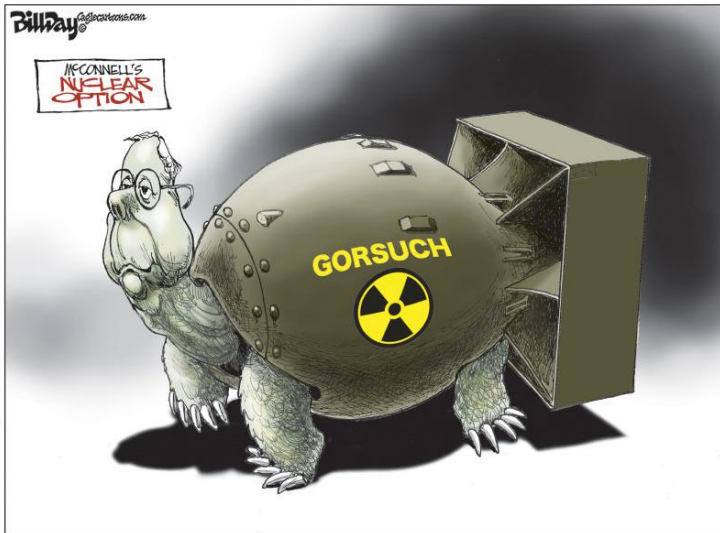


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# FRANCE - EUROPE

NATIONAL  
REVIEW  
ONLINE

## Cooke : French Election -- Le Pen & Macron Seek Francois Voters

*France* — Fact is stranger than fiction. In France, doubly so. On the day I leave for Paris, the following headline adorns *Le Monde's* front page: "Fillon Received \$50,000 to Introduce a Lebanese Industrialist to Putin."

*Alors*. A scandal to mar the French election. Anything less and they wouldn't really be trying, would they? Of all the world's political gods, those that serve the French are the most puckish.

And yet, the persistent rumors that have engulfed François Fillon are, in truth, the *least* interesting thing about this extraordinary election cycle. That Fillon's descent has left a gaping political void is interesting, certainly. But what's really fascinating is how it's being *filled*. Late last year, it seemed all but certain that France would have a sensible, center-right president of the sort you could take home to your mother. Today? Heaven only knows.

On paper, Fillon was perfectly placed. He had the experience, having been prime minister under Nicolas Sarkozy, and he had the novelty value, having become the North Star of a new French conservatism that has embraced Catholicism in spite of *laïcité*, turned happily toward "Anglo-Saxon" free markets, and even rebranded its flagship party as "the Republicans." In addition, he was well suited to bridge the gap between the sects in a country that remains as divided as ever — "How," Charles de Gaulle asked, "can you govern a country that has 246 different sorts of cheese?" — but has become steadily more right-leaning as the years have gone by. Astonishingly for a French politician, Fillon is running on a platform would be familiar to voters in the United States: Inter alia, he wants to reduce the number of civil servants, abolish France's "wealth tax," abolish the 35-hour work week, reform the health-care system, and raise the retirement age; and, while he has promised to protect the legal status quo, he is vocally pro-life and opposed to gay marriage. For once, the stars seemed to have aligned: The most credible, electable option was also the most sound.

But, damn those puckish gods, it was not to be. And, alas, the

alternatives to Fillon are markedly less appealing than is he. There is Marine Le Pen of the Front National (FN), who, despite having distanced herself from her father and swapped open-handed racism for implication-heavy populism, is still rather unpleasant. There is Benoît Hamon, the most left-wing candidate within the Parti Socialiste, whose big ideas are to tax robots and to add a universal basic income on top of France's creaking welfare state. There is Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a cerebral left-leaner whose destiny is to be the best-spoken also-ran in French history. And there is Emmanuel Macron, a self-described post-ideological moderate who is a leading contender for Luckiest Man in France.

Macron, an independent with no party apparatus around him, is a former Rothschild banker who at one point seemed destined to be a footnote but after Fillon's implosion is now the odds-on favorite to win the whole thing. Perilously untested, chronically vacuous, and ostensibly tarred by his work under the incumbent president, François Hollande (the most unpopular the Fifth Republic has ever had), Macron nevertheless seems set to take the lion's share of a political middle that is sorely lacking in credible representatives. Cosmopolitan, pro-immigration, and publicly insistent that "there is no such thing as French culture," Macron is precisely of whom Marine Le Pen is thinking when she lambastes the "savage globalization that has been a nightmare" for France.

Politically, France is in a bad place. Under Hollande's feckless leadership, the country has been attacked from both without and within and seen an average of 1 percent growth for almost half a decade. Unemployment among 15-to-24-year-olds is now at a staggering 25 percent and has led to an exodus that has rendered London the sixth-largest French-speaking city in the world. The reflexively proud French are no longer sure that they have a future. They are afraid for their economy. They are afraid of immigration. They are afraid of technology. There is, almost everywhere you go, a tangible sense of *ennui*. It is an

uncertainty that does not suit the people that produced de Gaulle.

For the establishment, the consequences have been grim. As *The Economist* put it, this year's primaries brought a "bonfire of the elites." To have a familiar name in 2017 — be it "Hollande," "Sarkozy," or "Juppé" — is to carry a heavy weight around your neck. As in America, many voters are in a burn-it-down mood. And without a strong, "safe" option that can Hoover up the middle, the extremists and opportunists have pounced.

Blame it on what you will — "populism," "nationalism," the revolt of the forgotten — the traditional French alliances are disintegrating before our very eyes. Why is it that so many are so worried that, this time, the execrable Le Pen family might finally get its hands on power? Because, this time, the support is coming from a variety of different places. The Front National has always had strongholds in the rural, revanchist South, but it is now converting the socialists in the Northeast, appealing to an unprecedented number of voters under 30, and winning over some key blocs of social conservatives who would historically have gone elsewhere. And, crucially, it is making its gains for a host of different reasons.

As France's flagship pollster, IFOP, has shown, there is agreement among fans of Le Pen and Co. that the streets are too dangerous and that there are too many immigrants. But, outside that, the coalition is intriguingly divided. For the young, the main issue is the economy — remarkably, between a quarter and a third of young voters now claim to support the FN. In the South, it is culture and taxes that drive passions, as well as a latent opposition to gay marriage that its entrenchment in the culture and the law has not dispelled. In the North, the stories echo those from the American Rust Belt: Having seen their industrial jobs disappear, lifelong left-leaners are looking elsewhere. For the first time in their history, reports the news station France 24, the FN's politicos "have been tailoring their message."

