, a former New York City homicide prosecutor and currently is "of counsel" at the New York law firm of Edelman & Edelman PC, focusing on wrongful conviction and civil rights cases. The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own.

(CNN)Opponents of President Donald Trump are eager to slap a set of handcuffs on House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes for his alleged "late night" visit to a secure intelligence facility (known in the intelligence community as a "skiff") within the White House complex, followed shortly thereafter by a meeting with the President.

In the full technicolor version of this fantasy, the cuffs would next be fastened on Trump, ending the progressives' enduring Trumpian nightmare.

It's clear that a lot more information is required before anyone can fairly judge the propriety and legality of Nunes' actions. What we do know is that shortly after this visit to view classified information, Nunes perhaps surprised even the President by requesting a meeting. He failed to tell the House Intelligence Committee about this meeting with the President, an action for which he recently apologized.

Nunes tried to explain

all of this to Wolf Blitzer earlier today, fielding specific questions about the White House visit. The chairman hedged on some questions and flatly declined to answer other inquiries, invoking the need to protect "sources and methods" and still "classified" information.

As chairman of the intelligence committee, enjoying among the highest of security clearances, the chairman would clearly be

and probably nobody would have seen me. But I wasn't trying to hide," Nunes told CNN. "In fact, I stopped to talk to several people there, just along the way, including, like I said, many foreigners."

Nunes' story has shifted: he said the president's communications were incidentally collected, then later walked it back to say it was merely possible; then later Nunes said he didn't know if the Trump transition team was surveilled or

merely mentioned in intelligence reports. Nunes has denied that his actions were orchestrated by the White House, but then admitted Monday that he had visited the White House grounds, which if not sinister at least gave the appearance of impropriety. The changing story lines add a cloud over Nunes' investigation.

have now become the center of an ever-widening and distracting controversy.

Though at this point there is no evidence that the chairman acted illegally, the country has the right to expect far more circumspect behavior from the chairman of the House committee in charge of America's secrets. It's a little late for him to be learning that secrecy is paramount in the business of investigating the intelligence community.

The missteps of Nunes and the inappropriate tweets of the President appear to be drawing both men into the dark fantasies of Trump opponents across the country. One lesson they both should have learned by now is that the denizens of America's spy apparatus are nicknamed "spooks" for good reason.



Editorial : A model for anti-corruption Russians

The Christian Science Monitor

March 27, 2017 —Of all the former states in the Soviet Union, according to a global ranking, Russia remains one of the most corrupt. That helps explain why an estimated 60,000 Russians took to the streets March 26 in anti-corruption protests. Not only were these the largest protests in five years, they took place in dozens of cities and despite the fact that officials denied permits for the demonstrations and the government has been cracking down hard on dissidents.

What stirred the thinking of so many Russians to envision an honest and accountable government?

While President Vladimir Putin remains popular, the focus of the protests was his prime minister and protégé, Dmitry Medvedev. A

scathing report on his wealth, released on YouTube in early March and watched by more than 12 million people, revealed the depth of Russian corruption — and Mr. Putin's vulnerability to mass dissent. One sign of Putin's worry: His security forces arrested more than a thousand demonstrators, including anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny. He's the one who compiled the corruption file on the prime minister.

Another reason for the size of the crowds is the fact that average wealth in Russia has fallen about 42 percent since 2013, a result largely of Putin's policies. Yet there may be another cause. In one former Soviet state — neighboring Georgia — anti-corruption protests achieved remarkable success, a fact not lost on many Russians.

Georgia's so-called Rose Revolution in 2003 overthrew a very corrupt regime and ushered in wholesale reforms aimed mainly at curbing low-level corruption. The traffic police, the face of daily bribery to the people, were all fired. In addition, taxes were simplified and the number of required permits was cut from 600 to a few dozen. The number of state workers fell by 50 percent while the salaries of the remaining workers were boosted. To hold officials accountable, the transparency of government transactions was greatly improved. And all this despite Georgia being one of the poorest of the former Soviet states.

Last year, Georgia was judged to be one of the least-corrupt countries in Central Asia and Europe. On the Corruption Perceptions Index of the group Transparency International, it

ranks near Spain, Latvia, and Costa Rica. Over the course of three governments since 2003, noted a January report by the Council of Europe, "Georgia has come a long way in creating a regulatory and institutional framework for fighting corruption."

The country still has corruption challenges, mainly in the judiciary. One in 8 Georgians says corruption is one of the nation's top three problems. But the country has achieved what The Economist magazine calls a "mental revolution." Perhaps more Russians want what their neighbors in Georgia already enjoy.

Stephens : A 'New Approach' to North Korea

Bret Stephens

Rex Tillerson was widely criticized earlier this month when he suggested that "efforts of the past 20 years to bring North Korea to a point of denuclearization have failed." The secretary of state then promised "a new approach" without offering details.

Perhaps he doesn't yet know what that new approach is. But recognizing failure is the first step on the road to wisdom.

Since the end of the Cold War the U.S. has pursued a three-pronged approach toward North Korea. First has been a policy of inducements aimed at getting Pyongyang to change its ways. These include the unilateral removal of U.S. nuclear weapons from South Korea in 1991, yearly shipments of heavy fuel for most of the 1990s, South Korea's construction of the Kaesong Industrial Complex inside North Korea in 2003, and the removal of North Korea from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism in 2008.

None of it worked. North Korea is too cynical, greedy and poor to stay bribed for long. And it knows it cannot abandon its nuclear program, lest it also forsake the only reason the West would pay bribes in the first place.

Then there are sanctions. North Korea may be the "most sanctioned"

country on earth, as Barack Obama pointed out in 2015, but sanctions on North Korea tend to fail because China has generally been reluctant to enforce them. China last year imported \$1.2 billion of North Korean coal, above the level allowed by U.N. sanctions. More recently, Beijing announced that it would cut off coal imports from Pyongyang, but only after it had already purchased its annual quota. And politically influential Chinese individuals continue to help the North evade sanctions through front companies.

Finally there is what the Obama administration called "strategic patience"—a policy of waiting for the regime to collapse or change course.

Strategic patience would be a more plausible policy if time weren't working against us. The North is now preparing its sixth nuclear test. Its ability to marry a nuclear warhead to an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of hitting the U.S. mainland is no longer a theoretical risk. A state-of-the-art uranium-enrichment plant gives it the ability to produce as many as eight bombs a year. Some of those bombs could be shared with or sold to Iran or other malign actors.

So what's the alternative?

It's time to make regime change in North Korea the explicit aim of U.S.

policy, both on strategic and humanitarian grounds. But there are two ways in which regime change can be pursued—and one can be used in furtherance of the other.

The first type of regime change is pro-China. Beijing has little sympathy for Kim Jong Un, who brutally purged his regime of its China sympathizers after coming to power five years ago. But Beijing's distaste is tempered by its interest in the existence of North Korea as an independent state, mainly because it has good reason to fear the strength and example of a unified, democratic Korea led from Seoul.

Pro-China regime change would take the form of a coup, in which Kim would be given the choice of exile or execution, to be replaced by a pro-Beijing figure willing to move the country from totalitarianism to authoritarianism—a Korean replay of the transition from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping. The U.S. would recognize the new government in exchange for verifiable nuclear disarmament, sealing the division of the peninsula.

The U.S. could support such a policy and work with China to achieve it because it would ease the suffering of North Korea's people and put the country's nuclear arsenal in safer (and more negotiable) hands. China should support it because it would maintain the North as a buffer state and get

rid of a regime that might otherwise collapse in unpredictable and dangerous ways.

Achieving such regime change will be tricky, but China could move things along by cutting off fuel supplies to the North and "inviting" Kim and his family for an extended luxury vacation.

And if the Chinese aren't amenable to this strategy? In that case, the U.S. should support the anti-China model of regime change, aiming not only at the end of the Kim regime but of North Korea itself.

That would mean a formal U.S. declaration in favor of unification. Other steps might include cutting off Chinese banks and companies that do business with Pyongyang from access to U.S. dollars, undertaking a campaign to highlight Chinese mistreatment of North Korean refugees, and further speeding the deployment of antiballistic missile systems to South Korea. As another inducement, Donald Trump could return to his suggestion last year that the South should have an independent nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Trump is scheduled to meet Xi Jinping at Mar-a-Lago next month. It would be a good occasion for the president to ask his Chinese counterpart which kind of regime change he'd prefer.

Duterte plays a winning hand with foreign policy, but will his luck run out? (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/emilyrauhala/?ref=ts>

MANILA — Rodrigo Duterte does not need your money. But he will take it.

Since his electoral triumph last summer, the man famous for cursing foreign leaders and calling for mass killing seems to be raking in the cash for Manila. A tidy \$24 billion in deals with China. Fresh billions from Japan. Not to mention the tens of millions in military and development aid the United States sends each year — despite his call for a "separation."

Indeed, eight months into his tenure, with President Trump in power and Asian affairs in flux, Duterte's devil-may-care diplomacy and relentless talk of "slaughter" seem to be paying off, propping up his domestic popularity even as an International Criminal Court prosecutor warns of a possible war crimes investigation against him.

Courting the president of the Philippines are new friends such as China, which last week sent a vice premier to Duterte's home town, and Russia, which recently dispatched two warships to Manila on a goodwill visit. Both see Duterte as an ally against the U.S. military's Asian ambitions.

Old partners such as the United States and Japan might bristle at Duterte's rhetoric and rights record, but they are willing to speak softly because they need his help countering Chinese claims to most of the South China Sea.

Duterte, meanwhile, seems happy to flirt with his various suitors, alternating between swearing and sweet talk, backtracking as required.

As a presidential candidate, the longtime mayor of Davao City promised Filipinos an "independent" foreign policy, vowing to stand up to the Americans and make money from everyone else. With deals and dignitaries streaming in, Duterte can

credibly say he delivered — at least for now.

But much of the Philippines prefers the United States to China; Duterte may want to align himself with Beijing's "ideological flow," as he put it, but swaths of the country's establishment do not.

