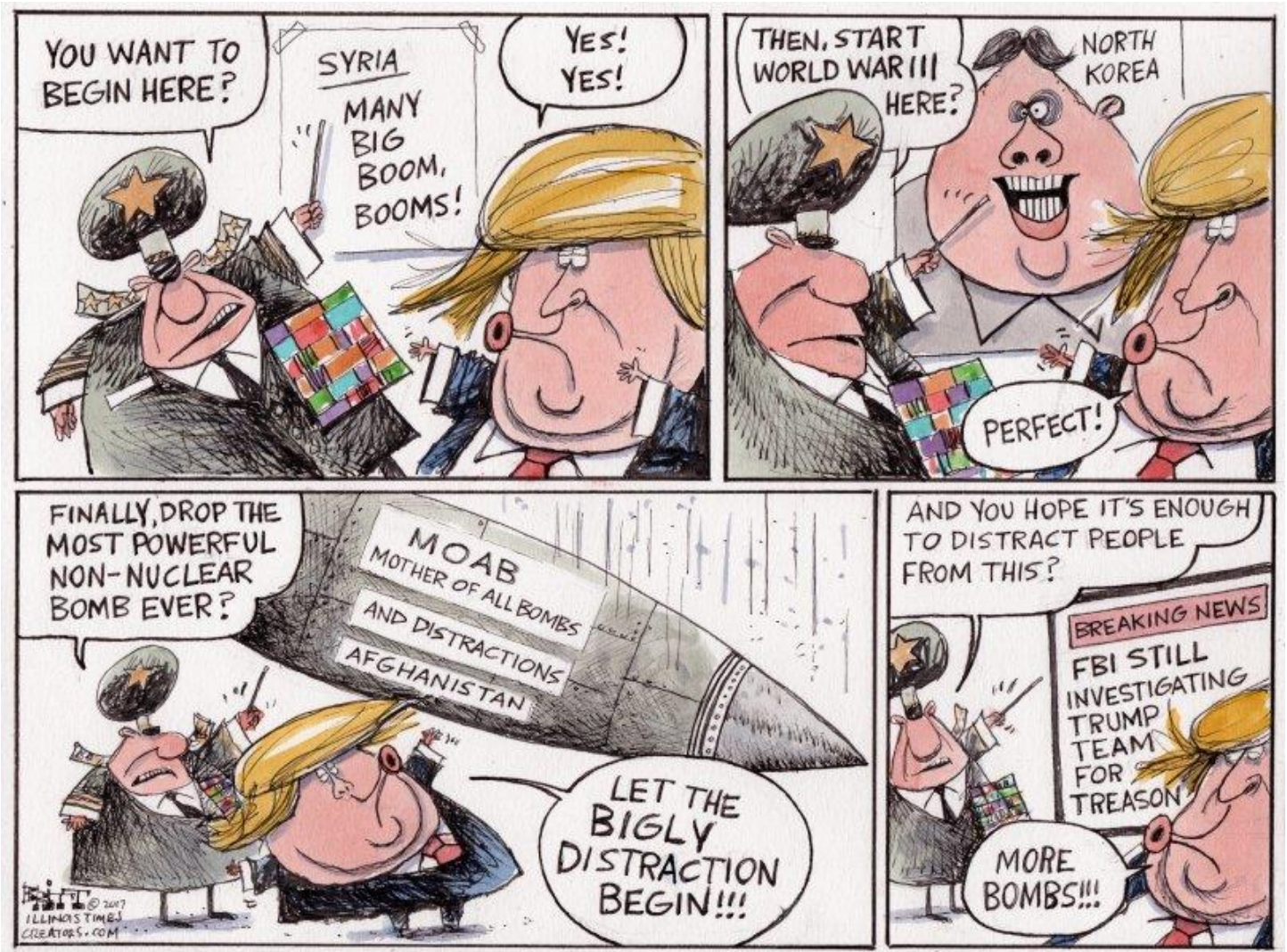


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FRANCE – EUROPE



Mallaby : France's turmoil makes Brexit seem tame

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

Contradicting expectations and her own explicit promises, British Prime Minister Theresa May has called a snap election. May is committed to the most misguided policy of any British government in memory — the foolish experiment in deglobalization known as Brexit. Yet such is the splintering of British politics, and the implosion of the opposition Labour Party under the non-leadership of a far-left nonentity, that May will probably win in a landslide. For Britain's immediate prospects, this may be a good thing: If the country is going to leave the European Union, it might as well have a prime minister who can negotiate from strength. But as a barometer of politics in Europe, the triumph of a deglobalizer is depressing. Meanwhile, across a narrow sea channel, another political drama makes the British one seem tame.

That other drama is in France. In the first round of its presidential election, to be held on Sunday, some three-quarters of the French electorate are expected to back candidates who stand variously for corruption, a 100 percent top tax rate, Islamophobia, Russophilia, Holocaust denial, the undermining of NATO and the traumatic breakup of Europe's political and monetary union. France was once the

cradle of the Western Enlightenment. Now it threatens to become a spectacle of decadent collapse.

Fortunately, France chooses its presidents in stages, so all is not quite lost. Emmanuel Macron, a fresh and vaguely pro-market ex-investment banker, will probably win about a quarter of the votes Sunday, perhaps placing him among the two candidates who make it to the runoff on May 7. If that happens, French voters may prefer him to whichever version of crazy he is up against. But there are no guarantees here. And the crazies are truly bad.

Opinions newsletter

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Start with the strongest of them, the far-right immigration-hater, Marine Le Pen. It was she who recently denied any French responsibility for the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz, a claim as shameful and post-truthy as any populist fable. Le Pen has endorsed Russia's swallowing of Crimea. Her party has accepted a large loan from a Kremlin-linked bank. And she wants to pull France out of NATO's military command and out of the European Union and the bloc's common currency. "The European Union will die!" she says, to rapturous screams from her supporters.

Next comes Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the Communist-allied candidate who styles himself after Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and promises a "citizens' revolution." No prizes for guessing that he's the one who proposes a 100 percent top tax rate, erasing all danger of hyperbole in the phrase "confiscatory tax." Like Le Pen, Mélenchon is hostile to NATO and the European Union. He also appears to see no evil in Vladimir Putin. Oblivious to the fact that France has taxed and regulated its way to a 25 percent youth unemployment rate and a government-debt trajectory that threatens Armageddon, he wants further cuts to the French workweek, an additional 10,000 civil servants and a shift in the retirement age from 62 to 60.

The last and weakest of the significant candidates is a conventional conservative, François Fillon. Conventional except for his strange attitude to Russia: Fillon, too, refuses to condemn the invasion of Crimea, which he has compared to the West's support for the secession of Kosovo from Serbia. And conventional except for the fact that he stands accused of funneling almost \$1 million of government money to his wife and two of his children for work they did not do. "France," he has declared brazenly, "is greater than my errors."

British and French decadence are not quite the same. Britain — hitherto an open, dynamic and broadly successful melting pot — has experienced a backlash from older voters who feel disoriented by immigration and technological change. France — culturally proud, economically sluggish, at times bizarrely insistent that Muslim women on beaches dress less modestly — has experienced a backlash from younger voters who can't get jobs. But in a larger sense, both countries point toward the fragile state of European politics. Elites are out of favor. Meager growth has not been shared equitably. Foreign voices are resented. Terrorist attacks add poison to the well.

Perhaps Britain's government, fortified by a fresh electoral mandate, can negotiate a divorce from Europe that limits the damage. Perhaps the French will rally behind Macron, who, though young and prone to platitudes, does not want to dismantle the European Union or NATO. But Europe is walking a long tightrope. It may escape the abyss one time, two times. But after France there will be Italy, another large economy that is central to Europe's cohesion and that features a similar brew of government debt, youth unemployment, discredited elites and scary demagogues. How long can the center hold?



Growing anti-Muslim rhetoric permeates French presidential election campaign

By James McAuley

PARIS — For some, the French presidential election will alter the course of a troubled nation steeped in economic and social turmoil. For others, it will alter the course of a troubled continent, challenging the very existence of European integration.

But in France itself, something far less abstract and far more intimate is at stake. In a country that remains under an official "state of

emergency" following an unprecedented spate of terrorist violence in the past two years, the election also has become a referendum on Muslims and their place in what is probably Europe's most anxious multicultural society.

Before the election's first round of voting Sunday, each of the five leading contenders — from across the ideological spectrum — has felt compelled to address an apparently pressing "Muslim question" about

what to do with the country's largest religious minority.

Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front, has made her answer crystal clear. In February, in the same speech in which she declared her candidacy for president, she decried "Islamist globalization," which she called an "ideology that wants to bring France to its knees."

While Le Pen's diverse array of opponents do not all share her

extremity or conviction, each seems to agree that, when it comes to Muslims, something needs to be done.

"I want strict administrative control of the Muslim faith," announced François Fillon, the now-disgraced mainstream conservative candidate, in a January campaign speech.

By contrast, Emmanuel Macron, the popular independent candidate, has spoken frequently of what he considers the urgent need to "help

Muslims restructure the Islam of France.”

The far-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who has condemned Islamophobia, ultimately wants to stamp out “all communitarianisms” and has reiterated what he calls the “urgent” need to “put an end to the misappropriation of public funds attributed to private denominational education.”

Only Benoît Hamon, the Socialist candidate, has regularly defended the community interests of French Muslims, insisting — in the year of the “burkini” scandal — that French law protect “both the girl in shorts and the one who wants to wear the scarf.”

[School shooting, letter bomb at IMF put France on alert]

With many of the devastating terrorist attacks perpetrated by French or European passport-holding militants affiliated with or inspired by the Islamic State, public opinion has grown increasingly suspicious of the Muslim population that has existed in this country for centuries.

Despite the intricate diversity of that population, there is widespread anxiety that if either Le Pen or Fillon is elected, things could get significantly worse. Both candidates probably would move quickly to advance crackdowns on veils, mosques and Muslim community organizations in the name of state secularism.

The alternatives also leave a profound sense of bitter resignation: Few French Muslims see a candidate in the running who would change a status quo that many view as unsustainable.

“There is no campaign for us — no one who understands our situation,” said Laorla Loub, 56, a fifth-generation French citizen and professor of Arabic literature in Clichy, a Paris suburb. She was waiting to enter the Annual Meeting of French Muslims, a large-scale community event held in several warehouses next to the tarmac of Paris-Le Bourget Airport.

As a result, voter abstention among French Muslims is rising, said Hakim El Karoui, the author of a widely circulated 2016 report on Islam in France published by the Institut Montaigne, a Paris-based think tank.

[E.U. court says employers can ban Muslim headscarf in workplace]

A principal reason, he said, is that the strict anti-terrorist stance adopted by the Socialist administration of President François Hollande — especially by his former prime minister, Manuel Valls, who famously persecuted the “burkini” last summer — has undercut the desire among French Muslims to support the left in the 2017 election, as many normally do.

“The right has always been against Muslims and immigrants,” El Karoui said. “But with Valls, it’s as if he gave up the left’s image of neutrality among Muslims. He gave it a toxic name.”

Chief among the concerns many Muslims harbor is over the so-called state of emergency, a security regime imposed by Hollande the day after the November 2015 Paris attacks, nominally to fight terrorism. The period of heightened scrutiny technically is slated to end this summer, but it already has continued for more than 16 months. Only one of the candidates — Mélenchon — has proposed ending it.

Since its imposition, French authorities have been permitted to carry out upward of 4,000 warrantless searches on French homes, and likewise have placed more than 700 people under house arrest.

But many Muslims say they have been targeted unlawfully. According to France’s Collective Against Islamophobia (in French, CCIIF), an advocacy organization committed to fighting discrimination, more than 400 French Muslims reported having their homes searched for no clear reason in 2016. Approximately 100 of those also were placed under house arrest, while nearly 30 were asked to leave the country.

For some, the consequences have been dire.

On December 3, 2015, for example, Drissia — a Muslim resident of the French Alps who declined to give her last name for fear of professional reprisal — sat up in bed at 4:30 a.m. to the sound of 10 French police officers banging on her door, three wearing face masks. They searched her apartment until 6 a.m., she said, telling her and her 7-year-old daughter that everything was fine.

“But it was only the beginning of the nightmare,” she said, recounting how six days later she was fired from her job after 15 years as a traffic security regulator. The reason, she later learned through her lawyer, came from the regional prefect, who, in Drissia’s telling, had “confidential information proving that some of my close relatives were a threat to the security and staff of the Mont Blanc transit authority.”

“I had no idea who those ‘close relatives’ were,” she said.

She ultimately won her appeal in court, but her legal exoneration did little to overturn the harsh sentence she received in the court of public opinion.

“I’ve read horrible and hurtful things in the press about myself,” she said. “One headline was, ‘The ATMB fired a radicalized employee,’” a reference to her employer.

[A mosque is at the center of a raw debate in the South of France]

As central as French Muslims have become to the presidential campaign, they have rarely been included in the frequent debates among the non-Muslim candidates vying to be their president about how they should interpret their faith and live their lives.

If they are focal points of public discourse, they are also somehow absent from public view — and, some say, entirely unknown.

When presidential candidates pitch ideas such as “university training programs in the values of the Republic” for imams — as Emmanuel Macron did recently —

many bristle at the suggestion that these are somehow values they do not already know.

Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed, 40, is an openly gay imam and the founder of Europe’s first LGBT-inclusive mosque, which he runs weekly in a rented room in Marseille, the sprawling metropolis on France’s Mediterranean coast.

“If you think it’s not possible to be both of those things, then good for you,” he said of the apparent separation between “French” and “Muslim” identities. “But I have never felt the need to convince you otherwise.”

Much the same is true across the ideological spectrum.

“When Marine Le Pen says that imams should be preaching in French, she’s right — that’s normal. This is France,” said Farid Ait-Ouarab, a senior leader of Muslim Scouts of France, a youth organization that strives to teach young Muslims how to reconcile their faith with the values of the French republic.

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“Islam is about doing things together — in a circle, by consensus,” Ait-Ouarab said. “We see exactly that in the National Assembly, in the Senate, where deputies gather to decide our laws in tandem, together. For a real Muslim, there is no difference between ‘French’ and ‘Muslim.’”

“People talk about Muslims as if we are all the same person, one single person,” said Asma Bougnaoui, 31, who was fired in 2009 for wearing a headscarf to her job as a design engineer at Micropole, a French IT consultancy. “There’s absolutely no recognition of the diversity.”

“Who are French Muslims?” she said recently, sitting in a cafe in Paris’s Gare de Lyon. “What are we?”

Cléopée Demoustier contributed to this report.



2 Held in France Over ‘Violent’ Plot to Disrupt Presidential Campaign

Aurelien Breeden

French police officers cordoned off a street in Marseille, where two men said to have been “radicalized” were arrested on Tuesday. Claude Paris/Associated Press

disrupt campaigning before the first round of the country’s presidential elections on Sunday, the authorities said.

The target of the plot was not disclosed. The news injected additional uncertainty into a tumultuous and dynamic race, in which the four main candidates are neck-and-neck in the polls. It also put worries about terrorism back at

the forefront of a campaign that had focused mostly on economic issues.

The two men, French citizens aged 23 and 29, were arrested Tuesday morning in the southern port city of Marseille, according to François Molins, a prosecutor in Paris who handles terrorism investigations nationwide.

Mr. Molins, at a news conference on Tuesday, said that evidence gathered by investigators showed that two men, identified only as Mahiedine M. and Clément B., were preparing a “violent” and “imminent” act, and that they had gathered firearms and explosives at their hide-out in Marseille.

France’s Vote: The Basics

The presidential election will be held in two stages.

- **Round 1**

Voters will choose from 11 candidates on **April 23**.

- **Round 2**

If, as is widely expected, no one receives more than 50 percent of the vote, the top two candidates will compete in a runoff on **May 7**.

But he said investigators had not determined when or where the attack was to take place. The campaigns of several presidential candidates said Tuesday that they had been warned last week by the French authorities of a potential terrorist threat.

Marine Le Pen, the far-right candidate, and Emmanuel Macron, an independent, said that their campaigns had received warnings

about the two men, including their photographs. Ms. Le Pen planned a campaign rally in Marseille on Wednesday evening.

Mr. Molins said the two men met in prison in 2015 and were known to French intelligence services for their "radicalization."

At the apartment the two men rented in Marseille, investigators found several firearms and rounds of ammunition, as well as bomb-making material and three kilograms of explosives.

Mr. Molins said that French intelligence services "intercepted" a video last week that one of the men had been trying to transmit to the Islamic State. It showed a submachine gun, a black Islamic State flag and the front page of a newspaper that featured a picture of one of the candidates, who was not identified.

Images released by the French police of men the authorities suspect were preparing an attack to disrupt presidential election campaigning. Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Since early 2015, France has experienced a series of terrorist attacks that have claimed more than 230 lives in Paris, Nice and elsewhere, and the French authorities regularly arrest people they suspect of planning attacks.

Security has been tightened at campaign rallies around the country, with multiple and thorough bag checks and pat-downs. France is still under a state of emergency that was first declared after the coordinated attacks in and around Paris in November 2015, in which 130 people died.

Matthias Fekl, the French interior minister, said Tuesday that the

terrorist threat was "still higher than ever."

He also said that his ministry was "completely mobilized, more than ever," to protect campaign rallies as well as the candidates and their headquarters.

Over 50,000 police officers, gendarmes and soldiers will be deployed across France to secure the two rounds of voting, on Sunday and on May 7, when a runoff between the two top vote-getters will be held.

Asked if he was worried about an attack on Election Day, Mr. Fekl told the newspaper *Journal du Dimanche* on Sunday that "no threat is ruled out," adding that the authorities had to secure 67,000 polling stations.

Thwarted Attack Rattles France Days Before Presidential Vote

John Leicester and Lori Hinnant / AP

(PARIS) — Extremism concerns shook France's presidential campaign Tuesday as authorities announced arrests in what they said was a thwarted attack and candidates urged tougher counterterrorism efforts for a country already under a state of emergency.

While national security previously has been a strong theme in the campaign, far-right candidate Marine Le Pen hardened her tone on foreign extremists and border controls in the wake of the arrests that came days before the first round of voting.

Centrist Emmanuel Macron called for national unity and stronger intelligence. Le Pen and Macron are among four leading candidates seen as most likely to progress from Sunday's first round and to reach the May 7 runoff between the top two.

As the government prepared to flood streets with more than 50,000 police and soldiers to safeguard the ballot, Interior Minister Matthias Fekl said police thwarted an imminent "terror attack," arresting two French men in the southern port city of Marseille.

Both are suspected Islamic radicals, according to Paris prosecutor Francois Molins. Police seized guns

and explosives from the apartment the men were leaving when they were arrested, Molins said. The explosives found are of a type used in previous attacks in France and Belgium that were inspired by the Islamic State group.

It was unclear whether a campaign event was a potential target for the attack; Molins said investigators have not determined "the day, the targets and the exact circumstances" of the suspects' plans.

Macron's campaign team said authorities earlier provided a photo of the suspects to his security detail.

The presidential election is being watched as a bellwether for global populist sentiment, in large part because of Le Pen's nationalist, anti-immigration positions.

In a written statement Tuesday, Le Pen pointed to "a devastating multiplication of attacks and threats of attacks" in France which she said was the result of "Islamic fundamentalism" that "has expanded exponentially" in the last decade in the country.

"It's time to put back France in order," she said, using one of her campaign's mantras.

Before Tuesday's arrests were announced, Le Pen said on RTL radio that she would expel foreign

extremists and draft army reservists to close France's borders as soon as she takes office.

"We cannot fight the terrorism that weighs on our country without controlling our borders," she said.

Macron struck a tough, but conciliatory tone.

He called the arrests a reminder that "the terrorist threat remains very high," especially during the election campaign, and reiterated calls for pressure on internet companies to better monitor extremism online.

But he added that "terrorism ... is a challenge that calls upon us more than anything else to come together, because the terrorists wish nothing more than our division."

Macron and conservative candidate Francois Fillon have pledged more robust counterterrorism efforts, but remain committed to Europe's open borders.

"Democracy must not get on its knees in front of the threats and intimidations from terrorists," Fillon said in a written statement. "The campaign must continue until the end."

Far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon suggested his three main rivals — Fillon, Le Pen and Macron — could have been potential targets of the two suspects

in Marseille. He expressed solidarity with his fellow presidential hopefuls.

"We will never make the gift to criminals to divide in front of them. We are not afraid," Melenchon said during a rally in Dijon.

Melenchon, who leads a far-left alliance that includes the Communist Party, has risen in polls in recent weeks and is now considered as having a chance of reaching the runoff election.

France's fight against homegrown and overseas Islamic extremism has, with jobs and the economy, been one of the main issues for the stumping presidential candidates.

Those on the right have been particularly vocal, seeking to appeal to voters traumatized by IS-inspired attacks that have killed at least 235 people in France since January 2015, by far the largest casualty rate of any Western country.

With the terror threat "higher than ever," Fekl said "everything is being done" to secure the election, the candidates, their election headquarters and rallies.

He said more than 50,000 police, gendarmes and soldiers will be deployed in France and its overseas territories on Sunday and during the decisive May 7 second round.

2 Held in France Over 'Violent' Plot to Disrupt Presidential Campaign (online)

Aurelien Breeden

French police officers cordoned off a street in Marseille, where two men said to have been "radicalized" were

arrested on Tuesday. Claude Paris/Associated Press

PARIS — Two men were arrested in southern France on Tuesday on suspicion of preparing an attack to

disrupt campaigning before the first round of the country's presidential elections on Sunday, the authorities said.

The target of the plot was not disclosed. The news injected additional uncertainty into a tumultuous and dynamic race, in which the four main candidates are neck-and-neck in the polls. It also put worries about terrorism back at the forefront of a campaign that had focused mostly on economic issues.

The two men, French citizens aged 23 and 29, were arrested Tuesday morning in the southern port city of Marseille, according to François Molins, a prosecutor in Paris who handles terrorism investigations nationwide.

Mr. Molins, at a news conference on Tuesday, said that evidence gathered by investigators showed that two men, identified only as Mahiedine M. and Clément B., were preparing a "violent" and "imminent" act, and that they had gathered firearms and explosives at their hide-out in Marseille.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Men Accused of Plotting Attack in France Pledged Allegiance to ISIS (online)

Noemie Bisserbe and Joshua Robinson

Updated April 18, 2017 3:13 p.m. ET

PARIS—Two young men detained on suspicion of planning an imminent terror attack in the French city of Marseille had pledged allegiance to Islamic State, authorities said on Tuesday, reviving security fears just days before France's presidential elections begin.

The suspects, identified as 30-year-old Mahiedine M. and 24-year-old Clément B., were "preparing to carry out a violent and imminent action," said Paris prosecutor François Molins. On Tuesday, police raided their rented apartment in the southern port city, discovering bomb-making materials, automatic and semiautomatic firearms, a silencer, an ISIS flag and a map of Marseille.

French authorities didn't say if the men were

The Washington Post

Belgium had sought suspect in foiled French election attack (online)

By Associated Press

By Associated Press April 19 at 6:34 AM

PARIS — Belgium's federal prosecutor says the country had opened an investigation into one of

France's Vote: The Basics

The presidential election will be held in two stages.

But he said investigators had not determined when or where the attack was to take place. The campaigns of several presidential candidates said Tuesday that they had been warned last week by the French authorities of a potential terrorist threat.

Marine Le Pen, the far-right candidate, and Emmanuel Macron, an independent, said that their campaigns had received warnings about the two men, including their photographs. Ms. Le Pen planned a campaign rally in Marseille on Wednesday evening.

Mr. Molins said the two men met in prison in 2015 and were known to French intelligence services for their "radicalization."

At the apartment the two men rented in Marseille, investigators found several firearms and rounds of ammunition, as well as bomb-making material and three kilograms of explosives.

Mr. Molins said that French intelligence services "intercepted" a video last week that one of the men had been trying to transmit to the Islamic State. It showed a submachine gun, a black Islamic State flag and the front page of a newspaper that featured a picture of one of the candidates, who was not identified.

Images released by the French police of men the authorities suspect were preparing an attack to disrupt presidential election campaigning. Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Since early 2015, France has experienced a series of terrorist attacks that have claimed more than 230 lives in Paris, Nice and elsewhere, and the French authorities regularly arrest people they suspect of planning attacks.

Security has been tightened at campaign rallies around the country, with multiple and thorough bag checks and pat-downs. France is still under a state of emergency that was first declared after the coordinated attacks in and around

Paris in November 2015, in which 130 people died.

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He also said that his ministry was "completely mobilized, more than ever," to protect campaign rallies as well as the candidates and their headquarters.

Over 50,000 police officers, gendarmes and soldiers will be deployed across France to secure the two rounds of voting, on Sunday and on May 7, when a runoff between the two top vote-getters will be held.

Asked if he was worried about an attack on Election Day, Mr. Fekl told the newspaper Journal du Dimanche on Sunday that "no threat is ruled out," adding that the authorities had to secure 67,000 polling stations.

suspected of targeting presidential candidates or sites linked to the two-round election to be held on April 23 and May 7. However, their allegiance video clearly showed a newspaper featuring one of the presidential candidates on the front page, Mr. Molins said.

Officials quietly circulated photos of the two suspects to each candidates' security services last Thursday, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Presidential candidates seized on the news of the police operation to rally supporters. Incumbent President François Hollande has been criticized by Marine Le Pen of the National Front and other presidential candidates for his government's failure to prevent attacks in Nice and Paris.

Ms. Le Pen, who is scheduled to hold a major rally in Marseille on Wednesday, hasn't commented on the alleged plot and a spokesman

for the candidate declined to immediately comment.

France has been on high alert after a spate of terror attacks in the past two years that have left more than 200 people dead.

French Interior Minister Matthias Fekl said Tuesday that 50,000 members of the security forces, including the military, would be deployed in the first and second rounds of the elections.

"Democracy must not yield to terrorist threats," François Fillon, the conservative presidential candidate, said. "The campaign must continue until the end."

Centrist presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron praised authorities for foiling the plot Tuesday.

"They showed, once again, how security forces are an essential part of the life of the Republic," said Mr.

Macron, who previously served as economy minister to Mr. Hollande.

The two suspects, both French citizens, met when the pair were cellmates for around two months in 2015, Mr. Molins said. They had been the target of preliminary investigations since early April, but authorities stepped up their efforts after discovering the video, which the suspects allegedly recorded and attempted to send to members of ISIS, Mr. Molins said.

Mr. Molins added that several of the items in the video—including an Uzi and the ISIS flag—appeared to be present in the Marseille apartment raided on Tuesday, in addition to the bomb-making materials, other firearms, a bulletproof vest and a hunting knife.

Write to Noemie Bisserbe at noemie.bisserbe@wsj.com and Joshua Robinson at joshua.robinson@wsj.com

intention of going to Syria. He had links with Belgian jihadi networks, according to French officials.

Belgium's federal prosecutor said Wednesday that there was already an alert out for Baur, who was wanted for questioning in an ongoing Belgian investigation.

In the Marseille apartment of the two men arrested Tuesday, police found an automatic rifle, two handguns, ammunition and three kilograms of explosives, French authorities said.

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French candidates boost security ahead of tense vote

FILE - In this Feb. 5, 2017 file photo, French far-right leader presidential candidate Marine Le Pen acknowledges applause in Lyon, central France. Do voters judge a book by its cover? France's presidential candidates certainly think they do, and more than ever are trying to get their political message across through their wardrobes, from centrist Emmanuel Macron's regular-guy

suits to far right leader Marine Le Pen's masculine dark wardrobe and hard-left Jean-Luc Melenchon's communist-inspired jackets. (AP Photo/Michel Euler, File) (The Associated Press)

PARIS - French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen says all the presidential contenders - and all French people - are potential attack targets.

The candidates for France's first-round presidential election Sunday have increased security in recent days. Authorities announced Tuesday that they had arrested two Islamic radicals suspected of plotting a possible attack around the vote.

While prosecutors haven't identified the potential targets, Le Pen said on BFM television that "we are all targets. All the French."

Le Pen also defended her decision to force national French news network TF1 to take down the European flag during an interview Tuesday night. She said Wednesday that "I am a candidate in the election for the French republic" and said Europe is acting like France's "enemy."



French election: Closer look at top 5 presidential contenders

Kim Hjelmgaard, USA TODAY
Published 2:14 a.m. ET April 19, 2017 | Updated 1 hour ago

So many cities, so little time...if only they could cover two places at once. That's the idea behind the campaign of far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon, who's been appearing to supporters via hologram in a technological first for a presidential campaign in France. Video provided by AFP Newslook

French presidential election candidates, left to right, Francois Fillon, Emmanuel Macron, Jean-Luc Melenchon, Marine Le Pen pose before a televised outside Paris on March 20. (Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Five candidates have emerged from the pack as serious contenders in France's presidential election on April 23 to replace unpopular Francois Hollande, who is not running again.

The vote will be watched closely as the latest test of anti-European Union and anti-immigration sentiment in Europe.

If no candidate wins a majority of the vote, which is highly likely given the large field, the top two candidates go head to head in a runoff on May 7. So far, polls suggest voters prefer a far right, far left or independent candidate over the traditional mainstream parties that have ruled France for the past half century.

Here is a look at the top five candidates:

Marine Le Pen, National Front

Marine Le Pen delivers a speech during a campaign rally in Metz, France, on March 18. (Photo: EPA)

Le Pen, 48, took control of the far-right National Front party from her father Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2011 and epitomizes Europe's anti-EU and anti-immigration attitude.

She is a lawyer who has worked to soften the party's image following her father's strident rhetoric. The telegenic, twice-divorced mother of three children lives in the Paris suburbs. Her calls to forcibly expel illegal immigrants, close mosques linked to extremists and pull France out of the EU resonate with many middle class and rural voters.

Le Pen wants to ban all visible religious symbols worn in public, including Muslim headscarves and Jewish Kippahs. She believes globalization and international organizations such as NATO and the International Monetary Fund have undermined the nation-state.

Le Pen has been dogged for months by an anti-corruption probe into allegations that she improperly used EU funds to pay her personal assistant and bodyguard for jobs in France. She has denied breaking any rules and refused to submit to questioning until after the election.

Le Pen helped her party achieve its best-ever showing in a presidential election when the National Front came in third in the first round of 2012's vote. Current polls show she stands a good chance of making the runoff.

Emmanuel Macron, On the Move

Emmanuel Macron in Paris on March 20. (Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Macron, 39, who has never held elected office, is married to a former teacher 20 years his senior. If elected, he would be France's youngest president. While polls show a tight race with Le Pen in the first round, Macron has a sizable lead in projected second-round voting. The former investment banker was France's economy minister, but quit Hollande's government to run for president as an independent.

The business-friendly challenger has emerged from relative obscurity to adopt a centrist position viewed as a liberal alternative to Le Pen's populism, and a break from France's traditional left or right political leadership. He wants to invest in public health and infrastructure, cut corporate tax rates and modernization workplace rules in a country that cherishes its time off. The "Macron Law" is a bill he introduced as economy minister that allowed more stores to open on Sundays.

Francois Fillon, The Republicans

French presidential election candidate for the right-wing Les Republicains party Francois Fillon speaks during a press conference. (Photo: Christophe Archambault, AFP/Getty Images)

Fillon, 63, is an experienced political operator involved in French politics for more than three decades, having served in a number of cabinet posts and as prime minister under President Nicolas Sarkozy. He grew up in a strict Catholic household and lives in a 12th century castle in western France.

He had been favored to win the election after cruising to an upset victory in his party's primaries, but the center-right candidate has been dogged by scandals that have hurt his chances.

Fillon faces multiple counts of embezzlement over allegations that he placed his wife and two of his five children in taxpayer-financed jobs as aides. Ethics inquiries also have been opened into his expensive tastes; French media reported that he once paid a tailor more than \$50,000 for a suit. Fillon has refused to quit the race as the investigation into his personal affairs deepens.

Politically, he wants to shrink the size of government, remove a wealth tax on the rich and lengthen France's mandatory 35-hour work week. He also wants to

invest heavily in national security and has spoken about the need for the EU to end sanctions on Russia over the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea province in 2014.

Benoit Hamon, Socialist Party

Socialist candidate for the presidential election Benoit Hamon. (Photo: AP)

Hamon, 49, the son of a dockworker and a secretary, is married with two children. He previously served as Hollande's education minister and defeated former Prime Minister Manuel Valls to win the nomination for the current ruling party. Hamon is known for his radical policies even within the left-wing Socialist Party. He wants to introduce a universal basic income plan that would boost the salaries of everyone earning under about \$2,400 per month, decriminalize marijuana and make it harder for companies to fire workers. He wants France, which relies heavily on nuclear energy, to stop using it entirely by 2050.

Hamon is a long shot to win the presidency because the Socialist Party has failed to inspire voters after years of economic stagnation and a string of terrorist attacks that have shaken the French. Hamon, who has been dubbed the "French Bernie Sanders," also risks losing votes to other leftist candidates.

Jean-Luc Melenchon, Left Party

Jean-Luc Melenchon speaks during a rally in Paris on March 18. (Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Melenchon, 65, is the son of a postmaster and teacher who lived in Morocco until his family moved to France when he was still a child. He is further to the left than Hamon, and is supported by France's Communist Party. He has served as a senator and in various ministerial positions. A fiery orator, Melenchon has capitalized on some of the disappointment with the Socialist Party. Among his campaign

pledges: to redistribute wealth by imposing heavy taxes on the rich, reduce homelessness to zero and force employers to recognize burn-out as an occupational illness.

Melenchon also wants a review of France's European treaties,

although he has not explicitly called for France to leave the EU as has Le Pen. In the 2012 presidential vote, he came in fourth. Melenchon has resisted calls to drop out of the contest because it splits the left-wing vote. Recent polls show

him surging to third place, behind Le Pen and Macron.

As the twists and turns continue in the French presidential election, a petition calling for Barack Obama to join the race has reached nearly

50,000 signatures online. Video provided by AFP Newslook

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CNBC : The French election is a big deal — and it has more than one scary outcome for markets

Patti Domm

France's presidential election is a major test for euro zone unity, and the first round Sunday could bring on intense market volatility, depending on which candidates make it to the final leg of the race.

French stocks closed down 1.6 percent Tuesday, after recovering from the worst intraday selloff since the U.K. voted to leave the European Union last June. Investors globally have been hedging ahead of the vote by piling into safe haven assets like U.S. Treasuries and gold, and buying yen against the euro.

"I think it's potentially huge, or it could be nothing, and we'll know that Sunday night before the market opens," said Andrew Brenner, global head of emerging market fixed income at National Alliance. He said the spread between French and German 10-year bonds continues to widen, a signal of market unease.

The big fear is that far-right National Front candidate Marine Le Pen will win, since she has run on a platform to divorce France from the euro — an action that could threaten the future of the entire euro zone. As it stands now, there is a good chance Le Pen will emerge from the first round pitted against one of three candidates: far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon, conservative Francois Fillon and centrist Emmanuel Macron, a former economy minister.

"It is true that four candidates are coming all within a margin of error. It

is impossible to know for sure whether the French electorate will look at these polls and decide to vote with their hearts or get excited by the underdogs," said Charles Lichfield, associate, Europe at Eurasia Group. "Something we can say is Mrs. Le Pen is most likely of those four candidates to make the second round. They're all between 18 and 22 percent. Ninety percent of Mrs. Le Pen's 22 percent will vote for her."

The candidate favored by markets is Macron, who is expected to beat Le Pen in the final vote. "If it appears Macron is in the race, all of this goes away for the near term," said Brenner.

The disruptive candidate not named 'Le Pen'

However, Lichfield said Melenchon also stands a chance to win. Like Le Pen, he would be considered a disruptive candidate. A fan of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, he would like to tax individuals who earn 400,000 euros (\$430,000) or more at a tax rate of 100 percent. He also would like to renegotiate France's relationship with the European Union, and if it fails, he would seek to leave the EU.

"Depending on how high [Le Pen] is, the market could react quite violently. If her runner-up is 6, 7 points behind her, many people would see that it's possible she wins," Lichfield said. The runoff election is set for May 7.

"You hear people saying if Le Pen gets elected, France pulls out of the euro and the EU collapses. That's utter nonsense. For France to pull out, there has to be a vote of Parliament and they're overwhelmingly against leaving the euro," said Robert Sinche, chief global strategist at Amherst Pierpont.

There is a parliamentary election in June, and it in fact could be the more important election. Le Pen's far-right National Front isn't seen making much in the way of inroads.

"I still expect Macron and Le Pen to be in the runoffs," said Marc Chandler, chief foreign exchange strategist at Brown Brothers Harriman. "A lot of people think the French election is about the presidential election. It's also about the parliamentary election in June. The president is a figurehead. The problem is none of the candidates have a strong parliamentary presence. The key to the outcome is going to be the parliamentary elections. Political risk is going to subside, but it can't go away."

Chandler said a Le Pen victory could foster other nationalist groups in Europe, but it could also be a problem for Italy. Germany also has an election later this year.

"The key would be not so much the German election, but the Italian election," he said. Italy, under Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, has undertaken steps to provide emergency liquidity guarantees and

capital injections for its banks. Former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi resigned in December, after Italy voted down a key constitutional referendum.

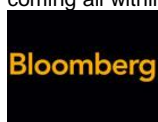
The views on how France's election could affect markets diverge as much as do potential outcomes.

Lichfield said he sees a 35 to 40 percent chance for Le Pen to win. He said there are very slight odds, perhaps 10 percent, that financial market chaos erupts after the election. It could be so volatile it would send French yields skyrocketing and hurt the country's banks.

The long-shot scenario could even be extended to consider a French default at which point, France could be forced to leave the euro zone, Lichfield said.

More likely is that European Economic and Monetary Union officials keep the situation under control and panic does not set in. Even so, a Le Pen win would not be a positive.

"It will be negative because there's this now complacent view that Brexit wasn't so bad. Trump hasn't been so bad, so why are we worried about Le Pen? But if you look at what she wants to do, if suddenly the market slowing into what her actual policies are and realize she's right at the center of a vulnerable monetary union, then it becomes much more troubling," said Lichfield.



French Election Shocker: Pollsters Baffled by Four-Way Race

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18 avril 2017 à 23:00 UTC-4
19 avril 2017 à 08:33 UTC-4

- 'Unprecedented' close battle makes polling more difficult
- Victories of Sarkozy in 2007, Hollande in 2012 seen by polls

The four-candidate battle to reach the runoff in France's presidential

election is putting pollsters to the test as never before.

With just a few days to go before Sunday's first round of voting, every poll for the past month has shown independent Emmanuel Macron and the National Front's Marine Le Pen taking the top two spots. Macron would then easily win the May 7 runoff, polls show. Yet both front-runners have been steadily slipping over the past two weeks, and Republican Francois Fillon and Communist-backed Jean-Luc Melenchon are now within striking distance.

Macron, Le Pen, Fillon and Melenchon

Photographer: Marlene Awaad/Christophe Morin/Bloomberg

It's a challenge for French pollsters, who have a near-perfect record in forecasting the vote share for the top five finishers in the first rounds in 2007 and 2012 and the subsequent runoffs. Until recently, the expectation was that France wouldn't have an electoral shock like Britain did with Brexit and the U.S. went through with the election of Donald Trump.

"This situation is totally unprecedented," said Emmanuel Riviere, managing director of Kantar Public France. "The fact that there are four potential finalists makes the situation very complex."

French political pollsters are aided by heavier reliance on Internet polling than in the U.S. and the U.K. And French elections are simple -- one person, one vote, across the nation. The two-round system means a straight face-off between the top two candidates in the runoff, reducing voter options.

The difference for this year's first round is that the top four candidates are within a range of fewer than 4 percentage points. Given margins of error that are typically between 2.5 points and 3 points, the race is tighter than it might initially appear. On top of that, as many as 40 percent of voters have yet to decide on their candidate, according to estimates by multiple polling firms.