Outside Marseille Provence airport, in France's southernmost region, there are Le Pen posters on every

pillar. Some feature the veteran fascist Jean Marie Le Pen, and read *Avec Le Pen. Contre l'arnaque Européenne!* (With Le Pen, against the European scam!). Others show Jean-Marie's daughter, Marine, and carry a populist slogan: *Au Nom du Peuple*. Next to them are flyers for another hopeful, an anti-American conspiracy theorist named François Asselineau. His taglines are more paranoid in nature — *Suivez votre intuition!* (Follow your intuition!) — and there is a contrived heroism in his language. *Participer à l'histoire!* reads one of Asselineau's affiches. That's History with a capital H, one suspects.

Along both the Autoroute du Soleil and the hairpin roads that flirt with the imposing Mount Faron, this pattern continues. For mile after mile I see craggy mountains of chalk and green; the usual array of Tuscan-orange roofs; and, everywhere, posters for the Front National. In the South, this disposition seems to be more ideological than anything else, for there is little obvious poverty in this region. (A decade or so ago, my Malawian cousin was turned away from a restaurant in this area on the open grounds that she was "noire.") My fellow drivers are retirees, soccer moms, and businesspeople, and they are safely ensconced in Audis, BMWs, and Mercedes. While rural, the area is no backwater. Nearby Toulon has an important enough port to have hosted the scuttling of the French fleet in both 1942 and 1793, and figures prominently in both Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and Joseph Conrad's *The Rover*.

A few miles from the city border, I stop for a break at one of the many pizza places that litter the roadside. The owner of the joint has pasted a Marine Le Pen poster onto an electrical box outside his property. After ordering a Coke, I ask casually about the election: "You think Le Pen has a chance?"

This should have been a straightforward question. Toulon, after all, has a long history with the Front: In 1995, it was one of the four French cities that shocked the world by electing a Front National mayor. And yet, to my immense surprise, I immediately regret the inquiry.

"Who wants to know?" the proprietor asks immediately, cocking his head

to the side. I tell him that I am a British journalist who lives in America, and that I'd seen his sign and been intrigued.

"What do they think in America?" he asks, trying to change the focus.

I say that America probably hasn't given the French election much thought, which is half true and half a dodge designed to leave me on the fence.

"D'accord," he says, deftly. "So what do you think?"

Busted.

I flirt with the idea of explaining that I loathe Marine Le Pen, that I'm one of those dastardly *Anglo-Saxon* Atlanticists, and that I haven't truly liked a politician since Coolidge. But, wanting to stay alive for a few more years, I think better of it, pay for the drink, and move on.

An hour away in Orange, a similar dynamic obtains. Once a major seat in the Roman Empire and home to the best Roman theater in Europe, Orange is another of the towns that elected a Front National mayor in '95. This year, it will almost certainly go for Le Pen.

In a backstreet near the center of town, I meet a man putting up flyers that are covered in tall capital letters: IMMIGRATION! TERRORISME ISLAMIQUE! FRANCE!

I introduce myself and again ask whether Le Pen has a chance.

"Oui," he says, looking around.

I encourage him to say more. As he speaks, I am again struck by how seedy the whole thing feels. This is a man who is putting up political posters on the street, and yet his eyes dart nervously as he talks, he declines to give me his name, and he speaks of the candidate he supports as Mr. Rochester spoke to Jane Eyre about his wife. The flyers behind him say "For the people!" and, in this town at least, a majority of those *peuple* seem to agree with the complaints his literature is making in unabashed 60-point solid caps. And yet he behaves like a naughty schoolboy who has been caught watching

pornography in his bedroom. The *New York Times* tells me that the Front National is "no longer spat upon," and I see ample evidence of this. Still, there's a defensiveness at play in the South that smacks more of *la résistance* than *la majorité*.

It is a different story in Hénin-Beaumont, a former mining town near the Belgian border that once reliably voted for the Parti Socialiste but has turned lately to the Front. As of 2014, Hénin-Beaumont has a Front National mayor, Steeve Briois. In an interview with *Paris Match*, a town assemblyman described meetings under the mayor as a "circus" but conceded that Briois had been tactically flexible enough that "a very large majority of the population has no objective reason to complain."

Even the Communists are impressed. Jacques — I'm calling him Jacques because he doesn't trust me and won't give me his real *prénom* — tells me that he is voting for Le Pen, whom he calls "Marine," as if they are friends. But, as a former member of the now-routed Parti Communiste, he also likes Benoît Hamon's idea of taxing robots, which he regards as insidious traitors that are stealing human jobs. Jacques seems smart and put together, and in trying to figure out how someone as lucid as he is could have arrived at the viewpoints he has, I have to remind myself that this is a country in which SWAT teams go on strike if they aren't permitted to drink at lunch.

Jacques is typical. Writing from Paris in 2007, Christopher Hitchens observed that "there is a reason why the French Communist Party, which used to dominate the working class, the unions, and much of the lumpen intelligentsia, is now a spent force that represents perhaps 3 percent of the electorate. And that reason, uncomfortable as it may be, is that most of the Communist electorate defected straight to the National Front." Indeed. And in getting there, many have walked straight past center-right candidates such as Sarkozy and Fillon, just as many Rust Belt Americans skipped past Mitt Romney on the way to Donald Trump. Realignments, lest we

forget, tend to change things from the ground up.

One can overstate the case. Marine Le Pen is unlikely to become president of France, if just because the system is explicitly designed to prevent people like Marine Le Pen from becoming president of France. According to polling aggregated by *The Economist*, Le Pen has an excellent shot of getting to the second round — a 93 percent chance, in fact — but after that her odds drop to just 5 percent. The reason for this is simple: In the first round of French presidential elections, the sheer number of non-FN candidates serves to fracture the "normal" vote into small pieces. In the second round, however, that vote regroups behind the most palatable non-FN candidate and vastly outstrips the FN's 25 percent average.

This is, make no mistake, a Good Thing. Marine Le Pen is not her father, but she is not much better, all told. Like Nigel Farage in Britain, she has a point on the EU, and she is sensible to express concerns about crime and immigration that nobody else will touch. And yet she has an emetically close relationship with Vladimir Putin, takes skepticism toward immigration and trade to unpalatably farcical levels, and, as a Gaullist admirer of *dirigisme*, is no friend to the market reforms that France so desperately needs. She is, in short, bad news.

And yet that so many "what if?" stories are being written in earnest should indicate that something is afoot. The socialists are no longer winning their voters. The young are becoming radicalized. The political are giving up on politicians. To combine a lack of economic growth with an impermeable elite class is, we are learning, to develop an especially toxic brew — *especially* when that elite class is perceived to disparage all that the voters hold dear. And in France, of all places?