Duterte's defense secretary, Maj. Gen. Delfin Lorenzana, recently expressed concern about Chinese survey ships lingering in waters off the Philippine coast. Faced with questions from reporters, Duterte seemed confused; he eventually asserted that he would ask the military to tell Beijing to back off — but in a friendly way.

There is a growing sense that his foreign policy is a short-term fix, said Herman Kraft, a political scientist at the University of the Philippines. "We have a tiny window when we can still play both sides."

Duterte has a flair for the dramatic, and his entrance to the foreign

policy stage was nothing short of spectacular.

Casting insults at President Barack Obama, he made a show about finding new "best friends" in Moscow and Beijing — although his calls to curtail the decades-old U.S.-Philippine military partnership were quickly played down by members of his own cabinet.

China, seeing an opportunity to curry favor with a key U.S. ally, invited him to the Chinese capital, where he signed billions in deals. Duterte thanked his hosts by railing against the United States.

Not a month after his speech in Beijing, Donald Trump's triumph had Duterte singing a different tune. The two countries could now stop feuding, he said — a turnaround that gave him room to quietly reach out to the United States.

While Trump prepared for his inauguration, a U.S. ally stepped in. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo

Abe paid a visit. He toured Duterte's home in the southern Philippines, reportedly admiring his bed and mosquito net, and announced \$8.7 billion in aid.

Duterte's diplomatic maneuvering allowed him to press ahead with state-led killings of alleged drug dealers and users while securing billions of dollars' worth of deals. "Despite all his shenanigans, he hit a strategic sweet spot," said Richard Javad Heydarian, an assistant professor of political science at Manila's De La Salle University.

"But," Heydarian added, "this may be a bit of strategic beginner's luck. If he keeps at this for a few years, he will be seen as a flip-flopper."

Filipino and foreign experts are skeptical about whether big promises from China and Russia will actually materialize and, if they do, whether the money will keep coming.

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China will eventually make a move in the South China Sea that Filipinos find unpalatable, said Jose L. Cuisia Jr., who, until June, was the Philippine ambassador to the United States. When that happens, it will be hard for Duterte to do as China pleases, and those Chinese pledges could dry up, Cuisia said.

"I am not sure that we will see a strong relationship with China and Russia in the long term," he said.

For now, Duterte seems likely to woo as many allies and investors as possible, said Aileen S.P. Baviera, a China expert at the University of the Philippines' Asian Center.

"Because of Trump, most countries want to hedge their bets and remain as flexible as possible," she said. "And right now, China looks like a more stable partner than the U.S."



Sharma : Modi's Alarming Power Grab

Mihir Sharma

getting away with it.

Relatively quietly, India's government has just undertaken an unprecedented power grab -- one that should worry not just citizens and taxpayers but also foreign investors. And it comes in the most unlikely of places: the annual federal budget.

The presentation of the budget is a fairly splashy event; it's announced by the finance minister in a speech to parliament that usually reveals the direction of economic policy in the coming year. Once the speech is done, the budget usually vanishes from view: Lawmakers debate and negotiate, a few minor amendments are carried out, and a finance bill is passed, turning the budget into law.

Not this year, however. While the budget itself was lackluster -- with a few handouts, but no real growth-promoting reform -- what happened afterward has been startling. The government decided to tack on amendments that are worrying in both intention and execution. These amendments change as many as 40 other laws, and will have wide-ranging effects. They seem to suggest the worst: that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government are trying to expand the powers of the Indian state in ways not seen for decades. Also, he's

Here are just a few things that the new bill does. It will allow Indian companies to donate as much money as they like to political parties, by removing a cap linked to net profits that's been in force for years. Voters won't have a chance to examine which company is giving money to which politician; all donations will henceforth be anonymous. An earlier requirement that a company officially declare its political contributions has been erased.

Another amendment merges various "tribunals," or quasi-judicial bodies that examine appeals of regulatory decisions and which are, essentially, ways to get around the widespread rot in India's regular courts. This might seem like straightforward rationalization, but it's not. In fact, the government will now "make rules to provide for the (i) qualifications, (ii) appointments, (iii) term of office, (iv) salaries and allowances, (v) resignation, (vi) removal, and (vii) other conditions of service" for the tribunals' members. In other words, the executive has been given arbitrary power over the tribunals. It's trying to subvert and control a slew of hitherto independent institutions. The Indian state is already relentlessly litigious and a dangerous enemy. The government

has just made that problem much worse.

Most worrying, perhaps, is the way the bill will expand the power of income-tax officials. Indians were already concerned that the prime minister would unleash "tax terror," using tax raids and claims against political opponents. In the process, they worried, ordinary taxpayers would have to endure arbitrariness from the authorities.

Those concerns now look justified. Soon, an income-tax officer will be able to waltz into anyone's house or office to conduct a search or a seizure -- and not even have to explain why. Not to you if you're being investigated, and not even to the tax tribunal you would appeal to for help. With almost comical villainy, the government has even made this apply retrospectively -- the tax guys can, without explanation, investigate you or your company all the way back to 1962. This after Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has insisted several times that he doesn't believe in retrospective tax law.

So why is the government getting away with this headlong expansion of its power? Because the annual finance bill is what is called a "money bill" -- unlike regular legislation, it doesn't need the

approval of the upper house of India's parliament. It only needs the lower house to pass it. Right now, Modi's party has a majority in the lower house, but not in the upper. By tacking these changes onto a money bill, the government has ensured that they've been signed into law by Modi's partymen in just one house.

The larger trend here is what should worry us. India has worked as a democracy and as a slowly liberalizing economy precisely because there are at least some checks on government power. Already, anyone doing business in India knows that half your time -- perhaps more -- is spent getting on the right side of the government. But the courts, the tribunals and the upper house of parliament have all acted as constraints on the executive. Modi, empowered by his huge victory in recent local elections, is trying to reduce the power of these checks. Together with his decision to turn hard right on social policy, and left on economic policy, this expansion of his government's power suggests Modi's chosen path for India is far less liberal than earlier hoped.



Gladstone

United States and Allies Protest U.N. Talks to Ban Nuclear Weapons

Somini Sengupta and Rick

Koreans have threatened to strike the United States and its allies with what North Korea's state news media has called the "nuclear sword of justice."

Ms. Haley and Ambassador Matthew Rycroft of Britain emphasized that their countries had vastly reduced the size of their nuclear arsenals since the height of the Cold War.

Mr. Rycroft said his country was not participating in the talks "because we do not believe that those negotiations will lead to effective

progress on global nuclear disarmament."

Ms. Haley questioned whether countries favoring a weapons ban understood the nature of global threats. Referring to nations participating in the talks, she said, "You have to ask yourself, are they looking out for their people?"

She cited North Korea and Iran in articulating her opposition to the talks. But those countries have taken divergent positions. North Korea, like the United States and its allies, is sitting out the talks. Iran,

which does not have nuclear weapons and has promised not to acquire them, is participating.

"Is it any surprise that Iran is in support of this?" Ms. Haley said.

Her counterparts from Russia and China, both veto-wielding permanent members of the Security Council, did not join her protest group. But they are not participating in the talks.

Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov of Russia said in Moscow last week that his government did not support a global nuclear weapons ban,

essentially agreeing with the American position.

"Efforts to coerce nuclear powers to abandon nuclear weapons have intensified significantly recently," the Tass news agency quoted him as saying. "It is absolutely clear that the time has not yet come for that."

Proponents of a nuclear weapons ban have acknowledged the challenges of reaching a treaty, but have been encouraged by efforts that led to landmark prohibitions on other weapons, including chemical weapons, land mines and cluster munitions.

If a sufficient number of countries were to ratify a nuclear weapons ban, supporters contend, it would create political and moral pressure

on holdouts, including the big nuclear powers.

Beatrice Fihn, the executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, said in a statement that the opposition expressed by Ms. Haley and her allies "demonstrates how worried they are about the real impact of the nuclear ban treaty."

Ms. Fihn, whose organization is a strong supporter of the negotiations, said a treaty would "make it clear that the world has moved beyond these morally unacceptable weapons of the past."

Humanitarian aid groups not directly engaged in disarmament causes also endorsed the talks.

"Of course, adopting a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons will not make them immediately disappear," Peter Maurer, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, said in a statement. "But it will reinforce the stigma against their use, support commitments to nuclear risk reduction and be a disincentive for proliferation."

As the talks began inside the General Assembly hall, Toshiaki Fujimori, a survivor of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, made an emotional appeal to diplomats.

"I'm here at the U.N. asking for an abolition of nuclear weapons," he said through an interpreter. "Nobody in any country deserves seeing the same hell again."

More than 2,000 scientists signed an open letter endorsing the talks.

"We scientists bear a special responsibility for nuclear weapons, since it was scientists who invented them and discovered that their effects are even more horrific than first thought," stated the letter, posted on the website of the Future of Life Institute, a charitable organization that promotes the peaceful use of technology.

Quoting President Ronald Reagan, the letter stated, "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."

ETATS-UNIS

**The
New York
Times**

and Pam Belluck

When it was created more than a half century ago, Medicaid almost escaped notice.

Front-page stories hailed the bigger, more controversial part of the law that President Lyndon B. Johnson signed that July day in 1965 — health insurance for elderly people, or Medicare, which the American Medical Association had bitterly denounced as socialized medicine. The New York Times did not even mention Medicaid, conceived as a small program to cover poor people's medical bills.

But over the past five decades, Medicaid has surpassed Medicare in the number of Americans it covers. It has grown gradually into a behemoth that provides for the medical needs of one in five Americans — 74 million people — starting for many in the womb, and for others, ending only when they go to their graves.

Medicaid, so central to the country's health care system, also played a major, though far less appreciated, role in last week's collapse of the Republican drive to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. While President Trump and others largely blamed the conservative Freedom Caucus for that failure, the objections of moderate Republicans to the deep cuts in Medicaid also helped doom the Republican bill.

"I was not willing to gamble with the care of my constituents with this

In Health Bill's Defeat, Medicaid Comes of Age (UNE)

Kate Zernike,
Abby Goodnough

huge unknown," said Representative Frank A. LoBiondo of New Jersey, a member of the centrist Tuesday Group caucus, noting that in three of the counties in his district in the state's more conservative southern half, over 30 percent of all residents are covered by Medicaid.