Despite the tightening polls, bookmakers still make Macron the favorite, with a 51 percent chance of winning. Fillon is next at 26 percent, having overtaken Le Pen this week. The National Front leader is at 24 percent and Melenchon at 11 percent. The bookmakers surveyed are based outside of France, where it is illegal to bet on politics.

Get the latest on the French election here

Pollsters haven't forgotten 2002, when Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine's father, unexpectedly qualified for the runoff. That was considered a big fail for French polling, and companies say they've adjusted their methods since then.

Nor do they confront quite the complexities their colleagues in the

U.K. and the U.S. did. In the case of Brexit, it was only the second nationwide referendum on EU membership since 1975, meaning pollsters had no voting history to weigh polling results. And the U.S. electoral system is so convoluted, even many Americans don't understand it.

"There's one round, 50 states, and an electoral college -- we have nothing close to that complication," said Edouard Lecerf, director of political opinion studies at Kantar TNS.

Helmut Norpoth, a political science professor at New York's Stony Brook University who predicted Trump's victory, says French pollsters are right to collect information via Internet surveys.

"The reliance on telephones in the U.S. and the U.K. is a problem," he said. "They are dinosaurs."

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A generation ago, about one-third of people would agree to be questioned when called,

said Jerome Fourquet, director of opinion studies at pollster Ifo. Now it's about 5 percent. At the same time, the number of people with an Internet connection is now about the same as those with a phone. "Online polling is more reliable," Fourquet said. "People are less likely to be shy about their vote on a computer screen than when talking to a human by phone."

Representative Sample

Registered voters are contacted by email and asked to answer a series of questions. Then they're grouped to ensure a mix of ages, social class and the like to ensure the sample is representative.

The five polls carried out on April 19, 2012, the last day polling was allowed before the first round that year, showed Socialist Party candidate Francois Hollande winning between 27 and 30 percent. On voting day three days later, he won 28.6 percent. Incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy was credited with 25 to 27 percent, and won 27.2 percent. Polls were similarly accurate before the 2007 election.

As of Tuesday, Macron was running at 23 percent and Le Pen at 22.3

percent, according to the Bloomberg composite of French polling. Fillon and Melenchon are both at 19.5 percent. A Kantar Sofres Onepoint poll released late Tuesday had Macron at 24 percent, Le Pen at 23 percent, Fillon at 18.5 percent and Melenchon at 18 percent. In the second round, Macron would defeat Le Pen by 64 percent to 36 percent, according to Opinionway, which also says Fillon would defeat Le Pen 58 percent to 42 percent.

According to Kantar's Riviere, 60 percent of French voters are sure of the choice they have made this year. In 2012, 71 percent of voters had made a firm decision and in 2007, 66 percent had done so. Only in 2002 were voters about as unsure.

Noting that most of the undecided voters were on the left, Riviere said: "There is a real sense of hesitation about what to do."

(Updates with bookmakers in seventh paragraph. An earlier version of this story corrected a spelling mistake in the deckhead.)

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Raphael : French Voters Are Also Impatient, But Not for Change

Therese Raphael

To a politically attuned American, the French presidential election sounds familiar: A great but divided country facing economic and social problems grows disillusioned with the political class. Cue a populist movement to rip up the script, deconstruct the state and drain the swamp, right?

Some of the parallels are genuine. There really is a voter revolt going on in France -- all the obvious candidates for the job were rejected and the two front-runners don't come from mainstream parties. And France does have a populist disruptor. That's Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front party, who shares with President Donald Trump an anti-immigrant, protectionist platform. Trump promised to make America great again; Le Pen pledges to do the same for France.

And yet don't think for a minute that this means the French want a radical overhaul. While French voters want change, it's not the root-and-branch kind that Trump voters were seeking, or that Britons yearned for when they voted last year to leave the European Union. Indeed, as I learned during a recent visit, it's hard to find anyone who wants to dismantle France's fabled social contract; the bargain by which the state delivers wide-ranging

services in return for collecting a hefty share of people's incomes.

In this presidential race, think of the French state as a patient on an operating table. Everyone agrees that the patient is unwell. The debate is over which of the four main candidates is best placed to administer treatment.

Le Pen advocates quarantining the patient and imposing an extreme diet. Borders will be closed to foreign bodies (immigrants), and harmful influences (competition from foreign products) restricted. Her radical methods appeal to those fed up with the pain and failure of traditional medicine; she offers a clear prescription and the purifying simplicity of a detox.

Jean-Luc Melenchon, the left-wing firebrand who has surged in the polls lately, is a sort of charismatic voodoo doctor, the practitioner who ignores empirical practice and conventional wisdom. He seeks to revive Gallic glory by amping up state intervention.

Melenchon wants to pull France out of treaties, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the euro. He wants to lower the retirement age to 60, reduce the workweek to 32 hours, guarantee a universal basic income and impose a tax rate of 100 percent on incomes

that are 20 times higher than the median.

Emmanuel Macron, the former Socialist economy minister who is favored to beat Le Pen in a run-off on May 7 if both make it through Sunday's first round, is the brilliant young surgeon who offers a promise of new technologies and modern therapies to replace the tired methods of older doctors. He has styled himself as a safe pair of hands, but also an outsider who can bring order, efficiency and honesty to the French state and so improve opportunity and economic prospects.

Then there is Francois Fillon, the unexpected choice of the mainstream conservative Republican Party, who might have coasted to victory were it not for an investigation into alleged misuse of public funds in the hiring of his family members. Fillon, a self-described Thatcherite, is an advocate of shock therapy, such as a pledge to cut 500,000 civil servants. Fillon is the doctor who refuses to sugarcoat and advocates reconstructive surgery. But even he wants to save the patient, not kill it. His platform, for example, seeks to consult civil servants about their own restructuring.

The French social contract is fundamentally about delivering security: physical security, job

security, social security. This attachment to the state, so antithetical to Americans, is historical. France's industrial and agricultural production was on its knees in 1945 and poverty and sickness were endemic. Charles de Gaulle's massive program of nationalization, investment and social reform revived French industry and pride, delivering a standard of living that became the envy of many (and the butt of plenty of jokes).

It worked well enough for decades, but in recent years the services have grown tired or failed in some areas, such as education. They are also too expensive to deliver without asking the French to give over even more of their income. For years, governments of the left and right have tried to keep this arrangement working. In some cases, they succeeded in introducing market mechanisms that took the burden off the state. At other times, the attempt to wean the French off some protection was met with protests lasting weeks or longer.

Those who aren't benefiting from the state security blanket -- the young, the unemployed, rural inhabitants whose industries or lives have been disrupted -- have their culprits: immigrants, globalization, the EU and establishment parties and politicians who misuse public funds.

But they don't question the system itself. That is the red line French voters aren't yet willing to cross.

Four candidates face off on Sunday. Some 30 percent of voters are still said to be undecided. The

candidates offer different therapies, but whoever wins on May 7 is going to have to be a miracle-worker to deliver on those expectations.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial

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NPR : French Presidential Candidate Macron Takes Page From American Political Playbook

Jake Cigainero

French Presidential Candidate Emmanuel Macron addresses voters during a political meeting on April 17 in Paris. **NurPhoto via Getty Images** [hide caption](#)

toggle caption

NurPhoto via Getty Images

French Presidential Candidate Emmanuel Macron addresses voters during a political meeting on April 17 in Paris.

NurPhoto via Getty Images

This weekend, voters in France head to the polls in the first round of the presidential election.

One of the leading contenders is political newcomer Emmanuel Macron.

His supporters are using an American tactic, unfamiliar to French voters. The French rarely knock on their neighbors' doors. So, asking a stranger to talk politics during election season is something new.

Christelle Deron, 25, has decided to step out of her comfort zone for Macron, her presidential pick.

"It's not normal," she says. "People are quite surprised that we just knock on their doors to talk about politics. They're not used to that."

Deron makes her way into a social housing complex in the 18th district of Paris, a working-class neighborhood. People there used to vote socialist, but this year many say they are undecided — which makes them a prime target for Macron's volunteers.

She knocks on a door. The woman who answers says her husband is a taxi driver who has lost 30 percent of his business to Uber. Macron supports the ride share service, but the woman is open to persuasion. Deron explains the candidate's policy to create more jobs and leaves a brochure.

Another house call results in a heated ten-minute debate.

Deron says it's the undecided voters that excite her the most.

"Because the guy was unsure about his vote ... just for having us and discussing with us, he was convinced in the end," she says. "In the end, he will help us relay the program to his friends and family."

By the end of the day, Deron and other volunteers in the 18th arrondissement knocked on more than 1,900 doors and spoke to nearly 600 people.

Knocking on doors is a tactic that was used by another politician who, like Macron, was an inexperienced newcomer when he first appeared on the scene. His name was Barack Obama.

"What we've seen in all the political studies, going door-to-door, having an exchange face-to-face, it raises the chance of persuading someone to vote by eight-to-ten times," Deron says.

Lex Paulson is an American who worked on Obama's 2008 campaign.

He now teaches political science in Paris and is an unpaid adviser to Macron.

Paulson says he's hearing the same frustrations from French voters that he heard when he worked for Obama.

"I feel the stakes are exactly the same here, and even more urgent now that America has gone the direction it has gone," Paulson says. "I think this is the most important campaign in the world right now."

If Macron does make it to the second round, he's likely to meet the extreme right candidate Marine Le Pen in the runoff. He's hoping the new tactic of talking to voters on their doorsteps will help him win enough national support to defeat Le Pen and become the next president of France.

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Teachers' Pet Macron Wants to Rewrite French Script

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John Follain

Even in high school, the drive that propelled Emmanuel Macron to his unlikely run for the French presidency was on show.

When his drama teacher in the northern French city of Amiens told the teenage Macron that the play he wanted to stage didn't have enough parts for their class, he suggested they rewrite it together. Every Friday for months, Macron and Brigitte Auziere worked side-by-side on reshaping "The Art of Comedy," by the modern Italian playwright Eduardo De Filippo.

And Macron, at the age of 16, played the leading role.

"Being on stage, center stage, fascinated him," said Renaud Darteville, a close friend of Macron at the school, La Providence. "He loved being in the spotlight, and he was interested only in the main parts." The shared labors of pupil and a married teacher 24 years his senior had another outcome: The

two began a relationship that raised local eyebrows and led to a wedding in 2007.

Photographer: AFP Pool via Getty Images

Today, the young actor and playwright has the country's biggest role in his sights. This after being at the top of his high-school class, graduating from the prestigious National School of Administration, holding a senior post at Rothschild & Cie, and serving as an adviser to President Francois Hollande and then as economy minister.

In his bid for the presidency, he has held front-runner status for much of the campaign, jostling with far-right candidate Marine Le Pen and benefiting from center-right candidate Francois Fillon's loss of support due to an employment scandal. Since late February, Macron and Le Pen have been expected to survive the first-round vote and face each other in a May 7 runoff that polls show would be won by Macron.

La Providence school in Amiens, where Macron was a student.

Photographer: Marlene Awaad / Bloomberg

But a late surge by Communist-backed Jean-Luc Melenchon has thrown this Sunday's contest wide open. Although Macron is still ahead, the differences among the four leading candidates are within the margin of error.

While theater played a large part in the formative years of the candidate, now 39, he also excelled in more academic subjects. The young Macron's teachers and schoolmates describe him as an exceptionally gifted and driven adolescent, fascinated by literature, interested in politics — and also reserved.

When he watches today's Macron on TV, his former French and Latin teacher Leonard Ternoy, 75, sees the boy he taught. Ternoy once asked Macron — "a brilliant student" — to give a talk on 19th-century French writer Guy de Maupassant. "Macron spoke without notes for more than an hour, reciting extracts

from memory, walking up and down in front of the class — a lot like he does today at his rallies," Ternoy recalled.

"He's always growing, he's on the move, as he puts it himself," Ternoy said. En Marche!, or On The Move!, is the name of his political movement and bears his initials in French.

Macron's childhood home in Amiens, France.

Photographer: Marlene Awaad / Bloomberg

The son of a neurologist and a pediatrician, Macron was born in Amiens on the River Somme, which was heavily bombed during both world wars. Its economy has been blighted by the closure of a Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. plant in 2014 and job losses at the Whirlpool Corp. appliance factory due next year.

While Macron began his political career with the Socialists, his birthplace leans right. The National Front's Le Pen, Macron's closest rival in the race, scored 28.3 percent

of the vote in Amiens in 2015 regional elections, trailing the center-right at 71.7 percent.

Macron's bedroom at his house on rue Gauthier de Rumilly, where he grew up with a younger brother and sister, was dominated by a big bookcase. It was decorated not with posters of rock stars or Che Guevara but with photographs of leading French writers, according to his friend Dartevelle.

The house is in an affluent, southern neighborhood of the city. France's possible next First Lady, Brigitte Auziere, from a chocolate-making family, lived around the corner. A short walk away is their elite Jesuit school, a sprawling complex where religious studies were optional and which boasts a 750-seat amphitheater and a swimming pool.

The young Macron stood out even then for his politics — the only person his friends knew who declared himself on the left. The teenage Macron admired Jacques Attali, a former adviser to President Francois Mitterrand. Years later, Attali became Macron's mentor and helped propel him to the side of another Socialist president, Hollande.

Macron himself, in his book "Revolution," mentioned his Amiens

years only briefly.

Macron at the Salon du Livre book fair. |

Read more: The rise of Emmanuel Macron

Photographer: Christophe Morin / Bloomberg

"I spent my childhood in books, a bit removed from the world," he wrote. "I lived to a great extent through texts and through words." Recently, though, he's focused anew on his birthplace. He launched his movement there in April last year, then signed some 200 copies of his book in an hour spent at the Martelle bookshop in November.

Macron rarely speaks about his childhood or his home town; when he does, it is usually about the legacy of war. "Nationalism is war," Macron shot at Le Pen in a televised debate earlier this month. "I come from a region that is full of its cemeteries and I don't want to go back to that."

To center-right mayor Brigitte Fouré, 61, Macron is opportunistic. "He needs to shake off the Parisian banker, establishment label, so he's only recently rediscovered his roots here," Fouré said in an interview in her elegant office in City Hall. "The truth is that he spends more time in

Le Touquet." The Macrons have a house in that coastal resort, further north.

Fouré backs Republican Fillon and would vote for Macron in the runoff if that's the only way to keep out Le Pen. "I don't think Amiens will vote more for him than any other place," Fouré said. "People don't really identify with him."

Brigitte Fouré, mayor of Amiens.

Photographer: Marlene Awaad / Bloomberg

Partisan comment aside, Macron was distant from his schoolmates as well. "At 15, Macron had the maturity of a 25-year-old," echoed Daniel Leleu, his ex-sports teacher. "He preferred to spend his time talking with the teachers rather than his classmates."

Though Amiens acquaintances of Macron and his wife speak reluctantly of that relationship, Dartevelle was a witness. After Macron adapted the Italian play, Auziere enthused: "Emmanuel has an incredible talent as a writer," Dartevelle said, adding, "Her tone of voice wasn't the normal one of a teacher talking about a pupil." At the cast party in a restaurant on the last night of the Italian play, Dartevelle saw Macron and Auziere exchange

what he would only call "a tender gesture."

The Macron campaign declined to comment.

But in this bourgeois, provincial milieu, the relationship was discussed only in private. "Brigitte was a colleague, we didn't really talk about it and she was very discreet," said ex-teacher Ternoy. "We weren't there to feed gossip."

Macron left Amiens to spend his last year at a prestigious Paris high school. Auziere later also moved to Paris, to teach at another Jesuit school.

"I think Brigitte left to get away, to escape the gossip," Ternoy said. "Both Macron and Brigitte leaving was the best solution," said mayor Fouré, who knows her family well. "It was logical that someone as smart as Macron would go to study in Paris, but the relationship probably accelerated that."

Macron's friend from those days, Dartevelle, still has the poster of the Italian play they performed at the school 24 years ago next month. The poster is signed by several members of the cast — including, as he puts it, "the future president."



Melenchon Softens Attacks on Euro as French Race Tightens

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- Surveys show vast majority of French voters want to keep euro

Jean-Luc Melenchon, France's presidential candidate, speaks during an election campaign event in Lille, France, on Wednesday, April 12, 2017.

Photographer: Christophe Morin/Bloomberg

Communist-backed Jean-Luc Melenchon is toning down his anti-euro rhetoric as his chances rise of reaching the runoff in France's presidential election.

"Don't believe what they tell you: 'He wants to get out of Europe, of the euro,'" Melenchon, 65, told a meeting in Dijon on Tuesday, simultaneously appearing as a

hologram in six other locations, including the distant island of Reunion. "Come on, let's get serious."

Jean-Luc Melenchon

Photographer: Christophe Morin/Bloomberg

Only days before the first round of voting on April 23, the fan of Cuba's Fidel Castro and former Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez is closing in on the election front-runners, sowing concern among investors.

Melenchon's support has almost doubled in the past month to reach 19 percent in the Bloomberg Composite of polls for the first round. Centrist Emmanuel Macron leads at 23.5 percent with the far-right National Front's Marine Le Pen at 22.5 percent and Republican Francois Fillon at 19.5 percent. The top two go through to the runoff on May 7.

Still, Melenchon and Le Pen's attacks against the euro and the European Union are seen as a brake on their potential support. About 72 percent of voters want France to keep the euro, according

to an Ifop poll published in Le Figaro newspaper last month.

In his program, Melenchon explains what he calls Plan A as "a joint exit from European treaties by abandoning existing rules for all countries which desire it and the negotiation of other rules." If such negotiations fail, Plan B involves "the unilateral exit from European treaties by France to propose other forms of cooperation."

'A Very Nice Guy'

The candidate repeated his threat to pull out of the euro in an April 2 interview with the Journal du Dimanche, saying that France should only stick with the currency if the rest of the union accepts his demands such as revoking the independence of the European Central Bank.

Melenchon said at his Tuesday rallies that he was "sure" that he would manage to negotiate changes to European treaties. Other European countries, he added, "are not our enemies but neither are they our masters, they are our partners and in a partnership you discuss problems to resolve them."

Melenchon's rivals have attacked him on his Europe plans. "Jean-Luc Melenchon -- he's a very nice guy but his promises are impossible to deliver and his program would be a disaster for France," Macron said on April 9. "He's for the destruction of the European Union, the Europe that protects us."

Le Pen stuck to her criticism of the single currency on Wednesday, saying it was better to negotiate an exit from the euro before a potential crisis hit. "The euro will die," Le Pen said on BFM television. "We must together negotiate a return to national moneys to avoid chaos."

With her long-time lead erased in the final weeks of the campaign, even Le Pen has wavered over just how sure she would be to break up the currency union.

Le Pen, who refused to have an EU flag on display during the interview, also denounced the bloc: "I consider that the EU tramples on our sovereignty, undermines our economy, and prevents us from protecting ourselves."

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'Red' Melenchon Scares France's Rich Into Considering Exile

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Jean-Luc Melenchon

Photographer: Anne-Christine Poujolat/AFP via Getty Images

At the elegant Bistro Volnay, a diamond's throw away from Place Vendome's jewellers, Communist-backed presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon dominates conversations of wealthy Parisians as they dig into their sautéed terrine of pig's trotter and calf sweetbread.

Jean-Luc Melenchon

Photographer: Christophe Morin/Bloomberg

Some of the restaurant's clientele is considering exile if Melenchon, a declared fan of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, wins the presidency -- just like the prospect of Socialist Francois Mitterrand's win in 1981 prompted many millionaires to abandon their country amid talk, partly in jest, of Soviet tanks rumbling down the Champs-Elysees.

"People are saying they'll leave if Melenchon wins, and I'm sure that sooner or later I'll have to look for a way out too," said Philippe Marques, 45, whose restaurant is close to jewelers like Cartier, the Chanel headquarters, the offices of J.P. Morgan and the Ritz hotel. "There's no economy possible with a President Melenchon. His plans for taxes, for limits on wages -- it'll be a bigger blow for the economy than the terrorist attacks were."

Marques, whose restaurant's patrons include luxury shoe designer Christian Louboutin and Arsenal football club manager Arsene Wenger, is voicing the mounting anxiety of the country's wealthiest and its business community from the stealthy rise in the polls of the leader of the France Unbowed party. The 65-year-old far-left candidate could emerge as one of the two contenders winning the first round on Sunday, qualifying him

for the May 7 runoff and giving him a fair shot at the presidency.

Populist Candidates

Polls show that the far-right National Front's Marine Le Pen and Melenchon would together draw about 40 percent of the votes in the first round, reflecting the same populist, anti-establishment trends that resulted in the Brexit vote in the U.K. and Donald Trump's election in the U.S.

Still, the two French candidates evoke concerns in slightly different ways: The anti-immigration, anti-euro Le Pen wants to take France out of the European Union and has a nationalistic agenda, while Melenchon, also hostile to EU institutions, is focused more on the redistribution of wealth.

Melenchon strikes fear in the hearts of many wealthy voters who remember the early eighties, when Mitterrand ran with Communist backing and promised to nationalize banks. He won the election on May 10, 1981. Soviet tanks never did make it to Paris, but some of France's wealthiest fled. LVMH Moet Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE's billionaire Chief Executive Officer Bernard Arnault moved to the U.S. as did Nathaniel de Rothschild. Some others moved to Switzerland.

Melenchon's Agenda

Melenchon wants to limit executive pay to 20 times that of the lowest-paid employee, ban companies from paying dividends if they've laid off workers for economic reasons, impose capital controls to fight tax fraud and expand the base of those paying the existing wealth tax.

"We've invented the universal tax," Melenchon said in a speech in Dijon on Tuesday. "It's not worth fleeing. There will be tax agents even in hell."

Melenchon considers anyone earning more than 4,000 euros (\$4,287) a month as "rich," and would expect them to do more to further his aims for France. He would slap a 90 percent tax on anyone who makes more than 400,000 euros a year. He plans to make inheritance tax-free below 130,000 euros per child, compared with 100,000 euros now, but tax it more for higher amounts.

"We want to make those who can afford it pay more," Manuel Bompard, his campaign chief of

staff and son-in-law, said on La Chaine Parlementaire television on April 12. "There should be a cap on the accumulation of wealth in this country."

Different Europe

Melenchon's plans for France's role in Europe remain uncertain. He aims to change the status of the European Central Bank so it can lend directly to member countries. He wants to renegotiate EU treaties and scrap the bloc's budgetary and fiscal limits, something Germany and other member countries would be unlikely to agree to -- having vetoed even the most minor easing of rules.

"Melenchon's stance toward the EU is like that of a child who threatens to hold his breath until his mother does what he wants," Art Goldhammer, a researcher affiliated with Harvard University's Center for European Studies, said on his blog. "He will turn blue in the face, but eventually he will have to start breathing again, and his mother will still be standing there with her arms folded."

Melenchon also wants to backtrack on the bloc's push for the liberalization of public markets including utilities, telecoms, energy and transportation. The far-left candidate has promised to nationalize motorway companies, energy providers Electricite de France and Engie SA, but not nationalize banks like Mitterrand did.

Mitterrand's Record

Mitterrand's "110 proposals" platform clearly indicated his intentions: the nationalization of "nine industrial groups" -- which eventually happened in 1982. Companies nationalized included industrial firms such as Saint-Gobain, Suez, Pechiney, Rhone-Poulenc, and 42 banks including Worms, Rothschild and Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas. By the end of 1983, one in four French workers was in the public sector.

It wasn't long before Mitterrand was forced to tone down his rhetoric. After his initial policies caused capital flight, a widening budget deficit, higher inflation than elsewhere in Europe, and consequently several devaluations of the franc, he changed tack in March 1983 and cut government spending, raised taxes, and froze wages. After his Socialist Party lost

legislative elections in 1986, the victorious center-right parties named Jacques Chirac as prime minister and he proceeded to privatize many of the companies that Mitterrand had nationalized.

Costly Revolutionary

For now, non-millionaires are not that worried about the Melenchon phenomenon.

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"Everyone will leave France? Oh come on, just the 1 percent," said Marie Monteiro, 42, a mother-of-three who lives in Paris and usually votes Socialist. "The fear of a market collapse, of a run, these are all electoral tactics to frighten voters. Melenchon's election would end injustices inflicted on the majority of the people. The Brexit vote, the rise of Melenchon or Le Pen should send a signal to those who have left the people without hope -- to the elite."

That said, ordinary French people may be underestimating the cost of a victory of one of the two populists, some observers say.

"France's borrowing costs will rise, as will its trade deficit," said Goldhammer. "Consumers will feel the pinch as the prices of imported goods, especially food and fuel, rise."

The conservative think tank Institut Montaigne says Melenchon's platform would be even more costly than that of Le Pen. The Paris-based group estimates that Melenchon's program would add 200 billion euros to the budget deficit, double what it forecasts for Le Pen.

For Bistro Volnay's Marques, who was too young to remember much about Mitterrand's victory, the doomsday scenario that may follow a Melenchon win is not in doubt.

"There's no chance that many people will be able to maintain a decent standard of living," he said. "The world of French luxury will disappear. Some of my clients are talking about making for Switzerland."

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New York Magazine : French Voters May End Up Choosing Between a Radical Leftist and a Neo-Fascist

Eric Levitz

April 18, 2017 04/18/2017 4:32 p.m.

Socialisme ou barbarie? Photo: Stephane De Sakutin/AFP/Getty Images; Sylvain Lefevre/Getty Images

Over the past 12 months, the world has seen its fair share of shocking, epoch-making elections — ones that have left us living in the age of Brexit, President Trump, and sultan Erdoğan. On Sunday, France could very well make this chapter of world history even more fascinating for our great-great-grandchildren, assuming humans and history books survive the next century.

For a long time, the big story of the French election was the disconcerting strength of National Front nominee Marine Le Pen. Founded by Marine's father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the National Front began its life as that rare breed of nationalist party that's nostalgic for the days when its nation was occupied by Nazis. More concretely, Le Pen the elder built a fierce but narrow constituency on appeals to anti-Semitism, anti-globalism, economic protectionism, law-and-order crime policies, and, above all else, keeping the Muslim hordes out of France. (I know — hard to believe that a platform this ugly could attract significant support in an advanced Western democracy.)

The French hold their presidential elections in two waves. The nominees of the nation's many, many parties face off in a battle-royale-style first round. Then, the top-two vote getters proceed to a runoff. This system allows parties with small — but committed — bases of support to become genuine contenders, for at least the opening round. And in 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front proved to be just that. The hatemonger actually made it to the finals — where he was effortlessly annihilated by Jacques Chirac.

So, even as the French news media hyped Marine Le Pen's strong first-round poll numbers for eyeballs and clicks (I know — hard to believe the French Fourth Estate could be so craven and nihilistic), the sophisticated take was that she actually had very little shot of winning the whole thing.

And then François Hollande's Socialist Party nominated the prodigiously uncharismatic Benoît Hamon, who has struggled to even retain support from the party's base. And the center-right *Républicains* nominated Catholic reactionary François Fillon — a longtime opponent of same-sex marriage, abortion rights, and the welfare state. If Fillon's program appeals to anyone outside his conservative Catholic base, it would probably be the very Islamophobic nationalists who make up Le Pen's. In a Fillon–Le Pen runoff, the more multiculturalism-tolerant candidate would be the author of a book titled *Overcoming Islamic Totalitarianism*. Fillon has vowed to restore traditional French values by limiting immigration and regulating Islam. That said, he is a bit less hostile to both immigrants and the EU's existence than is Le Pen, and has less interest in denying France's role in the Holocaust or banning burkinis.

But his sharpest contrast with his neo-fascist opponent may be on economics. Fillon wants to raise the retirement age, lengthen the workweek, cut civil-service jobs, and slash welfare spending — Le Pen wants to lower the retirement age, keep the workweek capped at 35 hours, protect civil servants, increase welfare spending, and pursue protectionist policies aimed at increasing domestic employment.

The best choice for left-of-center French voters in a Fillon–Le Pen race is far from clear, but many would doubtlessly vote to protect their retirement benefits.

But then, it looked like a timely scandal and a charismatic outsider would spare France that grim choice. News broke that Fillon's wife and two of his children collected more than 900,000 euros in public funds as parliamentary aides while doing little work. Establishment forces turned their eyes to independent outsider Emmanuel Macron.

Macron is a political novice — an investment banker and former economic minister, known for his business-friendly reforms. Running under the banner of his own personal party, *En Marche* (On the Move), Macron has kept his platform deliberately vague. But he's

basically the French version of what some in the United States would describe as a pragmatic technocrat (and/or “globalist cuck”). Macron is fiscally moderate, socially liberal, Eurozone-friendly, and multiculturalism-positive.

The candidate's youth, good looks, charisma, and reassuringly mainstream rhetoric vaulted him into first place — and all polls suggest that he'd wipe the floor with Le Pen in a runoff.

So, as of couple weeks ago, the global mainstream was finally starting to breathe easy. France wasn't on the cusp of electing its own Trump, but merely its own Justin Trudeau.

But *then*, France's version of Bernie Sanders aced the presidential debates.

Now remember, this is France: The *centrist*, fiscally moderate candidate is the one who cites Scandinavia as a model for reforming the welfare state. The French “Bernie Sanders” candidate, by contrast, is a literal communist fellow-traveler.

The 65-year-old Jean-Luc Mélenchon was a longtime member of the Socialist Party's left wing. But by 2008, the Socialists had veered too far to the right for Mélenchon's taste, so he and the party's like-minded leftists decided to found a new party, allied with the French Communists. Mélenchon won a seat in the European Parliament in 2009, and ran for president in 2012, garnering 11 percent of the vote.

This year, Mélenchon is running as the standard-bearer of a new party called *France Insoumise* (or, *France Untamed*) — and on a platform of taxing all income above €400,000 at 90 percent; shortening France's draconian 35-hour workweek to 32 hours; exiting the American-dominated NATO and International Monetary Fund; demanding new terms from the European Union allowing France more freedom to set its own monetary, labor-market, and fiscal policies; rewriting the French Constitution to make the nation more small-d democratic; devaluing the euro; and radically increasing investment in offshore wind energy, while gradually transitioning France to an economy sustained by “local

produce and zero-carbon consumption.”

Mélenchon touts a genuinely radical view of world affairs, and has, in the past, evinced more sympathy for Hugo Chavez's former government than America's. Mélenchon once summarized his feelings about the United States thusly: “Yankees ... represent everything I detest. A pretentious and arrogant empire, composed of uncultured rubes and pitiable cooks.”

But, as the quote might suggest, Mélenchon is also a sophisticated with a quick wit. He outshined Macron during the televised debates, and won over some of the centrist's soft supporters. And most of Macron's support *is* soft — the Establishment's best hope is a first-time candidate from a brand new party. Macron has no historic base to fall back on.

Mélenchon's support from young leftists appears relatively intense. Some have sought to spread the good news about socialism via a video game: In *Fiscal Combat*, the player guides an amped-up Mélenchon down a French street, as he expropriates the wealth of the capitalist class, one bourgeois pedestrian at a time.

Mélenchon is a fan.

One month ago, Mélenchon was irrelevant, claiming a mere 12 percent support in polls. Now, those surveys are giving him 19 percent of the vote, putting him neck and neck with Fillon for third place. The front-runners, Macron and Le Pen, are polling just a bit ahead, at around 24 and 23 percent, respectively.

So: It remains the case that this whole thing *probably* ends with the relatively mainstream, outsider candidate handing the Le Pen family another second-round embarrassment.

But it's entirely plausible that the French will end up having to choose between a radical leftist euroskeptic and a neo-fascist one. And polls suggest that communism may still have fascism's number in the 21st century.

Will the French Election Pit Leftist Against Neo-Fascist?

Newsweek : Why France's presidential election is exciting even if you aren't French

By Josh Lowe On 4/18/17 at 1:49 PM

There's an election in France! On Sunday! You probably know this. You probably also know that it involves a whole load of Presidential candidates, mostly dark-haired men whose names all end with "-on." And there's a lot of stuff about the EU all mixed up in there.

But here's why you should be paying even more attention. The 2017 French presidential election is probably going to be Europe's most important and exciting poll this year. Here's five reasons to watch closely:

A battle of the extremes

Unlike, say, the U.S. Presidential race, where a politically conventional Democrat went up against a much more unconventional Republican, in France, most of the main candidates are unconventional, and some are pretty extreme.

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On the right, there's Marine le Pen, a hardline anti-Islam populist who has promised a moratorium on all immigration and wants to reverse decades of trade liberalizations.

There's also Francois Fillon, candidate for the center-right Republicans. He's the closest the race has to a "normal" candidate but as an admirer of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who mixes traditionalist social values with a free market economic agenda he's actually pretty unusual in statist France.

And, on the left, both the mainstream Socialist Party candidate Benoit Hamon and Jean-Luc Melenchon are proposing bold redistributive policies, while the former wants a universal basic income and the latter plans bottom-up reform of France's democratic system.

The fight for the center

Whether you think the moderate center ground in politics must be preserved at all costs or you welcome a return to a more combative, ideological political battleground, France's centrist candidate and frontrunner Emmanuel Macron is one to watch.

Macron's politics aren't unconventional: he is offering targeted state spending accompanied by overall budget cuts and an internationalist, pro-EU foreign policy. His ideology is the one that has run the western world

for the past couple of decades. But he is interesting because he is making that case without shame even as the rest of his country's politics becomes more protectionist or nationalist.

And Macron is fighting without the support of an established party: his movement, En Marche! (Onwards!) is only a year old.

If Macron storms to victory, it will signal that despite the rise of populism, western electorates still have time for such messages if sold correctly. If he crashes and burns, it will add to the weight of evidence supporting the opposite view.

Russia's watching

Just like in the U.S., there are fears of Russian interference. Le Pen, Melenchon and Fillon are all Vladimir Putin-sympathetic to varying degrees, and the Russian President could benefit from any of them emerging victorious. France's polling commission issued a warning in February over a false Russian news report suggesting conservative candidate Francois Fillon led the race for the presidency.

Meanwhile Macron's campaign says he has been the victim of a series of targeted cyber-attacks. Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault

denounced the interference as "unacceptable" in a February interview.

There is as yet no evidence of Russian meddling, and it may be that the Kremlin isn't playing any direct role in the French political process. But even if that's the case, the election result could be a big boost for Putin, and it's worth paying attention.

Crunch time for Europe

After Brexit, the refugee crisis, the 2015 Greek debt crisis and a host of smaller squabbles, the EU is not at its strongest point right now. But at the same time, it is more resilient than many give it credit for: as it stands, the union is not on the brink of collapse.

But the French election could change the game somewhat. The far-right candidate Marine le Pen is running in second place in the polls. Her platform includes a referendum on France's continued membership of the euro, and she is a strong Euroskeptic. Meanwhile Melenchon, an independent left-winger, is creeping into third place, and wants to renegotiate swathes of EU treaties. Victory for either candidate would bring the EU several steps toward crisis point.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Four-Way Presidential Race Tests the Strength of French Democracy

Not so long ago, it appeared that ever-more-advanced polling techniques would soon render every election a snoozer: Models would tell us well in advance who would vote and how, taking drama out of the equation. Such was the case in 2012, when Nate Silver and his *Five Thirty Eight* team called every single state in the U.S. presidential election.

Not five years later, the idea that polling science could be perfected seems quaint. The comforting faith in polls gave way to the suspended disbelief of London elites as results came in from Sunderland on the long night last June when Brexit materialized, and to Silver's own wildly shifting predictions the night Donald J. Trump won the White House in November. Outcomes are once again in doubt, which means elections have been made fun again.

This year's French presidential campaign has never been boring. For starters, the primaries of both established parties — the storied Socialists and the Gaullist UMP, now somewhat oddly rebranded "Republicans" — led to the selection of extreme non-consensus candidates. On the right, the clean-

cut Thatcherite François Fillon beat shoe-in centrist Alain Juppé and former president Nicolas Sarkozy. On the left, Benoît Hamon — a man who argues for the taxation of robots — beat sitting president François Hollande's centered, centrist prime minister, Manuel Valls.

Hamon and Fillon, as the standard-bearers for France's two major parties, were supposed to be the biggest challengers to the woman who had led the race since polling first began in 2013: Marine Le Pen. After inheriting the Front National from her fascistic father, the younger, populist Le Pen has been busy "de-diabolizing" the party, moving it to the left economically while maintaining its extreme-right positions on Europe and immigration. This direction became only more accented in the aftermath of Brexit and Trump, hence the accounts of Socialist strongholds now voting Front National.

But Le Pen's problem was the same one her father always faced: the second round of French elections is designed to prevent a fragmented field from leading to a populist victory by mandating that the winner takes more than 50 percent of the vote. With disapproval consistently over 50 percent, Le Pen loses badly

in almost every conceivable scenario — "almost" being the operative word.

Although the Anglo-American press has been veritabably Le Pen-obsessed, with outlets in Britain writing more articles on her than their Gallic peers, she has led not a single runoff poll in the whole campaign. She was projected to lose against Juppé and then Fillon when they led the polls, and now she is projected to lose to the election's third man, Emmanuel Macron.

Like Le Pen, Macron is running as an outsider, having left the Socialist party to form his own eponymous "movement," EM. (His initials nominally stand for "En Marche!") Over the last four months, Macron's campaign has gathered momentum as front-runner Fillon nose-dived in polls amid corruption allegations that tainted his wife, his children, his expensive suits, and his real-estate holdings.

Macron promises a new take on "third way" supply-side reforms at a time when social democracy looks to be in decline everywhere else.

Macron is running on a pro-European, anti-populist platform that calls for the French welfare state to be preserved even as pro-market economic reforms, including the loosening of France's notoriously strict labor laws, are implemented. Though sometimes weak on foreign policy, he is very strong on the question of Europe, arguing clearly that the EU needs monetary reform rather than mere monetary accommodation to be sustainable, and calling for a serious conversation about deeper integration of European finances and defense (incidentally the two of the pillars of the early American republic). His best speech on these ideas was delivered, of all places, in Berlin.

Without arguing for Fillon's Thatcherite revolution, Macron promises a new take on "third way" supply-side reforms at a time when social democracy looks to be in decline everywhere else, from the United States to Britain, Spain, Greece, Germany, and even Italy. Aggregate polling puts him in the second round, where he is predicted to beat the other likely candidates by a considerable margin.

Over the last 40 years, second-round polls have tended to tighten,

but never topple. And yet, after two long televised debates, a fourth man has risen over the last few weeks: Jean Luc Mélenchon, who is to the extreme left what Le Pen is to the extreme right — the Bernie Sanders to France's wannabe Trump.

Not unlike Le Pen, Mélenchon and his upstart party, *La France Insoumise* (literally, "Unsubmissive France"), have made "*la finance*" and the elite the main enemy of their campaign. Given such rhetoric, it is rather unsurprising that his platform is about as realistic as Sanders's: He calls for the immediate dismantling of the Gaullist Fifth Republic, to be replaced by a Sixth Republic "for the people"; a 100 percent tax rate on incomes over 20 times the median; the "freeing of France from finance"; and a unilateral withdrawal from NATO. His position on Europe is at best contradictory and at worst confused: He wants to change the charter of the European Central Bank to allow it to lend directly to member states and "leave current treaties" while still somehow preserving the European Union.

One suspects, in other words, that Mélenchon would not fare quite as well as Macron in Berlin. The trouble

is that he appears to be faring quite well in France. With an impressive online operation rivaled on the European left only by that of Italy's savvy 5 Star Movement, Mélenchon has gone viral. He is now the preferred candidate of the 18–25 demographic, many of whom follow his weekly YouTube fireside chats and dial thousands of potential supporters daily in a gameified twist on the tedium of electioneering. Though his rise has so far seemed to come mainly at the expense of the uninspiring Hamon, he is no longer all that far behind the front-runners.