On the plane from New York, I am struck again by the chasm that has opened between the jet set and everybody else, and by the scale of the opportunity that has presented itself to the iconoclasts. I am on a British airline, and the in-flight

magazine is *aggressively* cosmopolitan. The "Editor's Note" celebrates, among other things, that a third of Londoners were born abroad. The featured interviewee argues that British television should shed its famous and traditional period dramas in favor of shows about immigrants. And the most prominent advertisement describes "dual citizenship" as "the insurance policy of the 21st century." If "globalization" were to be parodied by the sharpest minds in the West, it would look a little like this. This, to paraphrase an American refrain, is how you got Brexit. It's how you'll get Frexit, too.

Which brings us to Monsieur Macron, the likely next president of France. There seems little doubt that, for now, the French will choose the bloodless option over the crazy option — as well they should. But that Macron will likely prevail will make him no less bloodless, and that he will remain bloodless will, in turn, create a new set of frustrations in a French polity that is moving inexorably rightward. Over dinner in Paris, an anti-Le Pen friend of mine puts it this way: "There is no question that if we get Macron, we will get a Trump, because Macron is the worst possible person for this moment."

And so he is, which is why even in Paris you see dismissive, desperate signs — *Tous sauf Macron!* ("Anyone but Macron!") — and why otherwise sober people are muttering about the coming end of the Fifth Republic. Had his scandals never surfaced, one suspects that Fillon could have taken some of the sting out of this peculiar moment. In his absence, there seems to be nobody else who can. What that means for the French and their system remains to be seen.

— Charles C. W. Cooke is the editor of National Review Online. This article appears in the April 17, 2017, issue of National Review.



## Marine Le Pen's tricky alliance with Donald Trump

By James McAuley

PARIS — In the early hours of Nov. 9, Marine Le Pen was the first foreign politician to congratulate the new U.S. president-elect.

In the weeks that followed, the leader of France's far-right National Front did everything she could to tie

her presidential campaign to the upset victory of Donald Trump, claiming that she would be the next chapter in a global populist revolt against the "establishment."

On the morning after the U.S. election, she took to the stage at her party's headquarters outside Paris, heralding Brexit and Trump as part of an unstoppable worldwide phenomenon — "democratic

choices that bury the old order and steppingstones to building tomorrow's world."

But a month before the first round of the French elections, Le Pen's tone has markedly changed: no more President Trump — at least not for now.

Le Pen, almost certain to qualify for the second and final round of the

elections, seems to be keeping her distance from her compadre. The word "Trump" rarely figures in her speeches and rallies these days, and when she squared off against France's four other presidential candidates in the campaign's first televised debate March 20, she avoided mentioning him in any policy discussion, despite ample opportunities to do so.



On a broader level, following the defeat of Geert Wilders in the Dutch elections last month, Le Pen and her aides even have shied away from their frequent forecasts of the populist wave soon to cascade through France and carry them to power. If she wins, she now says, it will be because of France and the French — not because of a seismic shift in geopolitics and the tail wind it would bring.

"I'm counting on you to carry out with me the battle for France!" she said Thursday, speaking at an agricultural fair in rural Brittany.

"We have to put France back in order!" she said Monday in a speech in the Vendée.

"I will engage France on the path of economic patriotism — for our small business, for our farms," she said Sunday in Lille.

The shift, analysts say, mirrors her recent softening of her famously hard-line stances on both the European Union and the euro. Le Pen has campaigned largely by advocating the removal of France from both, but she now says she would hold referendums on each — especially after recent opinion polls

have reiterated the popularity of the currency among ordinary French voters.

The same now applies to Trump.

"It's difficult for Le Pen to use Trump, when she knows that so many French disapprove of him," said Dominique Moisi, a political scientist and co-founder of the Paris-based French Institute for International Relations.

According to opinion polls, nearly 8 in 10 French voters harbor strongly negative views of the U.S. president, who has repeatedly insisted — sometimes through the commentaries of a mysterious, unidentified friend named "Jim" — that "Paris is no longer Paris" and that "France is no longer France" in the wake of the terrorist attacks that have claimed 230 lives here since the beginning of 2015.

In France, where even fringe politicians are expected to dazzle with wit and erudition, the brash and often unscripted public persona of the U.S. president has become something of a liability for his chief French ally, who was spotted in the basement cafeteria of Trump Tower on an impromptu visit in January.

"In France, even if you are of the extreme right, as Marine Le Pen is, you do not have credibility if you do not know how to align a subject, a verb and a complement," said François Heisbourg, the chairman of the Geneva Center for Security Policy and a former member of a French presidential commission on national security.

"Trump truly wouldn't last 20 minutes in the French political system — not because of his ideas, but because of the way he expresses them."

In fact, the substance of Trump's ideas — or versions of them — does remain popular with a number of French voters, who favor a return of national sovereignty, immigration bans and rapprochement with President Vladimir Putin's Russia. These are all pillars of Le Pen's platform, and she is expected to garner at least 40 percent of the vote, according to the latest polls.

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There is also the issue of the anti-Americanism at the heart of the National Front, which for decades has railed against "American imperialism" abroad and its principal local manifestation — the European Union. If Trump's isolationist rhetoric represents a departure from decades of U.S. foreign policy, he is still an American president in the eyes of a party long in favor of France abandoning its ties with the United States for a new relationship with Russia.

If she rarely mentions Trump anymore, Le Pen — who met with Putin in Moscow last month — has no qualms about reminding her supporters at every turn of her plans to deliver on that Russia promise.

In her recent speech in Lille, days after returning from Russia, she called Putin a "real statesman" engaged in the same "fight against terrorism" as France.

The crowd went wild.



## France's Socialists Are Losing to a Communist

James Traub

PARIS — Earlier this month, I joined the estimated 130,000 Frenchmen who answered the call of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the very-far-left presidential candidate, to stage a "March for the Sixth Republic" from the Bastille to the Place de la République in Paris. Among other radical positions, Mélenchon argues that the Fifth Republic, which was declared by Charles De Gaulle in 1958 and enshrined a monarchical presidency, has reached the end of its useful life and that it's time for a new, more democratic, more egalitarian France. Mélenchon is a left-wing populist who compares himself to Bernie Sanders. Like Sanders, Mélenchon speaks to the widespread desire of voters on the left to rewrite the orthodox rules of politics. These voters are the other side — the side we have tended to overlook — of the polarization of politics across the West.

Mélenchon, 65, spent his career as a Socialist Party backbencher until 2008, when he bolted to form his own Left Party. In 2012, he ran for president and captured a respectable 11 percent of the vote. In that election, the Socialist François Hollande defeated right-wing incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy. But Mélenchon viewed Hollande as the Tweedledum to Sarkozy's Tweedledee — an apostle of

globalism, neoliberalism, and financial austerity, and a puppet of the "Eurocrats" who "dream" of locking "the people in an open-air prison," as he recently put it in his very pungent (and long-winded) weekly blog post. In February 2016, long before any other candidate had declared him or herself, Mélenchon announced that he would run once again, now as the standard-bearer of another self-created party, *La France Insoumise* (France Standing Tall, more or less).