In the Senate, many Republicans, echoing their states' governors, had worried about jeopardizing the treatment of people addicted to opioids, depriving the working poor, children and people with disabilities of health care and in the long run reducing funding for the care of elderly people in nursing homes.

The Republican bill would have largely undone the expansion of Medicaid under the A.C.A., which added 11 million low-income adults to the program and guaranteed the federal government would cover almost all of their costs. It would have also ended the federal government's open-ended commitment to pay a significant share of states' Medicaid costs, no matter how much enrollment or spending rose. Instead, the bill would have given the states a choice between a fixed annual sum per recipient or a block grant, both of which would have almost certainly led to major cuts in coverage over time.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office predicted that the Republican bill would have cumulatively cut projected spending on Medicaid by \$839 billion and reduced the number of Medicaid

beneficiaries by 14 million over the coming decade.

Many Republicans could not stomach those consequences. Even some conservatives — Christopher H. Smith of New Jersey, for example, and Daniel Webster of Florida — expressed concerns about the number of Medicaid recipients who could suffer.

The Trump administration will likely still seek to rewrite Medicaid rules and give states more leeway to limit benefits or eligibility, for example, allowing them to require certain adults in the program to have jobs or pay monthly premiums. And many Republican governors and members of Congress remain determined to curb Medicaid spending, including by methods proposed in the bill. In 2015, the nation spent more than \$532 billion on Medicaid, of which about 63 percent was federal money and the rest from the states.

Still, last week's defeat reflected how hard it is to take away an entitlement. It also showed the broad and deep reach of Medicaid, which covers about six times as many people as the private marketplaces created under the A.C.A. but, perhaps because the markets are more strongly associated with President Barack Obama and his law, got less attention in this month's contentious debate.

Medicaid now provides medical care to four out of 10 American children. It covers the costs of nearly half of all births in the United

States. It pays for the care for two-thirds of people in nursing homes. And it provides for 10 million children and adults with physical or mental disabilities. For states, it accounts for 60 percent of federal funding — meaning that cuts hurt not only poor and middle-class families caring for their children with autism or dying parents, but also bond ratings.

The program is so woven into the nation's fabric that in 2015, almost two thirds of Americans in a poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation said they were either covered by Medicaid or had a family member or friend who was. The program not only pays for 16 percent of all personal health care spending nationwide, but also accounts for 9 percent of federal domestic spending.

Because it has always covered a patchwork of groups — and many of its beneficiaries are poor and relatively powerless — Medicaid lacks the unified, formidable political constituency that Social Security and Medicare have. States often have different names for the program, and many who rely on it don't realize that MassHealth in Massachusetts or TennCare in Tennessee are just Medicaid by another name.

But in Kaiser's polling since 2005, the percentage of people who support cutting Medicaid spending has never exceeded 13 percent. "The conventional wisdom that there's a great deal of stigma attached to this program does not bear out in the public opinion data,"

said Mollyann Brodie, who oversees polling for the foundation.

President Trump led the charge for the bill that would have slashed Medicaid, but he recognized the program's political potency during his campaign, proclaiming when he announced his candidacy that Medicaid should be saved "without cuts" and repeatedly taking to Twitter to declare his support for it. "The Republicans who want to cut SS and Medicaid are wrong," he wrote in July 2015.

The C.B.O. report made it clear that within a few years, the cuts to Medicaid in the Republican bill would have been felt by millions of Americans.

"It's health care for a huge chunk of the country," said James A. Morone, a political-science professor at Brown University, "and as Donald Trump discovered, it's really, really complicated to mess around with."

Facing Need Back Home

As he waited to see what would happen to the Republican proposal last week, Myrone Pickett said, "I've got a question mark hanging over my head."

Mr. Pickett, of Bloomfield, N.J., got health insurance under the A.C.A.'s expansion of Medicaid, and has used it for monthly shots of Vivitrol, a drug that reduces cravings for opioids and alcohol. A heroin addict for 16 years, Mr. Pickett, 51, said the treatment had helped him stay clean for the past year, get medication for bipolar disorder and land a job at a grocery store.

The A.C.A. offered a tempting deal to states that agreed to expand Medicaid eligibility to everyone with incomes up to 138 percent of the poverty level — \$16,400 for a single person — mostly low-wage workers like cooks, hairdressers and cashiers. The federal government would initially pay 100 percent of the costs of covering their medical care, and never less than 90 percent under the terms of the law. Over the past three years, 31 states and the District of Columbia took the deal.

The move was especially helpful to states overwhelmed by the opioid epidemic. It required Medicaid to cover addiction and mental health treatment for those newly eligible.

Announcing his vote against the G.O.P. proposal last week, Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, a Pennsylvania Republican who represents a politically moderate district north of Philadelphia, said his top concern was "the impact on the single most important issue plaguing Bucks and Montgomery Counties, and the issue that I have

made my priority in Congress: opioid abuse prevention, treatment and recovery."

The Republican bill would have allowed Medicaid payments to grow per person at an inflation rate that would have eroded their value over time. The C.B.O. estimated that states would have gradually had to devote more of their own money to Medicaid, cut payments to doctors, tighten eligibility or cut services covered.

In 2020, states would have started losing the 90 percent federal match for anyone who had gained Medicaid under the A.C.A. expansion but was dropped from the rolls, even briefly. And the bill required beneficiaries in the expansion population to re-enroll every six months, instead of annually, increasing the likelihood that many would be dropped.

As a result, the C.B.O. estimated that by 2026, less than 5 percent of Medicaid recipients enrolled under the A.C.A. would have been covered at the higher matching rate. But more broadly, the cuts would have almost inevitably affected every group covered by Medicaid, including the biggest block of recipients: 36 million children as of last year.

Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler, a Washington State Republican, announced her "no" vote on the bill Thursday, saying, "Protecting vulnerable children is a core purpose of the Medicaid program and when the program fails to do so, it fails entirely."

The cuts would also likely have eventually hit poor, chronically ill mothers like Tracie Scott of Paulding, Ohio. She has multiple sclerosis and quit her job at a dollar store two years ago because of it. Medicaid covers her and her four children, including her 2-week-old daughter and an 8-year-old son with brittle-bone disease who has needed expensive medication and care for frequent fractures.

"I'd be afraid to see some of the bills for my son," Ms. Scott, 30, said as she cradled her newborn, Izabella, in their hospital room recently. "It's been a lifesaver."

For more than six million Americans older than 64, Medicaid pays for nursing homes and other long-term care that they would never otherwise be able to afford, while Medicare covers their medical care.

The threat to such care propelled Representative Webster, whose Central Florida district includes The Villages, a retirement community with more than 150,000 residents, to lean "no" on the bill.

"This uniquely impacted Florida and our growing senior population that's only going to explode in years to come," said Jaryn Emhof, his spokeswoman.

Representative Smith of New Jersey said he was voting no because of concerns about the impact on people with disabilities, who make up just 15 percent of all Medicaid recipients but account for 42 percent of spending, making them particularly vulnerable to cuts.

For millions of disabled people, Medicaid covers services provided at home or through local programs — aides who help them walk, eat and bathe, for example, and physical and speech therapy — that allow them to stay out of institutions, where care is often more expensive. But those services are optional for states, while the cost of institutional care is not. The law would have given states an incentive to place them in institutions.

Medicaid pays for Barbara Theus, 67, to attend a day program in Southfield, Mich., so that her son and caregiver, Royale Theus, can work. Ms. Theus sustained a serious head injury in a car accident 11 years ago and has not been able to care for herself since then. Medicaid also pays for home health aides who help Ms. Theus, a former nurse who did not have much savings at the time of her accident, get showered and fed.

Mr. Theus was relieved when the bill failed. Had his mother lost coverage, he said, he would have had to leave his job to care for her. "I was hopeful that the powers that be would make the best decisions for the people, and that's what happened," he said.

The Battle Against Medicaid

This was the third major effort by Republicans to end Medicaid as an open-ended entitlement. The first was under President Ronald Reagan, the second was in 1995, after President Bill Clinton's unsuccessful attempt to expand health care coverage. But this was the first time Republicans tried it while they controlled the White House and both houses of Congress.

For all the battles over the years, Medicaid started as something of an afterthought.

By 1960, both parties were worried that the country's growing reliance on employer-based insurance was leaving out elderly people, who were unable to pay the rapidly rising cost of health care.

The night of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, Lyndon Johnson

returned to his home in Washington and, unable to sleep, summoned three aides. "That's when he took out his pen and wrote down the priorities that he was going to pursue," one of those aides, Bill Moyers, recalled in an interview. Among them was government health insurance.

President Harry S. Truman had sought to establish national health insurance — and failed. Democrats decided to take on a more limited goal: insurance for elderly people. They called it Medicare. Democrats pushed for it to cover hospital bills for the elderly; Republicans wanted it to pay for private doctor's bills.

The American Medical Association had long lobbied against Medicare, hiring Reagan, then a Hollywood actor, to be the face of its campaign, producing a 1961 LP titled "Ronald Reagan Speaks Out Against Socialized Medicine."

And the doctors' group had an ally in Wilbur Mills, a conservative Democrat who was chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, who like the doctors' group did not think that well-off elderly people should have their bills covered. In 1960, Mr. Mills had co-sponsored a law that established a small program to help the states treat the needy, as a way to stave off proposals for Medicare. The doctors' group suggested expanding this program, preferring it because it would be administered by states, not the federal government.

Mr. Mills had a change of heart after Johnson's landslide victory in 1964. Johnson's Republican opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, had denounced Medicare, and Mr. Mills, and many Republicans, were eager to distance themselves from him.

In early 1965, Mr. Mills proposed what became known as the three-layer cake: Medicare for hospital insurance, Medicare for doctor's bills and a broadened version of the law that helped states pay for the care of the poor, the program that would become Medicaid.

"Hardly anybody talked about Medicaid," said Paul Starr, a sociology professor at Princeton. "It just got added on."