After Hollande's disastrous experiment with a 75 percent marginal tax rate at the beginning of his presidency, the French elite has been losing sleep over Mélenchon's proposed 100 percent tax rate. Of course, enraging the rich has only helped him with his base, and that is what his critics miss: The main threat represented by his ascendancy is political rather than financial, given his expressed admiration for left-wing Latin American populists such as Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales.

In the post-Marxist tradition of philosophers Ernesto Laclau and

Chantal Mouffe, Chávez, Morales, and their ilk have tended to deem republican checks and balances incompatible with a "volonté generale" of the disenfranchised. This populist logic may have justified their work in behalf of the poor, but it also underpinned their authoritarian lust for power and the egregious corruption of their cliques. Mélenchon is so closely identified with Chavismo in the public imagination that he felt the need to clarify this week that he does not want to "make France into Cuba." Yet, all protestations to the contrary, his lofty plans for a Sixth Republic "free from finance" and elites are eerily reminiscent of Chávez's own illiberal "democratization" of Venezuela. It takes real gall to argue for Venezuelan-style socialism in France at the same time that Venezuela itself is collapsing amid food shortages and the gutting of its democratic institutions.

With less than a week to go, then, the atomized French presidential field has four plausible candidates: Le Pen, Fillon, Macron and Mélenchon. Although both Le Pen and Mélenchon would lack a legislative majority to implement their extreme platforms, there are now politically viable populists on

both the extreme left and the extreme right. And their populism is worryingly popular, making this election a nail-biter to the bitter end. The so-called Republican pact — the age-old unspoken agreement whereby centrist parties band together to prevent the victory of a fascistic candidate, especially one with the surname Le Pen, in the runoff — can fend off one of them in the second round, but not both.

— *Pierpaolo Barbieri is executive director of the geopolitical macroeconomic advisory firm Greenmantle and a senior associate in the Applied History Project at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He is working on a history of Latin American populism.*

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Nature : French scientists focus on the big political picture

Marlene Awaad/Bloomberg/Getty

Marine Le Pen has dominated discussions ahead of the French presidential elections.

As France prepares to vote on Sunday in the first of two rounds to elect a president for the next five years, it's worth recalling the shock waves that reverberated across the country on 21 April 2002, when Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the National Front, narrowly made it into the second-round runoff. In response, an estimated 2 million people took to the streets in protest. Jacques Chirac, the centre-right candidate, went on to be elected with 82% of the vote.

Fast-forward 15 years, and Marine Le Pen, who took the helm of the National Front in 2011, is omnipresent in the media. Most commentators have taken it as a given that she will easily qualify for the second round, and there is little of the shock and disbelief of 2002.

Researchers in France, as we report this week, are solidly ranged against Le Pen. Most, after all, are middle-class intellectuals and staunchly pro-European. Europe seems to figure most prominently among researchers' concerns in the highly unlikely event that Le Pen should be elected.

Le Pen has promised to renegotiate European Union membership and has promised a referendum on France's place in Europe and on leaving the euro. But she has been vague on details, and for good reason. Opposition in Brussels and the EU make for good election-campaign rhetoric. But even if soft Euro-scepticism is widespread in France, more than two-thirds of French people, including many among Le Pen's electorate, have no appetite for leaving.

Another paradox is that the National Front's intolerance is similarly out of touch with the bulk of French society. The annual report published last month by the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, an independent state watchdog, found that tolerance continues to increase in French society, with a broad rejection of racism and xenophobia, and increased acceptance of minorities.

Conducted since 1990, the commission's surveys have shown that tolerance has risen with each new generation and with the progressive increase in levels of advanced education in the population. Counter-intuitively perhaps, this year's report also said that events such as the terrorist attacks in France and the refugee crisis had not dented the large

increase in tolerance over the past few years.

But the commission rightly cautioned that everyone has tolerance and intolerance within them. Indeed, social science tells us that people might not care much about, say, immigration day-to-day, but with attention they can easily come to believe that it is a major issue for the country.

"Populism has been uncontrollably released into the wild, with disastrous results."

Many social and political scientists are taking an interest in populism, the idea that has helped to normalize extremist parties such as the National Front and banalize their theses. It comes from perhaps an unlikely quarter — once purely an academic concept, populism has been uncontrollably released into the wild, with disastrous results.

Yet populism alone — defined roughly as an ideology that views society as being made up of two antagonistic groups, with a homogeneous, pure 'people' struggling against a corrupt elite — has little utility or meaning. The left-wing Spanish party Podemos is populist but pro-European, progressive and inclusive, and it staunchly defends minorities, including refugees. It has almost

nothing in common with the National Front, which is also 'populist'.

In his bid to stay in the presidential race, the centre-right candidate François Fillon has increasingly shifted to the far right and has co-opted many of Le Pen's themes. Social scientists rightly see this co-opting of far-right policies by mainstream parties as being as dangerous to liberal democracy as populist far-right parties themselves — or perhaps even more so in the long run.

When the time to vote comes around, the French would do well to bear in mind that Jean-Marie Le Pen's success in the first round in 2002 did not result from a surge in support for his ideas. Le Pen's share of the registered vote was no different from the low levels he had obtained in other presidential elections. His success was down to record levels of abstention, and a dispersion in the centre-left vote towards smaller parties. One of the few routes to victory by Marine Le Pen in a second-round contest would be a high turnout of her voters and a low turnout of her opponent's. So the message to scientists and others in France is clear — *allez votez!*

Dreyfuss: France confronts more domestic discontent — in South America (online)

By Joel Dreyfuss Opinions newsletter

Joel Dreyfuss is a Washington Post Global Opinions contributing columnist.

You would think that France, with its 400-year history as a colonial power, would be better at managing its overseas territories. Yet a simmering confrontation between the authorities in Paris and protesters in the French department of Guiana burst into violence on April 7, when several policemen were injured (and one hospitalized) during a demonstration. Three days later, President François Hollande urged the protesters to end their actions and offered to meet with the territory's elected officials to plan "Guiana's future." The activists turned down a meeting but temporarily lifted their barricades to let their fellow Guianese do their Easter shopping.

Guyane, as the French call it, is a vestige of a colonial empire that once stretched from Canada to West Africa to the Pacific Ocean. Located on the northeast coast of South America, and bordered by Brazil and Surinam, French Guiana is by far the largest and most sparsely populated French overseas territory, with 250,000 residents scattered over 32,000 square miles (roughly the size of Portugal). Other remaining French possessions around the world include specks of land scattered from the Caribbean (Martinique and Saint Bart's) to Polynesia (Tahiti) and the Indian Ocean (Reunion and Mayotte).

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The union-led protests in French Guiana are now into their fourth week and have included a general strike that has paralyzed the territory, caused businesses and schools to shut and forced airlines to cancel daily flights between France and the major city, Cayenne. Visits by the French minister of overseas territories and the interior minister and an offer of a \$1.1 billion package to build schools, upgrade medical facilities and improve security have not defused tensions. French Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve last week rejected a demand from the protesters for an additional \$2.7 billion.

It's not the first time France has faced unrest in its overseas territories. In 2009, Guadeloupe was paralyzed for weeks by strikes. In 1996 and 1997, confrontations between the government, students and separatists (who advocate for independence from France) flared up in Guiana. The desire for a complete break surfaces from time to time, but it remains a minority view, even among the protesters, whose anger is primarily directed at the lack of economic opportunity.

After World War II, French authorities sought to hold their faraway territories more closely by turning them into "departments" of France, integral political entities equivalent to those on the mainland with elected representatives in the Assembly and the Senate. French Guiana, first settled in 1643, was

primarily used as a prison for dangerous criminals and political prisoners. (Capt. Alfred Dreyfus was kept on Devil's Island off Guiana's coast.) Guiana is now the site of France's Kourou space center, a busy launch point for the Ariane rockets carrying commercial satellites. Kourou has become Guiana's most important economic engine. But Guiana, like most of the other overseas territories, suffers from high unemployment, now at 23 percent, and more than 50 percent among youths.

France's Observatory for Inequalities, an independent think tank, says poverty and inequality are most severe in France's overseas territories. Crime is also high, not least because Guiana serves as a drug trans-shipment point between South American producers and Europe. One demand of the protests is a greater police presence. With 42 murders in 2016, Guiana is the deadliest French department and also the most brutal, at 23 violent incidents per 1,000 inhabitants. In addition to drug trafficking, Guiana suffers from undocumented immigration, mainly from nearby Brazil, Surinam and Haiti, and from illegal gold prospecting that pollutes the land with mercury. There is also a high suicide rate among the Amerindian population.

Despite these problems, Guiana, like other French overseas territories, appears relatively well-off compared with its neighbors. It has the highest per capita GDP in Latin America (estimated at \$16,530 in 2014). That is still, however, less than half of the level in metropolitan

France. "The amount of financial transfers [from France] make each overseas territory an island of affluence at the heart of a relatively poor environment," noted Jean-Christophe Gay in a 2009 report, warning that these territories are heavily dependent on funds from France and the European Union.

Living costs are higher than in France because almost everything is imported from France, despite the proximity of lower-cost producers such as Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico. This practice goes back to the "exclusive," a law during the colonial era that barred French colonies from trading with neighboring countries. While the law is no longer on the books, local entrepreneurs say they are discouraged from making trade links outside of France.

With its jungles and vast rain forests, Amerindian tribes, multiracial population and rich biodiversity, Guiana has the potential to attract visitors and boost its economy. But Guianese have heard many promises from the authorities in Paris and they no longer trust them. Hope is fading and little may be accomplished in the coming weeks as the country turns its attention to the presidential elections. A popular T-shirt worn by demonstrators reads in Creole: *Nou bouké sa!* or "We're fed up!" They may have to stay that way for a while yet.

Theresa May Calls for New Election in Britain, Seeking Stronger 'Brexit' Mandate

Steven Erlanger

LONDON — Prime Minister Theresa May of Britain on Tuesday called for an early election in less than two months, clearly anxious that her thin majority in Parliament would weaken her hand in complicated negotiations on the British exit from the European Union.

Mrs. May's proposal for a snap election on June 8 broke her oft-repeated vow not to call an early vote and was aimed at exploiting her popularity to gain more parliamentary seats. This would strengthen her political backing in the negotiations for Britain's departure, known as Brexit.

But it also provides a new opportunity for Britain's anti-Brexit voices to be heard, potentially reopening the bitter disagreements that polarized Britons over their nation's future during the referendum campaign. Voters narrowly decided last June to leave the European Union.

Nobody expects the new election to undo that decision. Yet depending on how well Mrs. May's side does, it could affect her demands in the negotiations.

"The country is coming together, but Westminster is not," Mrs. May said in a sudden appearance outside the prime minister's residence at 10 Downing Street, adding that she had "only recently

and reluctantly come to this conclusion."

Having fired the starting gun for two years of talks with Brussels and the other 27 members of the European Union only last month, Mrs. May is already facing divisions within her own Conservative Party. She is clearly counting on a strong performance in June — before those talks get serious and difficult, before the British economy is seen to be hit and before critical German elections in the fall — to carry her government through the exit, hard or soft, that she has promised to deliver.

The financial markets bid up the pound on the news, apparently anticipating a Conservative sweep that would give Mrs. May the

mandate to override hard-liners in her own party who might resist concessions to the European Union in return for market access — the so-called soft Brexit.

Certainly, the Conservatives' election prospects look promising. They are riding high in the opinion polls, with the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn in disarray, the centrist Liberal Democrats weak and the fractious far-right U.K. Independence Party, if anything, more a threat to Labour than to the Tories.

Although the margins are sure to tighten, the Conservatives hold a double-digit lead over Labour, which, if it holds up, would translate into a working majority in Parliament

of more than 100 seats, compared with only 17 seats now.

But the decision does carry political risks for Mrs. May. For a politician who has cultivated a reputation as a straight shooter who puts country before party, the about-face on early elections could smack of opportunism. And in a year of election surprises, embittered but highly motivated voters from the Remain camp could coalesce behind one of the parties to register their anger over leaving the bloc.

"She presents herself as someone putting the national interest first, before her party, and someone who does not play political games," said Steven Fielding, a professor of political history at the University of Nottingham. "It might bite her, but she'll play the stability-versus-instability card."

Mrs. May apparently calculated that the risks of an early vote were small compared with the possible payoff from a strengthened Conservative hold over Parliament.

Mrs. May took office less than a year ago, when her Conservative predecessor, David Cameron quit after losing the June 23 referendum on British membership in the European Union. Chosen by the Tories to become prime minister when her most obvious rivals fell away, Mrs. May is now seeking an electoral mandate of her own to deal with her real danger: an unhappy group of anti-European Conservative legislators who are opposed to anything that might smell of compromise with the European Union.

Without an early vote, Mrs. May said, "the negotiations with the European Union will reach their most difficult stage in the run-up to the next scheduled election," in 2020. She added, "Division in Westminster will risk our ability to make a success of Brexit, and it will cause damaging uncertainty and instability to the country."

Analysts generally praised her decision to call

early elections. "This is the act of a rational politician, but one who had repeatedly promised not to call an early election," Mr. Fielding said. "But her lead in the polls can only go down as soon as Brexit negotiations start, so why not go now?"

Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour Party, in London last month. Andy Rain/European Pressphoto Agency

Some were more effusive, all but guaranteeing a Conservative sweep. "It's a surefire certainty it will be a thumping majority, no doubt about it," said Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London. "Something terrible about Theresa May would have to emerge between now and polling day for that not to be the case."

The last election was in 2015, when Mr. Cameron won a surprising but thin majority as the Labour Party lost heavily in Scotland and the Liberal Democrats were reduced to just eight seats in Parliament.

Labour's choice of Mr. Corbyn, a man of the hard left, has proved hugely unpopular, but on Tuesday he issued a statement welcoming an early election, as politically he had to do. That makes it likely that Parliament on Wednesday will give Mrs. May the two-thirds majority she needs to call an early election under the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act, which otherwise mandates an election in May 2020.

"I welcome the prime minister's decision to give the British people the chance to vote for a government that will put the interests of the majority first," Mr. Corbyn said in a statement. "Labour will be offering the country an effective alternative to a government that has failed to rebuild the economy, delivered falling living standards and damaging cuts to our schools and N.H.S.," the National Health Service.

Mr. Corbyn, 67, was elected after Labour's bad defeat in 2015 and took the party strongly to the left. He was a weak supporter of the Remain campaign, and efforts by Labour

legislators to unseat him have failed. He will lead a badly divided party and, if Labour loses this election, too, as expected, will be under considerable pressure to resign.

The Liberal Democrats, under a new leader, Tim Farron, have explicitly opposed leaving the bloc and have called for another referendum on any final deal with Brussels. Though the Liberal Democrats are expected to win back some seats in June from the Conservatives, the Conservatives are expected to win more seats from Mr. Corbyn's Labour Party because many Labour constituencies in Britain's hard-pressed northern cities voted strongly for leaving.

While a third or so of Conservative voters voted against leaving, they are considered likely to back Mrs. May, given the alternatives, especially as she has hinted lately that a transitional deal with Brussels would probably involve some compromises in the national interest.

Mrs. May portrayed the election as one of leadership. "It will be a choice between strong and stable leadership in the national interest, with me as your prime minister, or weak and unstable coalition government, led by Jeremy Corbyn, propped up by the Liberal Democrats who want to reopen the divisions of the referendum," she said Tuesday.

The Liberal Democrats have promised to bludgeon the Conservatives with the specter of a "hard Brexit," in which Britain would leave the European Union's single market and customs union without a mitigating trade agreement.

On Tuesday, Mr. Farron said that "if you want to avoid a disastrous hard Brexit, if you want to keep Britain in the single market, if you want a Britain that is open, tolerant and united, this is your chance."

"Only the Liberal Democrats can prevent a Conservative majority," he added.

Mr. Cameron endorsed Mrs. May's announcement, calling it a "brave — and right — decision."

The leader of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon of the Scottish National Party, was harsh, saying, "This announcement is one of the most extraordinary U-turns in recent political history, and it shows that Theresa May is once again putting the interests of her party ahead of those of the country."

Ms. Sturgeon, who favors an independent Scotland but also wants to remain within the European Union's single market, said the snap election was about "standing up for Scotland in the face of a right-wing, austerity-obsessed Tory government with no mandate in Scotland but which now thinks it can do whatever it wants and get away with it."

Paradoxically, however, a more confident Mrs. May, with a larger majority, is likely to be able to negotiate more flexibly with Ms. Sturgeon over final terms to leave the bloc and undercut momentum for another Scottish independence referendum.

In recent weeks, Mrs. May's office repeatedly insisted that an early election was not going to happen, despite considerable pressure to call one from party notables like the former leader William Hague. But British politicians remember well how speculation that a Labour prime minister, Gordon Brown, was going to call an early election in 2007 rebounded on him when he failed to follow through, destroying his credibility.

Mr. Brown took office after his predecessor, Tony Blair, stepped aside. Despite polls showing that Labour would win a commanding majority and provide him with his own mandate, Mr. Brown waited and suffered from the 2008-9 financial crisis, despite his skillful management of it, and Labour lost the 2010 election.

by imposing a three-day working week on British industry. What followed was five years of Labour Party rule, initially under Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

Forty-three years on, few pundits expect Prime Minister Theresa May to lose her majority, now a narrow 17 seats, and she clearly expects to increase it substantially.

Rarely have incumbent leaders looked so comfortable going into a British general election.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Brexit Set to Dominate U.K.'s Snap Election

Stephen Fidler
April 18, 2017

Peter Kellner, former president of the YouGov polling firm.

The complication is that attitudes to Brexit aren't divided along conventional political party lines. The two main political parties and their voters are split over Brexit—and the big question is to what extent will people change their traditional voting behavior according to their views on the EU.

"For political scientists, it is going to be the most dazzling and fascinating

election in their lifetimes," said Mr. Kellner.

Not since 1974 has an election been called on a single issue. Prime Minister Ted Heath called a snap election to strengthen his mandate in a fight with trade unions which was depicted as a battle over who governed the country.

Mr. Heath lost his majority: Many voters blamed him for precipitating an economic crisis after he responded to a coal miners' strike

1:33 p.m. ET

LONDON—June's general election in Britain will be dominated by one issue: Brexit. The subject has been just about all that has mattered in British politics since last June's referendum decision to leave the European Union.

"Because the overriding issue is Brexit, it will be as close as you ever get to a one-issue election," said

Opinion polls suggest that popular support for the main opposition Labour Party under leader Jeremy Corbyn has melted down. If that performance continues into the election, the party will post its weakest electoral showing in decades, with its share of the 650-seat parliament falling perhaps as low as 150-200 seats.

True, Labour will be hard to dislodge from many seats in which it holds a very substantial majority. Mr. Corbyn won't risk alienating his party's pro-Brexit supporters in the North of England by campaigning to stay in the EU. Indeed, he showed Tuesday he will try to fight the election on Labour's traditional trump cards of public services and living standards of the less well-off.

John Curtice, professor of politics at the University of Strathclyde, said Mrs. May's strategy depended on her preserving support among Conservative

Party voters. "She has to keep together the coalition of those who voted to leave and those who voted remain," he said.

Labour's current weakness will likely help to that end, Mr. Curtice said.

If she succeeds, the advantages for the prime minister are several-fold. She would have more freedom within her party to negotiate the sort of deal she wants with the EU without having to worry about the wing of her party that wants a sharp and decisive break with the bloc.

It also would give her more clout in the negotiations in Brussels by giving her opposite numbers the confidence that she can deliver at home on her pledges to them that would be unpopular among her party's right wingers—for example, on immigration from the EU and on making some kind of post-Brexit financial contributions to the EU.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Five Things About the U.K.'s Surprise General Election You Should Know

Jason Douglas

Updated April 18, 2017 11:28 a.m. ET

U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May said Tuesday she would seek Parliament's approval to hold a general election on June 8—three years earlier than scheduled and just before Brexit talks with the European Union are due to kick off in earnest.

Here are five things you should know:

The U.K. System of Government

The U.K. has a parliamentary system of government. Voters, by and large, choose the local representative of their favored political party. The leader of the party that wins the most seats then forms a government and serves as prime minister. There are 650 seats up for grabs and Mrs. May is hoping to strengthen public support for her stance on negotiating the terms of the U.K.'s exit from the EU.

Parliamentary Arithmetic

Britain's "first-past-the-post" electoral system tends to deliver outsized rewards to whichever party wins the most votes, even if its margin of victory overall is thin.

For example, in the 2015 general election, the Conservative Party (which Mrs. May now leads) won 36.9% of the popular vote but claimed 331 seats—more than

half—of those in Parliament. The opposition Labour Party won 30.2% of the vote, but gained only 232 seats.

The winner-takes-all nature of the system is even starker when smaller parties are involved. The UK Independence Party came second in many constituencies but won only a single seat. The Scottish National Party received less than 5% of the nationwide vote in the U.K., but claimed 56 seats, because its support was concentrated in one region.

The upshot is that Mrs. May's sizable poll lead over her rivals could translate into a considerable parliamentary majority, perhaps of 100 seats or more.

Some analysts urge caution, though, saying the rise of the SNP in Scotland means it is now much harder for either of the two main parties to win the sort of 100-plus majorities of past prime ministers like Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair.

Fixed-Term Parliament Act

Mrs. May's push for an election will be the first test of a newish feature of the U.K.'s ancient parliamentary system: the Fixed-Term Parliament Act. This 2011 law established five-year terms for governments and was drawn up to help stabilize a rare coalition government from 2010 to 2015 under former prime minister, David Cameron.

If so, that would seem likely to reduce the prospect of the U.K. tumbling out of the EU without a deal and to increase the chances of temporary arrangements to soften the economic disruption of Brexit. Certainly, the pound's rally Tuesday suggested that some in the financial markets believe a hard post-Brexit landing is now less likely.

If all goes according to schedule, the U.K. would leave the EU as planned around March 2019. But it could then slip into transitional arrangements that would be terminated at the most three years later. In 2022, after serving out its full five-year term, the Conservative Party could fight the next election on having, as promised, delivered Brexit to the British people.

But Mrs. May is also taking a risk. She has performed an explicit about-face over an early election, which she previously depicted as a threat to stability, with the possibility

that she could be accused of political opportunism.

She is gambling that attitudes to Brexit won't lead to tactical voting that will erode support for her party's MPs. Anti-Brexit Conservatives may switch allegiances in some places to the third party Liberal Democrats, which will campaign for Britain to remain in the EU.

So far, the Liberal Democrats have succeeded in attracting Labour Party opponents of Brexit, mainly in the south of the country, said Mr. Curtice. So far, few Conservatives appear to have switched allegiance. Mrs. May will be hoping it stays that way.

Write to Stephen Fidler at stephen.fidler@wsj.com

Appeared in the Apr. 19, 2017, print edition as 'Britain Gears Up for a One-Issue Election.'

This law meant the next U.K. general election was scheduled for 2020. But Mrs. May is seeking to use a provision of the act that allows for an earlier election if there is support from two-thirds of lawmakers in the House of Commons.

Labour has said it would back an early vote, meaning Mrs. May will likely have the support she needs when Parliament votes on Wednesday on whether to hold the election.

Why Now?

Mrs. May took over the leadership of the ruling Conservatives in July after Mr. Cameron stood down following June's Brexit vote, which he had campaigned against. Victory in an election would silence Mrs. May's critics who say she lacks the mandate to govern because she has never won a popular vote to be party leader.

A bigger factor is her slim majority of only 17 seats in Parliament, which leaves her vulnerable to defeat on major issues if rebel Conservatives side with opposition lawmakers in parliamentary votes.

Mrs. May said Tuesday that an election would root out opposition to Brexit in Parliament and strengthen her hand in negotiations with the EU.

The date of the vote—June 8—means the election will take place

while European leaders are still discussing their negotiating priorities before Brexit talks gather steam.

Economists say it is an opportune time for the government to call a vote, because the economy, while resilient, is showing signs of slowing that will likely intensify.

What Do the Polls Say?

Opinion polls suggest Mrs. May will comfortably win the election. A YouGov poll in April put support for the Conservatives at 44%, against 23% for Labour.

Mrs. May's personal popularity trumps that of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, a veteran left-winger. The same YouGov survey found 50% of respondents thought Mrs. May would make a better prime minister than Mr. Corbyn. Only 14% thought the opposite.

Polls also suggest the SNP, which supports Scotland's secession from the U.K., would again win the most seats in Scotland, adding to pressure for another referendum on Scottish independence.

Write to Jason Douglas at jason.douglas@wsj.com

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EU Says U.K. General Election Will Not Alter Bloc's Resolve on Brexit Talks

Laurence Norman and Valentina Pop

April 18, 2017 11:15 a.m. ET

BRUSSELS—European politicians and officials mainly welcomed British Prime Minister Theresa May's decision to call for a general election in June, saying it could ease negotiations over the U.K.'s divorce from the European Union, but said the decision won't affect their approach to the talks.

U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May spoke briefly with European Council President Donald Tusk on Tuesday morning after making her surprise announcement calling for June 8 elections. Parliament must still approve the move.

The EU is currently in the process of fixing its own stance ahead of the negotiations, a process it aims to complete by May 22nd.

EU leaders will meet on April 29, a month after Britain formally notified its exit from the bloc, to agree their basic stance. The bloc aims to agree the detailed negotiating mandate for chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, by May 22. It will then be ready for negotiations with Britain.

"The U.K. elections do not change our EU27 plans," said Mr. Tusk's spokesman Preben Aaman.

EU officials have laid out a tight timetable for the Brexit negotiations, with Mr. Barnier saying he wants negotiations completed by October 2018. The two-year window for Britain to exit from the bloc ends in March 2019.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said in a statement Tuesday that "any extended uncertainty...does nothing good for the political and economic relationship between Europe and Great Britain."

However he added that new elections would "hopefully lead to more clarity and predictability in the negotiations with the European Union."

That was also the take in Brussels, with officials noting that a big poll lead for Mrs. May's Conservative party could translate into a bigger parliamentary majority.

"The chances for a good outcome of the Brexit negotiations have just gone up tremendously," said one senior EU official. "Instead of being

at the mercy of the Brexiteers, PM May will now get a very, very strong mandate that will allow her to negotiate a reasonable deal with the EU."

A second person said Mrs. May will "probably be more comfortable throughout the whole process" of negotiations.

Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's point man on Brexit said on Facebook that the June election will give U.K. voters a fresh opportunity "to express themselves on how they see the future relationship" with the EU.

In her remarks Tuesday morning, Mrs. May said a June ballot was the last chance to hold an election before detailed negotiations with the EU begin.

Whoever wins the election, they will start the Brexit negotiations with a popular mandate, something Mrs. May currently lacks. She took over as prime minister last July after David Cameron resigned following the Brexit vote.

However, France and Germany also have elections in coming months, meaning Britain won't be the only

country with a newly elected or re-elected leader at the negotiating table.

Some analysts said Mrs. May's decision could have additional upside for Britain. By holding an early ballot, the next government will now face elections in 2022, not in 2020 in the aftermath of Brexit.

That could allow the next government greater leeway for compromise on a transitional deal which could last for several years, avoiding a cliff-edge exit from the bloc.

"The absence of an election on the scheduled timetable of 2020 makes it easier for May to win domestic approval for a transitional deal," said Mujtaba Rahman, Europe director with Eurasia Group, a London-based consultancy.

—Anton Troianovski in Berlin contributed to this article

Write to Laurence Norman at laurence.norman@wsj.com and Valentina Pop at valentina.pop@wsj.com



The big questions as Britain's Theresa May calls for new elections

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

she may desire direct validation from voters.

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British Prime Minister Theresa May stunned her nation on Tuesday with a call for a snap election on June 8. May's bid requires approval by two-thirds of Parliament — a vote that is likely a formality. If it goes ahead, it will mark Britain's third general election in two years, following parliamentary elections in 2015 and Britain's Brexit referendum last June.

Why is there yet another election now?

In remarks delivered outside 10 Downing Street, May said her government needed a new mandate as Britain enters tense negotiations with the European Union over the terms of departure from the bloc. May only became prime minister after her predecessor, David Cameron, resigned last year in the wake of the Brexit referendum, and

"I have concluded the only way to guarantee certainty and stability for the years ahead is to hold this election and seek your support for the decisions I have to make," said May.

Why did May change her mind?

As my colleague Adam Taylor observed, the move contradicts repeated statements from May that elections would only be held when Parliament's term expires in 2020. But May, it seems, could be sensing political opportunity. Her Conservatives command a slender majority of 17 seats in Parliament, but opinion polls show May's popularity rising and the Conservatives in a strong position to extend that margin — particularly at the expense of a Labour Party in disarray. It also helps to stage the vote before a divided British public further reckons with the price of leaving Europe.

"We need a general election, and we need one now," said May, "because we have at this moment a one-off chance to get this done while the European Union agrees its

negotiating position and before the detailed talks begin."

What does it mean for Brexit?

If May and the Conservatives win big — as many expect — then the election would strengthen her hand as she knuckles down for talks with Brussels and seeks what's been dubbed a "hard Brexit" — abandoning access to the European single market and many other E.U. privileges. If opposition parties do well, it may temper those negotiations and force May into concessions. But what is unlikely to happen in any scenario is a reversal of Brexit.

"May has seized on this moment to reset her clock as Brexit negotiations get underway, but the dynamics just aren't there to redo last year's referendum," explained my colleague Michael Birnbaum. "There's no single leader who could rally anti-Brexit voices in a credible threat to May. How bad is it? Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's reaction to the snap elections avoided any mention of Brexit, Britain's central political issue this generation, in a sign of his fears that trying to reverse the 2016 decision could alienate a big part of his base."

What's wrong with Labour?

The leading opposition party is a mess and could be on track for its worst electoral showing since 1918. In each of the previous national elections, it saw some of its working-class base drift away toward pro-Brexit, anti-immigrant platforms. A by-election in February for a constituency in northern England seemed a grim bellwether: The seat, which had been in Labour hands since 1935, was won by a Conservative candidate.

Part of the problem rests in the profile of the current party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, a staunch leftist who spent months locked in internecine conflict with Labour's more moderate wing. "A recent poll showed that, in a head-to-head matchup between May and Corbyn, not even a majority of Labour voters would want Corbyn as their prime minister," reported my colleague Karla Adam.

Corbyn has been lukewarm in his opposition to Brexit. On Tuesday, he supported May's decision for fresh elections, but he now faces another backlash within his party, as some Labour members of Parliament urged him to

reconsider acquiescing to the prime minister's cynical political calculation.

Can any other party challenge May?

Not really. The far-right United Kingdom Independence Party, which once led the calls for Brexit, has seen much of its *raison d'être* co-opted by the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats, decimated in the 2015 election, are hoping to reassert themselves.

"If you want to avoid a disastrous 'hard Brexit.' If you want to keep Britain in the single market. If you want a Britain that is open, tolerant and united, this is your chance," said Lib Dem party leader Tim Farron. But even if they do gain ground, it'll likely be as much to the detriment of Labour as the Conservatives.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

And what about Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon, the leader of Scottish National Party, said May's decision to call for an election was a "huge political miscalculation." But her party is expected to retain its dominance over Scotland's seats in Westminster and may be even more emboldened to push for a renewed independence bid.

May turned down a request by Sturgeon last month for a second independence referendum in Scotland "on the basis that it would be irresponsible to hold such a vote when the terms of Brexit were not yet clear," the Economist observed.

"It is hard to see why the same cannot be said of holding a general election now in Britain."

Meanwhile, a new general election may further deepen an ongoing political crisis in Northern Ireland.

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Bloomberg

Editorial : Theresa May's Brexit Gamble

The Editors

With her decision to call an election in June, Theresa May becomes the second consecutive U.K. prime minister to take a gamble with Brexit. Her decision need not prove as disastrous as David Cameron's, however -- especially if she runs the right kind of campaign.

May has reason to ask voters for her own mandate as leader of the government. Recall that she succeeded Cameron, who was forced to resign last year after voters approved Brexit. Up until then, the Conservative government, including May, had favored remaining in the European Union. After the country voted to leave, its task under new leadership was to negotiate a separation on the best possible terms. In principle that justifies an

early election, and May could have saved herself some political grief by not promising, as she did, that there wouldn't be one.

But asking for a mandate does not give her the right to shut down opposition to the government's approach to Brexit. May says the country is coming together, but Westminster is not. Her critics in parliament are making her task more difficult: The point of the election, she implies, is to shut them up.

The country is, in fact, bitterly divided over Brexit. And the problem with the opposition's stance on Brexit is not that it exists, but that it has been too angry and bewildered to exert any useful effect.

Brexit is happening. The country has voted to leave the EU and formal

notice has now been served on the other members. But the full consequences of this choice are still much in doubt, and will depend in part on the demands the U.K. makes during the exit talks. Those demands -- including the country's so-called red lines on issues such as immigration and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice -- should not be hoisted out of the political realm. And by the way, whatever the election's outcome, they won't be. May is wrong to want this, and wrong to think she can get it.

QuickTake Why Britain Voted to Quit the EU

The best result would be an election in which the government's goals for Brexit are tested and come into clearer focus. If May's tactical

calculation is correct, a show of strong support for that position might then allow her to deal with the EU more confidently. Conceivably, the prospect of an electoral contest might also channel her critics' arguments in more productive directions -- accepting that Brexit will happen, and concentrating on winning the most favorable terms.

The election will serve a valuable purpose, in other words, if it makes Britain a little more pragmatic and a little less divided. But as Cameron discovered, votes don't always promote consensus, and they don't always go as planned.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : Theresa May's Election Opportunity

April 18, 2017
2:46 p.m. ET 37

COMMENTS

Theresa May surprised her countrymen Tuesday by calling for a new British election on June 8, and it's a reasonable if daring bet. The Prime Minister wants a new and larger majority in Parliament as she negotiates Britain's departure from the European Union. Let's hope she uses the campaign to offer a vision for a competitive Britain that meets the post-Brexit challenge.

The next election wasn't scheduled until 2020, and the safer play was to negotiate Brexit first. But Mrs. May is still living with David Cameron's pre-Brexit Tory majority, and she figures she'll be in a stronger negotiating position if she can win a larger majority in her own right. You have to admire her nerve, and her faith in democracy, especially in this era of populist surprises.

Mrs. May continues to be popular since taking over from Mr. Cameron

last year, and her Tories lead in the polls. Markets reacted well to Mrs. May's election news, with the pound rising on expectations that she will be able to grow the current 17-seat Tory majority.

She is also striking when the Labour Party is divided under Jeremy Corbyn. The unreconstructed socialist is nostalgic for nationalized railroads and a union-dominated economy that modern Britain long ago left behind. His foreign policy is of the global left, with a soft spot for Hamas and dislike for NATO. Many Labour MPs think Mr. Corbyn didn't do enough to fight Brexit last year, so he has his own challenge laying out a coherent post-Brexit policy.

Then again, anything can happen in a democracy, especially these days. Britain has more than a little post-Brexit anxiety and even buyer's remorse. Some of this is the uncertainty of change but some relates to real economic developments since the Brexit vote.

The plunge in the pound since last summer is expected to push inflation above 3% this year. Wages aren't keeping up, and households feel the squeeze. Business confidence is flagging as the EU's line on trade talks has hardened and the difficulty of concluding other trade deals comes into focus. Separatism is flaring again in Scotland.

Mrs. May's challenge amid this ferment will be articulating a vision of what Brexit is for. Economic liberalizers supported Brexit as a way to free Britain from EU statism, but that hasn't been Mrs. May's governing identity. She has been offering a form of Christian-democratic solidarity instead of Thatcherite reform and a new dynamic Britain. Immigration restrictionists supported Brexit to preserve Britain's national identity, but Mrs. May now admits Britain will continue to need immigrants.

Mrs. May is hoping an election victory will help her transcend those differences and present a united

Tory government in talks with the EU. But to win that majority she'll need to offer a vision of a greater Britain than the kind of communitarian conservatism she has offered so far. Her politics is dominating the political center in Britain, thanks in part to Mr. Corbyn's incompetence and radicalism.

But the economic and political challenges of Brexit are so formidable that Mrs. May will need to challenge the public to take risks to meet the competitive moment. Britain can't succeed as a solo version of the EU welfare state. It can only prosper post-Brexit if it becomes a mecca for investment and human capital. Mrs. May wants a mandate to negotiate, but she'll be in a stronger position if she also has a mandate for pro-growth reform. She should ask for it.

Appeared in the Apr. 19, 2017, print edition.

As More Migrants Die at Sea, EU and Aid Groups Are at Odds on Approach

Drew Hinshaw and Pietro Lombardi

April 18, 2017 6:00 a.m. ET

ROME—Emergency crews near the shores of Libya are confronting a grim paradox: There have never been so many rescue boats along the sea passage to Italy. Yet never before have so many people been dying there.

Three years into an all-out push to stop fatalities in the central Mediterranean Sea, it remains the world's deadliest migration route. Despite efforts by dozens of governments, navies, international organizations and aid agencies, smuggling practices have become more hazardous on Europe's southern waters. Some 4,500 people died there last year, a toll 2017 is on track to surpass.

Those lost lives are sparking recriminations over who is to blame, pitting aid groups that say there aren't enough rescuers on the sea against European officials who say there may be too many. Both sides agree the number of people crossing and dying in the central Mediterranean is set to break another record this year. Last year, about 180,000 crossed over. So far this year, arrivals are up almost 24% from the same period in 2016.

Increasingly, rescued migrants are carried to Italy by aid agencies like Doctors Without Borders. Such NGOs rescued nearly 47,000 migrants last year and were involved in about a quarter of all operations. This year, they have been involved in about a third. International conventions require rescued migrants to be brought to a safe country

Aid groups fault the European Union for deploying too few rescue boats, too far from Libyan waters. The NGOs say if they weren't there, even more people would die.

EU officials, however, have been pursuing an explicit policy of staying away from the coast to avoid encouraging more migrants to undertake the perilous passage. So many aid agencies are now sailing so close to Libya, the EU argues, that they may be acting as a pull factor for migrants and a boon for smugglers sending out rubber boats.

The recriminations show how divisions between Europe's humanitarians and its border patrols are enabling the very traffic they all want to stop. For years, the two sides have debated where and how ships should respond. Meanwhile, thousands have died.

"If they keep arguing instead of working together, smugglers will be able to work almost unhindered," said Alfonso Giordano, professor of political geography at Rome's LUISS University.

The death rate is rising, all sides agree, in part because smugglers are using more treacherous boats. Smugglers are stripping engines from dinghies mid-journey, authorities say, stranding horrified migrants at sea. More crossings are taking place at night and in extreme weather. Boats are often so packed there wouldn't be room to wear life jackets even if anybody had one.

This is happening, some officials argue, because smugglers know their boats only need to make it to the line of rescue ships sitting just offshore. EU border agency Frontex says smugglers sometimes give the

migrants phones with the NGOs' numbers already programmed in.

"We have never had so many vessels deployed to save lives and we have never had so many deaths," said Fabrice Leggeri, head of Frontex.

In contrast, the NGOs say smugglers are behaving more dangerously because an EU naval patrol has destroyed more than 400 of their boats. That practice, they say, discourages cartels from investing in supplies they figure they are bound to lose at sea anyway. Life in Libya, they add, has become so horrible that many migrants are willing to board hopelessly treacherous boats to escape.

"Often, all of the women have been raped," said spokeswoman Laura Lanuza for rescue agency Proactiva Open Arms. "They don't mind if they die finally in the sea, honestly, because they can't stand to be in Libya anymore."

Two years ago, Frontex unveiled a program to stop the deadly passage. It planned for Italy's navy to end its roughly \$10-million-a-month rescue missions along Libya's shore. In their place, the EU dispatched patrol boats closer to the Italian coast, far from Libya.

The EU sought to make the crossing more difficult so people would stop attempting it, bringing down deaths overall, according to an EU report on the patrols. It warned, however, that the void could risk higher fatalities, at least at first, it said.