Mélenchon has no real chance of becoming president and is unlikely to finish higher than fourth in the first round of the upcoming presidential elections. He may well, however, come out ahead of Benoît Hamon, the Socialist candidate. That would constitute an immense moral victory for Mélenchon and his votaries, and an absolute calamity for the Socialists, who, like traditional center-left parties all over Europe, suddenly find themselves in free fall. Earlier this week, Hamon implored Mélenchon — and not for the first time — to withdraw his candidacy in order to create a united left front. Mélenchon responded by telling a crowd of 5,000 supporters that "It is to you that I bound myself. I will negotiate nothing with anyone."

I asked everyone I met at the march what was wrong with Hamon, who, after all, represents the left wing of

France's institutional left party. The first person I asked, Daniel Monnet, who, as it turned out, was running for parliament on Mélenchon's list in the Haute-Marne district in the northeast, said that the problem wasn't Hamon's program, but his party. "The Socialist Party has betrayed us," he said, "and betrayed working people. Despite all his promises, Hollande accomplished only one progressive thing during his tenure — "marriage for all," or gay marriage.

It's absolutely true that Hollande has governed as a centrist, pleasing neither left nor right. He instituted budget cuts to reduce France's deficit, offering little resistance to the German-led austerity caucus in the European Union. Worse still, if that's possible, he continued Sarkozy's campaign to liberalize French labor rules, passing — in the face of mass protests — an employment law that allows individual companies to bypass such key rules as the 35-hour workweek. Mélenchon, by contrast, has called for massive new government spending to stimulate the economy and a "relocalization of production" enabled by a new regime of protectionism. He's vowed to renegotiate France's relationship with the EU — or leave. He would establish workers' committees at the heart of big companies with the power to veto the boss's decisions

to close factories, lay off workers, or move capital abroad.

As a young man, Mélenchon was a Trotskyist, but he joined the Socialists rather than enlist in a Communist Party that would become increasingly marginal after the 1970s. He rose through the ranks of the party in Essonne, a department southwest of Paris, ultimately serving as a junior minister under Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin from 2000 to 2002. But having grown up in Morocco, attended a regional university, and worked as a teacher, Mélenchon was never fully comfortable in the party's intensely elitist culture, any more than he was with its mainstream social democratic principles.

Mélenchon now enjoys the support, albeit grudging, of the Communist Party, which views him as a reckless individualist rather than a disciplined cadre. The party's red flag waved all along the route of the march. People also carried signs that read (in French) "Share the Wealth" and "Democracy in the Workplace," though also "Death With Dignity" and "No More Stop and Frisk."

One of the compelling features of Mélenchonism is that it fuses the most intensely nostalgic elements of the French left with the most avant-garde.

For the young people in the crowd — and there were a great many — Mélenchon was the ardent “ecologist” who would replace nuclear facilities with wind farms and solar batteries. For the oldsters, he’s the sworn enemy of capitalists and the moneyed power.

For the young people in the crowd — and there were a great many — Mélenchon was the ardent “ecologist” who would replace nuclear facilities with wind farms and solar batteries. For the oldsters, he’s the sworn enemy of capitalists and the moneyed power. Mélenchon also defends the rights of immigrants and refugees, a brave position given the profound anger at both that has driven French politics to the right. However, he has played to nativist sentiment by complaining that the “posted workers” sent to France from low-wage EU countries “took the bread out of French workers’ mouths.” No one I talked to at the march raised Mélenchon’s defense of immigrants as a reason for supporting him. In his speech the candidate steered clear of this supremely neuralgic question.

For the French left, the backward look is far more enthralling than the forward gaze; the past is where hope lies. The speakers who appeared on the stage before Mélenchon read a poem Victor Hugo had written to celebrate the doomed Paris Commune of 1871, two works of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, a passage from Albert Camus on the imperative to resist fascism, and a fragment of Jean-Paul Sartre: “There is no human nature; man is what he does.” Gerard Miller, a psychoanalyst who had made a documentary on Mélenchon, urged the crowd not to “fall into the trap of ‘How much does it cost?’” Rather, “at the outset you must demand what is desirable.” The crowd roared, “Resistance! Resistance!”

And then Mélenchon, a stocky man with a red tie — always red — showing through his rather chic open-necked black sweater, took the stage. Mélenchon is, as the French say, a “tribune” — an orator who knows how to stir the masses. The melodramatic vocabulary of the Revolution, the Commune, and the anti-fascist struggle of the 20th century issues from him as fluently as Elizabethan English from a gifted Shakespearean actor. “Listen to the sound that rises from our ranks,” he cried to the great throng. “This sound has no name, like the sound of the wind in the leaves, like that of the rain on the pavement. The sound has no name, but it is a sign — that of the people when it arises in its history.” It might sound like malarkey to a nonbeliever; to this crowd it was nectar.

Mélenchon raged against “a presidential monarchy” — the semi-regal, unaccountable French head of state — “and its close collusion with the kingpins of finance who subjugate and dominate.” He insisted that the Socialist Hollande, like his right-wing predecessor Sarkozy, had surrendered French sovereignty to a European Union where “all power is given to a wholly independent central bank whose sole mission is the protection of rent” — a term straight out of *Das Kapital*. Mélenchon also said that workers must exercise greater control over “the means of production.” For all of Mélenchon’s facility with social media and his conversion to the cause of environmentalism, he seemed to be summoning his followers to join him in a glorious crusade to the 19th century.

### Left behind

The center-left parties of Europe, which for decades dominated both its politics and political culture, have lost their way. In the Dutch elections last month, the Labour Party finished seventh, plummeting from 38 seats in Parliament to nine. The British Labour Party has been rendered almost nonfunctional by splits within its ranks provoked by hard-left party leader Jeremy Corbyn. France’s Socialist Party still enjoys a near-majority in the National Assembly and holds many of the country’s most important mayoralities, but Hollande has suffered from record unpopularity almost throughout his tenure. Hamon may win little more than 10 percent of French votes. (Social Democratic parties do, however, continue to enjoy support in Germany and elsewhere in northern Europe, though at a lower level than they had been accustomed to in recent years.)