At first, Medicaid helped states provide medical care only for single parents and children on welfare.

Over the next 25 years, Democrats — sometimes working with Republicans — gradually pushed to expand benefits — to two-parent families, to children with speech and development delays, to home treatment for people who would otherwise be institutionalized, to

children up to age 5, then to age 8 and later to age 18, and to pregnant women.

Ironically, some of the biggest expansions in Medicaid came in the 1980s under Reagan, the onetime A.M.A. mouthpiece.

After Republicans failed to turn Medicaid into a block grant, Democrats, who still controlled Congress, worked on compromises with the president and other Republicans, sometimes allowing cuts in programs like Medicare in exchange for expanding Medicaid, said former Representative Henry Waxman, a Democrat who shepherded many of those expansions.

Democrats carefully calibrated each expansion to fit within the annual budget, submitting plans to the Congressional Budget Office for "scoring," to see how much each would cost. "We couldn't do it all at once because we didn't have enough money in the budgets," Mr. Waxman said. But eventually, the goal to decouple Medicaid from the welfare system was achieved. "We broke the link to welfare," he said.

By the 1980s and '90s, health insurance was becoming prohibitively costly, and wages were starting to stagnate. Employer-based health insurance was eroding. States

led by Republicans as well as Democrats began to expand their Medicaid programs.

"What people began to accept, including Republicans, was that the assumption that you could afford health insurance if you were an able-bodied adult was not true," said Colleen M. Grogan, a professor at the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, who has written extensively on health care. "You could be working and still not afford health insurance."

In 1996, Mr. Clinton expanded Medicaid to cover more working families as part of his welfare overhaul. Campaigning for re-election that year, he depicted Medicaid as a middle-class program, telling audiences it was helping their grandparents.

"He is the first Democrat to start calling Medicaid one of 'our programs,'" said Professor Morone of Brown. "There was a sense that Medicaid had sort of grown up as an entitlement."

The expansion of Medicaid in the Children's Health Insurance Program, passed with Republican sponsorship in 1997, set the stage for the sweeping expansions of the Affordable Care Act 13 years later.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

COMMENTS

Editorial : The GOP Entitlement Caucus

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6:29 p.m. ET 302

The full dimensions of the GOP's self-defeat on health care will emerge over time, but one immediate consequence is giving up block grants for Medicaid. This transformation would have put the program on a budget for the first time since it was created in 1965, and the bill's opponents ought to be held accountable for the rising spending that they could have prevented.

The members of the House Freedom Caucus who killed ObamaCare's repeal and replacement claim to be fiscal hawks. Most of them support a balanced budget amendment. Yet they gave zero credit to a reform that would have restored Medicaid—a safety net originally intended for poor women, children and the disabled—to its original, more limited purposes.

Over the years liberal and some otherwise conservative states opened Medicaid benefits to new

populations. And in 2010 ObamaCare added working-age, able-bodied adults above the poverty level. The result is that Medicaid now insures more than 72 million people, or one of every five Americans. In six states it's one of every four or higher. Medicaid is now the third-largest program in the federal budget and the fastest growing. Federal outlays are nearly three times higher today than in 2000, as the nearby chart shows.

Republicans had a rare opening to change the projected trajectory, by limiting the federal government's open-ended commitment. The federal government "matches" between 50% and 74% of costs for the pre-ObamaCare population, while new Medicaid earns 90%-95%. This formula rewards states that spend more and means they are less accountable for controlling spending or allocating resources toward high-quality care for the most vulnerable.

These disincentives, combined with price controls and low provider reimbursement rates, produce the

But politics during Mr. Obama's presidency had become highly polarized. While earlier expansions of Medicaid had sometimes been bipartisan, the A.C.A. passed without a single Republican vote in Congress. The Tea Party had risen in opposition to the legislation, and later helped elect many of those who now form the conservative Freedom Caucus.

Gradually, though, Republican-led states have adopted the expansion. And now that the law known as Obamacare has survived the effort to repeal it, more states may choose to expand Medicaid. In Maine, voters will decide this fall whether to do so, and in Kansas, the Legislature has all but approved an expansion, although Gov. Sam Brownback could veto it.

Last week, despite their desire to repeal Mr. Obama's biggest domestic legacy, some Republicans recognized that any bill that would lead to such drastic cuts in Medicaid would simply hurt too many of their constituents.

In Ashland, Va., Medicaid made it possible for Kim Goodloe and her husband, Tom, to start a small company making metal parts for semiconductors and medical devices after the birth of twin boys with tuberous sclerosis 27 years ago. The genetic disorder causes

tumors in vital organs, leading to frequent seizures, and Mrs. Goodloe had quit her job to take care of the boys when they were 4 — Medicaid did not cover services for them back then. But now, Medicaid provides a home aide for Matthew, who is incontinent and nonverbal, suffers daily seizures and needs help walking.

For the other twin, Christopher, who is less severely developmentally disabled, Medicaid provided a job coach, helping him to work at their company and earn enough money that he now pays taxes.

The Goodloes have private insurance, but it is not required to pay for the twins' services, she said. With Virginia facing such steep cuts to its federal Medicaid payments, Mrs. Goodloe worried about losing the home health aide. They would have had to downsize the business, which employs 30 people.

"Even within my own family, when you say 'Medicaid' it comes with some, 'Those people don't want to work.' They believe there's a lot of fraud, there's people that don't deserve it."

"But then," she said, "They'll say, 'How could they take it away from Matthew?'"

worst health outcomes of any insurance in the U.S. A pioneering New England Journal of Medicine study in 2013 found that Medicaid "generated no significant improvement" across measures like mortality, high blood pressure or diabetes compared to the uninsured.

The House bill would have transitioned to a per-capita block grant that would grow with an index of medical inflation. The change would have broken the direct link between state spending and federal subsidies and started to make more of a defined contribution. In exchange, Governors would have gained reform flexibility. Federal Medicaid rules strictly limit state freedom to try new ideas, and the poor would be better off if decisions about their welfare are made locally instead of in Washington. States would have been better off as Medicaid crowds out other state priorities like education and public safety.

The bill wasn't perfect. Per capita block grants that rise with medical

inflation is insufficient fiscal discipline, and the bill would have added to the political pressure to join new Medicaid in the 19 states that haven't. Block grants also would have been delayed until 2020, and the danger of waiting is that they get overturned by a future Congress or become a new version of the old "sustainable growth rate" recipe in Medicare—an orphan that Congress defers year after year.

But the Freedom Caucus decided to wait not until 2020 but forever. A fragile compromise that could attract majority support was rejected in favor of sustaining Medicaid's march into insolvency. Republicans may not get a better chance for decades to modernize Medicaid in a way that helps the poor and taxpayers, and voters would be right to doubt the Freedom Caucus's evanescent fiscal bona fides.

Congress Gears Up for Fight Over Spending After Failure of Health-Care Bill (UNE)

Kristina Peterson and Siobhan Hughes

Updated March 27, 2017 9:18 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump and GOP leaders enter their next big battle facing stubborn opposition in both parties that increases Republicans' worries that they will need more Democratic support than previously expected to avert a government shutdown by the end of April.

It is a sign of the new reality in Washington after Mr. Trump and House Speaker Paul Ryan failed to persuade the House's most conservative Republicans, as well as centrists, to back a bill to replace the Affordable Care Act. The failure derailed the GOP leadership and the new administration's top legislative priority and has put unexpected questions before both parties about their paths forward.

For Republicans leaders, the main challenge is the House Freedom Caucus, an alliance of the most conservative Republicans who successfully defied the White House to sink the health bill.

For Democrats, unified opposition to the bill helped give the party a surprising legislative win and deprived Mr. Trump of an early victory. Their success in sticking together has left the party less incentive to compromise with Republicans, who will likely need them to supply votes for the fiscal measures, as they often did under Mr. Ryan's predecessor, Speaker John Boehner.

- After GOP Bill's Failure, Health-Law Lawsuit Takes Center Stage

President Donald Trump and GOP lawmakers, seeking to regroup following the collapse of the effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act, have an option for gutting the health law relatively quickly: They could halt billions in payments insurers get under the law.

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- Kushner Agrees to Meet Senate Panel in Russia Probe

President Trump's son-in-law and adviser, Jared Kushner, has agreed to an interview with the Senate committee probing Russia's interference in the 2016 election.

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- Trump Team's Ties to Russia: A List of Who's Who

At least six current or former associates of the president have been shown either to have had contact with Russian officials or suspected agents since the start of the 2016 campaign, or done business with the country in the past. Here's a list.

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- Trump to Sign Executive Order to Roll Back Obama Climate-Change Policies

President Donald Trump will sign an executive order Tuesday taking steps to unravel the most contentious climate-change policies of his predecessor.

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House Intelligence Chairman Devin Nunes reviewed sensitive information last week on White House grounds a day before saying that U.S. intelligence agencies intercepted information about President Donald Trump and his staff.

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TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

The most immediate test comes at the end of April, when the government's current funding expires. Lawmakers have only 12 legislative workdays before April 28, the date by which they will need to pass a new spending bill or trigger a partial government shutdown. More distantly, Congress must approve an increase in the nation's debt limit, likely by this fall, and then fund the government for fiscal 2018, which begins in October.

Some Republicans say they are worried about the prospect of repeating the experience of 2013, when the party drew most of the blame for a partial shutdown related to a fight over the health law.

Asked if chances of a government shutdown were rising, Rep. Tom Cole (R., Okla.) said, "If we don't get focused on it, there's always a risk."

"The government can't shut down," he said. "If you have a Republican Congress shutting down a Republican government, that's just about as politically stupid as it gets."

"Shutting down the government when you are a Republican Congress and a Democrat is in the White House was one thing. You could chalk that up to a disagreement between the parties," Rep. Tom Rooney (R., Fla.) said in an interview Monday. "But when you control the House and the Senate and the White House and shut down the government—there is no excuse for that at all."

Some Republicans saw Democratic support as one way through the political minefield.