The plan didn't go as hoped, Frontex now says. Some 500,000 people have crossed since then, and 11,200 died trying. Italy's maritime emergency center has

continued to get distress calls virtually every day from migrants on stranded dinghies.

It is a crime under international maritime law to ignore such alerts. So when no rescue ship is nearby, the emergency center is obliged to send the next nearest ship.

Often that has meant calling on container ships so enormous they often pose a danger to the boats they are trying to save. In April 2015, more than 800 people died when a dinghy drove into the cargo ship coming to rescue it. A similar incident killed 400 a week earlier.

The procedures have infuriated commercial shippers. "We feel very strongly that as long as Europe is in charge of the rescue organization, we're never going to see a resolution," said Peter Hinchliffe, Secretary-General of the London-based International Chamber of Shipping, which has asked the United Nations to send rescuers.

Cargo ships also lack medical staff and supplies, one reason why NGOs say they have stepped in. Nearly every dinghy has a medical emergency on board, they say: Refugees are arriving with chemical burns and fresh torture wounds from kidnapping gangs in Libya. Four times this year, a passenger gave birth at sea.

"We are the ones saving lives," said Stefano Argenziano, director of search operations for Doctors Without Borders. "They're blaming the firefighter for the fire."

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

Already Unwelcoming, Hungary Now Detains Asylum Seekers (UNE)

Rick Lyman

HORGOS, Serbia — Double rows of razor-wire fences. High-tech watch towers equipped with search lights, motion sensors, cameras and loudspeakers. Hungary's border with Serbia, specially fortified in the last two years to keep out migrants and refugees, is anything but a welcome mat.

Now, add to those deterrents detention camps — small container villages surrounded by razor wire, with a tiny playground for children.

Hungary, which already had one of the toughest immigration policies in the European Union, last month rolled out a draconian new asylum

procedure that will reduce applicants to a trickle — 10 people a day — and essentially put them in prison camps for months while their cases are decided. Even after that, if the recent past holds true, more than 90 percent are likely to be rejected.

By May, several hundred asylum seekers already in Hungary may also be relocated to the detention camps, evoking ugly and unavoidable echoes of rounding up Jews, Roma and others during World War II.

But if Hungary's authoritarian prime minister, Viktor Orban, provoked a loud outcry from his European peers by slapping up a razor-wire border

fence two years ago as hundreds of thousands of migrants flooded into Europe, this time the condemnation, at least from his political peers, is more muted.

It is a measure of just how much the winds have shifted in his favor and against asylum seekers in Europe as nationalist, populist, far-right movements present a potent threat in a year filled with important elections, next in France and Germany.

If anything these days, Mr. Orban feels a sense of vindication and insists that the rest of Europe is coming around to his approach. He may be right.

Vast crowds of migrants, like those in the chaotic scenes at Hungary's border with Serbia in 2015, are a thing of the past.

Frontex, the European Union's external border control agency, has stepped up boat patrols in the Mediterranean to choke off the flow of migrants, particularly from Turkey to Greece.

Roszke, Hungary, is home to one of two new transit zones where asylum seekers are detained. Each of the two zones admits five people a day. Akos Stiller for The New York Times

The Greek authorities are holding thousands of migrants who crossed last year at camps on Greek islands,

under sometimes difficult conditions, while their asylum applications are processed.

All of these measures have effectively squelched much of the traffic along the so-called Balkan route used by an estimated 764,000 migrants to enter Europe in 2015. In the first two months of this year, only 2,448 people tried to cross illegally using the same route, Frontex said.

"The Balkan route is basically closed," said Erno Simon, a spokesman for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Budapest.

If that message has not already been received, Hungary's new policies are intended to make it crystal clear.

The Orban government is training thousands of new "border hunters," even amid persistent charges of Hungarian police officers' brutalizing migrants. The charges mirror complaints in Bulgaria, Croatia and other states on the fringe of the European Union.

Under Hungary's new procedure, asylum seekers will be detained in two transit zones and housed in trailers. Capacity is currently about 500, with room to grow.

Hungary has steadily cut the number allowed into the transit zones from Serbia, citing processing capacity and the need for more stringent security checks to make sure no terrorists slip through.

The number allowed in will now be limited to five people a day at each of the two camps, and only on weekdays — a total of 50 people per week — with families given priority.

"They have done everything in their power to deter people from coming in and to make it difficult for people who do get in," said Lydia Gall, a Budapest lawyer and researcher for Human Rights Watch.

But Balazs Orban, head of research at Szazadveg Group, a pro-government research organization, says there are signs that Western leaders are starting to believe that the prime minister's tough approach two years ago was the proper one.

Double rows of razor-wire fences at the Hungary-Serbia border. Akos Stiller for The New York Times

He pointed to the agreement in principle at a European Union meeting in Malta this year to set up a big refugee camp in Libya, to hold asylum seekers while their cases are decided. That follows essentially the same principle as Hungary's transit zones, said Mr. Orban, no relation to the prime minister.

"The migrant pressure will be so huge in the next decade, we must create a system that stops them at the border," he added.

"What the Germans did, allowing a million migrants into their country, is against common sense," Mr. Orban said. "But what the Hungarians did is in line with common sense. More people are beginning to realize this."

In a recent interview on state radio, Viktor Orban said, "Whoever is right before all the others is considered to be a heretic."

That doesn't necessarily mean that refugees and economic migrants will stop coming.

An estimated 8,000 asylum seekers now wait in Serbia for permission to cross into Hungary. Hundreds more hide in forests and in informal camps, hoping for an opportunity to cross illegally. Many more are expected as the weather warms.

"I do not try to cross illegally," said Mohammed Wafa Sekendari, who left Afghanistan with his family a year and a half ago hoping for a fresh life in Europe, only to end up in a tent camp just feet from the entrance to one of Hungary's new transit zones.

"I want to do everything legal, to follow all the rules, so when I arrive in Germany, my family and I no longer need to hide," he said.

Mr. Orban denies charges from refugee advocates that Hungary's new policy violates international law and European Union rules. But his government has strictly controlled access to the camps and would not allow journalists to enter, saying that it was only safeguarding the refugees' privacy.

In most countries, asylum seekers are usually allowed to come and go freely, even if housed in immigration centers. Previously, that was the case in Hungary, too, though many walked away, continuing their journey to Western Europe.

In that regard, Mr. Orban's tougher new policy has taken the migratory pressure off his European Union partners, while allowing them to condemn him anyway.

An estimated 8,000 asylum seekers are waiting in Serbia for permission to cross into Hungary. Akos Stiller for The New York Times

As for the several hundred asylum seekers already living in Hungary, government officials say they will be taken to the new border camps as well.

"If they come for me, they come," said Nazari Khalid, 22, an Afghan who arrived in Hungary a year ago and lives in a homeless shelter in Budapest. "I don't care. Here in Hungary, you get no money, no food, no work. At least in jail they give you food."

For those who try crossing illegally, the costs — and the chance of capture — have risen. Human smugglers now charge \$2,000 or more to get from Belgrade, Serbia, to Budapest. In 2015, the cost was about \$400.

Today, about 150 people live in a camp outside Subotica, one of 17

such camps in Serbia where refugees must come to get their names put on a list to be allowed into Hungary.

Every Friday, Hungarian officials hand across the border to their Serbian counterparts an orderly schedule for the following week, handwritten on a torn sheet of notebook paper, detailing which refugee families will be admitted to which transit zone on which day.

But with only 10 people admitted per day, and thousands still waiting in Serbia, refugee officials are worried.

"We are preparing for big problems this summer when the Hungarians start rejecting applications under the new system and pushing back these families," said Norbert Gyori, one of the Serbian officials running the Subotica camp.

Among the lucky ones on a recent day were Mr. Sekendari and four of his children, who arrived at a transit zone with their tattered possessions after being given a day's notice.

Mr. Sekendari and his children packed their belongings at a tent camp in Horgos, Serbia, before crossing into Hungary. Akos Stiller for The New York Times

He became separated from his wife and two other children more than a year ago at the Turkish border and hasn't heard from them since. He hopes they are waiting for him in Germany.

One recent morning, a Hungarian official appeared at a nearby fence and called out. "It is time," Mr. Sekendari said to his children.

Slowly, they moved single-file across the sandy ground toward a metal turnstile at the edge of the transit zone. One by one, they disappeared over the border. None of them looked back.

INTERNATIONAL



Trump's 'Madman Theory' Isn't Strategic Unpredictability, It's Just Crazy

What worked for the president on the campaign trail is now becoming his greatest weakness. foreign-policy On the campaign trail, the media loved Donald Trump's unpredictability. What would the wacky candidate do next? It was an

approach he was keen to wield not only on the political stage but the global one, calling for an “unpredictable” foreign policy. “We are totally predictable. We tell everything. We’re sending troops? We tell them. We’re sending something else? We have a news conference. We have to be unpredictable, and we have to be unpredictable starting now,” he said in an April 2016 speech.

Recent weeks have seen a renewed focus on this pledge, with Trump switching positions almost by the day. Trump declared that NATO, despite his earlier claims, is “no longer obsolete.” He won’t declare China a currency manipulator. Despite months (and even years) of calling for cooperation with Syria and Russia to combat the Islamic State, and for an “America First” doctrine skeptical of the value of international norms, Trump ordered a cruise missile strike on Syria’s Shayrat air base in retaliation for the Bashar al-Assad regime’s apparent use of chemical weapons against civilians. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., now visibly disagree on whether the administration will resume Barack Obama’s policy of demanding Assad’s removal from power.

Reversals and shifts are far from unprecedented. New administrations often adjust their policies to deal with the complex realities of international affairs or with changing tides in domestic politics. But few of these have openly sung the praises of unpredictability or contradicted themselves with such abandon as the Trump administration. The president and his supporters argue that having a reputation for being unpredictable will make others think twice before messing with the United States.

But unpredictability isn’t a strength. For a great power such as America, it’s a recipe for instability, confusion, and self-inflicted harm to U.S. interests abroad.

Some commentators link Trump’s championing of unpredictability to the so-called “madman theory” of Richard Nixon’s attempt to persuade rivals — including the North Vietnamese and the Soviet Union — that he was impulsive and unpredictable. Neither Hanoi nor Moscow was ever entirely convinced by Nixon’s stance. But the madman theory also wasn’t about Trumpian unpredictability. Nixon wanted to convince his adversaries that he was irrational, but consistent, when it came to calculating the downsides of using force.

Consider nuclear brinkmanship during the Cold War. A “rational” leader would never risk nuclear oblivion over an issue of minor importance. It is, in fact, difficult to imagine any particular dispute being worth nuclear Armageddon, especially one that does not directly threaten the American homeland. That left some questioning the value of the deterrent at all.

So how do you make it credible that the United States will risk a nuclear exchange over West Germany or Japan, let alone, as Nixon toyed with, Vietnam or Israel? Nixon thought that it might help create the impression that he was irrational — but in the sense of being prone to impulsive and disproportionate actions without thinking about the costs. There was nothing unpredictable about his underlying policy preferences or goals.

The strategy was attractive, in large part, because some of the situations Nixon faced did not lend themselves to standard solutions. In the context of nuclear deterrence and coercion — which was central to Nixon’s calculations — the textbook approach is to make a nuclear response more or less automatic. Such policies are ways of approximating the act of “throwing the steering wheel out the window” in a game of chicken. They show your opponent that you can’t swerve out of the way — that you will, metaphorically or literally, fight to the death.

There was no guarantee that the United States would go nuclear over Berlin, but the U.S. troop presence in the city made clear that Washington would be under enormous pressure to “do something” following thousands of American deaths. It left multiple pathways through which an attack on Berlin might spiral out of control. As famed nuclear theorist Thomas Schelling noted of the garrison in Berlin, “What can 7,000 American troops do, or 12,000 Allied troops? Bluntly, they can die. They can die heroically, dramatically, and in a manner that guarantees that the action cannot stop there.”

The “tripwire” of an outmatched U.S. presence in Berlin therefore enhanced deterrence. By placing its troops in a place where they might be easily sacrificed, Washington showed it simply had no other option than escalating the conflict. While we might associate such behavior with a crazy person, it is *the exact opposite of unpredictability*. Throwing the steering wheel out the window makes the outcome of failing to swerve totally predictable.

In sharp contrast, Trumpian unpredictability often undermines

coercive diplomacy. What would have happened if the Trump administration had made clear that the use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria would result in American military action? Or if Trump and his closest advisors hadn’t repeatedly signaled that they would rather work with Assad than against him? We will never know. But an unambiguous threat to retaliate *might* have deterred the use of chemical weapons in the first place.

Seen from this perspective, the American strike looks like a failure of coercive diplomacy, not a success. While Trump demonstrated his willingness to use force by attacking the Shayrat air base, the only way that the attack will reduce the chances of the Assad regime using chemical weapons in the future is if it believes that Trump is predictable and that any future use will cause another strike.

Similarly, leaks from the administration suggested that if Pyongyang tested a nuclear device last weekend, then the United States would launch military action against North Korea. Other members of the administration walked back those threats, creating — at least in public — significant ambiguity about possible American actions. On Monday, Vice President Mike Pence warned that North Korea should not test American resolve but that the United States is open to talks. Let’s say that Trump does, in fact, intend to retaliate if North Korea tests another nuclear device. The unpredictability of the situation likely makes Pyongyang more, not less, likely to initiate a test. After all, it cannot be sure that Trump would, in fact, use force.

There are situations where this might benefit American policymakers. If Washington wants to deter an adversary, but does not actually want to use force, then leaving the threat ambiguous reduces the political costs of backing down, stopping opponents at home from accusing you of chickening out of enforcing a supposed red line. If the goal is to keep an adversary from taking any provocative steps — even those short of what you consider worth using force or imposing sanctions over — then introducing some unpredictability about what would trigger a response might be a good idea.

The problem is that ambiguity might encourage the adversary to probe your resolve and test the limits of your interests while making it more difficult to clearly signal that a particular move is a step too far and will credibly invite retaliation. For

example, in the absence of clear signals about what the United States is and is not willing to tolerate, and faced with mixed signals about American interests, Pyongyang might be tempted to initiate a series of low-level incidents designed to test the limits of U.S. tolerance. It is easy to imagine one of those actions, like the downing or seizure of a naval vessel or drone, crossing a line that prompts a forceful response to the perceived affront. The irony in such a scenario is that Pyongyang might steer clear of these actions if it could predict with some confidence how the United States would react.

The trade-offs around strategic ambiguity are difficult, but Trumpian unpredictability seems not to take account of them at all. No rational policy calculation for the United States favors sudden policy reversals, a failure to communicate consistent interests or preferences, consistently mixed signals, or any of the other forms of “flexibility” now on the table. Trump’s unpredictability is a strategy that carries more benefits for weak states facing vastly superior foes.

Indeed, Trump might make more sense if he were North Korea’s leader, not America’s. On the classic sitcom *Malcolm in the Middle*, the father, Hal, explains the strategy of schoolyard fights to his sons: “Crazy beats big every time.” Crazies fight harder and dirtier and care less about consequences. North Korea certainly derives some benefit from the common perception that its leaders are crazy. The United States has the ability to utterly annihilate North Korea a few times over. But the simple risk that “crazy” North Korea would be willing to risk total destruction, carrying large portions of South Korea and the U.S. garrison there with it, has contributed to deterring Washington from preventive action in the peninsula.

But the United States, in this scenario, is one of the big kids on the schoolyard. With the limited exception of the other nuclear great powers, Washington can inflict far more damage — economic, diplomatic, or military — on any other state than they can impose on the United States. Some of that outsized power derives directly from America’s vast network of allies and strategic partners, which no rival comes close to matching.

Thus, for the United States, unpredictability carries enormous risks. That’s true for Nixonian calculated irrationality, too, but much more so for Trumpian unpredictability. Rivals and allies can easily interpret mixed signals from different voices in the

administration and frequent high-profile policy reversals as evidence that the president does not mean what he says, that he has no idea what he is doing, or that he can change his mind on a whim. Intentionally fostering uncertainty reduces the credibility of existing commitments.

Unraveling the American alliance network by undermining confidence in Washington is probably the worst way to implement an America First

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Gordon Lubold

Updated April 18, 2017 12:05 p.m. ET

RIYADH—U. S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis arrived Tuesday in Saudi Arabia at the start of a five-nation tour of the Middle East and North Africa aimed at pressing for a political settlement of the war in Yemen and solidifying counterterrorism efforts with American allies in the region.

In the Saudi capital Riyadh, he will meet Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, as well as the defense minister, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. In addition to operations in Yemen, Mr. Mattis will discuss conflicts in Syria and elsewhere in the region, according to U.S. defense officials.

At the start of a trip that will also take him to Cairo; Tel Aviv; Djibouti; and Doha, Qatar, Mr. Mattis called the Saudis a “pillar of our security framework” and said he would discuss with Saudi officials ways to “deepen and broaden” Washington’s strategic relationship with Riyadh.

As a former Marine general and

policy. It undercuts a major source of American strength without gaining the benefits that might follow from strategic retrenchment — that is, of making deliberate decisions about what commitments are key to American security and which can be shed, while taking steps to ensure that unwinding those commitments don’t harm vital interests and alliances.

Trumpian unpredictability creates more problems than solutions.

Pentagon Chief Arrives in Middle East to Talk Yemen, Counterterrorism

head of U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. military operations in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, Mr. Mattis is no stranger to the region. But he is the first senior cabinet member in the Trump administration to embark on a regional tour here, as it faces decisions over how to address conflicts in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, as well as in Afghanistan.

Mr. Mattis is accompanied by newly appointed Deputy National Security Adviser Dina Powell, a former Goldman Sachs executive who previously worked for the administration of George W. Bush.

On his arrival in Riyadh, Mr. Mattis stressed the need for cooperation among regional powers to tamp down threats in an increasingly dangerous world. Referring to the U.S. confrontation with North Korea in recent days, he said the country’s leader Kim Jong Un “again recklessly tried to provoke something” by attempting a missile launch over the weekend the blew up seconds after liftoff.

“It shows why we’re working so closely right now with the Chinese” to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, he said. “China and the

Playing crazy may sometimes be an attractive strategy, especially for weaker actors that have a narrow set of minimalist goals — like survival or autonomy. But if a state has more expansive goals, and ample resources to pursue them, as does the United States, unpredictability is a poor approach to grand strategy. It is hard for others to follow your lead when they don’t know what your goals are.

United States, South Korea, Japan, we all share that same interest.”

The U.S. has gradually increased its support for the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen, providing intelligence, logistics and training for forces from the kingdom and the United Arab Emirates fighting both the country’s Houthi rebels and al Qaeda’s local affiliate.

Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan are also members of the coalition.

The U.S. has said the affiliate, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, poses a more serious threat to the U.S. homeland than does Islamic State, which a U.S.-led international coalition is combating in Iraq and Syria.

Mr. Mattis declined to provide specifics about what additional support the U.S. might provide Saudi Arabia in Yemen, instead suggesting that its primary focus is to push for a United Nations-brokered peace deal in the two-year-old conflict.

“Our goal is for that crisis, that ongoing fight, [to] be put in front of a U.N.-brokered negotiating team and try to resolve this politically as soon

Partners are less likely to stand by your side if they lack confidence that you will stand by theirs. If Trump wants America to remain a dominant power, and wants others to respect American interests around the world, he needs to bolster American credibility. This requires a good measure of predictability, not the attitudes of an unpredictable rogue state.

as possible,” he told reporters accompanying him on Monday.

“It has gone on for a long time...we see Iranian-supplied missiles being fired by the Houthis into Saudi Arabia, and this is something with the number of innocent people dying inside Yemen that has simply got to be brought to an end.”

The Houthis have acknowledged receiving Iranian political support but have repeatedly denied getting arms from Tehran.

Mr. Trump authorized a risky raid in central Yemen to collect intelligence weeks after assuming office in January, the result of a deepening relationship with the Emirati and Saudi forces leading the fight.

A Navy SEAL was killed—the first combat death of Mr. Trump’s administration—and a \$70 million U.S. aircraft was destroyed in the mission. The raid also resulted in several civilian casualties.

U.S. officials have maintained the raid yielded significant intelligence on AQAP.

Write to Gordon Lubold at Gordon.Lubold@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Saeed Shah in Islamabad, Pakistan, and Margherita Stancati in Dubai

April 18, 2017 12:27 p.m. ET

A Saudi-led coalition force of 41 countries is now taking shape and has found a focus: protecting member nations against the threat from Islamic State as the militant group’s strongholds in Iraq and Syria disintegrate.

The coalition, sometimes referred to as the “Muslim NATO,” is expected to have its first substantive meeting over the next few months in Riyadh when defense ministers from member states, from Morocco to

Saudi-Led Antiterror Coalition Sharpens Its Focus

Malaysia, will gather to agree on its structure and mission.

However, these are Sunni-majority nations and absent from the alliance is Saudi Arabia’s major rival in the Middle East, Shiite powerhouse Iran, which sees the grouping as a sectarian show of force.

The new coalition—concerned over where in the Middle East and Africa militants from Islamic State could lodge themselves as their “caliphate” in Iraq and Syria collapses—will set up a mobile military force to aid member countries that don’t have strong counterterrorism capabilities. It also will battle other jihadist groups spilling out of war-torn Libya and

Yemen, and Boko Haram in west Africa.

Under pressure from Riyadh, close ally Pakistan will provide a separate force of some 5,000 men to Saudi Arabia to help guard its vulnerable south, close to the border with Yemen, Pakistani officials said, a deployment yet to be announced.

At Saudi request, the coalition force will be led by the former head of Pakistan’s army, Gen. Raheel Sharif, said Pakistani officials. Gen. Sharif was lauded for taking the fight to Pakistani militants.

Pakistan, which borders Iran, had previously said it wanted to focus on its battle with terrorism at home and

stay out of the big confrontation in the Middle East between Riyadh and Tehran, aspirations that will be challenged by its participation in the coalition. Two years ago, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations reacted angrily when Pakistan refused to join their continuing war in Yemen.

Pakistani officials are treading carefully out of concern their latest moves could raise tensions with Iran.

“This alliance is against terrorism, especially to help those countries which are threatened, but don’t have the necessary wherewithal to combat terrorists,” said Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Pakistan’s

defense minister, in an interview. "We will not act against Iran."

However, experts say that the coalition will inevitably antagonize Tehran. The Saudis also see Iranian-backed groups as terrorists.

"They [Saudis] live in fear of Iranian expansionism. And when they realized they couldn't rely on the U.S., they turned to allies who have armies," said a Gulf-based Western diplomat. "They wanted their Sunni neighbors to help defend them from Iran. They turned to Pakistan and Egypt—Sunni countries that have armies."

The military component is the central focus of the alliance, which officials say is expected to be fully operational by year's end. Its command and control center, based in Riyadh, recently began hiring staff. It will also seek to boost cooperation to combat extremist ideology and terror financing.

"All countries will put effort into combating terrorism in the member countries, regardless of the nature of the terror groups. That is the

main goal," said Maj. Gen. Ahmed Asiri, an adviser to Saudi Arabia's minister of defense who is involved in assembling the new alliance. "Each country has its own expertise that it can contribute to the coalition."

The alliance isn't restricted to confronting terror groups like Islamic State and al Qaeda, said Gen. Asiri. In response to a request from a member state, he said the coalition could move against rebel groups and militias that pose a threat to member countries such as Yemen's Houthis, which is supported by Iran.

Iran's ambassador to Islamabad, Mehdi Honardoost, said this month that he had protested Gen. Sharif's appointment to Pakistan and that Muslim countries "should come together to form a coalition of peace to resolve their issues rather forming a controversial military alliance."

Riyadh has pursued a more muscular foreign policy under the leadership of King Salman, partly a

response to its growing frustration with the regional policy of its most important strategic ally, the U.S. Ties between the longstanding allies soured under the presidency of Barack Obama, largely over Washington's outreach to Iran.

President Donald Trump has since embraced closer cooperation with Riyadh, stepping up its support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, and it has vowed to take a harder line against Iran.

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis arrived in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, the first stop of an official trip "to engage with strategic partners in the Middle East and Africa, and to discuss cooperative effort to counter destabilizing activities and defeat extremist terror organizations," according to the Pentagon.

The coalition will be run by a council of member defense ministers, with a rotating chair, meaning that decisions shouldn't be in Saudi Arabia's hands alone, Pakistani officials said. It is expected to have a charter. The coalition will have a

relatively small but well-equipped military force, and it could call upon forces stationed in member countries and possibly recruit mercenaries, they said.

Pakistan currently has about 1,200 soldiers stationed in Saudi Arabia, mainly to train Saudi forces. The brigade that is now poised to be dispatched will be an operational deployment, aimed at protecting installations against terrorism and repelling any incursion into Saudi Arabia.

The Pakistan military spokesman Maj. Gen. Asif Ghafoor said any Pakistani troops sent "shall only be for employment within Saudi Arabia". He added that "we will not filter soldiers to send a particular sect only."

Write to Saeed Shah at saeed.shah@wsj.com and Margherita Stancati at margherita.stancati@wsj.com

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Ambassador Al-Saud : Saudis Know That U.S. Power Can Bring Lasting Peace

Abdullah Al-Saud

April 18, 2017 6:44 p.m. ET

President Trump's decision to order missile strikes in Syria earlier this month, along with his statement that the country's future cannot include Bashar Assad, shows that the U.S. will not give the Assad regime and its allies a free hand. These moves instead have encouraged America's allies, including my country, Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. has been working closely with us for a long time to combat terror groups and to deter Iran and Hezbollah, often in ways the public doesn't see. Our support has been critical, but there are certain definitive actions that only the U.S. can take, certain voids that only the U.S. can fill.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands by our American ally, as we invariably have. We appreciate the many sacrifices the American people have made in our part of the world, and we understand their fatigue with combat. But the region is still very dangerous. Any perception that the U.S. lacks the resolve to act when necessary only encourages those who do not share America's noble values to step in.

This happened in Syria, where the Assad regime has waged unrelenting warfare on its people for

six years. The Syrian government—supported by Russia, Iran and its terrorist proxies in Hezbollah—has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians, created one of the worst refugee crises the world has ever witnessed, and facilitated the growth of Islamic State.

Iran continues to destabilize the region, both by stoking sectarian tensions and by aiding extremist groups. It is supporting subversive and terrorist activities in the Middle East and beyond, and it has even given sanctuary to the top-ranking leaders of al Qaeda.

Saudi Arabia is sandwiched between Iraq and Yemen, both of which are fighting to determine their future despite Iranian meddling. Iraq is in a struggle against ISIS while still trying to bridge the sectarian divides Tehran has been exploiting and provoking since the 1979 Iranian revolution. Yemen has been a base for attacks against Saudi Arabia. Its civil war—provoked, fueled and sustained by Iran—has cost thousands of lives while generating political and economic chaos.

Saudi Arabia and the U.S. have a shared view of the situation in the Middle East, and the major elements of our policies largely coincide. This augurs well for the possibility of bringing stability and

peace to the region, but we are in for a long slog.

In Syria, our policy is to ensure a diplomatic solution to the crisis through the implementation of the 2012 Geneva I Declaration, which calls for a "transitional government body" with full executive powers that would include members of the present Syrian government and the opposition. Saudi Arabia believes that a political solution and a peaceful transition of power cannot be obtained without the removal of Mr. Assad. The Syrian people cannot accept or believe in a peace with him in power.

Last year, we stated our willingness to commit ground forces to Syria should the U.S. decide to lead a ground campaign against ISIS. Our objective would be to liberate territory from these terrorists and ensure that such areas do not fall under the control of Iranian-backed sectarian militias or the Assad regime. Saudi Royal Air Force jets operating out of the Incirlik air base in southern Turkey have conducted more than 340 strikes against ISIS targets in Syria as of February.

In Yemen we have rolled back Iran's attempt to gain a foothold in the region and supported the forces of the elected government. We want the Houthis to commit to a political solution based on U.N. Security

Council Resolution 2216. This resolution requires the Houthis to withdraw from areas they have seized, relinquish their arms and cease all activities that properly belong to the government of Yemen.

Saudi Arabia is in the midst of a period of rapid modernization, and the quality of life of our people is our foremost concern. But that quality of life is at risk if we cannot make our region more secure. We will gladly bring our resources to bear on efforts to bring that about, but we have seen that it is only in working closely with the U.S. that our contribution can be truly effective.

We value our alliance with the U.S., and we believe that American power—and the demonstrated willingness to use it judiciously—can change the dynamics in the Middle East for the better. In the end, it is American power, reinforcing and complementing the work of America's allies in the region, that will bring stability and lasting peace.

Mr. Al-Saud is Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the U.S.

Appeared in the Apr. 19, 2017, print edition.



Rand Paul: McCain and Graham are blind to the risks in Syria

Rand Paul

Story highlights

- Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham have advocated for more US military intervention in Syria
- Sen. Rand Paul: This is a mistake -- we need a new foreign policy doctrine, which states we only intervene if it's in our national security interests

Rand Paul is the junior US senator from Kentucky. He serves on the Foreign Relations Committee and the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. The views expressed in this commentary are his own.

(CNN)Recently, Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham predictably but mistakenly called for greater United States military involvement in the Syrian civil war, proving they have learned nothing from our history in the Middle East.

It seems that every dictator and every atrocity in that region is met with a call for action without a thought to consequences. Those who wish to send our soldiers to "take care" of every atrocity in the world might want to take a glance at

Maplecroft's Human Rights Risk Atlas

, which currently lists 35 countries as extreme risks for committing atrocities. Are we prepared to send our military to right the wrongs of all 35 countries?

Of course, Americans were horrified by the use of chemical weapons in Syria on innocent people. But there are horrors all around the world, and surely the suggestion is not that we battle them all.

United States military action is not to be taken lightly. It should be thoughtful, measured, constitutional -- and decisive for a victory. For over two decades, we have acted as a traffic cop in the Middle East -- sanctions, bombings, no-fly zones, invasions, occupations, policing, nation-building.

American foreign policy now requires a dramatic shift. It must be governed by the question: What are our vital national security interests in the region?

President Trump was elected in no small measure because he

castigated

the previous administration for the disastrous and destabilizing Iraq War. He

lampooned

the Obama/Clinton decision to bomb Libya and send it into chaos. And Trump warned, rightfully, that Syria was a quagmire, ripe with opportunities for mistakes and catastrophic consequences to world peace.

For years, I have argued against intervention in the Syrian civil war, and I have done so under both Democrat and Republican presidents.

It isn't that there aren't atrocities. There are -- and on both sides of the war. But sometimes discerning the good guys from the bad is not possible. Sometimes, there is no good side in war.

Assad, like so many strong hands in the Middle East, is an autocrat and likely much worse. But some of the armies that fight him and seek his ouster are radical Islamic rebels allied with the worst elements on Earth -- al Nusra, al Qaeda and, yes, ISIS.

Furthermore, America has no national security interest in this war. It isn't clear that the Islamic rebels who would replace Assad would be friends of America. However, it is clear that the

2 million Christians

in Syria who are protected by Assad fear his ouster.

So why do my colleagues persist in their quest for more war and intervention? I don't know, but one quote from Senator McCain's

website

offers some clarity: "Our strategy cannot presume to separate the

fight against [ISIS] from the Syrian people's fight against the Assad regime. They are inextricably connected."

It is true that the fight against ISIS and the civil war in Syria are connected, but not in the way neocons infer. Overthrowing Assad may actually lead to an Islamist regime that finds common ground with ISIS, not America.

The neocons' worldview is warped and naïve. Neocons see military action as the first option, and they never look back to view the mayhem that follows.

In short, they either ignore or do not understand the unintended consequences of our military involvement in the Middle East.

Not only did neocons fail to anticipate that the Iraq War would embolden Iran, but they predicted the opposite -- that a yearning for democracy would transform the Middle East into a replica of the West.

They also insisted that the US, along with Qatar and Saudi Arabia, arm the Islamic rebels in Syria. While the arms were not decisive, they were just enough to keep the civil war alive -- just enough to push Assad back and create the vacuum in which ISIS grew and thrived.

In Libya, these same neocons argued

one year

to arm Gadhafi and argued the next year to depose him. I warned that deposing Gadhafi would lead to chaos, and it did. With the iron fist of Gadhafi gone, militant Islamic groups festered and grew, including ISIS. America is at greater risk of Libyan terrorism today than it was before the overthrow of Gadhafi.

The neocons were wrong about the war in Libya. They were wrong about the war in Iraq. And they are wrong about getting us further mired in the civil war in Syria. They've been wrong about every major intervention of the past two decades in the Middle East. Maybe it is time to quit listening to them.

Recently, I introduced

legislation

to ensure that no American weapons are given to terrorist groups, especially in Syria. You wouldn't think we would have to have legislation to prevent our own government from sending arms to terrorists, but there it is.

In fact, the Syrian civil war involves dozens of "rebel" groups fighting Assad and literally hundreds of splinter militias. One observer

reported

as many as 1,500 different groups fighting Assad.

McCain and Graham still argue we must depose Assad because Iran is on his side. Well, ISIS is on the other side. Which is worse? I don't know for sure, but I know neither are our friends, and neither should be treated as such.

McCain and Graham also argue that we must fight in Yemen because Iran supports the Houthis rebels. Yet one major group also fighting the Houthis is al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Is it possible that our involvement in Yemen could also lead to such chaos that al Qaeda picks up the pieces and exploits the vacuum much as ISIS did in Syria?

Any military action against Syria or Yemen must come with the consent of Congress. There are two reasons for this. The first and most obvious is that it is what our Constitution says, and we should follow it. But the second is because we need thoughtful debate. We need to examine consequences. We need to look at enemies and allies, actions and reactions.

Is military action in our vital interest? What goal do we have? Can it be achieved? What are the costs and consequences?

President Trump ran on an America First platform, advocating for less intervention in global affairs, and I support him on that. I hope he keeps to it, and I urge my colleagues in Congress to do their job and hold him to it.



U.S. Isn't Saying How Much Damage 'Mother of All Bombs' Did in Afghanistan

Mujib Mashal and Fahim Abed

KABUL, Afghanistan — Since the United States dropped the "mother of all bombs" on an Islamic State cave complex in eastern

Afghanistan on Thursday, American military officials have been circumspect about the bomb's damage, but one voice has been

filling the information vacuum in the region: Islamic State radio.

The reluctance of the United States to discuss casualties and other damage from the 22,000-pound

bomb concerns local officials in Nangarhar Province who supported the massive bomb after military officials said ground operations had failed to penetrate the Islamic State

stronghold in the mountains of the Achin district.

"I and other people have this concern — that why American forces are not letting anyone visit the scene of the bombing?" said Zabihullah Zmarai, a member of the council in Nangarhar Province who held a post-bombing news conference to announce his support. "The U.S. authorities should provide an answer to this question."

Afghan security officials say that clearance operations are taking place around the site, and that Islamic State fighters are engaging Afghan and American forces, who are calling in more airstrikes to target the militants' positions. There are also reports that the American military has kept even Afghan forces from the bombing site.

One senior Afghan security official in Kabul said on Tuesday that Thursday's bombing killed 96 Islamic State militants, 13 of them major commanders. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the news media, provided the names and basic information about the commanders, most of whom were from the tribal areas across the border in Pakistan, but who also included some Indian citizens and Central Asians. However, the official provided no proof of the deaths or

information on how officials reached the number of 96.

The United States military, despite repeated attempts, did not provide comment.

The Islamic State's local radio outlet, which was unaffected by the bombing, continues to broadcast into Jalalabad, the urban center in the east. It broadcasts half-hour programs during the day and an evening program that often lasts more than an hour.

As early as the day after the bombing, it broadcast a call-in program in which voices of men who claimed to be fighters in the area who were not affected by the powerful bomb could be heard between rhyming Islamic chants.

"The media was expecting that this bomb would have killed all the Islamic State fighters or forced them to flee, but that is not the case," the program's anchor said. "After the big bomb, our warrior, brave youth became a shield in front of them."

Islamic State radio, known as Voice of the Caliphate, has been reconstituted after it was destroyed last year by a targeted American drone attack. Afghan officials said that the earlier operation was run by five militants from the back of a small truck that switched locations often to avoid being targeted.

Islamic State affiliates in Afghanistan expanded rapidly in 2015, before repeated Afghan military operations and American airstrikes brought them to a halt. Islamic State fighters are now estimated at about 700, down from 2,000 to 3,000, and their activities are reduced to mainly three districts in Nangarhar.

The tunnel complex in the Tangi Assadkhel area of Achin prevented military operations from eliminating the group entirely, American military officials have said in justifying the first use of the bomb, the GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast.

Naser Kamawal, another Nangarhar provincial council member, said the bomb did not seem to have succeeded in its mission. Afghan forces had not advanced past the areas they had cleared repeatedly long before the bombing.

"Why the bomb with such a big destruction had such few casualties?" Mr. Kamawal said. "If there was some 90 Islamic State militants, then why were our own Afghan forces not able to eliminate them in a military operation — what was the need for using such a big bomb?"

It was unclear whether any Afghan or coalition forces have made it to the bombing site five days after the attack. The senior Afghan security official said the day after the bombing that Afghan commandos

had done so and, after clearing the site, had handed it over to American military forensic teams.

Mr. Zmarai, the provincial council member, said local officials in Achin told him that neither Afghan nor American forces had arrived at the site.

A spokesman for the Afghan commandos, Jawid Salim, agreed. "It is not true that the members of U.S. forensic are at the scene of bombing — no one is there," he said. "We are in the area and we see everything."

Afghan commando forces advancing the day after the bombing overcame resistance about a mile from the site but continued with operations in other parts of Achin instead of going to the scene, he said, adding that American airstrikes were helping them during follow-up operations.

Mr. Salim expressed satisfaction that the bomb hit what he called an important target, and he seemed satisfied by the security official's report that more than 90 fighters were killed.

"They say it destroys everything within two miles, but that could be in plain land — in mountainous areas, the bomb may not have such big destruction," Mr. Salim said, speculating, like so many other officials, in the absence of any concrete information.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Turkey Opposition Party Seeks to Annul Referendum Vote

Margaret Coker and Ned Levin

April 18, 2017 4:35 p.m. ET

ANKARA, Turkey—The chairman of Turkey's main opposition party said he had lost faith in the country's justice system, as his party appealed to the central election authority on Tuesday to annul the government's narrow win in last weekend's constitutional referendum.

Controversy has mounted since Sunday's vote over a decision by Turkey's electoral body to validate irregular ballots cast throughout the country that lacked an official seal. Opposition parties believe as many as 2.5 million ballots were suspect. The unofficial tallies in the vote on whether to centralize power in the office of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan showed the pro-Erdogan "yes" campaign winning by a 51%-to-49% margin, with 1.4 million votes separating the two sides.

Speaking to The Wall Street Journal, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the chairman of the opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP

for its Turkish initials, said the decision by the Supreme Election Board, a governmental body composed of senior judges, cast a shadow over the entire voting process and made a sham of its impartiality.

"I don't have any trust" in Turkey's judiciary or the YSK, said Mr. Kilicdaroglu, using the board's Turkish initials, in an interview at his parliamentary office. "They see themselves as representatives of the [presidency] and not representatives of the judiciary."

President Erdogan and his supporters have hailed the unofficial results announced late Sunday as a win that expressed the will of the people. In the referendum, voters were asked to approve a constitutional amendment to centralize governing powers in the president's office and radically alter Turkey's democracy.

CHP's application for annulment of the vote cited a number of irregularities during both the voting and counting processes for the April 16 referendum. But its focus was centrally on the YSK decision

concerning the ballots without a seal.

The YSK didn't comment on the application. On Tuesday afternoon, the YSK published its rationale for the ballot decision for the first time, saying its actions were done to insure voters wouldn't be disenfranchised. Polling stations around the country had "voluminous complaints" about not having proper ballot papers, it said.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim expressed his trust in the ballot totals and said criticism of the voting process was politically motivated. "Everybody, particularly the main opposition party, has to respect the results," Mr. Yildirim said.