European postwar center-left parties were built on a base of unionized workers who enjoyed rising incomes as well as growing benefits from the welfare state, but also appealed to urban professionals and intellectuals. That coalition began to delaminate as white-collar jobs eclipsed blue-collar ones; the process has accelerated since the economic crisis of 2008 put an end to rising incomes. Marc Lazar, a historian at Sciences Po in Paris, argues that it is far too early to count the Socialists out for good. Nevertheless, he observes, Europe’s center-left parties have been losing supporters in three directions. Successful professionals have been leaving for “third-way” parties like Emmanuel Macron’s *En Marche!*, or the parties have repositioned themselves to the right, as is the case with Italy’s Democratic Party, the heir to older

left-wing and social democratic groupings. The blue-collar base has defected to the far right, whether France’s National Front or the UK Independence Party. Still others, including teachers and other civil servants, have found their way to left-of-the-left groupings, like La France Insoumise. Many leaders of France’s Socialist Party have announced that they will support Macron rather than Hamon. The latest was Manuel Valls, prime minister for most of Francois Hollande’s tenure. The Socialists seem to be crumbling away by the hour.

The Communist boilerplate that I heard at the march has deep and deeply romantic sources in France. Lazar is the author of *Communism: The French Passion*, and he reminded me that the Communists had been France’s leading party from the end of World War II to De Gaulle’s victory in 1958. The Communists were the party of both workers and intellectuals. Mélenchon draws from a historical legacy and a sense of romance that has outlasted the party itself. As Lazar puts it, “Anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, the idea that there is just one way to change, and that is towards Communism — this culture remains part of the politics of France.” The appeal of this noble atavism has only grown as the dynamic of globalization has increasingly compelled the parties of both the center-left and -right to bow before the laws of the marketplace — embracing fiscal austerity, free trade, the free movement of capital and labor. The dream of escape from these apparently iron laws is especially potent in France, where a poll recently found that only one of four respondents viewed free trade as an opportunity rather than a threat. In England, Brexit notwithstanding, the figure was twice as high.

### The politics of nostalgia

The first of three presidential debates took place last Monday. Only the five leading candidates were invited — Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front, François Fillon of the center-right Republicans, Emmanuel Macron of *En Marche!*, Benoît Hamon of the Socialists, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The debate lasted a stupefying three hours. And it was three hours of policy. Incredibly, neither of the two moderators asked Fillon about the scandals that have engulfed his campaigns, a lengthy list that begins with apparently giving his wife and children no-show jobs in his legislative office and ends — for now — with an allegation that a Lebanese billionaire paid Fillon \$50,000 to set up meetings for him

with Russian President Vladimir Putin and the head of the French oil giant Total. Le Pen, who has been accused of billing the European Union for the salaries of party workers, emerged similarly unscathed. The rival candidates raised the alleged improprieties only by way of delicate allusion. All present seemed to regard fiscal crimes with the tact which the French famously bring to extramarital sex.

The debate featured some exceptionally clarifying moments, however, above all on the question of immigration and French identity, the obsession of the National Front. Le Pen claimed that every year France absorbs 200,000 legal immigrants (the net figure is about half) and probably as many illegal ones (the state reported around 50,000 illegal immigrants per year every year between 2013 and 2015), and that terrorists were exploiting the flow to gain a foothold in France. She called for limiting the annual figure to 10,000, and for waging a campaign against “the pressure of these incessant claims in matters of food and clothing” — i.e., efforts by Muslim immigrants to keep pork out of schools and grant women the right to wear the veil. Fillon, though more cautiously seeking the xenophobic vote, declared that French Muslims must act against the rise of “*intégrisme*” — resistance to assimilation — and that France must tightly regulate the hiring of imams and the foreign funding of mosques.

Macron, who seemed largely intent on not offending either left or right, seized the moment by saying, “The trap in which you are in the process of falling, Mademoiselle Le Pen, by your provocations, is to divide society,” which is to make 4 million French Muslims “enemies of the republic.” Mélenchon, who risks losing working-class voters by refusing, even *sotto voce*, to sympathize with their rising anger against newcomers, ridiculed Le Pen’s proposal for strict limits. “But do you want to throw them in the sea?” he said, and asked voters to sympathize with the desperation that brought refugees to Europe. “If we were in their condition, we would also leave.”

Mélenchon is often accused of being a populist, but a strong thread of moral universalism runs through all his views.

Mélenchon is often accused of being a populist, but a strong thread of moral universalism runs through all his views.

Nevertheless, in the course of the evening it became clear that in other respects Mélenchon and Le Pen have much in common. Sounding

very much like Le Pen, Mélenchon said that France needed to “turn the page from chemical agriculture” — agribusiness — to small-scale “peasant agriculture.” Sounding very much like Mélenchon, Le Pen complained that “ultra-liberalism” and free trade had “ruined” French agriculture and industry. The state, she said, must openly favor French businesses and protect them from foreign competition. Both stoutly defended France’s sacrosanct 35-hour workweek; Mélenchon has said he would like to go to 32.

#### Out of time

One way of looking at the debate, and at French politics today, is as a referendum on the conditions and prospects of the West. Macron, the English-speaking youthful ex-banker and Blairite liberal, wants France to embrace globalization and free markets, at least insofar as one can divine views that he prefers to keep blurry. Fillon is a cultural conservative who appeals to Frenchmen and women, especially Catholics, who fear the loss of a

traditional order, but he’s also a Thatcherite who champions deregulation. Hamon is a classic social democrat who repudiates austerity in favor of Keynesian investment, but does not fundamentally dispute the merits of the private market.

And that leaves Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen, the practitioners, respectively, of a politics of economic and cultural nostalgia. Both promise to lead their followers to green pastures purged of ugly toadstools, whether financiers or Moroccan immigrants. Both regard incrementalism, the steady shaping of the world as it is, as a trap set by the enemies of the people. Both regard the state as the sole bulwark against the impersonal forces that dominate the world. It’s no surprise that large numbers of industrial workers in France’s northern Rust Belt, once the bulwark of the left, seem to be defecting to the National Front.

Nevertheless, there is a world of difference between the xenophobia

and provincialism of the far right and the cosmopolitan and fraternal spirit of the Marxist left. Most people I spoke to at the march seemed angrier about the harm the EU had done to Greece than about the alleged damage to France. Because we live in an era in which cultural fears are even more potent than economic ones, Mélenchon cannot compete with Le Pen for the votes of those who fear that French identity is under attack. It is almost a mathematical certainty that Le Pen will advance from the first round of voting to the second, and that Mélenchon will not. Yet Mélenchon was widely viewed as the shining light of the debate, witty and eloquent and fully at ease. Hamon, by contrast, was generally subdued, despite getting in a few good shots at Macron. Mélenchon has said that this will be his last election. If so, he may close his career by out-polling the Socialist candidate. Given his oft-expressed contempt for the party, this would count as sweet vengeance.