Rep. Chris Collins (R., N.Y.), a top congressional ally of Mr. Trump, said he "would not be too surprised" if Democrats supplied the majority of the votes needed to raise the debt ceiling. "There's 20 or so [Republicans] that would come to the rescue of our own party," he said. "If it comes to that, we will do it again."

Some GOP lawmakers said that while their party's most conservative members might feel new power to make demands, the conservative bloc could also splinter amid disagreements over whether it was wise to block the party's best chance to replace the Affordable Care Act and deliver on a central campaign promise.

One member of the House Freedom Caucus, Rep. Ted Poe (R., Texas), said Sunday that he had resigned from the bloc of the party's most conservative members, which includes many who worked to stop the health bill because they felt it was too tepid in repealing the ACA. On Monday, Rep. Brian Babin (R., Texas) said he was contemplating leaving the group out of "frustration" over the failure of the health bill.

Mr. Collins also suggested a consequence of last week's health-bill collapse might be to divide the House Freedom Caucus.

While some Freedom Caucus members are "emboldened" because they defeated a top leadership priority, Mr. Collins said, "there are others who are more chastened by what happened and the failure of Republicans with all the levers to not be able to repeal and replace Obamacare."

Mr. Trump is working to isolate the caucus. "The Republican House

Freedom Caucus was able to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory," he said Monday night on Twitter.

Greg Valliere, chief global strategist at Horizon Investments, said that "collapse of the health-care bill will embolden members of both parties; neither Trump nor Ryan look as invincible as they did just a week ago."

"The debt-ceiling extension this summer could rival the health battle for bitterness and GOP dysfunction," he said. "I can't see enough votes in the House to raise it without Ryan seeking votes from [House Democratic Leader] Nancy Pelosi's troops."

Congress agreed in the fall of 2015 to the overall spending levels of a two-year budget deal that ends in October. But several political conflicts could be triggered next month, depending on what else GOP leaders decide to put into the short-term spending bill.

Mr. Trump has asked for more funding to begin work building a wall along the border with Mexico, which Senate Democrats have said they would oppose in the April spending bill. And while Mr. Trump wants to boost military spending, Democrats have said any increase in military spending must be matched by a comparable increase in nonmilitary spending.

Moreover, conservatives are likely to pressure Mr. Ryan to cut off federal funding to Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the women's health-care provider, in the spending measure. That would draw opposition from Democrats and some Senate Republicans, potentially dooming any spending bill.

Any effort to defund Planned Parenthood "would make the women's march look like child's play," said Ilyse Hogue, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, referring to the anti-Trump protests in many cities in January. "You're just going to get backlash," she said.

Democrats say they won't compromise on core principles in the course of supporting the fiscal measures or a tax overhaul that is a top priority of Mr. Trump and his party.

Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York, the Senate Democratic leader, said Monday that if Republicans tried to pass "a huge tax break for the

wealthy and already profitable and powerful corporations—it will fail.”

Democrats said they felt empowered by the turn of events. “We never have to kowtow to their demands,” said Rep. Greg Meeks (D., N.Y.). He said the Republicans’ approach would determine how tough Democrats need to be in asserting themselves. “I think that the president should see and the speaker should see they have a choice: They can rely on the Freedom Caucus to try to get all of their votes...or they can try to become reasonable and deal with something that moderates on both sides can come together on.”

Republicans could start outreach with a phone call, said Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut. “It’s extraordinary how little outreach there has been from Republicans to Democrats,” he said.

**The
Washington
Post**

Paletta

After Republicans withdrew their health-care plan on March 24, President Trump announced he would shift focus to tax reform. “We will probably start going very very strongly for the big tax cuts and tax reform, that’ll be next,” he said. (The Washington Post)

After Republicans withdrew their health-care plan on March 24, President Trump announced he would shift focus to tax reform. “We will probably start going very very strongly for the big tax cuts and tax reform, that’ll be next,” he said. After Republicans withdrew their health-care plan on March 24, President Trump announced he would shift focus to tax reform. (The Washington Post)

The Trump administration is planning a much more assertive role in undertaking a broad overhaul of the tax code than it did during the failed effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, with some advisers working to craft a concrete blueprint for specific changes instead of letting Congress dictate details.

But there are divisions with congressional Republicans and within the administration over who should be in charge of the effort — and how ambitious it should be, say administration officials and congressional aides.

Some GOP allies say they have already produced tax legislation and that it would not make sense for the White House to produce its own. Key division points could be about

During the Obama administration, conservative lawmakers frequently opposed borrowing-limit increases as a tool to force spending cuts or other policy measures, such as a repeal of the ACA, the 2010 health law passed by Democrats. It isn’t clear how the Republican-controlled Congress would handle such opposition now, with a Republican president.

Top Democrats on two House committees earlier this month urged Mr. Trump to swiftly secure an increase in the borrowing limit. “It is imperative that you, like all of your predecessors, send a clear message that the United States will continue to pay its debts on time and in full,” said Reps. John Yarmuth (D., Ky.) and Richard Neal (D., Mass.).

whether to seek a broad overhaul of the tax code or whether to limit it to more specific provisions — such as those affecting corporations — and whether such an initiative could increase the deficit without offsetting spending cuts or changes to tax policy. Also highly controversial is a proposal to impose a new tax affecting imports.

Within the administration, meanwhile, there are open questions about who will lead the charge on tax policy. The Treasury Department has close to 100 people working on the issue, and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has signaled to lawmakers that he will be a point person in any negotiations. At the same time, some legislators say National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn has also emerged as a powerful force within the White House for overseeing economic policy and that he could attempt to take the reins of what is likely to be the administration’s most important policy issue going forward.

“We have so much in common with the Trump administration,” House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R-Tex.) said Sunday on Fox News. “It wouldn’t make sense to have a separate tax bill from Secretary Mnuchin, a separate tax bill from Gary Cohn, a third from whomever.”

There will be several key tests of the White House’s new approach. Congress must vote by April 28 to authorize new funding for federal agencies or face a partial government shutdown. If the Trump administration allows Congress to

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has also called on Congress to quickly address the issue.

Apart from the must-pass legislation, Republicans still have other big-ticket items they hope to finish this year, including an overhaul of the tax code, which is unlikely to get much Democratic support. That has been a top priority of Mr. Ryan, the former House Ways and Means Committee chairman. But on Monday, the White House said it planned to take the lead.

“Obviously, we’re driving the train on this,” White House press secretary Sean Spicer said.

Mr. Spicer told reporters that the White House has “a lot of folks on the team” working on a tax plan, including Mr. Mnuchin, National Economic Council Director Gary

Cohn and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross.

His comments came a day after the top tax writer in the House, Rep. Kevin Brady, cautioned the White House against assembling its own proposal. Mr. Brady, the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, said House Republicans and the Trump administration have “so much in common” that they should work together on one package.

—Nick Timiraos, Michael C. Bender and Richard Rubin contributed to this article.

Appeared in the Mar. 28, 2017, print edition as ‘Congress Gears Up For Fight Over Spending.’

Divisions threaten Trump’s hope of winning his next big legislative battle: Taxes (UNE)

By Damian

negotiate spending levels on its own, there could be another split between GOP centrists and conservatives. Another legislative setback could weaken the White House’s hand even further and embolden Democrats during the tax discussions.

That’s one reason the White House is trying to jump-start the tax negotiations. To take more of a leadership role, the administration is planning to issue a document that lays out the specific changes to the tax code it wants in any legislation, people familiar with the deliberations said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorized to speak publicly.

This approach reflects how the White House is adjusting to lessons learned from the intraparty collapse that occurred when House Republicans drafted a bill to repeal the health-care law and then splintered into different factions. The White House needs Congress to achieve crucial legislative victories, but some key White House officials warn that they executive branch should not be too deferential to the legislating process.

Trump believes that a major overhaul of the tax code — complete with huge tax cuts for the middle class — will lead to more economic growth and hiring. Administration officials have also said the tax code is too complicated and full of loopholes for special interest groups that have lobbied for pet provisions over numerous years.

Several GOP congressional aides said a key issue in the discussions will be which White House official emerges as their main interlocutor. Mnuchin has known Trump for 15 years but is a newcomer to government and has never negotiated even a simple piece of legislation before. Overhauling the tax code is considered to be one of the most daunting legislative tasks, and it hasn’t been completed since 1986 despite efforts by lawmakers from both parties.

“We’ve been working diligently since the first days of this administration to develop a tax reform plan that helps achieve our goal of sustained economic growth, provides relief for middle class families and creates a more competitive business environment that supports greater job creation and reinvestment in the American economy,” Treasury Department Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Tony Sayegh said in a statement.

Lawmakers have also spoken with Cohn about the tax overhaul plan, and he is seen as very close to Trump and one of his top advisers, son-in-law Jared Kushner. If Mnuchin and Cohn work closely on the effort, they could bolster the White House’s influence on Capitol Hill. But if they are seen as representing different views, the White House’s message could become cloudier.

Some House Republican leadership aides have pushed the White House to take more ownership of the tax overhaul plan, complaining that the appearance of lukewarm support for

repeal of the health-care law, and a lack of fluency on the details by Trump, made it harder for the party to unify.

Both Brady and the White House have said they want to pursue a comprehensive overhaul of the tax code, lowering tax rates for individuals and businesses. They have each called for consolidating the seven tax brackets for individual filers down to three brackets. Brady has called for lowering the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 20 percent, while Trump has said he wants the corporate rate lowered to 15 percent.

Brady has said a goal of his plan is that it will not increase the deficit. In other words, while it might cut tax rates, it will adjust the tax code in such a way that new revenue comes in from other adjustments. He accomplishes some of this by eliminating certain tax deductions, though tax analysts have said the plan would still lead to a sizable reduction in revenue over 10 years.

Tax analysts have estimated that Trump's proposal would lead to an even more severe revenue loss. Trump has called for huge cuts in tax rates, but he hasn't specified which deductions he would jettison to make up for the lost revenue. He has said, though, that he wants to increase taxes paid by private equity fund managers and hedge fund executives, but those increases would not make up for the lost revenue from the rate cuts.

There are numerous other differences that will test how assertive the

White House plans to be.