The YSK's chairman, Sadi Guven, said Monday that the contested ballots were valid, raising questions about what legal paths exist for the opposition to successfully contest the vote. The board would rule on any formal objections and its decisions about voting can't be appealed.

Mr. Kilicdaroglu said his party could appeal to Turkey's Constitutional

Court, the country's highest legal body, on the basis that the YSK's decision to allow irregular votes was illegal. Should that effort fail, the CHP would apply to the European Court of Human Rights, he said.

The country's legal professionals have joined in the criticism of the YSK. Metin Feyzioglu, the head of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations, said the body directly violated Law 101 of the 2010 election code, which directly states that unsealed ballot papers aren't valid.

"I'm unhappy. Not with the outcome [of the referendum] but with the shadow placed on the whole process," said Mr. Feyzioglu. "I don't know the numbers and whether it would have effected the outcome. But I do know that the YSK decision ... clearly violated the law."

Mr. Kilicdaroglu, speaking to his parliamentary bloc on Tuesday, accused the election body of intervening in the election on behalf of the state. "If you are making decisions in accordance with the political will that appointed you to

that post, take those judicial robes of yours off and leave that institution," he said in his speech.

The electoral boards are administered by judges. Three of the 11 members of the high electoral board and the chairmen of 221 lower electoral boards were purged and replaced since July, in the aftermath of last summer's failed coup. Approximately one-third of all judges have been dismissed or detained by the government in the same period.

Meanwhile, the opposition Peoples'

Democratic Party, or HDP, parliament's third-largest bloc, also filed challenges to the vote to local election committees on Tuesday. In addition to the irregular ballots, the HDP found discrepancies between the YSK's vote tallies and the records held by its poll observers in at least 700 polling places around Turkey, in particular in the Kurdish southeast, said an HDP member of parliament, Filiz Kerestecioglu.

Concern is growing in European capitals about continuing legal controversy swirling over Sunday's referendum,

considered one of the most important elections since Turkey's founding as a republic in 1923.

European election observers released a report on Monday concluding that the Turkish vote fell short of domestic and European standards due to numerous alleged voting irregularities, including the YSK decision.

Mr. Kilicdaroglu said Monday's phone call from President Donald Trump to Mr. Erdogan in which he congratulated the Turkish

leader on the successful referendum was counterproductive to Turkish democracy. "I do not find it appropriate to send congratulations for a result that has not been made final and that is under judicial review," Mr. Kilicdaroglu said.

—Yeliz Candemir contributed to this article.

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The New York Times

Videos Fuel Charges of Fraud in Erdogan's Win in Turkey Referendum

Patrick Kingsley

ISTANBUL — A village leader shoves four voting slips into a ballot box. An unknown arm marks three slips with a "yes" vote. An unknown hand adds five more. An election official validates a pile of voting slips — hours after they were meant to be validated.

These are four of the scenes captured in unverified videos that have helped stoke accusations of voting fraud in polling stations across Turkey during Sunday's referendum to expand the powers of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Mr. Erdogan's "yes" campaign has claimed victory by a small margin — 51.4 percent to 48.6 — in a vote that further insulates the president from scrutiny and tightens his grip on one of the most influential countries in the region.

But while Mr. Erdogan has turned his claimed victory into a political reality, the legitimacy of his win is still in question. Opposition parties say the vote was rigged. The main opposition party formally asked Turkey's electoral commission Tuesday afternoon to reassess the contents of multiple ballot boxes and — in a separate appeal — to annul the entire poll result. And two major international observation missions have a list of concerns over irregularities during the campaign and on the day of the vote.

One observer group said that 2.5 million votes — roughly twice the margin of victory — are under question. "It seems credible that 2.5 million were manipulated, but we are not 100 percent sure," Andrej Hunko, a German lawmaker who observed the election on behalf of the Council of Europe, said by telephone.

Other concerns raised by the opposition and by election observers include:

- Suspicions of ballot-box stuffing in "almost all" of Turkey's 165,000 ballot boxes, according to the Republican People's Party, or C.H.P., the main opposition party.

- A decision by the electoral commission, made during the vote itself, to significantly increase the burden needed to prove allegations of ballot-box stuffing.

Election officials at a polling station in Istanbul on Sunday. Alkis Konstantinidis/Reuters

- The barring of over 170 members of the opposition from participating in election observation.

- The temporary detainment of some international election observers, preventing them from fully observing election counts.

- Minimal "no" votes in an opposition stronghold in southern Turkey.

- At least one allegation of "no" votes being removed from ballot boxes and deposited in a building site in the same area of southern Turkey.

- The unfairness of the campaign itself, which observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe described as taking place on "an unlevel playing field."

Turkey's electoral commission has delayed announcing an official result, and it said it would assess allegations of fraud.

Appeals concerning individual ballot boxes are first assessed at a local level, then at a regional level and finally by a national board. The C.H.P.'s appeal to annul the entire process will be assessed directly by the national board. Both processes, according to the commission head, are likely to be completed with 12 days.

But there are few precedents for the annulment of electoral results in Turkey, a trend most analysts do

not expect to be suddenly bucked this week.

Sunday's result seemed particularly unlikely to be overturned after the head of the electoral commission defended the legitimacy of the referendum in a speech.

In the process, the commission has opened itself up to allegations of bias. "You are not a referee, you are taking sides," Osman Baydemir, a lawmaker and spokesman for the third-largest party in Parliament, the Peoples' Democratic Party, or H.D.P., said in a speech.

An official sealed votes in southeastern Turkey on Sunday. Emre Tazegul/Associated Press

The opposition is particularly concerned about the commission's decision, after voting began on Sunday, to allow unvalidated ballots to be counted unless it could be proven that they were inserted into the ballot box specifically to tamper with the results.

Turkish electoral law stipulates that ballots should be stamped by election officials and then placed in a stamped envelope before the envelope is placed in a ballot box. Unstamped papers, or papers within unstamped envelopes, are invalid by law.

On Sunday, the commission decided otherwise, saying that similar rulings had been made in multiple elections in the past. But some legal experts said the decision had no precedent, and in fact contradicts a ruling made by the same commission in 2014. The O.S.C.E. also said the decision "undermined an important safeguard and contradicted the law that explicitly states that such ballots should be considered invalid."

Kerem Gulay, an expert on Turkish electoral law at the University of Amsterdam law school, said, "Changing the rules of the game after the voting started and half an

hour before voting in the eastern provinces stopped — I haven't heard of anything like that in recent electoral history worldwide."

Specific allegations of ballot-box stuffing emerged in the southern province of Sanliurfa. In one district, "no" voters formed less than 1 percent of the total, even though the H.D.P. won over half the votes in the area at the last parliamentary elections, in November 2015.

Unverified photographs later emerged that seemed to show bags of "no" votes abandoned in a building site in the province. In another part of the same region, an H.D.P. lawmaker said he had witnessed multiple violations, including the stuffing of 400 ballots into a box that was only meant for 360 voters.

"Unconcealed voting, people voting multiple times, or on behalf of other people — these were widely practiced in rural Urfa," said the lawmaker, Ibrahim Ayhan, using an informal name for the region. "And the law enforcement officers did not intervene as they should have."

More generally, international election observers said on Monday that the poll had not been conducted in a fair environment.

Waiting to vote at a polling station in Istanbul on Sunday. Alkis Konstantinidis/Reuters

The 24-person team from the O.S.C.E. highlighted how the poll was held amid a state of emergency that had involved tens of thousands of people being arrested, including lawmakers from the H.D.P., and over 1,500 civil society organizations being shuttered. "No" campaigners faced physical intimidation and limitations on their ability to hold rallies and access public media, the group said.

A separate mission from the Council of Europe had similar findings. Mr. Hunko, the German lawmaker, said he had been detained by the police

in southeastern Turkey, preventing him from properly observing the counting process.

"We were hindered by police forces in a way that I have never experienced in any observation mission," said Mr. Hunko, who said he had participated in at least 15 such missions across the world.

Mr. Hunko said the situation was particularly concerning in the

southeast, where the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Kurds may have left many without a fixed address, and therefore without the right to vote. The arrest of tens of thousands of people, particularly in the Kurdish region, also cast doubt on whether the vote was free.

"Yesterday was not a free or a fair election," Mr. Hunko added. "It was not fair generally and it was not free

in part of the country, the southeast. If you have thousands in prison and they cannot vote, you cannot talk about free elections."

Hundreds of demonstrators have gathered in each of Turkey's three largest cities since Sunday night to protest the alleged violations.

Mr. Erdogan, however, rejected their concerns and those of other countries, which he described as

"politically motivated." The referendum was the "most democratic election" of any Western country, he told supporters at a rally.

"Know your place," Mr. Erdogan said in a barb directed at foreign observers.



Editorial : Erdogan's ugly win could cause all kinds of problems — even for him

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By Editorial Board

The Post's View

Opinion

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April 18 at 7:25 PM

RECEP TAYYIP Erdogan's ugly win in Sunday's referendum on a new, authoritarian constitution for Turkey creates big problems for the country's secular democratic forces and for Turkey's Western allies — but also for Mr. Erdogan himself. His victory was not convincing, as he had hoped, but narrow, contested and tainted by the finding of a European observer mission that the pre-election campaign was not free or fair. Turkey's three biggest cities voted against the would-be strongman. The country is not united behind him, but polarized — a political reality that even an

empowered ruler will ignore at his peril.

To be sure, the Turkish president sounded defiant in the wake of his victory, dismissing Western critics for their "crusader mentality" and hinting that he would embrace harsh new measures, such as reinstating the death penalty — something that would surely rupture Turkey's relations with European Union leaders. As it is, Mr. Erdogan's government has purged some 130,000 people from their jobs and jailed more than 45,000 since a failed military coup last summer. The new constitution, which will take full effect in 2019, could allow him to remain president until at least 2029, with only weak parliamentary checks and a judiciary he could shape with his own appointments.

Turkey, however, has not yet reached the state of Egypt or Russia, where elections are grossly rigged and most opposition has been crushed. Even Kurdish towns that have been assaulted by the

military in the name of defeating terrorists turned out to vote against Mr. Erdogan, as did the large secular populations of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Preliminary results showed 48.7 percent of the country voted against the constitution despite a one-sided campaign in which opposition voices were suppressed. A controversial decision by election authorities to accept ballots that lacked official stamps may have saved Mr. Erdogan from defeat, but at the price of further undermining his legitimacy.

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Mr. Erdogan would be wise to try to defuse some of the opposition by reaching out to opponents, as Western governments urged him to do. Until 2015 he pursued a peace settlement with the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party; some observers think he may return to it. But Mr. Erdogan's history over 14 years in office has reflected an

increasing hunger for power, matched by a growing intolerance of criticism. If that trend continues, Turkey will face relentless domestic strife.

All of this poses a dilemma for the United States and other NATO nations, which badly need Turkey as an anchor of the alliance on the borders of the Middle East but cannot easily countenance its drift toward dictatorship. The Trump administration awkwardly reflected this tension Monday as President Trump called Mr. Erdogan to offer congratulations and discuss Syria even as the State Department gingerly addressed the election irregularities and urged the government to "protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all its citizens." In the near term, Western leaders cannot afford to break with Mr. Erdogan, but they must do their best to push him toward ending his domestic repression. The millions of Turks who still seek to preserve democracy and civil liberties will need allies, too.



Galston : Turkey Leads an Authoritarian Trend

William A. Galston

April 18, 2017 6:35 p.m. ET

It has been another bad week for liberal democracy. In France a late surge by Jean-Luc Mélenchon raised the hitherto unthinkable prospect of a presidential runoff between the candidates of the hard left and the far right, both of whom have pledged to withdraw from NATO and institute a pro-Russian foreign policy.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan narrowly prevailed in a referendum that would amend the constitution to grant him sweeping new powers, opening the door to authoritarianism with a thin democratic veneer.

The conduct of the referendum illustrated the difference between mere majoritarianism and real

liberal democracy. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe declared Monday that the vote took place on an "uneven playing field." The referendum was held under the state of emergency declared after the failed July 2016 coup, which led to the arrest and prosecution of more than 100,000 citizens, the dismissal of more than 150,000 civil servants, and the dissolution of nearly 1,600 civil-society organizations. Since then, 150 journalists have been jailed and 158 media outlets have been closed, including 60 radio and television stations and 19 newspapers.

During the referendum campaign, government authorities used emergency powers to curtail freedom of expression, assembly and association. Many "no" campaigners were assaulted, the OSCE reports, and large numbers

were arrested on flimsy charges such as insulting the president. As the vote was under way, Turkey's election authorities announced they would accept ballots that did not meet the normal standard for validation.

The Turkish judiciary has primary responsibility for administering referendums. But in the nine months since the attempted coup, almost a third of the country's judges and prosecutors have been dismissed on allegations of harboring sympathy for Fethullah Gulen, the exiled religious leader the Erdogan government has fingered as the coup's mastermind. A leaked document from the European Union's intelligence unit found that Mr. Gulen had not ordered the coup and that President Erdogan had used the post-coup purge to tighten his grip on power.

The referendum's content was no more compatible with democratic principles than its process. In a Brookings report, Sinan Ekim and Kemal Kirisci concluded that the constitutional changes will "institutionalize a populist, one-man system that jeopardizes legislative and judicial independence and consolidates them in the office of the president."

The new constitution abolishes the prime minister's office and transfers his duties to the president, who may issue decrees carrying the force of law on political, economic and social issues. The president will also have the power to establish and abolish ministries and appoint and fire ministers, all without legislative review. Other changes significantly increase the president's power to select senior members of the judiciary and ram measures

through the legislature with a simple majority.

Turkey exemplifies the process by which populist democracy can turn authoritarian. Begin with a charismatic leader whose blend of assertive nationalism and traditional values mobilizes rural conservatives against the more liberal cities. Chip away at constraints in government and civil society. Attack enemies, foreign and domestic, to divert attention from inevitable political and policy failures. Seize on security threats to purge the opposition and legitimize hard-to-reverse constitutional changes concentrating power in the leader's

hands.

Today Erdogan of Turkey. Tomorrow Viktor Orban in Hungary. And the day after?

This said, the West bears a measure of responsibility for what transpired. The EU had a historic opportunity to bring Turkey more securely into the democratic fold. Early in the accession process, Mr. Erdogan's government took concrete steps to make its institutions and policies compatible with European democratic norms. But European leaders dragged their feet, signaling reluctance to bring the talks to a successful conclusion.

Many Europeans, I believe, were hesitant to admit a Muslim nation into their club. Beneath the surface of secularism lies a civilization that has not shed its Christian roots.

When Mr. Erdogan decided that Turkey was unlikely ever to be allowed to enter the EU, his incentive waned to restrain his authoritarian impulses. From then on, he was a motive waiting for an opportunity, which the tragically stupid leaders of the 2016 plot gave him.

Completing the circle of enablement is the U.S. If President Obama was ambivalent about democracy

promotion, President Trump is indifferent to it. His warm embrace of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi during his visit signaled this attitude, and Mr. Trump's congratulatory postelection telephone call to Mr. Erdogan confirmed it.

International pro-democratic forces must now rally to the defense of democracy wherever it is threatened. For the foreseeable future, they must do so without the support of the U.S. government.

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**The
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On Russia, Trump and his top national security aides seem to be at odds

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The message was defiantly optimistic, like a suitor determined to hold a relationship together despite mounting obstacles.

"Things will work out fine between the U.S.A. and Russia," President Trump declared on his Twitter account last week. "At the right time everyone will come to their senses & there will be lasting peace!"

Trump's interest in achieving warm relations with Moscow has been a consistent theme since the earliest days of his campaign, and it stands now as one of the few major foreign policy positions that he has not discarded or revised since taking office.

But in his devotion to this outcome, Trump appears increasingly isolated within his own administration. Over the past several weeks, senior members of Trump's national security team have issued blistering critiques of Moscow, using harsh terms that have led to escalating tensions between the countries and seem at odds with the president.

The harsh rhetoric — and the apparent lack of any rebuke from Trump — suggests that Russian skeptics have gained influence in the administration, making the rapprochement that Trump envisioned seem increasingly remote.

Team Trump's ties to Russian interests

In a speech at the United Nations, U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley lashed out at Russia for its role in Syria, asking "how many more children have to die before Russia cares" enough to prevent Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from committing further atrocities.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson accused Russia of being "incompetent or complicit" in the chemical weapons attack that killed dozens of Syrian civilians.

CIA Director Mike Pompeo went even further in an appearance at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington last week, depicting Moscow as an unredeemable adversary. Though Trump has repeatedly praised Russian President Vladimir Putin, Pompeo described him as "a man for whom veracity doesn't translate into English."

The statements have created confusion about the Trump administration's posture toward Russia and have put senior officials, including Haley, in the awkward position of having to explain why Trump has yet to echo any of their harsh words.

The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

Foreign policy experts close to the administration played down the apparent disconnect between Trump's statements and those of his national security subordinates, saying that Trump's words about Russia were often misinterpreted to signal he intended to be soft.

"There was never anything in the plan about being nice to the Russians," said James Carafano, the vice president of foreign and defense policy at the Heritage Foundation, who served as an adviser to Trump during the campaign and post-election transition.

"I don't think any of this is a U-turn, a reversal or a shift," Carafano said. He noted that Trump's decision to bomb an airstrip in Syria where the Russian military had worked with Assad's forces and Trump's recent vocal support for NATO

demonstrate his willingness to defy Putin.

"Trump doesn't have to do Russia bashing" and is probably seeking to leave an opening for Putin to pursue better relations with the United States, Carafano said. "The fact that [Trump's officials] are not mimicking the exact same words doesn't mean they're not on the same sheet of music."

In recent weeks, Trump has had opportunities to reinforce the messages of his subordinates. In a news conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg this month, Trump said relations with Moscow "may be at an all-time low" but described Russia as "a strong country" and said, "We're going to see how that all works out."

Asked about mounting concerns in Europe over alleged Moscow interference in elections and calls for bolstering Europe's military defenses, Trump had no words of caution for the Kremlin.

"Right now there is a fear, and there are problems," he said. "But ultimately, I hope that there won't be a fear and there won't be problems and the world can get along. That would be the ideal situation."

Trump's tack with Russia seems at odds with his approach toward other global powers and issues. He threatened to label China a currency manipulator and to cut off U.S. support for NATO, for example, before retreating from those positions in recent weeks.

His posture toward Moscow is also seen as a reflection of Trump's reluctance to acknowledge that Russia interfered in the U.S. election and, based on the consensus view of U.S. intelligence agencies, sought to help him win.

Critics said the administration's competing messages have caused concern overseas. Rep. Adam B. Schiff (Calif.), the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said that he recently attended a security conference in Munich where there were "profound questions among our allies about just where this administration is coming from."

"They don't see the president yet willing to take on Putin or to criticize him directly," Schiff said. "It doesn't matter what others in his Cabinet said. If they didn't hear it from the president, they didn't really believe it was administration policy."

Senior administration officials have struggled to explain the disparity between their comments — including statements suggesting that Russia may have known that Assad was about to launch a chemical weapons attack — and those of the president.

"I think we're both saying the same thing, it's just being reported differently," Haley said during an interview on ABC News this month. Pressed on why Trump has not condemned Moscow, Haley said, "This is what I can tell you: The president has not once called me and said, 'Don't beat up on Russia,' has not once called me and told me what to say."

Trump's national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, faced similar questions in a separate ABC interview this week when asked how the president could be so confident that "things will work out fine" and predict "lasting peace."

"Well," McMaster quipped, "when relations are at the lowest point, there's nowhere to go but up."

McMaster has helped form the administration's more combative stance toward Moscow. He

replaced Michael Flynn, who seemed to share Trump's interest in pursuing closer relations with Moscow before Flynn was fired for his misleading statements about his contacts with the Russian ambassador.

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Juan Zarate, a former national security official who advised

Pompeo during his confirmation as CIA chief, said that he sees Trump's continued conciliatory messages toward Moscow as a means of preserving options for the administration in its dealings with Russia.

"I worry less about what appears to be some discordance because I think you can have flexibility in messaging," Zarate said. "But you do have to have consistency in policy. For now it seems like we do.

In fact the policy seems to be getting more vigorous and confrontational."

But Zarate also noted Trump's tendency to "double down on positions." Trump was criticized for seeming lenient toward Moscow, "and lo and behold he's going to stick to his line."

Moscow has also noticed the administration's competing messages. After a series of sharp

exchanges with senior U.S. officials, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said this week that Moscow would focus on signals from the president.

"We will be guided by what President Donald Trump once again confirmed . . . that he wants to improve relations with the Russian Federation," Lavrov said. "We are also ready for that."

**THE WALL
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Jenkins Jr. : Behold the Master Conspirator

Holman W.
Jenkins, Jr.

"nobody in Russia seems to have heard of him."

April 18, 2017 6:36 p.m. ET

It was the bombshell that bombed. The Washington Post reported last week that a Trump campaign adviser, in the middle of last year's election campaign, had indeed been singled out by the FBI for surveillance as a potential Russian agent.

Unfortunately for the conspiracy theorists, it was Carter Page, the Walter Mitty of Trump world.

Far be it from me to suggest the FBI was just looking for an easy way to fob off Obama administration pressure to validate its Trump-Russia talking points. Mr. Page had been the target four years earlier of a sad little recruitment effort by Russian spies in New York, who eventually were prosecuted and whose monitored communications referred to Mr. Page as an "idiot."

He later gave an incoherent speech in Moscow in the middle of the campaign decrying U.S. sanctions. Most of all, he was singularly devoid of influence with either Donald Trump or the Russians, though perhaps not the least likely contender to say something foolish on a "wiretap."

Most media accounts take for granted his self-description as a player in Russian energy deals, but a lengthy Politico investigation as far back as September found that

So this is the man the FBI selected as the most likely spy in the Trump midst. Which explains a lot—like the deafening silence last week of media organs that so recently had been wetting themselves over tenuous Trump-Russia theories.

Silent was the New York Times columnist who a couple weeks ago jabbered about a "smell of treason."

Silent was House Intelligence Committee ranking Democrat Adam Schiff, who not long earlier had noisily detected "circumstantial evidence" and "more than circumstantial evidence" of a Trump-Kremlin conspiracy.

But then a lot of pundits and others have lately demonstrated their inability to reason about evidence or even understand what is truly a "coincidence" in the sense of an unlikely confluence of events. The only really interesting evidence has now been debunked by Byron York of the Washington Examiner, who shows that the claim that the Trump forces had weakened a GOP platform critique of Russian actions in Ukraine was simply misinformed.

Mr. Schiff and Mr. Page are fitting sharers of the stage in this episode, with a certain indefinable insubstantiality in common.

Mr. Page attached himself to Candidate Trump, promoter of better relations with Russia, after

apparently spending the past decade—since leaving a junior job with Merrill Lynch in Moscow—seeking to insert himself in energy deals in Russia in hopes, as his would-be spy recruiter put it, of "making a lot of money." If he ever did make any money, it hasn't shown up in an obvious place—campaign donations. Mr. Page's one recorded contribution was to John McCain back when Mr. Page still had a job with Merrill.

As for Mr. Schiff, he got the third-time's-a-charm job back in 1990 of prosecuting a hapless FBI agent for his affair with a Russian spy after two previous attempts ended in a hung jury and a mistrial. Mr. Schiff clearly hopes today to raise his meager profile as one of 53 California congressmen by riding his party's Trump neurosis to a shot at a U.S. Senate seat.

Appearing recently on the same ABC News show as Mr. Schiff, Sen. Marco Rubio noted puckishly of the Senate's own investigation: "No one's out there trying to turn this into a way to get famous."

Uh huh. No one also doubted Mr. Rubio was accurately summarizing Washington's fast-hardening consensus on Mr. Schiff.

Few memes have died so sudden a death as the Trump-is-a-Russian-mole meme, with his Syria strike, with his administration publicly accusing Russia of "complicity" in the nerve-gassing of civilians.

The Trump presidency is coming into focus. Astonishing are the headlines pronouncing it "astonishing" that Mr. Trump, facing the pressures, constraints and opportunities that other presidents face, is acting more or less like other presidents. Isn't this where his admittedly steep learning curve was always likely to lead?

If the House Intelligence Committee wishes to continue its descent into circushood, by all means accommodate Mr. Page—now styling himself a pro-Russia "dissident" whom the Obama administration sought to persecute—and his desire "eagerly" to testify. At least his offending Moscow speech took place after the Crimea grab when it was no longer U.S. policy to promote business dealings with Russia, an important threshold that Democrats anachronistically refuse to acknowledge (and which never applied to Paul Manafort but does apply to the completely ignored Russia dealings of the Podesta brothers).

Then again, the committee might resume its original mission of investigating Russia's shambolic propaganda efforts in the U.S. election, rather than peddling conspiracy theories about minor members of the Trump entourage.

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U.S. Jet Fighters Intercepted Russian Bombers Near Alaska

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territory. It was the first interception of Russian aircraft by the North American Aerospace Defense Command since 2015.

"On April 17, two Russian TU-95 Bear bombers were intercepted in international airspace off the coast of Alaska by two Norad U.S. F-22 Raptor fighter aircraft," said Lt. Col. Michelle Baldanza, a Pentagon spokeswoman, who called the intercept "safe and professional."

"Norad monitors the air approaches to North America and are ready to ensure air sovereignty and defend the airspace," she said.

Interceptions are a core function for Norad and one for which the crews routinely train, said John Cornelio, a spokesman for the command.

"Although we use the term intercept, it's more of a visual identification of aircraft," he said. "When there's unidentified aircraft operating in that

airspace, we're going to go up and take a look."

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian long-range military flights largely ceased, Mr. Cornelio said, but resumed in 2007. Since 2007, Norad has flown 60 intercept missions. This is the first intercept since 2015, he said.

The F-22s and Bear bombers didn't communicate, and the interception occurred without incident, he said.

WASHINGTON—U.S. jet fighters scrambled to intercept Russian bombers off the coast of Alaska, the Pentagon said Tuesday, a day after the event happened.

A pair of Air Force jet fighters intercepted two Russian long-range bombers in international airspace, near the Aleutian Islands. The Russian planes didn't enter U.S.

"They fly extremely professionally and we do the same," Mr. Cornelio said.

Mr. Cornelio said other support aircraft might have accompanied

the F-22s but that NORAD only comments on the aircraft directly involved in the interception. He also declined to provide the exact location of the meeting or how long

it lasted, citing operational security concerns.

Write to Ben Kesling at benjamin.kesling@wsj.com

Corrections & Amplifications
The correct spelling of the name of a Norad spokesman is John Cornelio. An earlier version of this article incorrectly spelled it John Cornelio. (April 18, 2017)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

6:23 a.m. ET

TOKYO—Vice President Mike Pence on Tuesday mixed tough words on North Korea with a gentle touch on trade, refraining from pressing Japan for economic concessions at a time of regional tension.

Mr. Pence was in Tokyo to start a U.S.-Japan economic dialogue after a campaign in which President Donald Trump frequently denounced Tokyo on trade issues such as the minuscule market share of U.S.-made cars in Japan.

But at a news conference after meeting Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Mr. Pence spent much of his time on security, describing the U.S.-Japan military alliance as a "cornerstone of peace, prosperity and freedom in the Asia-Pacific."

Reiterating language used by Mr. Trump during a visit by Mr. Abe to

Pence Reaffirms U.S.-Japan Alliance Amid North Korea Provocations

Peter Landers
April 18, 2017

the U.S. in February, Mr. Pence said his message to Japan, "We are with you 100% in the face of provocations across the Sea of Japan" by North Korea.

He described North Korea as the "most ominous threat" in the region and said "our resolve could not be stronger" to rid the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons.

On trade, Mr. Pence avoided criticism and didn't mention the U.S. trade deficit with Japan. He alluded to Japanese companies that built factories in his home state of Indiana and said the two countries had a strong business relationship.

He said the two-way dialogue started Tuesday "may result in bilateral trade negotiations"—a forum where Washington could press directly for concessions in areas such as agriculture—"but I'll leave that to the future."

Mr. Pence's counterpart, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister

Taro Aso, was all smiles after meeting the vice president, saying, "We've moved from the era of friction to the era of cooperation."

The two differed somewhat on the shape of future trade talks, with Mr. Pence saying that two-way deals were the best way to achieve results while Mr. Aso expressed hope that the U.S. and Japan could lead the way in setting broader regional-trade standards.

Shortly after taking office, Mr. Trump withdrew the U.S. from the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, which had been a top priority for Tokyo. Mr. Pence called the TPP "a thing of the past."

The two men said they planned to meet again by the end of the year on economic cooperation. A joint statement said the U.S. and Japan aimed to "generate concrete results in the near term," without setting a deadline.

Mr. Pence is on the second stop of an Asia-Pacific tour that started in South Korea, where he also focused on the North Korean threat.

In Seoul earlier Tuesday, he praised the U.S.-South Korea free-trade deal, known as Korus, that went into effect in 2012, telling business leaders that Korean companies are a fast-growing source of investment in the U.S. But he said it was concerning that the U.S. trade deficit with South Korea has more than doubled since the deal.

Mr. Pence said that he looked forward to working with South Koreans "as we reform Korus in the days ahead."

—Jonathan Cheng contributed to this article.

Write to Peter Landers at peter.landiers@wsj.com

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The New York Times

Aircraft Carrier Wasn't Sailing to Deter North Korea, as U.S. Suggested (UNE)

The Navy posted a photo of the U.S.S. Carl Vinson sailing Saturday in the Sunda Strait off the coast of Indonesia, thousands of miles southwest of the Korean Peninsula. Credit MC2 Sean M. Castellano/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

WASHINGTON — Just over a week ago, the White House declared that ordering an American aircraft carrier into the Sea of Japan would send a powerful deterrent signal to North Korea and give President Trump more options in responding to the North's provocative behavior. "We're sending an armada," Mr. Trump said to Fox News last Tuesday afternoon.

The problem was that the carrier, the Carl Vinson, and the three other warships in its strike force were that very moment sailing in the opposite direction, to take part in joint exercises with the Australian Navy in the Indian Ocean, 3,500 miles southwest of the Korean Peninsula.

White House officials said Tuesday that they had been relying on guidance from the Defense Department. Officials there

described a glitch-ridden sequence of events, from an ill-timed announcement of the deployment by the military's Pacific Command to a partially erroneous explanation by the defense secretary, Jim Mattis — all of which perpetuated the false narrative that a flotilla was racing toward the waters off North Korea.

By the time the White House was asked about the Carl Vinson, its imminent arrival had been emblazoned on front pages across East Asia, fanning fears that Mr. Trump was considering a pre-emptive military strike. It was portrayed as further evidence of the president's muscular style days after he ordered a missile strike on Syria that came while he and President Xi Jinping of China chatted over dessert during a meeting in Florida.

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With Mr. Trump himself playing up the show of force, Pentagon officials said, rolling back the story became difficult.

The story of the wayward carrier might never have come to light had the Navy not posted a photo online

Monday of the Carl Vinson sailing south through the Sunda Strait, which separates the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra. It was taken on Saturday, four days after the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, described its mission in the Sea of Japan.

Now, the Carl Vinson is finally on a course for the Korean Peninsula, expected to arrive in the region next week, according to Defense Department officials. White House officials declined to comment on the confusion, referring questions to the Pentagon. "Sean discussed it once when asked, and it was all about process," a spokesman, Michael Short, said of Mr. Spicer.

Privately, however, other officials expressed bewilderment that the Pentagon did not correct its timeline, particularly given the tensions in the region and the fact that Mr. Spicer, as well as the national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, were publicly answering questions about it.

"The ship is now moving north to the Western Pacific," the Pentagon's chief spokeswoman,

Dana White, said Tuesday. "This should have been communicated more clearly at the time."

The miscues began on April 9 when the public affairs office of the Navy's Third Fleet issued a news release saying that Adm. Harry B. Harris Jr., the Pacific commander, had ordered the Carl Vinson, a Nimitz-class nuclear-powered carrier, and its strike force — two destroyers and one cruiser — to leave Singapore and sail to the Western Pacific. As is customary, the Navy did not say exactly where the carrier force was headed or its precise mission.

Given the timing, it hardly needed to: Mr. Trump had just wrapped up a two-day summit meeting with Mr. Xi at his Palm Beach club, Mar-a-Lago, with a message that the United States had run out of patience with North Korea's dictator, Kim Jong-un, and its nuclear and missile programs.

That Sunday, General McMaster told Fox News that the deployment was a "prudent" move, designed to give the president "a full range of

options to remove" the threat posed by Mr. Kim.

What the Navy did not say was that the Carl Vinson had to carry out another mission before it set sail north: a long-scheduled joint exercise with the Australian Navy in the Indian Ocean.

South Korean and Japanese news media, as well as The New York Times, reported Admiral Harris's order as evidence that the crisis was intensifying. While an aircraft carrier is not the weapon of choice for a strike on North Korea — such an operation would more likely involve long-range bombers and cruise missiles — it sends a vivid message of military might.

In July 2010, President Barack Obama ordered the aircraft carrier George Washington to the Sea of Japan to intimidate the North after it had torpedoed a South Korean Navy corvette, killing 46 sailors. When his defense secretary, Robert M. Gates, asked him to reroute the carrier to the Yellow Sea, to send an additional message to Beijing, Mr. Obama resisted.

"I don't call audibles with aircraft carriers," he said, using a football metaphor to reject the midcourse correction.

By all accounts, Mr. Trump is less worried than Mr. Obama about

making such calls on the fly. His aides have praised this unpredictability as a virtue in dealing with rogue leaders in North Korea and Syria.

In South Korea, though, fears of a full-blown war erupted. The government rushed to reassure the public that the Carl Vinson was coming only to deter North Korean provocations. April 15 is the birthday of Kim Il-sung, the nation's founder and the grandfather of Kim Jong-un — an occasion the North typically uses to conduct celebratory weapons tests.

On April 11, Mr. Trump stoked the fears of military action with an early-morning Twitter post: "North Korea is looking for trouble. If China decides to help, that would be great. If not, we will solve the problem without them! U.S.A." Later that day, Mr. Spicer was asked by a reporter, who assumed the Carl Vinson was on its way north, why the United States had decided to dispatch the carrier group to the Sea of Japan.

"A carrier group is several things," Mr. Spicer replied. "The forward deployment is deterrence, presence." He added, "I think when you see a carrier group steaming into an area like that, the forward presence of that is clearly, through almost every instance, a huge deterrent."

Mr. Spicer did not point out that the Carl Vinson was not, in fact, steaming into the area and would not be for 14 more days. A senior administration official said the press secretary was using talking points supplied by the Pentagon. He was discussing the rationale for sending a carrier, this official said, not confirming the ship's schedule.

An hour after Mr. Spicer left the podium, Mr. Mattis, the defense secretary, reinforced the perception of ships racing to the scene. Speaking at the Pentagon, he said the Navy disclosed the Carl Vinson's itinerary in advance because the exercise with the Australians had been canceled. "We had to explain why she wasn't in that exercise," he said.

Mr. Mattis, however, had conflated two things: Admiral Harris had canceled only a port call for the Carl Vinson in Fremantle, Australia, according to Pentagon officials, because he feared that images of sailors on shore leave would be unseemly at a time when North Korea was firing missiles.

Navy officials said Admiral Harris never meant to suggest he was canceling the naval exercise. Organizing such exercises is a complicated effort that takes months. One official described it as a high-end exercise, raising the possibility that the two navies

practiced scenarios to counter China, or tested new missile defenses or cyberoperations.

Some officials expressed irritation with Admiral Harris, saying he did not think through the consequences of announcing the deployment of an aircraft carrier during a period of high tension.

Mr. Mattis sent mixed signals about the mission. He stressed the need for the Navy to operate freely in the Pacific but added, "There's not a specific demand signal or specific reason why we're sending her up there."

After a week of war drums, fueled by the reports of the oncoming armada, tensions subsided when the weekend passed with only a military parade in Pyongyang and a failed missile test.

Then, on Monday, the Navy posted the photo of the Carl Vinson, bristling with fighter jets as it passed Indonesia. It was spotted by Defense News, a trade publication, which broke the news that the ship was thousands of miles from where most of the world thought it was.

Helene Cooper contributed reporting from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.S. Carl Vinson Carrier Wasn't on Way to North Korea

Ben Kesling and Felicia Schwartz

April 18, 2017 7:55 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Navy confirmed Tuesday that it didn't send one of its aircraft carriers directly toward North Korea amid growing tensions with Pyongyang, despite representations by President Donald Trump and his top defense advisers that it was on its way.

In fact, the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson was thousands of miles away on exercises off the northwest coast of Australia and likely won't arrive near the Korean Peninsula until sometime next week.

The U.S. Pacific Command released a statement Tuesday that said the Vinson is now heading toward the Western Pacific as ordered after a shortened training exercise with the Australian Navy. The statement described the move as a "prudent measure."

The White House's avowed deployment of the Vinson came as foreign adversaries from the Middle East to Russia and the Far East

have been looking to test the mettle of Mr. Trump. On Tuesday, the Pentagon announced that it scrambled fighter planes earlier this week to intercept two Russian bombers off the coast of Alaska, the first such incident since 2015.

How Mr. Trump's muscular response to North Korea morphed into a false narrative about a naval armada sailing in a show of force toward waters off the coast of North Korea appears to be a story of mixed and contradictory messages that the Navy appeared to notice in the past week, but made no strenuous moves to correct.

"At the end of the day it resulted in confused strategic communication that has made our allies nervous," said Bonnie Glaser, senior adviser for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. "If you don't have a consistency with your actual strategy and what you're doing with your military, that doesn't seem terribly convincing."

Misunderstandings over the mission of the Vinson appear to have been born in part out of operational secrecy coupled with a desire by

the White House to project a tough image. Navy officials were aware of the public misimpressions, according to Navy officials.

The Vinson's location was earlier reported by Defense News.

A senior White House official blamed the mistake on the Pentagon and said that the Pentagon didn't realize the error until Tuesday.

A second White House official said the White House didn't need to know last week that the Pentagon had given misleading information because the details of the timing of the vessel's navigation weren't something White House press secretary Sean Spicer or National Security Council officials had discussed publicly. Their comments were about the signal that the movement of the vessel sent to North Korea.

"The only issue is that [Defense Secretary Jim] Mattis started to talk about timing and there was some confusion within DoD about whether or not they were going to maintain the exercise," the official said.

Defense officials first said more than a week ago that a carrier strike group would move toward the Western Pacific as a show of force. White House national security adviser Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster said on April 9 that moving the carrier group is "prudent to do," given North Korea's provocative behavior.

Also on April 9, a statement from the Navy said that Adm. Harry Harris, head of U.S. Pacific Command, had directed the Vinson to steam toward the Western Pacific and that planned port visits had been canceled in Australia.

On April 11, Mr. Mattis added to that at a press conference, saying that exercises had also been canceled and that the Vinson was "on her way up" to the Western Pacific.

"That's where we thought it was most prudent to have her at this time," Mr. Mattis said of the Vinson.

But soon after Mr. Mattis's press conference, the Navy issued a statement that seemed to contradict their boss.

"As announced over the weekend, the Carl Vinson Strike Group was

ordered north as a prudent measure to maintain presence and readiness in the Western Pacific," said Cmdr. Clay Doss, a Navy spokesman, in a statement issued that day. "While port visits to Australia were cancelled, impacts to other previously scheduled activities are still being assessed during the transit."

Mr. Trump the next day said, "We are sending an armada." In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, Mr. Trump said he also told the Chinese leader Xi Jinping of the carrier group.

**The
Washington
Post**

Trump's missing 'armada' finally heading to Korea — and may stay a while

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

(Reuters)

President Trump's 'armada' ordered to sail toward North Korea was heading in the opposite direction. The USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier is now sailing north. President Trump's 'armada' ordered to sail toward North Korea was heading in the opposite direction. The USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier is now sailing north. (Reuters)

BEIJING — It was supposed to be steaming towards North Korea more than a week ago, an "armada" signaling American resolve. Then it wasn't.