Beyond this, it would be foolish to predict what French voters will do. Macron may come to appear callow next to the gravelly, bushy-browed Fillon, whose florid misdeeds may be forgiven. Or Macron could face Le Pen in the second round but lose, current polls notwithstanding, because too much of the moderate right embraces the far right and too much of the left stays home. (Virtually everyone at Mélenchon’s march told me that they would refuse to vote, or submit a blank ballot, in a contest between Le Pen and Macron.) In the Dutch election earlier this month, the center held. In France, where the sound of the people rising is like the wind in the leaves, it may not.

Having witnessed Trump and Brexit, the French are knocking on wood and whistling past graveyards. So much is at stake in this election. For once, the French conviction that their nation stands at the very heart of world affairs is all too true.



## Editorial : Europe’s Firm But Fair Approach to Brexit

The Editors

With talks on Britain’s exit from the European Union finally about to begin, one procedural issue looms large: Do the negotiations on three big subjects -- exit terms, transitional arrangements, and a future comprehensive agreement on a U.K.-EU partnership -- move in parallel or in entirely separate stages? Disagreement over this seemingly minor detail could sink the whole effort.

The U.K. has far more to lose in these negotiations than the EU, but if the talks break down it would advance the interests of neither side. An understanding on how the talks should proceed is therefore needed at the start -- and a formula suggested last week by the

European Council offers grounds for optimism.

The EU is concerned, in the first instance, that Britain settles its liabilities and meets its other obligations to the EU when it leaves. The U.K. wants that discussion to happen alongside talks on future arrangements, so that concessions in one area might be traded against concessions in another.

The problem is that the European Commission has proposed an exit bill of as much as 60 billion euros (to cover planned investments, EU staff pensions and other costs), a figure that one British minister has called absurd. If the EU presents these terms on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, and the British government is unable to justify them to its citizens, the

talks could fail almost before they’ve begun.

QuickTake Why Britain Voted to Quit the EU

Last week the European Council, the body representing EU governments, issued draft guidelines to its negotiators. The overall posture is firm but fair -- and on this issue of sequencing, the council isn’t ruling out compromise. Describing the first phase of talks, the guidelines say the council will “determine when sufficient progress has been achieved to allow negotiations to proceed to the next phase.”

A good choice of words. “Sufficient progress” is sufficiently vague to allow negotiators to move on to other matters before exit terms are

signed and sealed. The greater the scope for compromise across the full range of issues, the better the prospects of a successful, mutually advantageous result. EU governments will need to resist the temptation to harden this “sufficient progress” language as things move forward.

The disentangling of Britain from the rest of Europe is likely to be one of the most difficult and complicated international negotiations ever undertaken. The chances of this ending well, especially for the U.K., are poor. But if Europe’s leaders adopt these guidelines, they’ll deserve some credit for choosing not to cripple the talks from the start.



## U.K.’s Challenge: Reconciling Its Brexit Aims

Simon Nixon

April 2, 2017

12:44 p.m. ET

After nine months of phony war, the Brexit battle lines have been drawn.

Last week’s opening salvos were cloaked in generous diplomatic language. British Prime Minister Theresa May used her letter invoking Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty to laud Europe’s liberal democratic values and declared her wish for a “deep and special partnership” with the European Union.

EU Council President Donald Tusk reciprocated by declaring the Brexit negotiations an exercise in “damage control” with the goal of keeping the U.K. as close a partner as possible.

The desire for an amicable divorce on both sides is sincere, not least because the consequences of a collapse of the legal frameworks underpinning current cooperation in areas such as trade, finance, science and security would be so severe. Yet neither side is confident that the obstacles to a deal can be overcome.

The greatest obstacles lie within the U.K. itself. Mrs. May faces what may prove an impossible trilemma.

She needs a deal that, first, is close enough to the EU to minimize disruption to business and allow the continued free flow of people, goods and services that are vital to the U.K.’s prosperity. Second, she needs a deal that will satisfy those in her own party who dream of a “global Britain” that can pursue an independent trade policy and cut regulation and taxes. Third, she needs a deal that will preserve the unity of the United Kingdom amid

rising nationalism in Scotland and Northern Ireland and questions about the status of Gibraltar.

These three goals may be irreconcilable. The EU made clear in its draft negotiating guidelines that the price of a deep and comprehensive trade deal will be fiscal, social and environmental safeguards to protect the EU from suffering a competitive disadvantage through what it calls “social dumping.”

Brexiters fear that whatever right the U.K. may have regained in theory to

strike its own trade deals and re-engineer its economic model would likely be constrained in practice as the country would remain bound by rules over which it no longer had any control.

On the other hand, the kind of “clean Brexit” demanded by hard-line Brexiters whereby the U.K. simply seeks to trade with the EU on World Trade Organization terms would not only cause maximum economic disruption, it would create a hard border with the Republic of Ireland which could fuel Irish nationalism and jeopardize the peace process.

If forced to choose, it seems clear which way Mrs. May intends to jump. In her public statements last week, she used the cloak of a largely confected row about whether she was blackmailing the EU by linking future security cooperation to a trade deal to drop many of the

cherished goals of the hard-line Brexiters.

She accepted that British businesses would have to abide by EU rules—at least when doing business with the EU; that the U.K. would have to pay a financial price to secure an exit deal; and that far from gaining £350 million a week, as Brexiters famously promised, there would be “consequences” for the U.K. economy.

Meanwhile, ministers acknowledged that immigration from the EU might even go up after Brexit and that the U.K. would continue to abide by EU freedom of movement rules until the U.K. leaves the EU in 2019.

Privately, some cabinet ministers accept that further substantial compromises will be essential if the U.K. is to get any negotiated exit and trade deal. They believe that Mrs. May has established enough

political capital with the Brexiters to negotiate whatever deal she thinks is in the national interest. They believe that many Brexiters will back down from their most hard-line demands if it helps to preserve the unity of the U.K.

These cabinet ministers also hope that even if Brexiters don't like what Mrs. May agrees to, they will back her because once Brexit is delivered, it will be easier for future U.K. governments to renegotiate the deal. Besides, senior ministers point out that Mrs. May faces no obvious internal challengers, giving her a degree of political freedom.

Nonetheless, Mrs. May's political capital is about to be severely tested. The EU's draft negotiating guidelines show that the bloc will be tough in defending the interests of its member states. It won't discuss future trade arrangements until the

two sides have made “sufficient progress” toward a deal that will settle the U.K.'s financial obligations and which protects the rights of EU citizens currently settled in the U.K. Neither of these are straightforward.

Far more problematically, the EU is determined to find a solution that avoids a hard border in Northern Ireland before trade talks start and it wants to make any deal effectively conditional on the U.K. reaching an agreement with Spain over the future status of Gibraltar. Both of these may require compromises beyond even Mrs. May's capacity to deliver.

Indeed, as Mrs. May contemplates her trilemma, it is clear that her need for a deal that strengthens the unity of the U.K. may be the toughest condition to fulfill.