Brady, for example, has included something called a border adjustment tax in his plan, which raises \$1 trillion over 10 years by effectively imposing new taxes on goods imported into the United States. It also incentivizes U.S. companies to export goods by ending taxation on exports. While House Republican leaders support this new tax, many Senate Republicans oppose the idea, saying it would drive up costs for retailers and hurt consumers.

White House officials have studied the proposal and see benefits and drawbacks, but some have acknowledged that the fierce resistance from Senate Republicans makes it hard for them to consider backing it.

But if the White House rejects the border adjustment tax, it will have to craft its own tax or tariff plan to follow through on Trump's promise that companies that move outside the United States and try to sell goods back to the country will face a financial penalty.

Mnuchin said during remarks in Washington on Friday that something akin to a border adjustment tax could be proposed for certain products or industries while others are exempt, but he didn't give more specifics.

The effort to repeal and replace the health-care law ended quickly, and a number of congressional Republicans have complained that more time wasn't spent devising a

better strategy and selling it to the public.

The White House has said it wants to complete an overhaul of the tax code by August, which would give it more time than the health-care effort but still allow only a narrow window compared with past tax negotiations.

Many of these past tax discussions have sought to lower tax rates but broaden the base of revenue that is taxed by eliminating deductions or finding new sources of revenue. Lowering rates is often popular, but finding new revenue to tax elicits major fights.

"If you are going to broaden the base and lower the rates, you are going to have to spend a lot of time working," former Senate Finance Committee chairman Max Baucus said in an interview. "It just cannot be jammed. I hope that's a lesson that's learned in the effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act."

Rohit Kumar, a former top tax aide to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), said the White House and congressional leaders will have to soon decide whether they are going to pursue a tax overhaul that doesn't widen the deficit or one that will simply become a major tax cut for businesses and individuals.

If they cut taxes for some but raise them for others, it will lead to the kinds of fights that have often killed tax changes in the past.

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"At some point, someone is going to look at tax reform and be a net loser in the transaction," Kumar said. "And that person is going to complain loudly and bitterly, and depending who they are and how loudly and bitterly they complain, that will make tax reform more difficult."

Following the collapse of the health-care repeal bill, senior White House officials have said they could adjust their legislative strategy and try to woo centrist Democrats toward supporting the tax overhaul instead of trying to keep all Republicans together.

But they have made little headway with Democrats so far, holding only perfunctory meetings and largely keeping them out of any negotiations.

Democrats and Republicans said the White House has only a short time to recover from the health-care-law repeal mistakes, and some suggested that a fair amount of damage has already been done.

"The president lost so much prestige and so much power with the failure of the repeal-and-replace effort, it's going to be awfully hard to make that up," Baucus said.

the Atlantic It Doesn't Get Any Easier for Republicans Now

Russell Berman

"In a way I'm glad I got it out of the way," President Trump told the *Washington Post* last week in the moments after he and Republican leaders in Congress pulled the plug on their first major legislative priority, repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act.

Health care was hard. Really hard. "Nobody knew that health care could be so complicated," the president had said in a now-infamous quote. The health-care legislation was pulled without a vote last week after House Speaker Paul Ryan told the president there were not enough votes from Republicans to pass it.

The implication of Trump's musings about the difficulty of passing complicated health-care legislation is that he believes the rest of his agenda will be much easier. Tax cuts? Everybody like tax cuts. The legendary border wall. More

defense spending. A big, bipartisan infrastructure bill.

Moving on from the American Health Care Act now liberates Trump to pursue the promises he's truly passionate about, the items that drew the loudest cheers at his campaign rallies last year. Yet Republicans in Congress don't see it that way, and for good reason: Passage of the health-care legislation was supposed to lay the groundwork and build momentum for a series of even tougher negotiation and votes to come. That to-do list is longer and less sexy than the president's agenda, and it includes a few items—like funding the government and raising the debt ceiling—where Republicans don't have the luxury of failure. And unlike the health care push, most of the upcoming legislative battles will require support from Democrats.

Funding the Government

Congress has just over a month to pass some sort of spending bill to avoid a shutdown of the federal government on April 29. But the window is actually much shorter than that, because the House and Senate are scheduled to take a two-week recess for Easter in the middle of the month. Once lawmakers return, they'll have just a week to strike a deal and pass a bill that would cover the rest of the fiscal year that ends on September 30.

Any legislation would be subject to a 60-vote threshold in the Senate, giving Democrats significant leverage in negotiations. While there have been discussions about an omnibus appropriations bill, the likeliest outcome is a continuing resolution that would maintain spending levels set during the final budget agreement of the Obama administration. But once the two parties agree on money, there may be a fight over policy.

Conservatives, for example, are expected to push to defund Planned Parenthood, which party leaders had hoped would be taken care of in the health-care bill. That effort could force Trump to take sides between the Freedom Caucus and Democrats who have fought to protect the women's health nonprofit. And moderate Republicans have already grown wary of injecting the politics of abortion and contraception into spending debates.

With Republicans in power, Democrats could be in the position of shutting down the government by blocking legislation in the Senate. But emboldened by the GOP's divisions and Trump's low approval ratings, they may gamble that the public would be more likely to associate a shutdown with the party that has historically been more antagonistic toward government.

Paying for the Border Wall

As part of the short-term funding debate, Trump has asked Congress for an immediate appropriation of \$30 billion to boost defense spending and another \$3 billion to start construction of the wall along the border with Mexico. And he wants lawmakers to find \$18 billion in cuts to domestic agencies to offset the new spending.

The president might get some money for the military, but Democrats (and some Republicans) have already signaled they'll put up a fight on the border wall and domestic budget cuts. "It shouldn't be rammed down people's throats," Schumer said Sunday on ABC's *This Week*. The Democratic leader has already started needling Trump about the fact that he's asking taxpayers to fund the wall when he assured voters that Mexico would fork over the money. (Mexico will ultimately pay the bill in some form, the White House has been saying lately.)

And as Schumer pointed out, a number of Republicans representing districts along the border have begun speaking out against Trump's proposal, noting that a wall doesn't make sense in certain geographical areas and that the government would need to assert eminent domain and seize private property in other places. "My prediction," Schumer said, "it wouldn't get the votes on either the Democratic or Republican side."

Passing a 2018 Budget

Trump's "skinny budget" landed with a thud on Capitol Hill earlier this month. Republican defense hawks wanted even higher spending for the Pentagon, fiscal conservatives were disappointed with a lack of entitlement reform, and a range of

GOP lawmakers opposed the steep cuts to popular domestic programs that Trump proposed.

Republicans are free to ignore the White House's longer budget proposal when it comes out in May—the budget is a resolution that Congress passes but the president does not sign. But GOP lawmakers still need to agree on their own budget proposal to set in motion the procedural mechanism for their more ambitious desire to rewrite the tax code. As with health care, Republicans want to use the reconciliation process to circumvent a Democratic filibuster of tax reform in the Senate, and passing a 2018 budget resolution is a necessary first step.

Enacting Tax Reform

This is the president's new obsession. As the health-care bill was teetering in Congress, Trump began hinting to anyone who'd listen that he was even more excited about tax reform, that it was an easier political lift, that he would have started out with that if his advisers and congressional leaders hadn't insisted for complicated procedural reasons that health care come first. "I would have loved to have put it first. I'll be honest," Trump said at a rally in Tennessee. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said as recently as last week that tax reform would "much simpler" than repealing and replacing Obamacare.

In fact, most Republicans in Congress believe the opposite is true. Overhauling the tax code affects every industry in America and is expected to touch off an unprecedented frenzy of lobbying, as interest groups and trade associations fight for the loopholes

and provisions that their businesses rely on. Divisions have already broken out between House and Senate Republicans over a centerpiece of Speaker Paul Ryan's proposal—a "border adjustment tax" that would generate \$1 trillion in revenue to finance rate reductions but which many Republicans worry will translate into higher retail costs for consumers.

And the GOP's failure on health care has only made tax reform harder, because legislators were counting on the tax-and-spending cuts in the American Health Care Act to give them more room in the budget to slash rates without blowing up the deficit. The consequence is that Republicans likely won't be able to cut rates as deeply—if they are able to get agreement at all. "Yes, this does make tax reform more difficult, but it does not in any way make it impossible," Ryan told reporters as he conceded defeat on health care last week.

Raising the Debt Ceiling

The biggest fiscal showdown of the Obama years came in the summer of 2011, when House Republicans took the country to the brink of a first-ever default by refusing to raise the debt ceiling. The two parties struck a last-minute deal, but thereafter Republicans only agreed to authorize more debt if Democrats provided the bulk of the votes in Congress.

Now that the GOP has unified control of the government, it is the Trump administration asking Congress to raise the debt limit. Mnuchin formally made the request to congressional leaders in a letter earlier this month, informing them that, as is customary, the Treasury

Department would resort to "extraordinary measures" to pay the nation's bills as long as it could in the meantime. Budget analysts expect the department to be able to buy time at least until summer, but at some point, Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell know they'll be in for a tough vote.

They will undoubtedly need help from Democrats, who might make the GOP's job easier by not asking for anything in return. "[We] are making it clear to the administration that we want a clean lifting of the debt ceiling," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi told *Politico* a few weeks ago.

White House officials have said in recent days that Trump wants to work with Democrats, though it's not yet clear how serious they are about forging a new bipartisan approach. Outreach to the opposition could be a way to isolate the hardline House Freedom Caucus and pressure them to compromise. But with Trump's approval rating plummeting and his own party seemingly in disarray, Democrats may have even less incentive to bail the president out.

"We all learned a lot," the president told reporters last week after he agreed to abandon the health-care bill. "We learned a lot about loyalty. We learned a lot about the vote-getting process." As Republicans embark on a tough road ahead in the next few months, Trump will have plenty of opportunities to prove it.

POLITICO Congress may stiff Trump on wall funding

By Burgess Everett and Rachael Bade

Congressional Republicans might deliver some more bad news for President Donald Trump, fresh off their embarrassing failure to scrap Obamacare: No new money is coming to build his wall.