Now, it seems the USS Carl Vinson may finally be heading north.

"Our deployment has been extended 30 days to provide a persistent presence in the waters off the Korean Peninsula," Rear Admiral Jim Kilby, the commander of Carrier Strike Group One, said in a message posted on the Carl Vinson's Facebook page addressed to "families and loved ones" of the personnel on board.

The Carl Vinson, accompanied by a carrier air wing, two guided-missile destroyers and a cruiser, was supposed to have been ordered to sail north after leaving Singapore on April 8. But a week later, the Navy published photos showing it was actually sailing the opposite

"I said, 'Look we have ships heading there,'" Mr. Trump said. "He says he knows it very well. I said not only are the aircraft carriers, we have the nuclear subs, which are far more destructive, and I think you have to let him know."

Mr. Spicer and a senior administration official did nothing to counter that version of events. Asian and American newspapers widely reported that the carrier was headed toward the peninsula.

A week later, on Tuesday, the Navy stressed it had never said the Vinson was given a final destination to the waters off North Korea. A

Navy official said that its messaging had been consistent and that from Singapore the carrier and supporting ships would head to planned exercises near Australia and then on to the Western Pacific, though it didn't specify where in the Pacific.

"We certainly did not say that and have been consistent with that messaging," a Navy official said Tuesday when asked if it had ever said the Vinson is headed to North Korea.

On Saturday, the Navy published a photo of the carrier steaming through the Sunda Strait, near

Indonesia, thousands of miles from the Sea of Japan and the Korean Peninsula.

—Carol E. Lee contributed to this article.

Write to Ben Kesling at benjamin.kesling@wsj.com and Felicia Schwartz at Felicia.Schwartz@wsj.com

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direction through the Sunda Strait between the Indonesia islands of Sumatra and Java, more than 3,000 miles southwest of the Korean Peninsula — and more than 500 miles southeast of Singapore.

[Despite talk of a military strike, Trump's 'armada' actually sailed away from Korea]

The White House is now facing questions about why it was not clear about the carrier group's whereabouts. Several times over the the last two weeks, the Trump administration said the ships were heading north.

On April 9, Admiral Harry Harris said the carrier strike group was headed north to the Western Pacific after departing Singapore on April 8. A spokesperson for U.S. Pacific Command linked the move directly to North Korea's "reckless, irresponsible and destabilizing program of missile tests and pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability."

Days later, Defense Secretary James Mattis told reporters the Carl Vinson was "on her way up there." In an interview that aired April 12, President Trump said the U.S. was sending ships. "An armada, very powerful" he said.

It is not clear why the carrier strike group never left Southeast Asia, or why the Trump administration did not clarify where she was. On Tuesday, Pacific Command said only that the strike group completed

military exercises — and would now head north.

"After departing Singapore on April 8 and cancelling a scheduled port visit to Perth, the Strike Group was able to complete a curtailed period of previously scheduled training with Australia in international waters off the northwest coast of Australia," a U.S. Pacific Command spokesperson said in a statement. "The Carl Vinson Strike Group is heading north to the Western Pacific as a prudent measure."

Both U.S. and South Korean media have reported that the Vinson is now expected to arrive in waters off the Korean peninsula by April 25, just as North Korea marks the anniversary of its army's founding.

"Our mission is to reassure allies and our partners of our steadfast commitment to the Indo-Asia-Pacific region," Rear Admiral Kilby wrote. "We will continue to be the centerpiece of visible maritime deterrence, providing our national command authority with flexible deterrent options, all domain access, and a visible forward presence."

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

(Reuters)

White House press secretary Sean Spicer on April 11 said the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier was

"steaming" toward the Korean Peninsula. Photos released by the U.S. Navy show the carrier was actually headed in the other direction. White House press secretary Sean Spicer on April 11 said the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier was "steaming" toward the Korean Peninsula. (Reuters)

China, meanwhile, is feeling anything but reassured, warning recently that "a storm is about to break" over the divided Korean Peninsula.

Beijing, long considered North Korea's last remaining ally, has stepped up its criticism of Pyongyang. At a daily Foreign Ministry briefing on Friday, ministry spokesman Lu Kang reiterated the Chinese side's "serious concern" about "recent trends about North Korea's nuclear and missile development."

He urged all parties to avoid "adding fuel to fire."

Read more

U.S. Navy sends strike group toward Korean Peninsula

China's Xi calls Trump, urges peaceful approach to North Korea

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Hand of U.S. Leaves North Korea's Missile Program Shaken

David E. Sanger and William J.

Broad

WASHINGTON — When a North Korean missile test went awry on Sunday, blowing up seconds after liftoff, there were immediate suspicions that a United States

program to sabotage the test flights had struck again. The odds seem highly likely: Eighty-eight percent of the launches of the North's most threatening missiles have self-destructed since the covert American program was accelerated three years ago.

But even inside the United States Cyber Command and the National Security Agency, where the operation is centered, it is nearly impossible to tell if any individual launch is the victim of a new, innovative approach to foil North Korean missiles with cyber and electronic strikes.

Bad welding, bad parts, bad engineering and bad luck can all play a role in such failures — as it did in the United States' own missile program, particularly in its early days. And it would require a near impossible degree of forensic investigation to figure out an exact cause, given that the failed North

Korean missiles tend to explode, disintegrate in midair and plunge in fragments into faraway seas.

But this much is clear, experts say: The existence of the American program, and whatever it has contributed to North Korea's remarkable string of troubles, appears to have shaken Pyongyang and led to an internal spyhunt as well as innovative ways to defeat a wide array of enemy cyberstrikes.

By all accounts, the program that President Barack Obama stepped up in 2014 has been adopted with enthusiasm by the Trump administration. President Trump's national security aides are eagerly hoping that the Chinese, among others, will get North Korea to freeze or reverse its program. Yet they have no compunctions about using this new class of weapon against missile tests that the United Nations has already prohibited.

Speaking in Moscow last week, Rex W. Tillerson, the secretary of state, was put on the defensive by a Russian reporter who challenged American complaints of interference in the American election, despite Washington's cyber attacks against Iran's nuclear program and North Korea's missile program. "Cybertools to disrupt weapons programs — that's another use of the tools, and I make a distinction between those two," Mr. Tillerson argued back, without specifically confirming their use against Pyongyang.

Perhaps taken by surprise at the question, Mr. Tillerson never took the next step to voice the argument that some of his Trump administration colleagues make in private: that since the United Nations Security Council has banned North Korean missile tests, any effort to interfere with them would have some basis in international law.

"When you look at what is emanating out of North Korea," Michael Chertoff, a former secretary of homeland security who now runs a cyberconsulting group in Washington, said Tuesday at the

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "I have sympathy for the argument that anything we can do to stop an unpredictable person from using nuclear weapons is worth trying."

But the question for the United States' intelligence agencies is whether this new tool is as effective as many have hoped. While billions of dollars have been poured into new offensive cyberweapons, touting a success in thwarting North Korea — whether it is real or imagined — can be turned into an argument for more.

It is a particularly difficult question in light of Sunday's botched test, because it is still unclear exactly what missile was launched. By nature, missiles teeter on the brink of failure, and new designs are often accident prone. At their best, missiles are dense welters of pipes, engines, valves, pumps, volatile fuels, relays, explosive bolts, wires, sensors and circuit boards that suddenly emit blistering flames and roar skyward with such shattering violence that they often quickly hit the breaking point. Things can easily go wrong, and frequently do.

But even by those measures, the North Koreans are having a rough time, and it has gotten a lot rougher since the United States accelerated its sabotage program.

In the annals of rocketry, experts say, roughly 5 to 10 percent of developmental test flights go awry. That holds even for such high practitioners of the art as the billionaires Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, and Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla, who are now racing to redefine the future of spaceflight. (By contrast, American commercial airline flights have a success rate of more than 99.9999 percent. And when crashes do occur, it can take investigators weeks, months or even years to identify the cause.)

But the sheer frequency of North Korean missile mishaps suggests that sabotage lies behind at least some of the recent failures.

So does the timing. Typically, countries encounter high failure rates when they start their rocket programs. As the programs mature, and engineers gain experience, spectacular failures decline and success tends to become a habit. In North Korea, the situation has been the exact reverse.

By and large, the North was a reliable maker of missiles in the 1980s, '90s and into the 2000s. The government sold its missiles to Pakistan and Iran, among others.

Then came the effort to launch the Musudan, an intermediate-range missile that Pyongyang first displayed in a military parade in late 2010. It was 5 feet wide and 40 feet long — remarkably small compared with the North's big rockets. But it represented an enormous threat. Carried on a truck, it could be hauled on country roads through forested regions or kept in tunnels, making it easy to hide and, as a target, difficult to find and destroy.

To date, the proven reach of the Musudan makes it the most threatening potential weapon in the North's emerging arsenal of missiles that might loft nuclear warheads. It is seen as able to hit targets up to 2,200 miles away — far enough to strike the sprawling American base at Guam.

Last year, the North conducted eight flight tests. Only one succeeded, giving the missile an overall failure rate of 88 percent. It was after the last failure that the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, was reported to have ordered an investigation into whether the United States was sabotaging his country's test flights, searching for spies in his system.

Examining North Korea's Missiles

At a recent military parade, North Korea displayed several missiles at a time of heightened tensions with the United States. Here's a closer look at what some of them are designed to do.

By MARK SCHEFFLER and DAPHNE RUSTOW on April 16, 2017. Photo by Wong Maye-E/Associated Press. Watch in Times Video »

Experts say that the best way to slow a program is to send a country scrambling for the causes of failures. "Disrupting their tests," William J. Perry, defense secretary in the Clinton administration, said at a meeting this year in Washington, would be "a pretty effective way of stopping their ICBM program."

But more recently, the effectiveness of the United States' sabotage has grown increasingly uncertain. Some new North Korean missile designs, using solid fuels, have had a higher success rate. Moreover, the North Koreans, as sophisticated cyberoperators, have grown better at defense.

John Schilling, a technical expert on North Korea's missile program, expressed skepticism on Tuesday about the efficacy of the foreign cyberattacks against Pyongyang's missiles.

"We haven't seen anything yet pointing to cyber specifically," Dr. Schilling said on a conference call organized by 38 North, a think tank specializing in North Korea at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

An easier target of sabotage, Dr. Schilling added, would be the parts and supplies that North Korea imports to feed its factories that make the missiles.

Longtime North Korea watcher Martyn Williams, who runs a California-based blog called North Korea Tech, recently reported that the North's scientists have developed a quantum encryption device that could completely secure communications systems from hackers, eavesdroppers and saboteurs.

The effort, Mr. Williams wrote this month, has the potential to "hamper the ability of foreign intelligence agencies to monitor and affect North Korean systems in real time."

The New York Times Criticism of Beijing's North Korea Policy Comes From Unlikely Place: China

Chris Buckley

BEIJING — When China's best-known historian of the Korean War, Shen Zihua, recently laid out his views on North Korea, astonishment rippled through the audience. China, he said with a bluntness that is rare here, had fundamentally botched its policy on the divided Korean Peninsula.

China's bond with North Korea's Communist leaders formed even before Mao Zedong's decision in 1950 to send People's Liberation Army soldiers to fight alongside them in the Korean War. Mao famously said the two sides were "as close as lips and teeth."

But China should abandon the stale myths of fraternity that have

propped up its support for North Korea and turn to South Korea, Mr. Shen said at a university lecture last month in Dalian, a northeastern Chinese port city.

"Judging by the current situation, North Korea is China's latent enemy and South Korea could be China's friend," Mr. Shen said, according to a transcript he published online.

"We must see clearly that China and North Korea are no longer brothers in arms, and in the short term there's no possibility of an improvement in Chinese-North Korean relations."

The speech was a strikingly bold public challenge to Chinese policy, which remains unwilling to risk a break with North Korea even as its

nuclear program raises tensions in northeast Asia and beyond. The controversy over Mr. Shen's views in China has distilled a renewed debate about whether the government should abandon its longstanding patronage of North Korea.

China's "traditionalist view that views the U.S. as a much greater threat than North Korea is deeply entrenched," Bonnie S. Glaser, an expert on Chinese foreign policy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said in an email. "But the proponents of change are vocal, too. They argue that North Korea is a growing liability."

For decades, China has tried to preserve ties with North Korea as a partner and strategic shield in northeast Asia, even when the North's leaders became testy and unpredictable. In recent years, though, China has also tried to soothe the United States, build political and business ties with South Korea and help rein in North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

President Trump with President Xi Jinping of China at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla., this month. The Trump administration has urged Mr. Xi to exert greater pressure on North Korea. Doug Mills/The New York Times

But as North Korea has improved its missiles and nuclear warheads, opening the possibility that it could one day strike the continental United States, China's go-between approach has become increasingly fraught.

North Korea did not hold a nuclear test over the weekend that some had expected, and its missile test on Sunday fizzled. But more tests and launches appear to be only a matter of time, and the Trump administration has pressed China's president, Xi Jinping, to use much tougher pressure on its neighbor.

"The era of strategic patience is over," Vice President Mike Pence said in South Korea on Monday.

"The president and I have a great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea," he told reporters, but "if China is unable to deal with North Korea, the United

States and our allies will."

China suspended coal imports from North Korea in February, cutting off a major source of revenue for the North. But China has resisted choking off trade with North Korea, and debate over how to balance Pyongyang, Seoul and Washington has sharpened and become more fractious. Trying to stay friends with all sides is proving perilous.

The Chinese government has fiercely objected to an American antimissile defense system, called the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or Thaad, being installed in South Korea, fearing it could be used to spy on China. But some Chinese experts have criticized the surge of anti-South Korean anger unleashed by Beijing as counterproductive.

Global Times, a state-run newspaper that often defends Chinese government policy, cautioned last week that North Korea would face harsher sanctions if it went ahead with another nuclear test. On Monday, the paper redoubled that warning, calling for China to choke off most oil supplies to North Korea if there was another test.

Mr. Shen has gone much further than other scholars in calling for a reset.

"The fundamental interests of China and North Korea are at odds," he said in his lecture. "China's fundamental interest lies in achieving a stability on its borders and developing outward. But since North Korea acquired nuclear weapons, that periphery has never been stable, so inevitably Chinese and North Korean interests are at odds."

American soldiers during a drill in South Korea in March. China has balanced its criticisms of North Korea by pushing the United States to agree to negotiations with the North and suspend military exercises with the South. Jung Yeon-Je/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

He derided China's opposition to the Thaad antimissile system as shrill and self-defeating, needlessly alienating South Korean opinion. "What we've done is exactly what

the Americans and North Koreans would like to see," he said.

Mr. Shen's views have incensed Chinese ultranationalists, who have accused him of selling out the country's ally in Pyongyang. His views and the debate about them have not been reported in Chinese state news media.

But Mr. Shen's speech remains on the website of the Cold War history research center at East China Normal University in Shanghai, where he works. He has also restated his views at lectures in Shanghai and, last week, in Xi'an in northwest China, he said.

In the past, articles in China critical of North Korea have been quickly censored. In 2004, an influential Chinese policy magazine was closed down after it published an essay critical of North Korea. In 2013, an editor at a Communist Party journal in Beijing was shunted from his job for publicly proposing that China withdraw support for North Korea.

Mr. Shen said the tolerance — so far — for his views suggested that the government might be willing to tolerate greater criticism of North Korea and debate about the relationship.

"Many people have asked me, 'Teacher Shen, why hasn't your speech been taken down?'" Mr. Shen said in a telephone interview from Shanghai.

"At least it shows that there can be different views about the North Korea issue. It's up to the center to set policy, but at least you can air different views in public, whereas before you couldn't," he said. The "center" refers to China's central leadership.

Still, Ms. Glaser said, President Xi appears unlikely to turn entirely on North Korea.

After a meeting with Mr. Xi, President Trump said his Chinese counterpart seemed willing to press Pyongyang. But China has balanced its criticisms of North Korea by pressing the United States to agree to prompt negotiations with the North and suspend major military exercises with the South.

A North Korean soldier at an outpost near the border with China. Beijing's bond with Pyongyang dates back to even before the Korean War in the 1950s. Johannes Eisele/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

In South Korea on Monday, Vice President Pence held out the possibility of opening talks with the North Koreans, noting that Washington was seeking security "through peaceable means, through negotiations."

His office added that any talks would include Japan, South Korea, other allies in the region and China.

Mr. Shen, 66, is well known in China and is often cited for his groundbreaking studies on the outbreak of the Korean War that used archival records to expose the tensions and miscalculations behind Mao's decision to send troops.

He is the son of Communist Party officials and previously used his earnings from business to pay for dredging archives in Russia, after serving a two-year prison term on a charge of leaking state secrets that he insisted was groundless.

He said he hoped that his research, including a new history of Chinese-North Korean relations that he hopes will appear in English this year, would dismantle deceptive myths that have grown up in China around that past.

"It's very hard for China to adjust relations," he said. "If everyone understands the truth and this myth is burst, then there'll be a basis among the public and officials for adjusting policy."

But Mr. Shen acknowledged that shifting direction on North Korea would carry risks. If political cooperation between Beijing and Washington fails to constrain North Korea, he said, the two governments should cooperate in a military response.

"If North Korea really does master nuclear weapons and their delivery, then the whole world will have to prostrate itself at the feet of North Korea," he said in the interview. "The longer this drags out, the better it is for North Korea."



U.S. tough talk belies its focus on diplomacy to contain Kim

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

Singapore toward the Western Pacific, apparently closing in on North Korea and its growing nuclear arsenal.

But the ship that some officials portrayed as a sign of a stepped-up U.S. response to threats was in fact, at the moment that North Korean

leader Kim Jong Un mounted a defiant show of military force last weekend, thousands of miles away from the Korean Peninsula, operating in the Indian Ocean.

Officials' nebulous — if not seemingly misleading — statements about the whereabouts of the USS

Carl Vinson come as the Trump administration attempts to deliver a dual message on one of its most thorny foreign problems: at once illustrating a willingness to employ force against a dangerous adversary while also steering clear of steps that could spiral out of control.

A series of binary, sometimes conflicting comments delivered by top officials in the past week highlight the Trump administration's hope that hard-line rhetoric will have a deterrent effect and, more fundamentally, the lack of attractive options it faces on North Korea. While officials are eager to signal a break from previous U.S. policy, their strategy appears to be a continuation of the Obama administration's attempt to use international economic and diplomatic pressure to force results in Pyongyang.

[Despite talk of a military strike, Trump's 'armada' actually sailed away from Korea]

"The Trump administration, having looked at the options, is speaking out of both sides of its mouth, which if done deliberately is good policy," said Patrick Cronin, an Asia expert at the Center for a New American Security.

"The idea is that we have the means of striking back, we're certainly going to protect our allies . . . but we're not going to make the mistake of starting a war," he said.

Standing at the demilitarized zone between the two Koreas this week, Vice President Pence issued his latest warning to North Korea. "The patience of the United States and our allies in this region has run out, and we want to see change," he said.

But even as they highlight Trump's willingness to use force in new ways in Syria and elsewhere, Pence and other officials have also expressed a preference for a negotiated disarmament for North Korea.

"Our hope is that we'll be able . . . to achieve this objective through peaceable means," the vice president said, adding that he hoped for a resumption of negotiations.

The double-barreled comments from Pence, like those from national

security adviser H.R. McMaster and other senior officials, also indicate the importance that China, which Trump hopes will play an instrumental role in persuading Kim to abandon his nuclear plans, holds in the administration's strategy.

Analysts said the White House is betting that its tough talk will convince Chinese President Xi Jinping that Trump is willing to use force to shatter the long standoff with Pyongyang, prompting Beijing to use the weight of its trade ties with North Korea to help avoid a huge conflict on its border.

Trump himself has issued repeated warnings to North Korea on Twitter, calling on China for help but promising to act unilaterally if need be. "I have great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea," Trump tweeted on Thursday. "If they are unable to do so, the U.S., with its allies, will!"

Bruce Klingner, a scholar at the Heritage Foundation, said such statements appeared to be out of sync with the Trump administration's preferred course.

"It's a message at a much higher volume and intensity than would seem warranted, if the focus is going to be on stronger sanctions" and a renewed diplomatic process, he said.

The use of bellicose rhetoric, even when paired with messages of continuity, could bring unanticipated results. Already, North Korea has ratcheted up its rhetoric against the United States, threatening its own preemptive strike.

Rodong Sinmun, an official newspaper of the ruling Workers' Party, declared this week that North Korea would use nuclear arms to "obliterate" the United States if it made a move suggesting a first use of military action.

Perhaps with that in mind, officials at the Pentagon and State Department have attempted to

ratchet down speculation about potential conflict. Some of that was fueled last week ahead of a major North Korean anniversary by news of the carrier strike group's deployment and media reports suggesting a preemptive U.S. attack might be in the works.

Military officials acknowledge that circumstances have grown far more dangerous as North Korea has made progress toward miniaturizing nuclear weapons and developing a missile that could reach the U.S. mainland.

While they have drawn up a range of actions that the United States might want to take in the event of a provocative move by North Korea — such as a nuclear test or strike on its southern neighbor — the officials indicate their hope is that diplomacy will prevail.

[White House warns North Korea not to test U.S. resolve, offering Syria and Afghanistan strikes as examples]

Those options probably include stepped-up cyber and electronic activity, which would be more easily denied and less likely to trigger a North Korean response.

"Diplomacy is only effective if it's backed up by credible options," said a defense official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss administration deliberations.

Officials at the State Department have signaled that a resolution to the standoff could be well off in the future.

"I think there's not going to be an answer tomorrow or the day after that. It's going to take more time," Susan A. Thornton, acting assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific affairs, told reporters this week.

"Our preference is to put pressure on the North Korean regime so that they will undertake to cease this threatening behavior and roll back their illegal programs," she said.

It is not clear what effect the news that the Carl Vinson has been thousands of miles away in the Indian Ocean, rather than bearing down on the Korean Peninsula, will have in Pyongyang.

While the belief that the Carl Vinson was heading toward Korea was reported as fact by media outlets around the world — Trump last week said he was "sending an armada, very powerful" — there were hints it was perhaps not steaming there as fast as many supposed.

On April 11, U.S. Naval Institute News reported that although the carrier had canceled port calls in Australia, it had not scrubbed training events to move faster toward the Korean Peninsula and would still take more than a week to enter waters near Korea — a point that was lost amid heated talk of "war."

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

Other photographs released by the Navy showed the Carl Vinson in the South China Sea from April 12 to 14.

In any case, the carrier strike force appears to be finally steaming in that direction now. A spokesman for the U.S. military's Pacific Command said the carrier strike group is "heading north to the Western Pacific as a prudent measure."

The spokesman did not provide a comment about why confusion about the ship's location persisted, even as Trump and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis appeared to confirm last week it was heading in that direction.

Thomas Gibbons-Neff in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and Karen DeYoung and Dan Lamothe in Washington contributed to this report.



Chinoy : How Washington hard-liners helped to create the North Korean crisis

By Mike Chinoy

Mike Chinoy is a non-resident senior fellow at the University of Southern California's U.S.-China Institute and the author of two books on North Korea: "Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Crisis" and "The Last POW." He has visited North Korea 17 times.

The conventional narrative about the North Korean nuclear crisis portrays the regime in Pyongyang

as determined to develop the bomb and responsible for the failure of diplomatic efforts to halt its program. It is a perspective that informs most public discussion and media coverage of the issue in the United States. But it misses key elements that have contributed to the current crisis.

The history of the past two decades shows that North Korea's nuclear breakout was the result not only of its own nuclear ambitions, but also of the efforts of hard-liners in the

administration of George W. Bush to sabotage any meaningful rapprochement with North Korea.

Opinions newsletter

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In 1994, the Clinton administration reached a deal with North Korea called the Agreed Framework, under which Pyongyang agreed to freeze its then-nascent nuclear program in return for economic and diplomatic concessions from

Washington. North Korea's nuclear facility at Yongbyon, the source of its minuscule amount of weapons-grade plutonium, was shut down and subject to international monitoring. It is widely accepted that without this deal, by the early 2000s, Pyongyang could have had a hundred or more nuclear bombs.

Despite North Korean frustration at U.S. delays in providing much of the promised assistance, the political thaw reached a high point in 2000. In October, then-President Bill

won a substantial payout and helped pave the way for his impeachment.

You would, I'm afraid, have to give up your nuclear arsenal to pursue this course, but Trump could afford to settle with you for significantly

more than Clinton paid Jones. Also, I know from Seth Rogen and James Franco that you admire Katy Perry and margaritas. I can't promise, but it's possible that if you renounced your nuclear weapons and sued Trump instead, Perry might perform

for you. And I would share my secret margarita recipe.

Please consider this peaceful alternative. Should you stay your current course, nobody knows what Trump might do. Not even Trump.

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Editorial : How the U.S. and China Can Find Common Ground on North Korea

The Editors

For the moment, fear of U.S. retaliation appears to have dissuaded North Korea from conducting another nuclear test. But the respite is only temporary. Lasting progress will require something more than saying a U.S. "armada" will be diverted toward the Korean Peninsula.

To its credit, the U.S. also seems to be redoubling its efforts to get cooperation from the one country that has the most leverage with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un: China. But if the U.S. is to work with China, then it's important to be realistic.

Unilaterally levying sanctions on Chinese banks and companies that do business with the North would probably only drive the two countries closer together. Instead, U.S. officials should be conferring with their

Chinese counterparts on specific measures that would both impose pain on the Pyongyang regime and disrupt the flow of money and technology that sustains its illicit weapons programs. The goal wouldn't be to bring down Kim Jong Un, but to ensure he and those around him think twice about how much support they can continue to expect from Beijing.

The U.S. can offer China a couple things in return, beyond the unspecified trade concessions Trump has already hinted at. First, U.S. officials should be willing to address Chinese concerns about the future of a reunified Korean Peninsula. This might mean promising never to deploy U.S. troops above the 38th parallel, or even to remove them from the peninsula entirely, although any commitments will have to take into account the interests of U.S. allies South Korea and Japan as well.

To this point, China hasn't shown much interest in such a dialogue, not least because it has little reason to trust U.S. promises. Even the hint of such talks, though, would have the added benefit of unsettling Kim and his cronies.

Second, the U.S. should make clear to Chinese leaders that if their pressure seems to be having an impact on the North's behavior, it will be prepared to hold bilateral talks with the North without demanding that they lead to full and immediate denuclearization. At best, such negotiations would produce a freeze of North Korea's missile and nuclear programs. It would be difficult to verify compliance; the risk of proliferation would remain.

Yet preventing proliferation is one of the obligations of a superpower. Kim cannot be allowed to develop and test a nuclear-tipped ICBM. Anything that furthers that goal is

worth pursuing. Even if talks fail, they could provide the U.S. with essential information about the North's weapons programs, and help convince China of the need for tougher measures.

A successful deal, on the other hand, would buy the world more time to deal with the North Korean threat, expose the isolated country to more outside influences and, ideally, undermine the regime from within. President Donald Trump may not like it -- few people do -- but talking to your enemy is generally preferable to fighting.

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Editorial : South Korea's Moment of Truth

The Editorial Board

The impeachment, ouster and now indictment of South Korea's president after months of protests, and the presidential race this has spawned, are about as much political drama as any nation could wish for. Yet all this is being played out in parallel with the crisis over the bellicose efforts by North Korea's dictator, Kim Jong-un, to assemble a nuclear arsenal and the threatening rumbles this has provoked in Washington. It's hard to imagine a worse time for a country to have a political convulsion.

But want it or not, that's where South Korea finds itself. And it need not prove disastrous: The fall of the president, Park Geun-hye, over arrant corruption marked the coming-of-age of a democracy that had hitherto regarded political malfeasance as a necessary adjunct of

economic development. The challenge now is for the election of her successor to be an equally responsible exercise in selecting a president who can both advance the deep reforms demanded by the protesters and provide the intrepid leadership demanded by the military threat.

Moon Jae-in, a top contender for president of South Korea, campaigning in Seoul on Monday. Ahn Young-Joon/Associated Press

The popular uprising against Ms. Park reflected more than indignation over the bribes she is accused of extorting with a shadowy confidante, Choi Soon-sil; it was a demand to end the cozy and sometimes collusive relationship between government and the family-controlled conglomerates that has dominated the economy for decades. In the best of times, that would be a tough task; the next president will enter office with Ms.

Park on trial and Mr. Kim rattling missiles.

With three weeks to go to the May 9 election, the campaign has shaped into a two-way race. Moon Jae-in, a 64-year-old human rights lawyer of the leftist Democratic Party, which holds the most seats in Parliament, was initially thought to be a shoo-in to succeed Ms. Park. But Ahn Cheol-soo, 55, a former physician who made a fortune in software, has surged in the polls, in part because many voters appear to believe he is better suited to deal with the North Korean threat.

The candidates have advanced similar programs: Both have promised reforms; both have emphasized the importance of the alliance with the United States while stressing the need for dialogue with the North. Yet many South Koreans, especially conservatives, seem to think that Mr. Ahn would be more likely to work well with the Trump

administration than the left-leaning Mr. Moon. One key issue is the planned American deployment of an antimissile system known as Thaad. Both candidates initially opposed the deployment, but Mr. Ahn now says it would be "irresponsible" for the next president to reverse the decision of the preceding administration.

A lot can still happen over the next three weeks — a North Korean nuclear test, for instance, or more saber-rattling in Washington. As the campaign intensifies, it is essential for the candidates to do their best to ensure that their race serves not to add to the anxieties of their nation or their allies, but to demonstrate that South Korea's democracy has achieved a strength and maturity capable of withstanding an extraordinary challenge.



IMF Boosts Global Growth Forecast to 3.5% Despite Geopolitical Angst

Ian Talley and Harriet Torry

WASHINGTON—The global economy is on course for its best performance in several years despite trade tensions and looming

geopolitical threats, the International Monetary Fund said ahead of a meeting of world finance chiefs in Washington this week.

Investors are skittish over a potential U.S. standoff with North Korea, France's elections and Washington's fresh use of force in

April 18, 2017 9:00 a.m. ET

the Middle East and Afghanistan. But global investment, manufacturing and consumer confidence are signaling strength. U.S. growth is projected to accelerate. Europe and Japan are finally showing signs of recovery.

Meantime, oil prices have risen from 2016 lows, boosting inflation readings from exceptionally low levels and offering hope for economies dependent on commodity exports that the worst of the two-year price rout might be over.

The International Monetary Fund, in its flagship report on the state of the global economy, nudged up its forecast for world growth this year a tenth of a percentage point to 3.5%, which will be the fastest rate in five years if the IMF is correct.

"Acceleration will be broad-based across advanced, emerging, and low income economies, building on gains we have seen in both manufacturing and trade," said IMF Chief Economist Maurice Obstfeld.

While the IMF kept its forecast pickup for U.S. growth at 2.3% for the year—up from 1.6% last year—it notched higher outlooks for all five of Europe's largest economies. The U.K.'s bump-up was the biggest, a 0.5 percentage point increase to 2% for the year.

In Asia, another dose of government stimulus has pushed China's growth forecast up a tenth of a percentage point to 6.6%, and the fund lifted Japan's outlook by 0.4 percentage point to 1.2%.

Growth in cross-border trade of goods and services this year—while still well below pre-crisis levels—is projected to nearly double to 3.8%. Consumer price inflation across advanced economies is projected to pick up to 2% on average, more than twice the previous year, and is gathering pace in emerging markets, too.

"The global economy is accelerating after a period of

expansion that has been the most gradual of the past century," Bank of Montreal chief executive officer William Downe told shareholders earlier this month.

Like many of the largest banks in the U.S., Canada's fourth-largest lender reported a better-than-expected first-quarter profits, with earnings up nearly 40% on the year.

Measures of optimism of households, businesses and investors show high hopes about growth prospects and expectations of higher inflation. Consumer confidence isn't just strong in the U.S.: It also ticked higher in March in the eurozone, underpinned by a eurozone unemployment rate that in February hit its lowest level since mid-2009.

Surveys of purchasing managers showed that activity in the first three months of the year in the eurozone's manufacturing and services sectors hit its highest measure since 2011, before the eurozone economy entered a slowdown caused by its government debt crisis.

Bellwether companies in Europe, like German car maker Daimler AG, reported sharply higher earnings in the first three months of the year. And French car parts maker Faurecia SA said first-quarter sales rose 9.8% on strong growth in the U.S. and China.

"A strengthening of the U.S. and global economy...allow us to make some positive assumptions about business conditions for the remainder of our fiscal year," said William Furman, chief executive officer of international railroad giant, Greenbriers Company, based in Lake Oswego, Ore.

Even with the generally positive projections outlined by the IMF, however, trade frictions, political uncertainty and China's debt problems still threaten to erode and potentially upend global growth. Those and other headwinds are

expected to keep world growth capped at 3.8% for the foreseeable future, according to the IMF's long-term outlook.

"The world economy may be gaining momentum, but we cannot be sure that we are out of the woods," said Mr. Obstfeld.

Investor sentiment in U.S. growth is reliant in part on the Trump administration delivering on promises of a tax overhaul and infrastructure spending, though the president has hit speed bumps advancing his agenda.

Productivity growth around the world—a critical component of economic expansion—is still slow. Growth is also held back by still-sluggish trade growth, aging populations and the failure of the European Union to resolve the legacies of its sovereign debt crisis.

Pre-crisis growth rates were an exceptional time for major emerging markets. Many are now bumping up against the ceiling of growth gains that could prove hard to extend. The rapid economic liberalization of China, India and Eastern Europe and the development of global supply chains made the pre-crisis trade-growth trend at twice the pace of the global economy a unique period, says World Trade Organization chief economist Robert Koopman. The WTO economist said he only sees an acceleration of trade to around 1.5 times the global growth rate.

Economic growth in China, the world's second largest economy, has also come at a cost of an unprecedented credit buildup that many economists warn could mean much weaker growth ahead and even financial turmoil.

Meantime, rising short-term U.S. interest rates could hurt highly-leveraged American firms that have loaded up on cheap credit over the past several years, the IMF said. Many emerging markets are also vulnerable to an increase in

borrowing costs and a strengthening dollar, having also stocked up on debt.

All these reasons are why building trade tensions are worrying the finance ministers and central bankers gathering in Washington this week for the IMF and World Bank's semiannual membership meetings. Fears of protectionism dominated a meeting last month of the Group of 20 largest economies, and IMF chief Christine Lagarde last week warned that "a sword of protectionism" is hanging over the global economy.

With trade long an important driver of world growth, the IMF estimates a surge in tariffs and other trade barriers could sap 2 percentage points off global gross product.

The U.S. says its policies or threats don't amount to protectionism, but rather are an effort to rebalance distorted trade relationships. Trump officials say other countries' tariffs, taxes and other barriers have fueled trade deficits with most of the country's biggest trade partners at the expense of U.S. workers.

But the IMF, Germany and other nations are anxious that overly-aggressive actions by the U.S. could spark a tit-for-tat trade war that stalls global growth.

So far, however, Mr. Trump's team has shown itself in the trade arena to be less aggressive than some feared. The White House proposal to rewrite the North American Free Trade Agreement has been more modest than many expected, and despite Mr. Trump's promises over several months to label China and other countries "currency manipulators," the president last week reversed course, with his Treasury Department officially declining to label any country with the designation.

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Editorial : How the U.S. Can Win the Alms Race

The Editors

In the 21st century, human misery has become something of a growth industry. Conflicts have driven the number of displaced people to an all-time high; last December, the United Nations launched a record appeal for humanitarian aid; three months later, citing impending famines in several African countries, it said the world faced the "largest humanitarian crisis" since the UN's founding.

Given the growing demands placed on top donor nations, they could be

forgiven their fatigue. What's badly needed are not only new donors to close the funding gap, but reforms to make current contributions go further.

The three top donors provide half or more of all humanitarian assistance, and the roster rarely varies (the U.S. on top, followed variously by the European Commission, Germany, and the U.K.). That the top 10 countries account for nearly three-quarters only points to how much more other developed countries could be doing. If

President Xi Jinping wants to advance China's aspirations to global leadership, he could step up his country's paltry humanitarian assistance (\$14 million thus far in 2017, versus \$1.3 billion from the U.S.). Russia, another permanent member of the UN Security Council, has given even less.

Yet none of this justifies President Donald Trump's plans to slash U.S. humanitarian aid. Although the U.S. is the top donor in dollar terms, its contribution ranked 19th as a proportion of national income. The

president ought to bear in mind that effective humanitarian relief is more than a mission of mercy: The countries on the UN's most recent famine watchlist, for instance, also top the leagues for incidences of terrorism or conflict.

The case for more funding must be pressed -- less than 20 percent of this year's UN appeal has been met -- but reform must accelerate, too. Donors can streamline their checklists and reporting requirements to speed the flow of aid. There needs to be less

earmarking and more aid funneled through local organizations (which channeled less than one percent of assistance in 2015). With displacement now lasting for an average of 17 years, more humanitarian aid needs to go toward education -- one of many areas where the boundaries between humanitarian and development aid need to be reset.

The U.S. bears a special responsibility for reform, not least

because its generosity has been subverted by special interests. If the Trump administration feels it must cut humanitarian aid -- and it shouldn't -- it should also support bipartisan legislation to ease, if not eliminate, requirements that food aid must be exclusively produced in the U.S., with at least half of it shipped on U.S.-crewed merchant ships. These rules cost dollars and lives.

The U.S. should also end "monetization," which requires 15 percent of all food donations to be sold for cash, with the money then used to fund development projects. This practice is wasteful and can disrupt local markets. The U.S. should also allow greater use of vouchers and debit cards to purchase local or regionally procured commodities.

No government program should ever be immune from scrutiny, and

U.S. aid money could certainly be spent more effectively. But putting America first shouldn't mean putting the world's most desperate people last.

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ETATS-UNIS



How Trump's First 100 Days Could End in a Government Shutdown

Russell Berman

On April 29, President Trump hopes to be commemorating his 100th day in office by touting his successful appointment of a Supreme Court justice and his quick victories in rolling back the Obama-era regulatory regime. But if Congress does not strike the first truly bipartisan deal of his presidency by then, Trump will instead spend his 100th day explaining to the public why the government he's charged with running has partially shut down.

Federal funding for most departments runs out on April 28, and House and Senate staffers are using the ongoing two-week congressional recess to negotiate a spending bill that would cover the final five months of the fiscal year. Despite their minority status in Washington, Democrats are feeling bullish about the talks, and the 100-day marker is a big reason why. Still reeling from their failure to repeal the Affordable Care Act, Republican leaders have little appetite for an all-out brawl that could result in a shutdown at a time when they are trying to prove to their constituents they can effectively run the country.

"Our Republican colleagues know that since they control the House, the Senate, and the White House that a shutdown would fall on their shoulders, and they don't want it," Senator Charles Schumer of New York, the Democratic minority leader, told reporters on Tuesday. "We want to make sure it's a good budget that meets our principles, but so far, so good."

Related Story

It Doesn't Get Any Easier for Republicans Now

Schumer's optimism means Trump is unlikely to get all of his top priorities in whatever agreement Congress can reach. Democrats have leverage in the negotiations because Republicans will need eight of their votes to clear a filibuster in the Senate and because conservatives in the House have been reluctant in recent years to vote for any bill that appropriates significant amounts of taxpayer money. Democrats are using that power to refuse to grant Trump any of the \$1.4 billion he sought to begin development of his signature southern border wall, and Republican leaders have signaled they are content to delay a debate on the issue until Congress considers funding for 2018. Nor is the president likely to see the \$18 billion in cuts to domestic programs the White House is seeking this fiscal year to help offset the boost in military spending that Trump wants even more.