## Brexit could give Spain major bargaining power over Gibraltar

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In the shadows of the massive rock pictured above live roughly 30,000 Britons, crowded onto a peninsula whose only land border is with Spain, and by extension, the European Union. Unsurprisingly, almost every single resident of Gibraltar, the United Kingdom's sole continental outpost, voted to remain in the E.U. in last summer's referendum on “Brexit.”

Speaking to my colleague Griff Witte in January, Gibraltar's chief minister, Fabian Picardo, described the Brexit campaign's triumph as a moment of “deep sorrow,” as his constituents, in Witte's words, “are committed Europeans and because they knew the vote to leave would give Spain leverage.”

Leverage, in this case, regards heretofore weak Spanish claims on the territory. Despite its obvious geographical contiguity with Spain, and the fact that more than 12,000 workers commute into the territory from Spain every day, native Gibraltarians steadfastly maintain

that they are British, as the land itself has been since the early 1700s. In a 2002 referendum, they overwhelmingly reaffirmed that in the ballot box.

*[From Brexit to 'Legs-it': Daily Mail disdusts Britain with 'sexist' front page]*

But with its essential reliance on the Spanish mainland, Britain's withdrawal from the open border and customs agreements of the E.U. means that Spain can choose to exert crippling economic pressure as a bargaining chip.

On Friday, the E.U. indicated that it would tacitly back Spain's claims on the territory in its draft negotiation guidelines for Brexit. The document stipulates that “no agreement between the EU and the United Kingdom may apply to the territory of Gibraltar without agreement between the Kingdom of Spain and the United Kingdom.” In other words, London will have to negotiate directly with Madrid on any Brexit-related arrangements affecting Gibraltar.

The wording was immediately lauded in Spain and seen as an affront in the U.K.

British Prime Minister Theresa May called Picardo on Sunday morning to say that the U.K. remained “steadfastly committed to our support for Gibraltar, its people and its economy,” and that she would defend the “freely and democratically expressed wishes” of its residents that had made their desire to remain part of Britain clear. A former leader of May's Conservative Party, Michael Howard, took the rhetoric up a few notches, saying that Britain would go to war against Spain for Gibraltar if necessary, just as Margaret Thatcher did against Argentina in 1982 over the Falkland Islands.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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“Thirty-five years ago this week, another woman prime minister sent a task force halfway across the world to defend the freedom of another small group of British people against another Spanish-speaking country, and I'm absolutely certain that our current prime minister will show the same resolve

in standing by the people of Gibraltar,” Howard told Sophy Ridge on Sunday on Sky News.

British politicians who did not support Brexit expressed alarm that “saber-rattling for war” against longtime European allies had begun even before negotiation guidelines had been agreed upon. “It is absolutely ludicrous and totally inflammatory,” said Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Gibraltar is home to a British air base, airport and seaport, and it is only 12 miles from the coast of North Africa. The U.K. handles its security and foreign policy, while leaving all other matters, including taxation, to the local government.

Article 50 is the legislation that sets out how a member state can leave the E.U. (The Washington Post)

Article 50 is the legislation that sets out how a member state can leave the E.U. What is Article 50? (The Washington Post)



## Serbia's Prime Minister Projected to Win Presidency, Consolidating Control

Matthew Brunwasser

With its coalition partners, his party has a strong and solid majority in Parliament, and the courts are weak and seen as politically controlled. The departing president, Tomislav

Nikolic, had been one of the few checks on Mr. Vucic's power.

With Mr. Vucic in the president's office, Serbia is likely to follow the same domestic and foreign policy course as during his time as prime minister: enacting the political and

economic changes required for membership in the European Union, while simultaneously seeking closer relations with Russia. Creating tensions with Brussels, Mr. Vucic has refused to support sanctions against Russia.

Declaring victory in Belgrade, the capital, Mr. Vucic said, “When you have results like this, it's clear to everyone that there is no instability,” adding, “Serbia is strong, Serbia is powerful and it will be even stronger.”



As Western governments decrease their involvement in the Balkans and membership in the European Union loses its appeal to Serbia and other countries, political leaders in the region are feeling less pressure to govern within the confines of democratic institutions or to protect human rights, press freedom and the rule of law, and to fight corruption.

The regional trend is toward "weak democracies with autocratically minded leaders, who govern through informal patronage networks and claim to provide pro-Western stability in the region," according to a study by the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group.

Observers view Mr. Vucic's consolidation of power as a product of this drive for stability that has shaped the politics of the western Balkans over the last decade, as Western governments choose to engage with strong leaders rather than work to strengthen democratic institutions.

"Stability trumps everything," said Jelena Milic, the director of the liberal Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies in Belgrade.

Public opinion surveys before the election showed that Serbian voters considered Mr. Vucic the best candidate for delivering stability, said Srdjan Bogosavljevic, a pollster at the Ipsos polling company in Belgrade.

Living in a region still inflamed by ethnic tensions and economic turbulence, in which older people experienced three wars in a generation, Serbs want a strong leader to guide the country, Mr. Bogosavljevic said.

Mr. Vucic's popularity surged after the arrest and prosecution of Miroslav Miskovic, one of Serbia's wealthiest magnates, who in June was convicted of fraud and sentenced to five years in prison. Mr. Vucic had campaigned for prime minister on a promise to rein in the country's oligarchs.

Mr. Vucic also positioned himself successfully on foreign policy: seeking good relations with Russia while also leaving no doubt that Serbia would eventually join the European Union, despite his frequent criticisms of the bloc.

"Serbian public opinion says, 'We love Russia, but we don't want to be part of Russia,'" Mr. Bogosavljevic said. "And we don't like Europe, but we want to be part of Europe."

Support for European Union membership has fallen to 47 percent, according to a poll in December by the government-run Serbian European Integration Office.

Mr. Vucic reinforced his image as an indispensable international partner during the campaign by meeting with world leaders. He met last month in Berlin with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and in Moscow with President Vladimir V. Putin, who wished him "success" in the vote.

Russia has been expanding its influence in the Balkans to fill the vacuum as Western powers draw back, Ms. Milic said.

Because Mr. Vucic has delivered on some international issues important to the European Union, like encouraging moderation in Bosnia and engaging in a dialogue with the leadership of Kosovo, the bloc has refrained from overtly criticizing him for abuses like restricting press freedom.

"The E.U. is very weak and disinterested in the Balkans now, and this has enabled him to get more credit and less scrutiny for his domestic policies than he should," said Florian Bieber, a professor of Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz in Austria.

"Behind closed doors, they always remind Vucic that he has to better protect the democratic process," Mr. Bieber said. "But they don't say it in public."