Trump hoped to jump-start construction of a massive wall on the U.S.-Mexico border with money in a must-pass government funding bill. But Democratic leaders are vowing to block any legislation that includes a single penny for the wall.

Story Continued Below

With the GOP consumed by its own divisions, the White House and Hill Republicans will have to rely on

Democratic votes to avoid a government shutdown next month in what would be another disaster for Trump's fledgling presidency.

Republican leaders, wary of this, are considering a plan that would not directly tie the border wall money to the April 28 government funding deadline. Some Republican insiders worry that the president cannot afford another major legislative setback — and they believe a shutdown showdown would result in just that.

While no decision has been made by GOP leadership, Republican lawmakers may decide to decouple the two to avoid a confrontation with Democrats. If they do, the chances of getting Trump's wall funding passed this spring become slim.

"It remains to be seen," said Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn (R-Texas) in an interview. "What I would like to see is a plan for how the money would be spent and a good faith discussion about what border security is really composed of. We haven't had that."

Asked about the prospects for a lapse in government funding, Cornyn was definitive: "There's not going to be a shutdown."

The White House made an initial request earlier this month for \$1.4 billion in border wall funding as part of a package that boosts defense spending by \$30 billion, with the thought that it would hitch a ride to the broader government funding bill due next month. Republicans

expect the final price tag for the wall could be more than \$20 billion.

The problem is that polls show the border wall is not all that popular, particularly if the United States is paying for it, and it does not unify congressional Republicans in the way Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch or even the basic goal of repealing Obamacare have done. That makes it a harder sell to the rank-and-file GOP — especially if pressing it means playing a government shutdown blame game with Democrats.

"The border wall is probably not a smart investment," said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), who proposes funding the wall as part a package legalizing some young

undocumented immigrants and beefing up enforcement.

Several sources said it is unclear whether Trump wants to take the fight to Democrats over the wall or avoid a shutdown battle. His Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney in recent weeks has suggested the administration will focus more on the wall in the future, perhaps as late as fiscal 2019. The White House didn't respond to a request for comment.

But building the wall was Trump's signature campaign promise. Pushing off funding for it now would leave Trump with another unchecked campaign pledge at a time the White House is thirsty for a victory after its Obamacare debacle.

Some defense hawks, like Graham, are concerned that the border wall fight could complicate an effort to get extra spending for the military.

"Democrats, I think, are in a spot where they're open-minded to military spending as long as it doesn't come at the expense of" domestic spending, Graham said. "Here's what I'd tell my colleagues in the House: If you don't think the Defense Department is an emergency situation, you've just stopped listening."

Of course, some in the GOP are itching for a border battle. A senior

Republican source suggested Trump could conceivably win a shutdown fight if he went to the mat to defend it: "This is his signature issue. I cannot imagine a scenario where the Trump administration loses on the border wall funding. If I were them, I'd dare the Democrats to shut down the government over this."

Another senior House Republican source disagreed completely: "The Trump administration can't have another disaster on its hands. I think right now they have to show some level of competence and that they can govern."

Republicans began the year thinking that they could get moderate Democrats and perhaps even Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) to fund construction of a wall that some Democrats have supported in the past. But Schumer has warned McConnell that his party will not support any "riders" in the funding bill intended to jam Democrats with conservative policies.

"The wall is a poison-pill rider," Schumer said in an interview. "They'll do it at their peril."

Other than the issue of the wall, the spending process on Capitol Hill is proceeding apace. Republicans and Democrats are working diligently together on a measure to fund the government through September that

can appeal to the center of each party, according to lawmakers and aides.

But adding the wall into the mix would create a toxic political environment.

"That's a bigger problem," said a Republican senator familiar with the emerging spending bills. Including wall funding in the must-pass government funding bill "would be hard."

House Republicans are expected to act first.

While the chamber operates on majority rule and could conceivably write red-meat appropriations bills that include wall funding, GOP leaders expect a significant number of conservatives to defect on any government funding bill, as they have in the past.

And after the hard-line House Freedom Caucus brought down the Obamacare replacement bill last week, GOP insiders worry they can't depend on them to help get major legislation across the finish line.

The conservative caucus discussed giving Trump "greater flexibility" on spending bills during a closed-door Monday night meeting, according to Freedom Caucus Chairman Mark Meadows — so long as it includes funding for Trump's wall.

"We understand that we have a very narrow margin of victory... and we understand it may require us to take more difficult votes than we have in the previous Congress," the North Carolina Republican told reporters.

One option for the House is to pass the government funding bill and the border and defense package in a way that allows the Senate to easily separate the two measures later.

Republicans could pass a bipartisan bill keeping the government open and then attach a second GOP bill with wall funding. That would let the Senate strip the wall provision from the must-pass bill to avert a government shutdown, and the House would be forced to swallow what the Senate can pass.

If Trump insists, House GOP leaders could include the wall money directly in the government funding bill — but they could lose only 22 Republicans if they receive no Democratic support.

Even if the House manages to pass a spending measure that includes funding for the wall, Republicans will need at least eight Senate Democrats to break a filibuster to fund the government, something Schumer says isn't happening if border wall money is included.



Trump moves decisively to wipe out Obama's climate-change record (UNE)

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

(Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

President Trump will sign an executive order on March 28 to wipe away former president Obama's environmental record. The order will instruct federal regulators to rewrite Clean Power Plan rules that curb U.S. carbon emissions. President Trump will sign an executive order on March 28 to wipe away former president Obama's environmental record. (Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

President Trump will take the most significant step yet in obliterating his predecessor's environmental record Tuesday, instructing federal regulators to rewrite key rules curbing U.S. carbon emissions.

The sweeping executive order also seeks to lift a moratorium on federal coal leasing and remove the requirement that federal officials

consider the impact of climate change when making decisions.

The order sends an unmistakable signal that just as President Barack Obama sought to weave climate considerations into every aspect of the federal government, Trump is hoping to rip that approach out by its roots.

"This policy is in keeping with President Trump's desire to make the United States energy independent," said a senior administration official who briefed reporters on the directive Monday evening and asked for anonymity to speak in advance of the announcement. "When it comes to climate change, we want to take our course and do it in our own form and fashion."

Some of the measures could take years to implement and are unlikely to alter broader economic trends that are shifting the nation's electricity mix from coal-fired generation to natural gas and renewables. The order is silent on whether the United States should

withdraw from the 2015 Paris climate agreement, under which it has pledged to cut its greenhouse gas emissions between 26 and 28 percent by 2025 compared to 2005 levels, because the administration remains divided on that question.

The order comes after several moves by Trump to roll back Obama-era restrictions on mining, drilling and coal- and gas-burning operations. In his first two months as president, Trump has nullified a regulation barring surface-mining companies from polluting waterways and set aside a new accounting system that would have compelled coal companies and other energy firms to pay more in federal royalties.

The administration also has announced it will reconsider stricter fuel-efficiency standards for cars and light trucks and has approved two major oil pipelines, Dakota Access and Keystone XL, that Obama had halted.

Accelerating fossil-fuel production on federal lands and sidelining

climate considerations could lead to higher emissions of the greenhouse gases driving climate change and complicate a global effort to curb the world's carbon output. But Trump has repeatedly questioned whether climate change is underway and emphasized that he is determined to deliver for the voters in coal country who helped him win the Oval Office.

"He's made a pledge to the coal industry and he's going to do whatever he can to help those workers," the senior administration official said.

U.S. coal jobs, which number about 75,000, have been declining for decades. The official did not predict how many jobs might be spurred by this shift in policy.

(Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

President Trump and many of his top aides have expressed skepticism about climate change, while others say human activity is to blame for global warming. So what's

the administration's real position? Does the Trump administration believe in climate change? (Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

Legal fight possible

The centerpiece of the new presidential directive, telling the Environmental Protection Agency to begin rewriting the 2015 regulation that limits greenhouse-gas emissions from existing power plants, will trigger a laborious rulemaking process and a possible legal fight.

The agency must first get permission from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, where the rule is tied up in litigation, to revisit the matter. Then, agency officials will have to justify reaching the opposite conclusion of the Obama EPA, which argued it was technically feasible and legally warranted to reduce carbon pollution by about one-third by 2030, compared with 2005 levels.

"So, for the president, even if he would like to revoke the Clean Power Plan, he doesn't have legal authority to do that," said Jeffrey Holmstead, a partner at the Bracewell law firm who opposes the Obama-era rule. Holmstead, who headed the EPA's air and radiation office under President George W. Bush, said he thinks the agency can justify reversing the regulation. But "they have to justify why they have changed," he added.

Mapping how the United States generates its electricity

While environmental groups decried Trump's move, mining officials welcomed it as an important course correction in federal energy policy.

"This rule was an unlawful attempt to radically transform the nation's power grid, destroying valuable energy assets and leaving our economy more vulnerable to rising power prices — all for an insignificant environmental benefit," said Hal Quinn, president and chief

executive of the National Mining Association.

Environmentalists vowed to fight the executive order in court and press ahead with their goals on the state level.

David Doniger, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's climate and clean-air program, said unwinding the Clean Power Plan will not happen quickly, no matter what the president wants. "Tearing the rules down require going through the same process it took to build them up," Doniger said. "We will make them face the music at every step."

Christopher Field, a professor at Stanford University's Wood Institute for the Environment, said in an email that the directive carries long-term risks, rather than immediate ones. "Some are risks from eroding the position of U.S. companies in the clean energy sector," Field said. "Others are from the loss of irreplaceable natural heritage that is put in jeopardy by ill-conceived policies."

The president will also instruct the Interior Department to rewrite a 2015 rule, currently stayed in court, that imposes restrictions on hydraulic fracturing on federal and tribal lands. The directive will also make it easier to flare methane in oil and gas operations on federal land, by triggering the review of a rule the Interior Department finalized in November.

More immediate actions

Other aspects of the executive order can take effect immediately, though it is unclear how quickly they will translate into greater coal extraction. One section overturns a 2016 White House directive to consider climate change when agencies conduct reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act, a sweeping law that informed any federal decisions that have a significant environmental impact.

Another provision instructs Interior's Bureau of Land Management to lift a freeze on federal coal leasing. That moratorium has been in effect since December 2015.