And in a move likely to anger some conservatives, GOP leaders are not even pushing to include a provision blocking funds to Planned Parenthood that they repeatedly—and unsuccessfully—demanded under former President Barack Obama. They had hoped to insert the measure in their health-care bill because it did not require Democratic votes, but with that effort stalled, so is the drive to defund Planned Parenthood. "It really hasn't been an issue," said one Democratic congressional aide briefed on the talks. The GOP has kept quiet about the discussions, and aides to senior Republicans in the House and Senate declined to comment on the remaining sticking points.

Thus far, the Trump administration has had minimal involvement in the

negotiations on Capitol Hill, and Democrats like Schumer say it's best for all involved that it stay that way. (That includes Democratic leaders leery of being seen as striking a deal with a president despised by their liberal base.) "If the president doesn't interfere and insist on poison-pill amendments to be shoved down the throat of the Congress, then we can come up with an agreement," he said. Schumer was referring obliquely to a request from the White House that Congress include a provision in the bill that would withhold money from so-called "sanctuary cities" that refuse to enforce federal immigration laws.

"We don't just cut \$30 billion checks and say, 'Buy all the toys you want.'"

Democrats, meanwhile, have policy demands of their own for the legislation. After Trump threatened to withhold subsidies for insurance companies under Obamacare unless Democrats agreed to help the GOP repeal the law, they want to add a provision to the spending bill requiring the administration to pay them out. House Republicans sued the Obama administration over those payments, but they are now under intense pressure from the insurance industry and the Chamber of Commerce to maintain them at least temporarily to prevent a further destabilization of the individual market that could lead to premium spikes for consumers.

Trump isn't exactly going to come away empty-handed. Lawmakers are likely to approve at least some additional money for defense spending, even if it's not the full \$30 billion the president requested or if it's not offset with steep spending cuts elsewhere. And Congress may place restrictions on how the Pentagon can use the money, since

the administration wants to spend much of it on buying new weapons and equipment. "We don't just cut \$30 billion checks and say, 'Buy all the toys you want,'" the Democratic aide said.

Lawmakers might also agree to give the administration money to enhance border security in ways that do not include construction of the physical wall, which might allow Trump to declare a partial victory. "We've made very clear to Congress that the president's priorities are increasing military spending and security of our border," Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, said last week when asked whether Trump would insist on money for the wall as part of the spending bill. "We're going to continue to have conversations with Congress, and we feel confident that they'll do their job."

Democrats caution that the negotiations could still blow up once members of Congress return to Washington next week. Will the House Freedom Caucus make demands of the GOP leadership, and will the leadership try to appease conservatives rather than jettisoning them in favor of a deal with Democrats? Will Trump reinsert himself into the talks with a Twitter rant? The conservative who sparked the last government shutdown in 2013, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, is already warning that Schumer might, in effect, try to bait Republicans into a crisis for which they'll get the blame. "I do have some concern that to appease the radical left, Chuck Schumer and the Democrats may do everything they can to try to provoke a shutdown," he said earlier this week, according to *The Texas Tribune*.

There's good reason to be skeptical about the prospects for a deal. The Republican Congress has had a sputtering start to the year, falling short on a health-care bill for which they needed no help from Democrats. Schumer and Trump

have spent more time insulting each other than bargaining, and the Democratic leader has little to gain politically from sparing the new president a nightmare on his 100th day in office.

That historical marker may be arbitrary, but the image-conscious Trump is reportedly invested in selling the public on his early, if limited, success. That might be incentive enough for an agreement. Trump isn't getting a major health-

care or tax-reform bill anytime soon. After 100 days in the White House, he might just have to settle for keeping the government open.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

McWhirter

Updated April 18, 2017 11:37 p.m. ET

CHAMBLEE, Ga.—The unusual attention paid to a special election in Georgia on Tuesday, as well as recent protests around the country over President Donald Trump's tax returns, show the presidential contest didn't end in November, at least for voters who didn't support the president.

The special election for an Atlanta-area House seat drew extraordinary campaign spending, volumes of political advertising and the attention of Mr. Trump, who recorded automated phone calls and posted Twitter messages in opposition to the leading Democratic candidate, Jon Ossoff.

The seat, vacated by former Rep. Tom Price, who joined the Trump administration as Health and Human Services secretary, has been held by a Republican since 1979, when Newt Gingrich took office. A Democratic victory would be widely seen as a sign of strength among voters who oppose Mr. Trump and a signal of potential danger for GOP candidates in the next election.

Mr. Ossoff was holding onto the prospects of an outright win Tuesday night by the narrowest of margins. At 11 p.m., with two-thirds of precincts tallied, he had 50.3% of the vote, just ahead of the share needed to avoid a runoff. Republican Karen Handel was in second place, with about 18% of the

Georgia Votes in Critical House Race Seen as Part Trump Referendum

Natalie Andrews and Cameron McWhirter

vote.

While Mr. Price carried 62% of the vote in his 2016 re-election, Mr. Trump won the district by about 1 point. Sensing a chance to win, Democratic activists from around the nation zeroed in the race, to make the election a referendum on the president's first few months in office.

"Trump really lit a fire under me personally," said Sharon Courtney, outside her polling location at the Warren Technical School in Chamblee. Ms. Courtney, who both voted for Mr. Ossoff and canvassed for him, said the election was an opportunity to send a message to Mr. Trump that she doesn't approve of his presidency.

The influx of out-of-state money and volunteers for Mr. Ossoff irritated some Republican voters. Karen Stroer, a 56-year-old sales representative who lives in Dunwoody, said Mr. Ossoff's campaign was "people trying to buy an election. When someone spends that much money it's very wrong."

She said she voted for Republican Tom Gray in part because he didn't have much experience in politics. She felt that if the Republicans can force a runoff against Mr. Ossoff, they would win a June election by all getting behind one candidate.

Other voters also said that Tuesday's election was more about Mr. Trump than any of the candidates on the ballot, including Mr. Ossoff, a 30-year-old documentary filmmaker and former congressional staffer who has never held elected office. With support

from Democrats beyond the district, the Ossoff campaign raised \$8.3 million in the first quarter from donors across the country. Republican groups spent more than \$5 million attacking Mr. Ossoff.

In Tuesday's "jungle primary" format, 18 candidates from both parties, as well as independents, appear on a single ballot. The top two finishers move to a runoff, unless one candidate draws more than 50% of the vote.

The election in Georgia comes just after thousands of protesters gathered on Saturday in several cities to demand that Mr. Trump release his tax returns. The president has refused to release the documents, unlike previous presidents and presidential nominees.

The rallies were dismissed by Mr. Trump, who wrote on Twitter that someone should "look into who paid for the small organized rallies yesterday," adding "the election is over!"

The friction shows "the election didn't settle anything," said Republican pollster Whit Ayers. "This was such a contentious election with no honeymoon to speak of that the pre-election battles have continued right into the postelection period."

Regardless of Mr. Ossoff's fortunes, Democrats say the engagement they are seeing among liberal voters in this year's special elections is a sign that they could pick up the 24 seats needed to take the House majority in the midterm elections next year.

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Joe Crowley (D., N.Y.) said, "The level of energy that is being created in these districts gives us more solace that in 2018 we're going to have even much more enthusiasm."

But due in part to low voter turnout and other unusual circumstances, special elections can be poor indicators of how the next general election will turn out. In 2010, a Democratic victory in a special election for a House seat from Pennsylvania was broadly read as a sign that Republicans would likely struggle the following November. But the GOP went on to gain more than 60 seats that year and take control of the House.

Republicans are favored in two special elections to replace Trump cabinet members next month in Montana and South Carolina. A Republican won a special election in Kansas last week.

Susan Sullivan, who voted for Mr. Ossoff, said disapproval of Mr. Trump has sparked unprecedented Democratic activity in the area. "There's a lot more activism for Jon Ossoff and the Democratic Party than there has ever been before here," she said.

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**The
Washington
Post**

Republicans avoid big loss by forcing runoff in Ga. House race

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

ATLANTA — Republicans avoided an embarrassing defeat in a House race in Atlanta's conservative suburbs by forcing a runoff against Democrat Jon Ossoff, who captured the most votes with a groundswell of grass-roots activism and millions in donations fueled largely by antipathy to President Trump.

Unofficial returns showed that Ossoff had earned less than 50 percent of the vote, the threshold needed to declare an outright

victory. Instead, with 48.3 percent, Ossoff was headed to a runoff against Republican Karen Handel, the top GOP vote-getter in a special election to replace Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price in Georgia's 6th Congressional District.

In a statement early Wednesday, Ossoff acknowledged that he had fallen short.

"This is already a remarkable victory," he said. "We defied the odds, shattered expectations, and now are ready to fight on and win in June."

Ossoff could find it difficult to sustain the momentum he witnessed this past week in a traditionally Republican district that has been in GOP hands since 1979. Although Handel had earned 19.7 percent of the vote with 88 percent of precincts reporting, in a runoff she is widely expected to rally Republican voters who had divided their votes among 11 GOP candidates in Tuesday's race.

Just before midnight, at her election night party in Roswell, Handel thanked supporters and urged

Republicans to unite. "Tomorrow we start the campaign anew," she said.

Ossoff took the stage at his own party, his voice hoarse. "We will be ready to fight on and win in June if it's necessary," Ossoff said. "Bring it on."

Handel's showing was due to more than name recognition from her long tenure in state politics. She also benefited from \$1.3 million in support from Ending Spending, a conservative advocacy group aligned with the billionaire Ricketts family.

National GOP groups, meanwhile, are readying new waves of television advertising.

Democrats had hoped to upend the national political landscape with a stunning victory in this round of voting, rousing their demoralized party just five months after Trump won the White House and stoking a burgeoning anti-Trump movement across the country. Ahead of next year's midterm elections, they saw an opportunity to raise expectations about possibly winning back majorities in Congress.

Ossoff's candidacy gave Democrats an exhilarating if brief taste of what it will be like to compete in a ruby-red district next year, when they have to win 24 seats to take back the House.

Republicans, at war with each other as much as with Democrats, were aiming to escape with a reprieve in the turbulent age of Trump. Facing more battles to come in 2018, the contest gave them little clarity about the party's ideological drift and how much it should be tethered to the president in the future.

Trump quickly took credit for the likely runoff, tweeting after midnight: "Despite major outside money, FAKE media support and eleven Republican candidates, BIG 'R' win with runoff in Georgia. Glad to be of help!"

Many Democrats moved quickly to frame the energy around Ossoff's bid as a damaging referendum on Trump as he nears the 100-day mark of a presidency so far defined by an early stumble on health-care legislation and a GOP split into bickering factions.

Even as the campaigns waited for the count to finish, Ossoff's team cast the incomplete results in a glowing light.

"While we await the final election results this evening, our first-place finish is a remarkable achievement that many said would never even happen," said Ossoff campaign manager Keenan Pontoni. "It's clear that Jon has incredible energy and support behind him that will only grow whether we win tonight or in June."

Per Georgia law, a runoff ballot would feature the two top finishers from the crowded nonpartisan primary, which was called after Price, who had represented the district since 2005, vacated the seat to join Trump's Cabinet. The district is a bastion of white college-educated professionals and upscale shopping centers.

Ossoff, 30, a former congressional staffer and political novice who catapulted to national notice, raised

more than \$8 million and drew heavy support from prominent Democrats and liberal organizers. They saw his campaign, as well as a special House election last week in Kansas where a Democrat narrowly lost, as symbolic battlegrounds for their recovering party.

Trump personally intervened in the final days, which risked becoming a political squall. On Tuesday, he tweeted that Republicans "must get out today and VOTE in Georgia 6" and warned that "Dem Ossoff will raise your taxes" and is "very bad on crime."

White House officials, such as chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon, paid close attention to the Georgia election, well aware of the implications for Trump's political capital as the president attempts to jolt his agenda in the coming months.

Trump continued to weigh in on the race in the late afternoon, pointing out in a tweet that Ossoff "doesn't even live in the district." Republicans, he implored at 4:38 p.m. Eastern, "get out and vote!"

Ossoff acknowledged in a CNN interview that he lives with his girlfriend near Emory University, which is outside of the district.

"I've been living with my girlfriend, Alisha, for 12 years now down by Emory University where she's a full-time medical student," Ossoff said. "As soon as she concludes her medical training, I'll be 10 minutes back up the street in the district where I grew up."

CNN's Alisyn Camerota, intrigued, then asked, "So when are you going to marry her?"

"Well, I don't want to give anything away," Ossoff said. "I'll give you a call when I have something to announce."

The clip was quickly picked up by news outlets. Looking ahead to a likely run-off, national Republicans seized on Ossoff's statement as another example of his lack of roots in the district, a critique that has been made repeatedly against the Democrat throughout the campaign. The Drudge Report, a driver of conservative Web traffic, made the story its banner, knocking the "Dem Trump slayer" as an interloper.

When asked Tuesday on Air Force One whether the Georgia race was a referendum on Trump's first 100 days, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said, "I wouldn't use the word referendum."

"I think [Trump] hopes to have a Republican elected to that seat, and hopefully it will be someone to follow in Tom Price's footsteps and be a leader from that district," Sanders told reporters.

Earlier Tuesday, volunteers for Ossoff — mostly youthful, clad in navy blue T-shirts and carrying bundles of door-knocking materials — rushed excitedly around a low-slung campaign outpost in the Atlanta suburbs to stoke turnout.

At Ossoff's cramped phone bank in Chamblee, situated between dental offices and piled with doughnut boxes and campaign posters, his staffers joked that the tweets amounted to an in-kind contribution that would incite their party's base to show up. Trump's messages also reflected how this once sleepy race had landed at the center of the political universe.

"The campaign has taken on a life of its own," said Ossoff aide Alyssa Castillo, 20, who works in public relations for a distribution center in DeKalb County. "Whatever happens, this is the start of something bigger, that's for sure."

Celia Henson, a stay-at-home mother from Decatur who identifies as an independent Democrat, said Tuesday night that Trump retains his support "from most people around here who like him since nothing he does seems to get him in trouble."

But more on-the-fence voters in the Atlanta suburbs, Henson said, have grown restless or uneasy about the president since his inauguration in January and since he has "kept tweeting."

"This is a district where people care about respect, people being respected and they don't like how he acts," she said.

In the final, frantic hours of canvassing and phone calls, avoiding a runoff was the priority. "No run-off, vote for Ossoff," read one poster at the Chamblee office.

"Look at the map," Tish Naghise, an Ossoff field organizer, said as she pointed to a green layout of the district on the wall. "Hillary Clinton came close to winning here, but you have to do really well in Chamblee and Tucker, do well in diverse areas, if you're going to have a shot of competing throughout this whole area."

The Republican slate in the 6th District had been roiled in recent weeks by nerves about Trump and lingering internecine dramas over ideological purity and local loyalties. While some GOP candidates sought to align closely with Trump, others chose more cautious paths in

an effort to navigate the president's mixed popularity here.

Republicans' failure to pass their plan to overhaul the nation's health-care system frustrated some suburban GOP voters about Trump's effectiveness in cutting deals with lawmakers in Washington, as well as about the party's promises.

The National Republican Congressional Committee dispatched staffers to Georgia to boost turnout among core GOP voters amid those grumbles. The Congressional Leadership Fund, an outfit aligned with the House GOP, has spent more than \$2 million on a spate of negative television spots about Ossoff.

Several GOP candidates — Dan Moody, Bob Gray, Bruce LeVell, Amy Kremer — embraced Trump and cast themselves as his would-be allies in Washington. Others were supportive but not always enthusiastic, such as Handel and Judson Hill. One Republican, David Abrams, opposed the president. Most of the leading candidates bounced between those poles depending on the day or the latest controversy.

[This cowboy-poet is trying to steal a Republican House seat in Montana]

Republicans veered between wanting a typical party man to preferring a Trump-style hard-liner. In interviews, some voters genteelly tried to sidestep questions about loyalty to Trump, and the varying levels of support the President has seen from Republican candidates here in the 6th.

"We didn't support Karen based on who she supported for President," said Allison Newman, a 42 year-old special education teacher, when asked why she and her husband supported Handel. "We supported Karen based on her track record, she's ethical and she's a good person."

Others said the Trump factor was paramount. "It's important that he agrees with Trump on issues of trade and certain platforms of Trump's campaign," said Brendan Foy, 36, a volunteer for Gray who also served as a North Carolina field director last year for Trump. "I voted for him the same reasons Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania voted for him."

LeVell, an African American jeweler and former Trump campaign adviser, as well as Trump-aligned conservative activist Kremer, never gained traction in a Republican district that is not dominated by grass-roots nationalism. Abrams, who campaigned with anti-Trump

independent Evan McMullin, also failed to land on the political map.

Gray was seen by Republicans in recent days as having the best shot of outpacing Handel and making a runoff, since he began inching up in various eleventh-hour polls.

The Daily 202
newsletter

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Eli Stokols and
Laura Meckler

April 18, 2017 7:34 p.m. ET

President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he wants to change rules for distributing visas to high-skilled foreign workers, promising to direct more to the highest-paid applicants as he seeks to make good on his "America First" economic promises.

The result stands to benefit high-tech companies in Silicon Valley, with fewer H-1B visas going to outsourcing firms, many based in India, which critics say displace American workers. Under current rules, the visas are distributed at random by a lottery in which every applicant has an equal chance.

"It's America first—you better believe it," Mr. Trump said during a speech at Snap-On Inc., a tool manufacturer in Kenosha, Wis., before signing an executive order that calls for a government-wide review aimed at stricter enforcement of immigration and other laws governing the entry of workers into the U.S.

The order also initiates a 150-day review across all federal agencies aimed at detecting loopholes and waivers that undercut existing "Buy American" initiatives.

Mr. Trump said his "Buy American, Hire American" directive, coming as his administration nears the 100-day mark, fulfills a central campaign promise and "sends a powerful signal" to the world. "We are going to protect our workers, defend our jobs and finally put America first," he said.

Some congressional Democrats praised the executive order on the whole.

Sen. Chris Murphy (D., Conn.) called it "a step in the right direction." Sen. Sherrod Brown (D., Ohio) urged Mr. Trump to go further. "Reviewing Buy America alone won't put construction workers back on the job," Mr. Brown said in a statement. "Until we apply Buy America to all our infrastructure and public works projects, we will allow this business to go to foreign

A must-read morning briefing for decision-makers.

At Gray's campaign office in Johns Creek on Tuesday, his effort to tie himself to Trump was obvious. A massive poster of Vice President Pence greeted visitors at the office entrance. To the right, a yard sign from the Trump campaign was propped against a stack of "Gray for

countries at the expense of Ohio taxpayers."

Mr. Trump called for a change in how the scarce H-1B visas are distributed, but the actual executive order isn't specific about policy changes. The order simply directs several cabinet secretaries to suggest changes "as soon as practicable" that would ensure the visas are awarded to "the most skilled and the highest paid" applicants.

Mr. Trump cast the H-1B program, which brings 85,000 high-skilled foreign workers to the U.S. each year, as a victim of "widespread abuse" and promised it would stop.

He didn't say which companies he was talking about, but the firms that have come under the most scrutiny are outsourcing companies that handle technology work for U.S. companies. They rely heavily on foreign workers, who are often paid \$60,000 or slightly more. That is the minimum salary required by law to avoid burdensome regulations.

In some cases, these workers have replaced Americans, such as when companies lay off their technology staff and then outsource the work to one of these firms.

The president noted the visas are now awarded in a "total random lottery" and said instead, they should go to the "most-skilled and highest-paid applicants." That would have the effect of helping high-tech firms such as Microsoft or Google, which seek many H-1B visas but pay higher wages.

Tech firms have long lobbied for an increase in the number of H-1B visas, noting the high demand for the visas far outstrips supply, while others advocate a reduction. Either way, changes in the number awarded would need congressional approval.

Visas for next fiscal year were awarded this week after 199,000 applications for 85,000 spots were received in less than a week.

A professional society for U.S. engineers, known as IEEE-USA, has been lobbying the administration to change the lottery

Congress" signs. In a conference room, a photo of the president gave a big thumbs-up to phone-banking volunteers.

Brittany Evrard, 27, a volunteer for the Gray campaign, said Gray's pro-Trump stance was "very much" part of what made up her mind.

since Mr. Trump took office and has expressed deep frustration that another year's worth of visas were awarded under the existing rules.

But another group that supports restrictions on immigration, NumbersUSA, welcomed the announcement as a first step toward helpful changes.

Sam Adair, a partner at immigration law firm Graham Adair, who represents technology companies, including those in Silicon Valley, said the initiatives bode well for them. "For a lot of U.S. employers, simply discouraging the number that go to big outsourcing companies would be a good thing," Mr. Adair said.

Talk of changes in the H-1B visa program, though, is making some in Silicon Valley, nervous.

"I welcome any changes that will crack down on H-1B abuses or loopholes that could be used to hire workers at lower wages," said San Jose, Calif., Mayor Sam Liccardo. "However, we must not adopt any policies or rules that would hamper the critical flow of cutting-edge ideas and talent into our country."

The Indian outsourcers have been girding for changes in the program, and on Tuesday, their trade group, Nasscom, said critics of their business model are unfair. "We believe that the current campaign to discredit our sector is driven by persistent myths, such as the ideas that H-1B visa holders are 'cheap labor' and 'train their replacements,' neither of which is accurate."

Nasscom's president, Rentala Chandrashekar, added, "Any new requirements aimed at protecting U.S. workers should be applied to all visa sponsors to ensure a level playing field."

The wide-ranging presidential order also directs government agencies to strengthen rules barring foreign contractors from bidding on government projects and to review federal procurement rules and trade agreements with an eye on eradicating waivers on existing "Buy American" requirements.

But by early Wednesday morning, Gray was stuck at 10 percent in the returns.

Jonathan Lee Krohn in Johns Creek, Ga., contributed to this report.

Read more at PowerPost

Trump Signs Order Calling for Changes in H-1B Visa Rules

Eli Stokols and
Laura Meckler

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"We're going to do everything in our power to make sure that more products are stamped with those wonderful words: 'Made in the U.S.A.'" Mr. Trump said.

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Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) brushed off the executive order and speech as hollow gestures.

"Unfortunately for the American worker, reality hasn't matched his rhetoric," Mr. Schumer said in a call to reporters, adding that the president "seems to do what CEOs want, not what American people want."

Mr. Schumer pointed to the Keystone XL oil pipeline, which Mr. Trump initially pledged would be constructed from American-made steel before easing off that demand upon learning that foreign steel already had been purchased for the project.

But domestic steel producers are optimistic about the executive order and, specifically, its clear affirmation of the "melted and poured" standard ensuring that only steel melted and poured in the U.S. will be classified as American-made.

"The melted and poured standard is absolutely critical and ensures that the benefits of Buy American are maximized for companies throughout the supply chain," said Chris Weld, an attorney at Wiley Rein representing several domestic steel producers.

Although Mr. Weld believes additional executive actions or legislation may be needed to better ensure that Buy American directives are heeded and enforced, he called the president's initial action a positive first step.

Federico Pena, who served as Secretary of Transportation in the Clinton administration, said Buy American policies are "conceptually a good idea" but may result in the government's taxpayer dollars not going as far.

"The challenge occurs when the products and services are far more expensive than foreign products and services," Mr. Pena said. "One has to balance the good intention of

buying American products and services versus whether one is willing to overpay for those products and services.”

Mr. Trump also resumed his criticism of North American Free Trade Agreement, saying “very big changes” would be coming to the trade deal “or we are going to get rid of Nafta once and for all.” And he directed federal agencies to do

more to hire American-owned firms for government work.

In addition, he vowed to intervene in a trade dispute between Canada and the U.S. over milk imports.

“We’re going to stand up for our dairy farmers in Wisconsin,” he said, adding that he read about how a local dairy has been forced to cancel contracts with about 75

Wisconsin farms because of a drop in its Canadian business, stemming from a statute change aimed at favoring Canadian milk providers.

“In Canada, some very unfair things have happened to our dairy farmers and others,” Mr. Trump said, vowing to work on a solution with Wisconsin lawmakers Gov. Scott Walker, Sen. Ron Johnson and House Speaker Paul Ryan.

—Rebecca Ballhaus and Natalie Andrews contributed to this article.

Write to Laura Meckler at laura.meckler@wsj.com

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**The
New York
Times**

and Vinu Goel

Trump Signs Order That Could Lead to Curbs on Foreign Workers

Glenn Thrush,
Nick Wingfield

KENOSHA, Wis. — President Trump, hammering his “America First” campaign theme, signed an order on Tuesday that he said would favor American companies for federal contracts and reform the visa program for foreign technical workers.

After recent policy reversals that have angered his populist base, Mr. Trump described the visa program as an initiative gone awry that has driven down wages for Americans. The order was a means to end the “theft of American prosperity,” which he said had been brought on by low-wage immigrant labor.

Yet the order calls for a series of relatively modest steps, like a multiagency report on changes needed for the H-1B program, under which the government admits 85,000 foreign workers annually, many of them in the high-tech, industrial, medical and science fields. Collectively, the efforts outlined in the order could take years to carry out.

The H-1B program has become a focus in the debate over the impact of foreign workers. Mr. Trump has criticized employers for abusing the program and using it to avoid hiring higher-paid American counterparts. He vowed to revamp its lottery-based selection process.

The order, signed at the sprawling Snap-on tool factory here, represents a small win for bigger tech companies, which have been in pitched battles for those visas. Companies like Google and Microsoft, which rely heavily on high-skilled foreign workers, had worried that President Trump would make drastic curbs to worker programs that could cripple them.

“I think people are cautiously optimistic that this will be O.K., and maybe even better,” said Tom Alberg, a venture capitalist at Madrona Venture Group, a Seattle firm that invests in high-tech start-ups.

But the order would likely hurt the biggest users of the visa program, technology outsourcing firms that bring foreign workers to the United States to perform technical jobs, typically from India.

On the campaign trail, Mr. Trump stoked outrage from his supporters with accounts of companies like Walt Disney forcing laid-off technical workers to train their overseas replacements.

On Tuesday, Mr. Trump spoke in terms of an apple-pie populism that helped him pull off upset victories in November in Midwestern states like Wisconsin.

H-1B visas “should include only the most skilled and highest-paid applicants and should never, ever be used to replace American workers,” Mr. Trump told a gathering of about 500 workers and local luminaries, including the White House chief of staff, Reince Priebus, who hails from Kenosha.

On this point, many executives at American technology companies agree with Mr. Trump. They argue that they mostly apply for H-1Bs for workers when they can’t find qualified American workers, usually those with advanced degrees like a masters or Ph.D.

In recent years, there has been so much demand for H-1B visas that the whole fiscal year’s allocation has run out in a few days in April, when applications are accepted. The visas are then awarded by lottery to qualified applicants. Some 600,000 to 900,000 immigrants are currently in the United States on H-1B visas, researchers estimate.

Outsourcing firms — the top 13 of which accounted for a third of all granted visas in 2014, the last year for which information is publicly available — typically flood the system with visa applications. The top recipients were Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys and Wipro, all from India.

India’s leading tech trade group, the National Association of Software and Services Companies, said

Indian companies were being treated unfairly. “We believe that the current campaign to discredit our sector is driven by persistent myths, such as the ideas that H-1B visa holders are ‘cheap labor’ and ‘train their replacements,’ neither of which is accurate,” the group said in a statement.

Companies like Microsoft, Intel and Amazon are also big recipients. At least 15 percent of the American workforces of Facebook and the chip maker Qualcomm hold H-1Bs, according to the most recent documents the companies have filed with the Labor Department.

The announcement came at a jittery time for the White House, as Mr. Trump faces the 100th day of his presidency without much to show for it in the way of legislative accomplishment, after the defeat of his health care overhaul. And his two high-profile executive orders cracking down on immigration from predominantly Muslim nations have been stymied by the courts.

“This does nothing,” said Senator Charles Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader. “Like all the other executive orders, it’s just words — he’s calling for new studies. It’s not going to fix the problem. It’s not going to create a single job.”

Representative Zoe Lofgren, a California Democrat whose district includes Silicon Valley, said the issue of foreign workers was real, but dismissed the president’s order as poorly targeted and unlikely to achieve its desired result.

“Half of the start-ups in Silicon Valley were created by highly skilled people from other countries,” she said. “I don’t think the president and his staff fully appreciate that fact.”

In a briefing with reporters on Monday, White House officials said the “Buy American and Hire American” order would also overhaul federal procurement practices to increase the selection of products from American companies, especially in the

domestic steel industry, which has faced stiff competition from China.

One reform advocated by the Trump administration, which has drawn bipartisan support from Congress, would change the lottery system for awarding H-1B visas, giving extra preference to the highest-paying jobs — a proposal favored by many in the American technology industry.

Representatives from Microsoft, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Google either declined to comment or didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Blake Irving, the chief executive of domain name and web hosting firm GoDaddy, said he supported the idea of changing the system for issuing H-1Bs to give priority to higher-skilled workers. He said GoDaddy typically receives only about 20 percent of the H-1B visas it applies for.

“If anything, it moves the policy towards something that’s preferential to the expert work force,” said Mr. Irving. “Anything that gets us closer to that is goodness.”

But some smaller technology companies said they were concerned about the changes proposed by the Trump administration.

Punit Soni, the chief executive of Learning Motors, a six-person company in Silicon Valley that is trying to apply artificial intelligence to health care, said the visa changes proposed by the Trump administration would hurt start-ups.

Small companies cannot afford to pay high salaries and are already struggling to attract talent in a tight market, he said. A visa system that favors the highest-paid workers will steer immigrants only to already successful big companies like Google, his former employer.

“We’re a small start-up. Everyone is getting way below-market average salary,” he said.

White House Pushes Link Between Immigrants and Crime

Beth Reinhard
and Aruna

April 18, 2017 5:53 p.m. ET

The Trump administration on Tuesday pressed its case that illegal immigrants are helping fuel a crime wave, singling out a Central America-based international gang it said had flourished under the Obama administration.

In rapid succession, President Donald Trump, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly all promoted a crackdown on illegal immigration they said would improve public safety.

Their approach divides the law enforcement community, with some officers welcoming stricter immigration enforcement and others concerned a crackdown could deter undocumented residents from cooperating with police.

Early Tuesday, Mr. Trump said on Twitter: "The weak illegal immigration policies of the Obama Admin. allowed bad MS 13 gangs to form in cities across U.S. We are removing them fast!" MS-13 is an international gang, made up largely of immigrants from El Salvador or their descendants, that the Justice Department says has been operating since at least the 1980s.

Mr. Obama's backers sharply dispute the notion that his policies were weak, illegal or contributed to crime, and some criminal justice advocates say the Trump administration is exaggerating the threats to public safety. Crime rates remain near historic lows, despite surges in violence in a handful of large cities, and some studies show immigrants commit less crime than native-born Americans.

The debate over immigration and crime is heavily shaping the new administration as it approaches the closely watched 100-day marker. While Mr. Trump has backed away from some campaign promises, he has followed through on putting law and order at the forefront of his agenda.

Mr. Sessions on Tuesday echoed the president's tweet in remarks to federal law enforcement officials, blaming "an open border and years of lax immigration enforcement" for recent growth of the Central American gang. Police suspect MS-13 gang members murdered four young men last week in a park in Long Island, N.Y., in addition to killing two teenage girls last month

in Los Angeles with machetes and baseball bats, Mr. Sessions said.

Mr. Kelly used his first major speech to drive a similar message, saying there is "no better argument for secure borders than the transnational criminal organizations we face."

Wes McBride, executive director of the California Gang Investigators Association, a law enforcement group, agreed that tighter border security would curb gang activity, though he was hesitant to blame the Obama administration for growth of MS-13.

Under Mr. Obama, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on MS-13 in 2012, and the Justice Department prosecuted dozens of members. Last year, 56 members in the Boston area were indicted on racketeering, murder and other charges, while eight were convicted in New Jersey and four were sentenced in Atlanta. An FBI task force to target the group dates back to 2004.

Still, Mr. Kelly drew a sharp distinction between the Obama administration and Mr. Trump's first months in office, attributing a sharp decline in unlawful border crossings to a crackdown by the new administration. U.S. Customs and Border Protection data show a 64% drop in people apprehended at the southern border in March, compared to the same month in 2016.

Some law enforcement leaders have welcomed the renewed emphasis on law and order. But others in the criminal justice community dispute the administration's portrayal of a nation plagued by a rising tide of lawlessness, saying the administration's approach could put civil liberties at risk.

The latest FBI statistics show a complicated picture of crime in the U.S. Murder rates fell by nearly one-half in 2016 from their peak in 1991, though the nationwide rate rose an estimated 8% in the last year, according to an analysis released Tuesday by the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. That increase was fueled largely by a rise in murders in big cities, including Baltimore, Chicago and Washington, D.C.

Marc Mauer, executive director of the Sentencing Project, which opposes long mandatory sentences, argued that "Attorney General Sessions is creating hysteria about crime at a moment when violent

crime is down substantially from its peak."

William Lansdowne, the former police chief in San Diego, disputed the administration's efforts to link illegal border crossings and crime. "It has nothing to do with lax [border] enforcement," he said. "Once gangs are here, they recruit new members locally. They don't immigrate."

Write to Beth Reinhard at beth.reinhard@wsj.com and Aruna Viswanatha at Aruna.Viswanatha@wsj.com

Appeared in the Apr. 19, 2017, print edition as 'White House Links Migrant Gangs, Crime.'

Editorial : Mr. Trump Plays by His Own Rules (or No Rules)

The Editorial Board

Jennifer Heuer

Anyone who has been paying the slightest attention knows by now that this president and this White House intend to play by their own set of rules — rules that in some cases come close to breaking the law and, at the very least, defy traditions of conduct and transparency Americans have come to expect from their public servants. We know that Donald Trump has refused, unlike other presidents, to release his tax returns; that his trust agreement allows him undisclosed access to profits from his businesses; and even that he clings to a profitable lease on a hotel only a stone's throw from the White House when divesting himself of that lease is not only the obvious but the right thing to do.

But just when you think you've seen enough there's more. On Friday, the administration announced it would no longer release White House visitors' logs that have been available for years. (It cynically said posting these records would cost taxpayers \$70,000 by 2020. Compare that with the multimillion-dollar tab estimated for every weekend trip Mr. Trump takes to Mar-a-Lago.) Meanwhile, news trickled out that on the very day that two of Ivanka Trump's and Jared Kushner's children were serenading the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, at Mar-a-Lago, the People's Republic of China approved new trademarks allowing Ivanka to peddle jewelry, bags and spa services to a nation of 1.4 billion where she is a role model for aspirational oligarchs.

In the great scheme of things, neither the visitor blackout nor Ms. Trump's commercial coup seems a big deal. Yet both symbolize larger

problems. One is an almost total absence of openness in an administration that is already teeming with real and potential conflicts and that has decided it can grant secret waivers to ethics requirements. The other is a culture of self-enrichment and self-dealing in which corporate C.E.O.s, lobbyists and foreign officials seeking the first family's favor hold parties at Mar-a-Lago and at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, a couple of blocks from the White House. On Tuesday, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a government watchdog group, expanded a lawsuit charging that the hotel violates the Constitution's emoluments clause, which prohibits the president from taking payments from foreign nations.

One has to ask when this seamless meshing of statesmanship and merchandising will stop, if ever. Mr. Trump struggled for years to close deals across the Middle East; now that he's president, doors are opening. His family is seeking or holds trademarks in Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, where the president's sons just opened a golf course in Dubai, and in Jordan, whose King Abdullah II just visited the White House to discuss joint efforts against ISIS.

But Americans who expect that their government will stop this grotesque flouting of rules and traditional norms have been deeply disappointed. The Office of Government Ethics received 39,105 public queries and complaints about Trump administration ethics over the past six months, compared with 733 during the same period eight years earlier at the start of the Obama administration. But the office has no investigative or subpoena power: Its authority rests on the willingness of a president to take transparency in public service seriously, which this president does not.

That leaves Jason Chaffetz, the Utah Republican who is chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, which has the legal authority and the resources to investigate and hold the administration to account. Anyone familiar with Mr. Chaffetz's record of partisan, ineffectual witch-hunting won't be surprised to learn that he's done nothing.

Mr. Shaub and his team have been working nights and weekends trying to rein in what they can of the Trump entourage's abuses, combing through the financial

disclosures of administration appointees and ringing alarm bells. They've had a few successes: So far the Senate has refused to confirm nominees whose financial

disclosures don't earn approval from the ethics office, which has unearthed potential conflicts and led several nominees to shed assets that pose problems. But that's

hardly a match for an administration filled with people who seem determined to wring every last dollar and ounce of trust from the American people.

The New York Times

Abrams

LONDON — Ivanka Trump calls her father a homebody. "If it were up to him, he'd seldom leave New York," she once wrote.

By contrast, she has been her family's leading globalist — doing deals around the world in her father's name and her own. Even since her father took office, her own fashion brand has continued to look abroad, filing four new trademarks in Canada and the Philippines, according to a New York Times analysis of trademark records.

The continued activity is tricky territory for Ms. Trump's new job as White House adviser. While she has stepped down from both her own fashion company and from the Trump Organization and put her brand in a trust, she has not given up her financial control, an unusual situation to navigate now that she is subject to federal ethics rules on conflicts of interest.

Even though many of her trademark applications were filed long before she took her government job, they could be decided on by foreign governments while she works in the White House, creating ethical issues with little precedent. While trademarks do not directly confer financial gains, they protect the use of logos and other intellectual property, making them valuable tools for companies looking to build new ventures or expand existing operations.

Earlier this month, China approved three new trademarks for Ms. Trump's brand on the same day she met China's president, Xi Jinping, according to an Associated Press report. Japan also approved trademarks in Ms. Trump's name in February that included footwear, handbags and other apparel, records show. And trademark applications in Ms. Trump's name are awaiting decisions in 10 countries, the Times analysis showed, including Kuwait, Qatar, Panama and Brazil.

Ms. Trump has long been conducting a corporate two-step, trying to build her own global brand as she has helped push her father's name into new parts of the world. Over all, Ivanka Trump Marks L.L.C., her trademarking business, has filed 173 foreign trademarks in

Ivanka Trump's Global Reach, Undeterred by a White House Job (UNE)

Danny Hakim
and Rachel
Rachel

21 countries, as well as in Hong Kong and the European Union, in little more than a decade, according to the Times analysis. There are probably more, since there is no single repository of all global trademarks. All of the applications on record took place before she was a White House adviser.

Ms. Trump's previous role as an informal adviser to President Trump had already raised questions. She is a woman with a multitude of overseas business ventures who since the election has been afforded prime seating at meetings with a who's who of foreign leaders — from Justin Trudeau to Shinzo Abe to Angela Merkel.

Now such issues become more complex. While presidents are exempt from federal conflict of interest law, Ms. Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner, another senior White House aide, are not. They are barred from making decisions in government that could benefit their financial holdings, which are worth as much as \$740 million, according to recent filings. They are also covered by the Constitution's emoluments clause barring federal officials from accepting "any present, emolument, office or title of any kind whatever from any king, prince or foreign state."

Whether trademarks run afoul of such rules is a matter of debate between the Trump administration and its critics. Trademarks are certainly valuable assets as companies seek exclusive control over their global brands, and Ms. Trump herself has said that the first step in building a brand is to "do a comprehensive trademark search."

Ms. Trump has taken steps to separate herself from her company. Her brother-in-law and sister-in-law serve as trustees, while Abigail Klem, her brand's president, runs the company's day-to-day operations.

Night-shift workers at the Huajian shoe factory in Dongguan, China, where about 100,000 pairs of Ivanka Trump-branded shoes have been made. Greg Baker/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

But she has kept her financial interest in the company and retains the ability to approve or veto certain deals through her trust arrangement. Ms. Trump also

maintains a stake in the Trump International Hotel in Washington, just down the street from the White House.

"When they weren't going into the White House, I thought there was a lot of leeway there," said John Pudner, the executive director of the conservative nonprofit Take Back Our Republic.