Tom Sanzillo, director of finance for the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, said in an interview that the move "becomes a largely politically symbolic measure for right now" because other, lower-carbon sources of energy are out-competing coal. He noted that U.S. coal consumption has declined 27 percent since 2005, from 1.02 billion tons to 739 million tons in 2016, its lowest level in nearly four decades.

"They're not going to reverse the fundamental economic law here," Sanzillo said. "There's no market signal that's telling them they should be mining more coal."

Still, regulatory relief could make some coal firms, nearly 50 of which have filed for bankruptcy since 2012, somewhat more economically viable. Some of the sector's biggest companies — including Arch Coal, Peabody Energy and Alpha Natural Resources — are just now emerging from bankruptcy protection.

Ethan Zindler, head of U.S. research at Bloomberg New Energy Finance, said in an email that solar and wind are competitive with coal in some parts of the country and that natural gas ranks as the lowest-cost source of electricity generation overall. The sector that could suffer the greatest hit from the elimination of the Clean Power Plan is nuclear energy, which provides about a fifth of U.S. businesses' and households' power.

"Many of the 100 or so U.S. plants are aging, and approximately a third are economically uncompetitive today," Zindler said. Without stricter federal emissions limits, he added, "there may be little to stop the retirement of these plants in coming years and their replacement with a combination of gas, wind and solar."

Separately, Trump has instructed federal officials to abandon the practice of factoring in the impact of climate change — what is dubbed "the social cost of carbon" — in their policymaking decisions. That calculus, which is currently set at \$36 per ton of carbon dioxide, aims to capture the negative consequences of allowing greenhouse-gas emissions to continue to rise. But some conservatives have criticized it as too sweeping.

Federal officials will return to the traditional cost-benefit analysis the George W. Bush administration adopted nearly 15 years ago, which has a much lower cost associated with carbon emissions.

As Trump seeks to scale back federal limits on greenhouse gas emissions, states and cities are likely to take on a larger role in charting the course forward.

An analysis by the Rhodium Group, an economic consulting firm, found that Trump's forthcoming executive order would slow the country's shift away from carbon-emitting sources of energy. It found after Trump's action, the United States would be 14 percent below its 2005 emissions levels by 2025, compared to 21 percent below that mark had current Obama-era policies remained in place.

Tim Profeta, who directs Duke University's Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, said regulators from more than half-dozen states in the Southeast are now talking about how to chart their own path forward. Having met for nearly three years, the group stopped discussing how to comply with the Clean Power Plan after November's election, but it is still talking.

"We are now talking about the evolution of the power sector in an environment of uncertainty," Profeta said in an interview. "We're seeing the beginning of states taking control of their destiny."



Trump Kills Obama's Climate Change Rules in Favor of Fossil Fuel Industry

Jay Michaelson

The 'America First' energy policy takes shape, and it's good news for oil, gas, and coal companies.

The Trump administration will release an executive order on "Energy Independence" tomorrow that marks a 180-degree reversal of Obama's policies on energy, climate change, and public lands, according

to a briefing provided by a senior White House official.

Described as an "America First" energy policy, the new executive order shifts the government's balance to favor the fossil fuel industry over environmental protection.

First, the order will immediately rescind a number of Obama administration orders, guidances,

and other documents, while freezing Obama-era regulations in order to conduct new reviews. In particular, all executive orders on climate change will be formally rescinded. They "have run their course," said the official, and "simply don't reflect president's priorities... We are taking a different path."

According to the document:

- The White House Center for Environmental Quality's guidance that all agencies take climate change into account when making policy will be rescinded.

- The EPA's Clean Power Plan, which set the first-ever national standards for carbon pollution from power plants will be frozen pending a new review.

- The EPA's determination of the "social cost of carbon," i.e., the value of a ton of carbon not put into the atmosphere, will be rescinded. The Office of Management and Budget will set the value instead.

- The Department of the Interior's moratorium on new coal mining on public land will be rescinded.

- President Obama's 2013 memorandum calling for a climate action plan will be rescinded.

- President Obama's 2015 memorandum on climate mitigation efforts, to be conducted by multiple departments, will be rescinded.

- Regulation of fracking will be reviewed.

- Regulation of methane emissions at oil and gas production sites will be reviewed.

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All these and other reversals are but the first part of the executive order's ambit. The second part is even more devastating for environmental concerns: to set a new, national policy on "energy independence"—in other words, energy production.

Over the next 180 days, all agencies will be instructed to identify, and slate for repeal, "any rules that serve as obstacles or impediments to domestic energy production." Those will range from environmental laws that protect caribou at the expense of oil drilling in Alaska, to safety regulations that raise the cost of fracking.

Indeed, the order will call for reviewing any policies that "burden" energy production, including incidental ones

like water regulations, limitations on public land use, housing rules regarding the siting of fracking and other fossil fuel extraction, and even tax policies. The whole point of a six-month-long, government-wide review is explicitly to change all relevant government actions to benefit energy production.

How best to understand this broad executive order?

First, this should not be a surprise. Trump campaigned against the scientific consensus on climate change and against "burdensome" environmental regulations. He's put climate skeptics in charge of the EPA and in the White House. The extent of the action may be unprecedented, but anyone who is surprised by these moves has not been paying attention.

Second, this is more Republicanism than Trumpism. Most likely, Jeb Bush would've made many of the same changes. There are some distinctively Trumpist elements to it—pandering to coal miners ("the president made a pledge to the coal industry to do whatever he can to help those workers," the official said), calling the policy "America First." But those are more rhetorical than substantive. In fact, most of these changes are the ones that mainstream Republicans have been demanding for years. This order is as much Reince Priebus as Steve Bannon.

Indeed, the only reason that Trump can so swiftly roll back eight years of Obama administration policy is that the Republican-dominated congress refused to act on climate change. That left it to the executive branch to do the heavy lifting with regulations, executive orders, and other rules—all of which can be overturned by the next administration, as we are now seeing.

Finally, the White House official repeatedly expressed the president's desire to "get EPA back to its core mission" of protecting clean air and clean water. That spells bad news for everything else the EPA does: scientific research, climate change prevention, promotion of alternative fuels, protecting against environmental injustice, and so on.

There were a couple of interesting developments, however.

First, the Trump administration did not formally abandon the Paris Agreement on climate change, stating that it was "still under discussion." While this might offer a glimmer of hope to environmentalists, more likely it's simply a tactical move. Why formally withdraw from an international accord when you can simply ignore it and miss its targets? Better to sin and ask forgiveness later than to cause a ruckus now.

Second, the administration has more finely tuned its rhetoric regarding climate change. At the briefing, journalists were told that, in fact, the president does believe in man-made climate change. Indeed, when pressed, even the official, who as recently as four months ago was a lobbyist for fossil fuel companies, admitted that he, too, believed in man-made climate change.

"Yep, sure, I do," he said (after first saying it's "not relevant what I think"). "The issue is to what extent, and how serious, and the magnitude of it, and a lot of other questions that flow from that."

That is a more nuanced view than outright climate denial, or even climate skepticism. You might call it "climate meh." As in: OK, climate change is happening, but it's

probably not such a big deal. In the words of Whitney Houston, it's not right, but it's OK.

That view still runs directly counter to the entirety of the scientific community's estimates, which range from bad to catastrophic. But it is a brilliant political shift. Instead of baldly denying the science (and the weather, for that matter), the administration now invites us into the weeds of how much, how bad, how complex... how dull.

The Whitney Houston view also makes fighting climate change a matter of balancing. "It's an issue that deserves attention," said the official, "but the president has been very clear that we're not going to pursue climate or environmental policies that put the U.S. economy at risk."

See how that works—it's not right, but it's OK, and so we can balance it out against these other things. (Several journalists pointed out that climate change will be economically devastating, as coastal cities must protect against being inundated, extreme weather events increase in frequency, and crop belts shift northward—but the official played dumb. "I'd like the see the research," he said.)

What, finally, is an "America First energy policy"? Per the executive order, it's to "remove any obstacles so we can produce energy." But of course, that's really a fossil-fuel-industry first energy policy. Everything else just got sent to the back of the line.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Editorial : So Much for Donald Mussolini

Well, that was fast, if predictable. We're referring to the conventional wisdom that has moved without a moment of self-reflection from declaring Donald Trump to be a dangerous fascist to a hopeless incompetent.

Not too long ago our leading media lights were using Mussolini and Hitler analogies to describe the new American President's threat to "democratic norms." The Washington Post rolled out a portentous new slogan, "Democracy Dies in Darkness." Academics like Yale's Timothy Snyder and Dartmouth's Brendan Nyhan have used the theme to become mini-media celebrities predicting that

America in 2017 is ripe for 1930s European tyranny.

So much for all that. The real story of the Trump Presidency so far is that the normal checks and balances of the American system are working almost to a fault. The courts have blocked Mr. Trump's immigration order, albeit with some faulty legal reasoning. Congress has rejected the House health-care bill, his first big legislative priority.

The FBI and the House and Senate Intelligence Committees are investigating the Trump campaign's ties to Russia. Mr. Trump's Attorney General has recused himself from the FBI probe, and the President's

nominee for deputy AG is held up in a *Republican* Senate.

The permanent bureaucracy is leaking like a tent in a monsoon, and Mr. Trump is getting the worst press of any President since the final days of Richard Nixon. Mr. Trump may rage against the press, but the Alien and Sedition Acts aren't coming back. Rest assured that if Mr. Trump's Internal Revenue Service ever does to liberal groups what President Obama's did to the tea party, the media will provide nonstop coverage.

The greater likelihood has always been that, as a rookie politician, Mr. Trump would be too weak and

ineffective, not too strong. He lacks a solid party base, and the inertial forces of government resist any change that means lost power. His Presidency is young, and perhaps Mr. Trump will still find his bearings and make some progress on his reform agenda.

We can't say the same about the lost credibility of the many worthies who sold American institutions short while predicting fascist doom. They were always more partisan than principled. As for those quaking Yale and Dartmouth professors, their students should demand a tuition refund.