Now, he said, "anything can be viewed as influence."

"I think it's bad for the administration," added Mr. Pudner, who voted for Mr. Trump. "It could call into question any decision made, people wondering if there's a business angle to it."

The White House referred comments to the Trump Organization, which did not comment.

Ms. Klem, president of Ms. Trump's brand, said in a statement, "The brand has filed, updated and rigorously protected its international trademarks over the past several years in the normal course of business, especially in regions where trademark infringement is rampant.

"We have recently seen a surge in trademark filings by unrelated third parties trying to capitalize on the name, and it is our responsibility to diligently protect our trademark."

Ms. Trump has long had an international outlook. In her 2009 book, "The Trump Card: Playing to Win in Work and Life," she credited the influence of her mother, Ivana, for her own love of travel. And not long after she joined the Trump Organization in 2005, she helped lead her father's business abroad.

"Before my brothers and I joined the company, our business was primarily a New York-based operation," she wrote in her book, adding that her father would say, "There are plenty of great deals right here in New York."

It was not long before she began to concurrently push her own brand in many of the same markets as her father's.

While she was overseeing the development of a controversial Trump Tower in Azerbaijan, which has since been abandoned, she was also filing trademarks for her own brand, for clothes and cosmetics.

In China, while she was helping her father's company make inroads, she developed her own following, taking out at least 23 trademarks for everything from swimwear to wedding dresses, both to battle locals trying to infringe on her name and to support her own interests.

Ms. Trump has a following in China, where young professionals often equate material wealth with success. A video of her daughter singing in Chinese even went viral. But for many Chinese, Ms. Trump is the epitome of the fuerdai, a Mandarin expression that means "rich second generation," a term provoking a mix of respect and resentment.

Ivanka Trump merchandise for sale in Trump Tower in New York City. Todd Heisler/The New York Times

A spokesman for the brand said several of its licensees wholesale products in China. More than a dozen of Ms. Trump's own Chinese trademarks were filed during the election campaign.

In Manila, Ms. Trump was the linchpin for a new Trump Tower rising in Makati City, a project that "came about from a meeting that took place between Ivanka and I," Robbie Antonio, the son of a prominent Filipino developer, once said in a promotional video.

Ms. Trump's friendship with Mr. Antonio is not hard to understand. He has a bit of Trumpian flair himself — an art collector who once commissioned a Rem Koolhaas-designed home filled with portraits of himself.

Ms. Trump and Mr. Antonio have also been involved in a plan to sell her jewelry in the Philippines, but a spokesman for the brand said it did not have any current plans to open a store there. And records show her business has applied for three new trademarks in the country this year.

It is not clear how Ms. Trump, now a federal employee, will navigate continuing ties to far-flung foreign business interests. Robert Weissman, the president of Public Citizen, a left-leaning watchdog group, said that if Ms. Trump's brand was trying to expand operations or import from other countries, there could be "meaningful interaction" with foreign governments. Foreign companies, too, might also try to cut special deals with the brand to curry favor

with the Trump administration, Mr. Weissman added.

"Then you get into the issue about improper influence," he said.

Jamie Gorelick, a Washington ethics lawyer who is acting as an independent adviser to Ms. Trump's trust, said in a statement that since Ms. Trump had resigned from her company, she "has had no involvement with trademark applications submitted by the business."

"The federal ethics rules do not require you to recuse from any matter concerning a foreign country

just because a business that you have an ownership interest in has a trademark application pending there," she added. "Ivanka will recuse from particular matters where she has a conflict of interest or where the White House counsel determines her participation would present appearance or impartiality concerns."

For Ms. Trump, the risks may be necessary. Helping steady her father's presidency could be critical to preserving the appeal of both her brand and her father's. Certainly, his scorching rhetoric has led to a complicated period for Ms. Trump's brand, both at home and abroad.

Her business interests have faced boycotts, and Nordstrom, citing poor sales, said in February that it would no longer sell Ms. Trump's shoes and clothes. There was also a backlash to the backlash, as online sales of Ivanka Trump-branded products skyrocketed right after Nordstrom's decision, according to Lyst, a fashion e-commerce site.

Ms. Trump also made waves in China in February by posting a video of her 5-year-old daughter, Arabella, singing in Chinese on Instagram, a move some saw as aimed at soothing raw feelings between China and the Trump administration.

And in March, "Saturday Night Live" featured a sketch, starring Scarlett Johansson, that had Ms. Trump selling a perfume called "Complicit." (Ms. Trump recently told CBS, "If being complicit is wanting to, is wanting to be a force for good and to make a positive impact, then I'm complicit.")

"Everything she does," said Mr. Weissman of Public Citizen, "is effectively an advertisement for the Ivanka Trump brand."

**The
New York
Times**

Policy Advisers Urge Trump to Keep U.S. in Paris Accord

Coral Davenport

Secretary of

State Rex W. Tillerson, the former chief executive of Exxon Mobil, has also spoken in favor of "keeping a seat at the table" in the climate pact, and in recent days, major corporations have stepped forward to embrace that position.

While no decision has been made, experts tracking it say that view is gaining traction.

"We do not currently believe the Trump administration plans to withdraw from either Paris agreement," wrote Kevin Book, an analyst at ClearView Energy Partners, a Washington firm, in a memo to clients on Monday.

While Mr. Trump does not have the power to undo a multilateral United Nations accord, he could withdraw the world's largest economy from the pact, weakening it substantially. Such a move would win cheers from the nation's most powerful conservative political advocates, and give Mr. Trump bragging rights in coal country.

But withdrawing from the landmark accord that committed nearly every nation to take action against planet-warming emissions could create diplomatic blowback, while weakening American leadership in arenas far afield from energy and the environment.

Besides, keeping the United States' name on the accord does not obligate the Trump administration to abide by the ambitious emissions-control pledges of Mr. Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama. At least one senior White House climate policy adviser, George David Banks, has advocated staying in the agreement while replacing the Obama plan with a

weaker, more industry-friendly pledge.

Over recent weeks, Mr. Banks has asked top officials at several major corporations, including Exxon Mobil, who have similar views, to submit letters to the White House confirming their support for staying in the Paris deal, even if in a modified form.

In response, Peter Trelenberg, the manager of environmental policy and planning at Exxon Mobil, wrote to Mr. Banks, "Exxon Mobil supports the Paris agreement as an effective framework for addressing the risks of climate change."

Royal Dutch Shell and BP, European companies with significant investments in the United States, have also endorsed the accord.

Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, spoke last week to coal miners in Sycamore, Pa. He has emerged as a leading voice for withdrawal from the Paris accord. Justin Merriman/Getty Images

Last month, Representative Kevin Cramer, a Republican from oil-, gas- and coal-rich North Dakota, wrote, "The U.S. should present a new pledge that does no harm to our economy." Mr. Cramer, an early supporter of Donald J. Trump, advised Mr. Trump on energy issues during his presidential campaign.

Colin Marshall, the chief executive of Cloud Peak, a major coal producer in Wyoming, the nation's largest coal-mining state, also wrote to Mr. Trump: "By remaining in the Paris agreement, albeit with a much different pledge on emissions, you can help shape a more rational

international approach to climate policy."

Regardless of his decision, Mr. Trump has already undermined the United States' ability to meet its Paris pledge. Mr. Obama declared that the United States would reduce its planet-warming carbon pollution about 26 percent from 2005 levels by 2025. Its primary policy for meeting that target would be the Clean Power Plan, a set of Environmental Protection Agency regulations designed to shutter hundreds of heavily polluting coal-fired power plants, the nation's chief source of greenhouse emissions.

Last month, Mr. Trump directed Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, to begin the legal process of dismantling the Clean Power Plan. Whether or not the United States remains in the Paris pact, it almost certainly will not be able to meet its pledged pollution-reduction targets.

Mr. Pruitt has emerged as a leading voice for withdrawal from the Paris deal. Last week, he told Fox News, "It's something we need to exit."

That reflects the views of powerful conservative political advocacy groups such as Americans for Prosperity, which is funded by the influential libertarian brothers Charles G. and David H. Koch.

"What we say to the White House is that it's clearly a terrible agreement for the American people," said Tim Phillips, the president of Americans for Prosperity.

That view is also backed by economists at the Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank that has supplied the Trump administration with many of its policy proposals.

Harold G. Hamm, the chief executive of Continental Resources and a Trump campaign adviser, has also condemned the pact. "Cancel the Paris climate treaty and any other agreements entered into unilaterally and without the consent of Congress," Mr. Hamm wrote in a letter to Mr. Trump before his inauguration.

Bob Murray, the chief executive of the coal company Murray Energy, who is personally close with the president, has also strongly criticized the deal.

Mr. Book, the analyst, noted that the risks of withdrawing from the Paris deal include not only diplomatic ill will, but also the possibility of trade reprisals. Countries that tax emissions of carbon dioxide pollution could place a carbon tariff on imports of American-made goods. The European Union currently charges polluters fees for carbon emissions, while China, Mexico and Canada are in the process of carrying out such programs.

"If the U.S. were to pull out, it would do so in the context that would invite trade reprisals," Mr. Book said. "It could lead to a carbon tariff trade war."

Daniel M. Bodansky, an expert in international environmental agreements at Arizona State University, said that remaining in the Paris deal but weakening the United States' commitment could still have the effect of generating some ill will — but without the repercussions of trade sanctions.

"They could just submit a new plan," he said. "People internationally would not be happy, but they'd be a lot less unhappy than if the U.S. actually pulled out."

Editorial : Surprise us, Mr. President, and embrace the Paris climate agreement

The Times Editorial Board

Donald Trump has been president for only three months and already he's given up or reversed course or been stymied on a wide range of campaign promises. Given how awful some of those ideas were — ending Obamacare, declaring China a currency manipulator, ordering a blanket federal hiring freeze (done, but since lifted) — it is not necessarily a bad thing for the country that he's fallen down on the job.

Now, we're mildly heartened to learn that Trump also may be moving away from his ill-advised campaign pledge to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris climate agreement of 2015, under which nearly 200 nations pledged to reduce emissions of the greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

Climate change, of course, is viewed skeptically by the new president. He once described the idea that human activity is heating up the oceans and atmosphere in potentially catastrophic ways as "a total, and very expensive, hoax" that was "created by and for the Chinese" in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive. He

appointed a climate skeptic, Scott Pruitt, to run the Environmental Protection Agency, a department Trumps hopes to reduce by 31%, according to the budget proposal he sent to Congress. The administration also is pushing plans to roll back Obama-era limitations on methane emissions from oil and gas wells on public lands (an effort that, fortunately, may die in the Senate), and to consider weakening the aggressive fuel-efficiency standards for motor vehicles established under Obama.

Trump also has drawn a target on the Clean Power Plan, which was designed to significantly reduce emissions from primarily coal-fired power-generating plants responsible for a third of the nation's greenhouse gases.

His hostility to the science of climate change poses a global risk. The U.S. is the world's largest economy and second-largest emitter of carbon and other greenhouse gases. It was instrumental in crafting the Paris agreement, a milestone in international environmental cooperation even if experts say its goal of capping the rise in temperatures by 2100 to less than 2 degrees Celsius isn't ambitious enough if the world is to

avoid the worst effects of global warming.

It's slightly encouraging that there seems to be an internal debate underway between a set of Trump advisors who want the president to keep his promise to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris agreement and another set urging him to stick with the pact but loosen the Obama goal of reducing by 2025 U.S. emissions by up to 28% of 2005 levels. That the Trump administration is even debating the issue rather than blindly carrying out its ill-conceived campaign promise offers a hopeful sign that the president's position could change, and that he might still join the rest of the world in trying to address the potentially existential threat of global warming. For the United States to back off from the Paris accord now not only would imperil the chances of global success, but would marginalize the U.S. as a leader in a defining issue of our era.

At the same time, if the U.S. were to stay in the Paris agreement while weakening the United States' commitments, that still would be a losing proposition for the nation, and the world, given that emissions need to be even more sharply curtailed than already planned. Reducing reliance on fossil fuels is

a difficult challenge, but it needs to be done. Yes, there will be economic hits to the oil and gas industries, but alternative renewable energy already has become a significant part of the global economy and it is growing quickly. Given the worldwide damage that will be caused by rising seas — one estimate puts it at \$1 trillion a year by 2050 — insuring jobs today at the expense of the future is the definition of penny-wise, pound-foolish.

The president is in a position to prove his critics wrong — to demonstrate that he can weigh (actual, not alternative) facts and frame positions based on reality and in the best interests of the nation. We invite him to do so by sticking with the Paris agreement and the Clean Power Plan, and by directing the government to find ways to reduce U.S. emissions even further. Those are steps that a sagacious and respected world leader would take.

We hope Trump moves in that direction, away from his reckless campaign stance on this enormously important issue.

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POLITICO Democrats begin to wonder: When do we win?

By Gabriel Debenedetti

Story Continued Below

Democratic candidate Jon Ossoff failed to avoid a runoff election in Georgia's 6th congressional district. | Getty

For all the roiling anger and energy at the grassroots, the party still fell short in Georgia and Kansas. And Democratic prospects in upcoming elections aren't promising.

As it became clear late Tuesday evening that Jon Ossoff would fall just short of the 50-percent mark in the first round of voting in a suburban Atlanta special election, Democrats back in Washington started leafing through their calendars and asking: When does the winning start?

Ossoff's moral victory — capturing 48 percent of the vote in a conservative-oriented district — was welcome, but after two successive close-but-no-cigar finishes in House special elections in Georgia and Kansas, a new worry is beginning to set in.

For all the anger, energy, and money swirling at the grassroots level, Democrats didn't manage to pick off the first two Republican-held congressional seats they contended for in the Trump era, and the prospects aren't markedly better in the next few House races coming up: the Montana race at the end of May, and the South Carolina contest on June 20.

Their best shot at knocking Donald Trump down a peg appears to be Ossoff's runoff against Republican Karen Handel, also scheduled for June 20. But the Democrat will be an underdog in that contest, when there won't be a crowded field of Republicans to splinter the vote.

After that, it'll be another five months before the New Jersey and Virginia elections for governor, leaving some strategists and lawmakers wondering how to keep the furious rank-and-file voters engaged in fueling and funding the party's comeback — especially given the sky-high expectations that surrounded Ossoff's ultimately

unsuccessful run at the 50-percent threshold that was necessary to win the seat outright.

"The resistance has it right: they are fighting mad, but they find joy in the fight. And so it's not that anybody should be expected to gloss over the challenges that we have, or be Pollyanna about our situation as a country or as a party," said Hawaii Sen. Brian Schatz, decrying some of the party's messaging describing the prospect of an Ossoff loss as devastating. "It's just that there has to be a sense of momentum that builds over time and that requires that we define our objectives tightly — and that we are prepared to lose more than we win for the time being, but that we understand that we have the vast majority of the American people on our side, and history on our side."

Democrats have posted a few successes in the opening months of the Trump era. They've slowed the new president's agenda and overperformed in a slew of low-profile state legislative races. By any measure, Ossoff's strong

performance in Georgia and the 20-point swing toward the Democratic nominee in last week's Kansas special election are impressive accomplishments given the conservative orientation of those districts. But they still fall under the category of loss mitigation, not concrete victories against a president the party loathes.

Now, with Ossoff falling short of an outright win despite an unprecedented surge of campaign cash and national attention — in a district which Hillary Clinton lost by just one point in 2016 — comes the potential for another round of finger-pointing within the party. The worry: that if operatives and voters continue their practice of quietly blaming each other for losses, as they did after a narrow defeat outside of Wichita last week, the current level of runaway enthusiasm and budding trust in the national party leadership could sputter out long before the 2018 midterms.

"Whatever happens over the next few weeks, it's critical that rank-and-file Democrats feel like the

[Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee] left it all on the playing field," said longtime party strategist Simon Rosenberg, president of the NDN think tank.

After attorney James Thompson came within seven points of winning the race for CIA Director Mike Pompeo's old seat in Kansas last week, some leading progressive voices, including Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, were quick to blame national Democrats for not spending enough time and energy to help Thompson. Since then, DCCC and Democratic National Committee officials have been sure to detail the work they've done for the party ahead of Ossoff's race.

With the approach of a Montana contest that will see national resources poured in while political celebrities like Sanders descend on the state to support candidate Rob Quist, the question Democrats are asking themselves is whether it will be enough — and how to keep the grassroots fires stoked as Trump's administration passes its first 100 days mark. Trump won Montana by 21 points, after all, and the race in Georgia to replace HHS Secretary Tom Price illustrated that a combination of Republican infighting, the Trump factor and an avalanche of campaign cash still isn't enough to guarantee Democratic success.

The South Carolina race to replace Budget Director Mick Mulvaney will take place under similarly difficult conditions — in a district Trump won by 18 points, and in a state where he won by 14.

Supporters of Democratic candidate Jon Ossoff watch as the results for Georgia's 6th congressional district special election come in at a watch party in Atlanta. | Getty

One way to avoid a letdown, some Democrats say, is to train the focus on legislative fights where Democrats have slowed the White House, from its travel ban to the attempt to repeal Obamacare. Party operatives figure pushes like that might be enough to keep the base energized as opportunities to push back on individual policies surface.

"People are responding to Trump, and as long as Trump is in office they will continue to respond," said Democratic pollster Margie Omero. "There are plenty of other avenues for engagement. Constant meetings and groups popping up all over the country. You have corporate motivated efforts that people are taking to make sure that companies they support have political views that line up with their own. You have the groundswell of activism against

[Neil] Gorsuch, and then you have the protests like the tax protest or the climate ones coming down the pike. So there's lots of opportunity for opposing the president. [Yes,] as long there's voting people are going to be paying a lot of attention to it. But it goes beyond that."

The fact that Democrats have picked themselves up off the ground since Election Day to mount a resistance at all creates a positive feedback loop, they believe — pointing to local legislative races as evidence of an optimistic trend.

"The biggest driver of enthusiasm right now is the rejection of Trump and the Trump agenda," said party strategist Jesse Ferguson, a former top official at the party's House campaign wing. "There have been far more successes in resisting the Trump administration than anyone would have expected on November 10, whether it's beating back the health care repeal or some of these special elections in state legislatures, or closer-than-expected congressional races."

With the political map glaringly free of obvious near-term win opportunities, Schatz believes the party's messaging needs some refining. In his view, that means officials at the DCCC should cut the doom-and-gloom messaging in their fundraising emails — a significant

way the party communicates with backers.

"I don't mind the occasional call to action that is based on a negative emotion, it's the declaring final defeat at the start of the third quarter that bugs me. 'All is lost' is a preposterous thing to say to a voter or a donor, and to use words like 'crushing' is a total misunderstanding of how to motivate people," he said on Tuesday, just hours before the DCCC sent out a Nancy Pelosi-signed note with the subject line "crushing loss."

"The point to be made here is this is Tom Price's seat," he added. "One of the most conservative people in the United States House. And when he vacated his seat nobody thought it was going to be a problem for national Republicans and competitive for us. So if we can keep up this competitiveness, it's going to be a really interesting year in 2018. But if we define our success as winning in Kansas, Montana, and Georgia, we're setting ourselves up for potential disappointment."

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Trump voters discontented? So far that's not what polls say.

The Christian Science Monitor

April 18, 2017 —President Trump's rocky first months in office haven't much bothered his voters. At least, not yet.

Yes, there have been lots of stories from the Rust Belt about stirrings of discontent among the Trump faithful. But those are mostly anecdotal and so far data — meaning polls — don't back that thesis up.

For instance, in a big new Pew Research survey fully 92 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say Mr. Trump has done as well or better than they expected. Only 7 percent say he's done worse.

What this means is that Trump's base remains intact. In turn, his ability to lead and pressure the GOP-controlled Congress probably does too. After all, Congress as a whole is less popular than he is. House Speaker Paul Ryan's job approval rating, in that same Pew poll, is an abysmal 29 percent. That low number could damage Representative Ryan's ability to

drive any upcoming tax reform effort.

But Republicans haven't yet become a populist-tinged Party of Trump. Chaos matters. The administration's flopped travel ban is still stuck in the courts. Obamacare remains, stubbornly, unrepealed. Tax reform is receding into the distance. Trump's GOP backing might dwindle as well.

"His support even among Republicans is a mile wide but an inch deep," says Jeffrey Engel, director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University in Texas.

Of course, many Democrats can't believe that Trump's standing in the GOP remains as solid as it is. To them, his administration has been a rolling disaster, a circus of misstatements and poorly planned initiatives.

You can see this in Gallup's rolling daily average of Trump's general job approval rating. For the week of April 10 to 16, only 10 percent of Democrats gave a thumbs-up to Trump's performance as president. That's a historically low figure, even by today's partisan standards. And

it was an improvement from the previous week, when the comparable figure was only 6 percent.

The view from Logan, West Virginia

In contrast, Trump's job approval among Republicans for the week of April 10 to 16 was 87 percent. That's comparable to the support past presidents had from their own party at a similar point in their administrations.

"He's trying his best," says Loretta Evans, who's been a waitress for 34 years at Morrison's Drive In in Logan, West Virginia. "They are fighting him tooth and toenail, but he is trying. Of course, I do pray for him every night ... I would like to see him do good and I think his heart is in the right place."

Ms. Evans, a septuagenarian who has lived in Logan all her life, says that in her view, Congress and the Senate need to stop fighting the president's initiatives. "If they want to turn this country around, they're going to have to get together."

Trump's overall job approval ratings are quite low, especially for a chief

executive who's been in office only a few months. But as the above split shows, that's not due to widespread opposition. It's due to intense disapproval from the other party (and, to a lesser extent, independents).

The contrast with Speaker Ryan

Those ratings are higher than Paul Ryan's, however. If the struggle to be titular head of the Republican Party were a battle of numbers — and to some extent it is — than the president would beat the speaker. Ryan's positive job approval is 29 percent, versus almost twice as many, 54 percent, who disapprove of the job he's doing.

To some extent that rating may come with the position. Congress as an institution isn't popular, and the House Speaker is the personification of Congress. But it is also something of a referendum on Ryan. His predecessor John Boehner had better numbers at a similar point in his own speakership. So did Democrat Nancy Pelosi. Even Newt Gingrich, the Republican firebrand House leader, had somewhat better poll ratings in 1995, according to Pew.

Ryan may just be suffering an image letdown. For years he's positioned himself as a legislative whiz-kid who could pass big, meaty bills if given unified control of Washington. In his first chance, with the attempted repeal of the Affordable Care Act, he failed badly. That's inevitably going to damage his ability to frame any upcoming tax reform debate, vis-a-vis the White House.

"The Obamacare debacle made him look feckless, at best," says Dr. Engel at SMU.

For his part, Trump may have run as an outsider, a populist beholden to no one in the establishment wing of the GOP. But rank-and-file Republicans are now the bedrock of

his political support. That



Editorial : A Depression-era law could get a new life under Trump. Here's what it should look like.

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By Editorial Board

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

April 18 at 7:24 PM

THE TRUMP administration is more than halfway through the 120-day review of financial regulation that the president ordered on Feb. 3. Time flies! And the hot new idea is, well, an old idea: the Glass-Steagall Act, a Depression-era law which, until its repeal in 1999, separated federally insured commercial banks from risk-taking investment banks. Some say the law's repeal helped lead to the panic of 2008 and that reinstating it would stabilize Wall Street more than the convoluted Dodd-Frank law enacted in 2010. Gary Cohn, the Wall Street veteran who heads the National Economic

includes the prototypical Trump voter — a white male without a college degree — as well as other demographic categories of party members.

So if Trump's standing in the Republican Party slumps even a modest amount, the result on his overall numbers could be dramatic. And there are some warning signs. The just-released Pew poll shows somewhat bipartisan concern about Trump's decisionmaking process, for example. About 30 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents judged it "too impulsive."

And continued problems with his agenda could well cost Trump some GOP erosion in the months ahead.

Council, expressed a willingness this month to consider a 21st-century Glass-Steagall, in keeping with certain vague 2016 campaign remarks by Donald Trump and a line in the Republican platform.

What that might mean in practice is still anyone's guess. A bipartisan group of senators including Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) seized on Mr. Cohn's remark to reintroduce their long-standing proposal to restore Glass-Steagall pretty much as it was in the 20th century. Thomas M. Hoenig, vice chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC), has a more nuanced plan that would allow commercial and investment banks to exist within the same overall corporate structure, but with clearly separate capital and management so taxpayers faced no exposure to the riskier investment side's losses. Such a "ring-fencing" plan has been adopted in Britain; a key component is a tough capital requirement — 10 percent — for the commercial bank, as an added protection against

The president's problems with Congress are only going to continue, judges Engel. Trump has just passed through the easiest portion of his administration — the first part of his first term — and has missed picking even the low-hanging fruit, in this view. The travel ban was badly mishandled, the Obamacare non-repeal even more so. As a candidate who ran partly on a promise to be a great dealmaker, Trump has proved remarkably unable to strike any agreements at all, even with different factions in his own party.

"I'd put the vast majority of blame on Trump himself," says Engel.

Will Trump's pivots hurt his popularity?

systemic risk and taxpayer bailouts. Mr. Hoenig's proposal calls for a similar buffer.

An irony of the situation is that some of today's behemoth "universal" banks got that way because at the height of the crisis the government encouraged consolidation between, say, Bank of America and the failing Merrill Lynch investment bank. It would take tremendous effort — by legislators and bankers — to split them up again. The actual causal link between the repeal of Glass-Steagall and the financial crisis is a matter of great dispute, however, because the investment firms whose failures triggered the panic, Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers, had never been subject to the law.

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What they lacked was sufficient capital to weather a crisis; accordingly, beefed-up capital throughout the financial sector is

That said, there are some signs Trump is learning in office, Engel adds. That's a valuable trait for a chief executive. His foreign policy seems increasingly mainstream GOP, despite his campaign promises to get NATO allies to pay up and to confront China on trade.

Will that make GOP voters happy — or do they really expect an "America First," inward turn? The answer to that question could help determine Trump's popularity, and by extension his ability to maneuver in Washington, over the rest of his first year in office.

Staff writer Story Hinckley contributed to this report from West Virginia.

what's essential to protect against another meltdown, wherever it might originate. It so happens that Dodd-Frank, despite its undue complexity, has been fairly successful in forcing banks to build capital. This is why the Federal Reserve found last year that the U.S. banking system could withstand "a severe global recession with the domestic unemployment rate rising five percentage points." In fact, Wall Street's main complaint is that excessive capital requirements are forcing them to restrict lending — though FDIC data show that bank lending grew 5.3 percent in 2016 while the industry made healthy profits.

No doubt the financial sector would love to steer President Trump's Dodd-Frank rewrite in the direction of relaxed capital requirements. Whatever else a 21st-century Glass-Steagall turns out to mean, it must not be that.



Editorial : Highway From the Endangerment Zone

April 18, 2017
6:50 p.m. ET 135

COMMENTS

Scott Pruitt has emerged as a leading voice in the Trump Administration for U.S. withdrawal from the Paris global climate deal, so it's ironic that the Environmental Protection Agency chief is being assailed from the right for being soft on carbon. Too many conservatives these days are searching for betrayals where none exist.

As Attorney General of Oklahoma, Mr. Pruitt successfully sued to stop the enforcement of President Obama's regulations known as the Clean Power Plan, or CPP, and he's preparing to dismantle them for good as EPA administrator. The rap from the right is that he won't challenge the underlying determination for regulating CO₂ emissions known as an endangerment finding. In 2009 the EPA concluded in this finding that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases pose a threat to public health and the environment,

and this document serves as the nominal legal basis for the CPP and other anticarbon rules.

Mr. Pruitt's critics claim that withdrawing from the CPP without reversing endangerment will strengthen his opponents in the inevitable green lawsuits that are coming. Endangerment findings create a legal obligation for the EPA to regulate the relevant pollutants, even if carbon is far different from traditional hazards like SO_x and NO_x.

The endangerment finding was deeply misguided and flawed in its execution, and nobody fought it more than we did. But there's a practical reason that Mr. Pruitt is right about the risks of trying to revoke it now. The finding has been upheld by the courts, and creating a legally bulletproof non-endangerment rule would consume a tremendous amount of EPA resources, especially at an agency with few political appointees and a career staff hostile to reform.

Technical determinations about the state of the science are supposed to be entitled to judicial deference, but the reality is that the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals that would hear the case is packed with progressive judges. Climate change has become a theological conviction on the left, so Mr. Pruitt would almost certainly lose either with a three-judge panel or en banc.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Supreme Court's appetite

Editorial : Offshore Drilling Blowout Preventer

April 18, 2017
6:49 p.m. ET 14 COMMENTS

President Trump is filling out his Administration, but too slowly, and an offshore drilling proposal shows why having personnel to mind the store is so important. Barring a late reversal, Mr. Trump may abet his predecessor's goal of undermining American energy production.

Two days before President Obama left office—the encyclopedia definition of a midnight regulation—U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CPB) rolled out a new rule on the Jones Act. Under this 1920 law, all ships transporting goods between U.S. ports must be U.S.-flagged, constructed in the U.S., owned by U.S. citizens and crewed by U.S. citizens.

Most ships in the offshore oil and gas industry like crewboats or

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Barnes: Gorsuch Lessons for Trump's Next Nominee

Fred Barnes
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Republicans have created a political machine for confirming conservative nominees to the Supreme Court. It functioned like a well-run presidential campaign after President Trump nominated Neil Gorsuch to succeed the late Antonin Scalia. And it needed to perform, despite Justice Gorsuch's impressive credentials.

The effort to confirm pulled off two surprises. As divided as Republicans are on health care, they were united behind Judge Gorsuch once the few wavering senators were won over. Even more unusual, Mr. Trump was all but silent on Judge Gorsuch—no tweets, no controversial comments to the press, no distractions.

The Gorsuch experience has strengthened Republicans, should Mr. Trump have a second Supreme Court vacancy to fill. Democrats won't be able to block the new nominee by filibuster, having foolishly forced Senate Majority

for such a case is also minimal, since it would run directly at the 2007 ruling in *Massachusetts v. EPA* that prepared the way for the endangerment finding. Justice Anthony Kennedy was in that 5-4 majority.

Mr. Pruitt is already taking on difficult and controversial challenges, so better for the Administration to use scarce political capital where it will make a difference instead of burning it on a

platform-supply vessels already comply with the Jones Act in the Gulf of Mexico, Alaska and elsewhere. But Customs now wants to extend the mandate to certain specialized drilling, construction and engineering vessels. Currently, about 30 CPB regulatory precedents stretching back 40 years exempt these ships from the Jones Act.

The reason is that the drilling industry is global and mobile. Heavy-lift construction vessels, for example, are used to install moorings in deep water and perform other specific, limited tasks. There are 76 in the world—and none of them comply with the Jones Act. The international fleet of crane barges tops out at 173, only 17 of which qualify.

If the CPB reverses historic precedent, the damage will be

Leader Mitch McConnell to confirm Justice Gorsuch by invoking the "nuclear option" to kill the filibuster of his confirmation.

That isn't to say that the next nominee will have smooth sailing. If Justice Anthony Kennedy, the swing vote, or any of the four liberal justices retires, the court's ideological balance will be at stake. One issue in particular will rise to the top: abortion. Democrats will insist that a new conservative justice would be the fifth vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Moderate GOP senators might agree. Republicans control the Senate with only a narrow margin, 52-48.

The struggle over Mr. Trump's second nominee would probably make the fight over Justice Gorsuch seem cordial. Democrats have vowed total resistance. The confirmation machine would have the benefit of its experience with Mr. Gorsuch and the ability to deploy its forces quickly.

In the 11 months between Justice Scalia's death and the Gorsuch nomination, a lot happened. Mr. McConnell's decision to keep the

doomed mission. The endangerment finding doesn't dictate any specific regulation, and Mr. Pruitt has the discretion to interpret the Clean Air Act to achieve his favored policy outcomes, including to repeal legally tenuous central planning like CPP.

A future Democratic President could use the endangerment finding to revive something like CPP, but then that same Administration could

immediate and disorderly. Current development will be delayed or the rule could even become a de facto moratorium. Removing foreign-flagged vessels from the U.S. supply chain will make future projects riskier and more expensive. Proponents claim U.S. fleets can simply buy new equipment, but that takes time and in any case is a misallocation of resources to satisfy an arbitrary regulation.

The motives of Mr. Obama and career CPB staff are obvious: to reduce oil-and-gas investment. Less obvious is the support of some Republicans in Congress, especially the Louisiana delegation led by Majority Whip Steve Scalise. They're cheering because they think blocking foreign competition will benefit the local maritime trade.

Perhaps Mr. Trump even buys into this America-first logic. But deep

seat open for the next president to fill unnerved even some Republican senators. When Sen. Jerry Moran of Kansas said President Obama's nominee, Merrick Garland, deserv'd hearings, he was pressured to change his mind, which he did.

Democrats targeted Chuck Grassley of Iowa, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, who faced re-election in 2016. The media declared his seat in jeopardy if no Garland hearings were held. To bolster him, op-eds backing his refusal to schedule hearings began to appear in Iowa papers. At a town hall, a woman stood up and thanked the senator for standing strong. Mr. Grassley was re-elected with 60% of the vote.

The confirmation machine began gearing up in March 2016, when Washington attorney Don McGahn introduced Mr. Trump to Leonard Leo, the executive vice president of the Federalist Society. Mr. Trump said he wanted a list of potential conservative nominees to the Supreme Court. Mr. Leo not only produced it, but added a second list

restore endangerment too. Mr. Pruitt is a natural target for the left, but when conservatives are impugning one of the leaders of President Trump's economic deregulation project as a sellout, maybe the problem is the critics, not Mr. Pruitt.

water operations in particular don't have the scale to support a purely domestic business. Any short-term boon to boat building or shipyards will be exceeded by the disruption to jobs and investment, and the larger economy will lose to the extent there is less oil and gas development.

Mr. Trump only recently nominated a permanent CPB commissioner, and in the meantime the bureaucracy seems to be riding herd. The new rule could be finalized as soon as this month. Mr. Trump is otherwise committed to domestic energy and economic deregulation, and he could serve both goals by ordering a top-to-bottom review of Mr. Obama's destructive parting gifts.

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that included Judge Gorsuch. The list of 21 names became critical once Mr. Trump declared that he would pick from it if he became president. Mr. McConnell believes this not only made the Supreme Court the "principal" issue in the campaign, but made Mr. Trump acceptable to wary Republican voters.

Everyone played his role perfectly. Upon being nominated, Judge Gorsuch's job was to be an appealing witness at his confirmation hearings. He was never argumentative. Mr. McConnell concentrated on keeping Republican senators from bailing out. Mr. McGahn, now the White House counsel, handled Mr. Trump. Mr. Leo, who had earlier helped in confirming Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito, took leave from the Federalist Society to run the outside campaign.

Mr. Leo kept this last part quiet and orderly. When Judge Gorsuch was hit with a last-minute charge of plagiarism, the appropriate academics had already been lined

up. They dismissed the charge as unwarranted. Mr. Leo insisted on no surprises. There were none.

The well-funded Judicial Crisis Network and its chief counsel, Carrie Severino, were a key part. Also arranged were TV ads by the National Rifle Association, which urged four Democratic senators to vote for Judge Gorsuch. Two of them did. The last hurdle was locking up three holdout Republican senators, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Bob Corker of Tennessee. If they had voted against eliminating the filibuster, Justice Gorsuch might not be on the court today. Mr. Corker,

who regarded the filibuster as a valuable Senate tradition, was flooded with pro-Gorsuch phone calls, and the possibility of a primary challenger was raised. He complained but voted to end the filibuster anyway.

With a second nominee, the confirmation machine faces a threshold question: Will President Trump choose from the list? He hasn't said so. Before picking Judge Gorsuch he interviewed three other candidates and was especially impressed with the runner-up, Judge Thomas Hardiman of the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. He is 51.

There's considerable risk for Mr. Trump if he chooses a nonconservative, says Ann Corkery, a Washington lawyer who worked to confirm Justice Gorsuch. "Along with David Souter, the lesson of Harriet Miers should not be forgotten," she says. Justice Souter, appointed by President George H.W. Bush, joined the court's liberal faction. Ms. Miers, the White House counsel whom President George W. Bush nominated to the high court, dropped out after conservatives opposed her. "Conservatives are not going to just roll over because it's a Trump nomination," Ms. Corkery says.

Mr. McConnell expresses confidence. If a second Supreme Court vacancy arises, he said in an interview shortly after Mr. Gorsuch's confirmation, "I think we are going to see a quality nominee." The list is brimming with them, conservatives all, with a political machine eager to get behind them.

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Forbes, Kudlow, Laffer and Moore : Why Are Republicans Making Tax Reform So Hard?

Steve Forbes, Larry Kudlow, Arthur B. Laffer and Stephen Moore

United States' gross domestic product.

cut, and it should be sold to the American people as such.

Instead, the primary goal of Mr. Trump's first tax bill should be to fix the federal corporate and small-business tax system, which has made America increasingly uncompetitive in global markets and has reduced jobs and wages here at home. The White House and the Treasury already have a tax plan that we were involved with last year. The three most important planks of that plan are:

To help win over Democratic votes in the House and Senate, we would also suggest another component: What many workers across the country want most from President Trump is infrastructure funding. As part of this bill, we should create a fund dedicated to rebuilding America's roads, highways, airports and pipelines, and modernizing the electric grid and broadband access — financed through the tax money raised from repatriation of foreign profits.

We should emphasize that business tax relief is not a sellout to corporations but a boon for middle-class workers. A study by the Tax Foundation and Kevin A. Hassett, then at the American Enterprise Institute and now the chairman of President Trump's Council of Economic Advisers, found that middle-class wages rise when business taxes fall.

As for fixing the maddeningly complex individual income tax system — lowering tax rates and ending needless deductions — we are all for it, but that should wait until 2018. Jobs and the economy are the top priority to voters.

First, cut the federal corporate and small-business highest tax rate to 15 percent from 35 percent, which is now one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world.

As much as possible, this bill should include private financing for projects like toll roads and energy drilling. We also favor "user pays" financing, such as toll roads, and we would oppose any Fannie Mae-type financing structure for projects that would put taxpayers on the hook for hundreds of billions in potential losses.

The additional increase in real wages could be nearly 10 percent over the next decade, which would reverse 15 years of income stagnation for the working class in America. And, if we are right that tax cuts will spur the economy, then the faster economic growth as a result of the bill will bring down the deficit.

Republicans need to act with some degree of urgency. The financial markets and American businesses are starting to get jittery over the prospect that a tax cut won't get done this year. A failure here would be negative for the economy and the stock market and could stall out the "Trump bounce" we have seen since the president's election.

Second, allow businesses to immediately deduct the full cost of their capital purchases. Full expensing of new factories, equipment and machinery will jumpstart business investment, which since 2000 has grown at only one-third the rate recorded from 1950 to 2000.

For this strategy to work, Republicans need to take several steps. First, President Trump and Paul Ryan, the speaker of the House, should stop insisting on "revenue neutrality." In the short term, the bill will add to the deficit. But President Trump's tax bill, like those of Presidents Ronald Reagan and John Kennedy, should be a tax

Next, Republicans should abandon the so-called border-adjustable tax. A border tax is a poison pill for the tax plan: It divides the very business groups that the party needs to rally behind tax reform. Retailers like Walmart will never go along. A carbon tax would be even worse. The best way to bring jobs back to America is to simply lower tax rates now while rolling back anti-jobs regulations, such as rules that inhibit American energy production.

Mr. Trump should demand that Congress send him a jobs bill this summer that he can sign into law on Aug. 13, 2017. That is the day President Reagan signed his historic tax cut in 1981 at his beloved Ranch del Cielo in Santa Barbara, Calif.

That tax cut and President Kennedy's before it unleashed two of the longest periods of prosperity in American history, and that is a result Donald Trump should want to replicate.