## Editorial : At the barricades in Belarus

ALEXANDER LUKASHENKO used to be called the last dictator in Europe. He is still a dictator, but now he has company. Even so, the president of Belarus stands out for his clever use of survival authoritarianism, easing repression one day, applying it the next, cozying up to Russian President Vladimir Putin one day and the European Union the next.

In recent weeks, this tactical balancing act, which has helped Mr. Lukashenko remain in power for more than two decades, has seemed again precarious. As in neighboring Russia, people in Belarus appear to be fed up with decline and stagnation, which is even more marked in a nation that never reformed itself out of Soviet socialism. A spate of recent small protests turned larger on the weekend of March 25-26 and the

Feb. 17 and brought out 2,000 to 3,000 people. Over the weeks that followed, more demonstrations were held across the country, with people chanting, "I am not a social parasite." It was notable that the protests spread beyond Minsk to provincial cities, which had not been the case in earlier protests. The demonstrations were peaceful and largely not disrupted by police. On March 9, the president announced that the decree would be suspended until 2018 and protesters could voice objections, while the "instigators" of the demonstrations would be "picked out like raisins from a bun." Mr. Lukashenko controls the security services, which carried out a string of arrests in March of opposition politicians, activists, bloggers and journalists. Then last weekend came large protests in Minsk and a severe

president and his security services responded with hundreds of arrests, the most serious crackdown in seven years. The arrests threaten to tarnish Mr. Lukashenko's recent warming with the European Union and also give the shivers to Mr. Putin, who props up Belarus with economic favors but hates it when more than two people hold up a placard in a public space.

In February, the authorities announced they would begin to enforce a 2015 decree that places a fine of \$250 a year on those people who work fewer than 183 days a year. This is a throwback to an old Soviet complaint about slackers and wreckers. The rules were drawn so that freelancers, housewives, artists and others who did not formally register as unemployed were subject to the tax or stiff penalties as "social parasites." In the capital, Minsk, the first big protest broke out

police response, arresting hundreds in the city square.

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The repression is in keeping with Mr. Lukashenko's long record of intolerance of democracy and dissent. Last year, the E.U. lifted sanctions on Belarus, citing its improved human rights record, but no one should be fooled that Mr. Lukashenko will ever become a democrat. As long as he rules, Belarus will be locked in a kind of dead zone. The recent spark of protest may be a sign that society is tired of this prison and won't be silenced.

they crouched, opened their bags and let out a stream of color. Thousands of ping-pong balls, painted green, pink, blue and yellow, bounced past policemen, who scrambled to stop them. Residents would find balls tucked in nooks and crannies for months. Each was

## INTERNATIONAL



## 'The hospitals were slaughterhouses': A journey into Syria's secret torture wards (UNE)

By Louisa Loveluck and Zakaria Zakaria

BEIRUT — One evening in the early days of Syria's uprising, Mohsen al-

Masri's band of activists slipped through the Damascus streets and waited for the coast to clear. Then

they crouched, opened their bags and let out a stream of color.

Thousands of ping-pong balls, painted green, pink, blue and yellow,

bounced past policemen, who scrambled to stop them. Residents would find balls tucked in nooks and crannies for months. Each was



marked with a single word: "Freedom."

The punishment for Masri's acts of peaceful protest would begin a journey into hell, unusual not because of what he saw, but because he survived.

In a series of interviews, he described how he was tortured and interrogated over a two-year period in four detention facilities before arriving in a hospital at the heart of a nationwide system of brutality.

The hospital, known as 601, is not the only site of torture in Syria. But after it was seen in a cache of photographs showing thousands of skeletal corpses, it became one of the most notorious.

Inside the facility, about a half-mile from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's palace, sick prisoners are tortured as they lie shackled to beds crammed with dying men, according to Masri and former detainees and military personnel who worked there. Corpses have been piled in bathrooms, outhouses and anywhere else they will fit, then meticulously documented and trucked away for mass burial.

In interviews across Lebanon, Turkey and Europe, more than a dozen survivors and army defectors described horrors in Syrian military hospitals across the country for which war crimes lawyers say they have struggled to find a modern parallel.

The former detainees come from all walks of life. Elite, working-class, leftist and Islamist, their only connection to one another was involvement in Syria's 2011 uprising. Some were its instigators. Others said they had simply commented on the Facebook statuses of friends who supported protests.

*[How the Syrian revolt went so horribly, tragically wrong]*

Investigators say that testimony and documentation from Syria's military hospitals offer some of the most concrete evidence to date of crimes against humanity that could one day see senior government figures tried in court.

"We were swept into a system that was ready for us. Even the hospitals were slaughterhouses," Masri said in an interview last month.

Medicine has been used as a weapon of war since the earliest days of the uprising, when pro-government doctors performed amputations on protesters for minor injuries.

Military hospitals across Syria have long set aside wards for prisoners. But since 2011, these have been packed with men left starving and

broken by the conditions they have already endured.

More than 100,000 people have been arrested or forcibly disappeared in Syria since the country's revolt began, according to a list compiled by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, a monitoring group. During that time, international aid groups have gotten access to only a handful of prisons with the government's permission, none of which the detainees interviewed by The Washington Post spent time in.

Masri's ordeal began in the spring of 2012 when he was arrested on his way to a conference in Turkey. Repeatedly tortured as he was transferred from jail to jail, he arrived at Sednaya, one of the most feared.

In a report published in February, Amnesty International said torture and forced starvation are systematic at the prison. But Masri said that prisoners learned to stay silent when guards asked who needed to go to the hospital.

"It didn't matter what they did to us; we had to pretend we were fine. People rarely came back from those trips," he said.

After months of starvation, Masri's name was added to the weekly transfer list. As darkness fell on an evening in May 2012, he was chained to another man and taken to trucks outside. Attaching a number to Masri's body, a guard told him to forget his name. Then he was blindfolded.

Everyone gets the "welcome" party, Masri said — a savage beating involving guards and medical staffers wearing white coats over military uniforms. In Hospital 601, the weakest man was pushed to the floor and brutalized first. In the nearby Tishreen Military Hospital, a former technician at the facility, Mohammed al-Hammoud, said he had seen prisoners dragged down steps by the hair.

"Everything was about control," said Somar Mustafa, a physics student from Damascus who was sent to Hospital 601 at the end of 2012. Inside, he saw detainees chained to their beds and packed so tightly that they sat with their knees jutting into their rib cages.

Bathroom breaks were so rare that prisoners would defecate where they sat, remaining in the same spot for days. "We were blindfolded with that smell all around us. You can't shake the memory of it, even when you leave," Mustafa said.

*[Syria has secretly executed thousands of political prisoners, rights group says]*

At least five branches of the Syrian security forces have operated wards inside Hospital 601 since 2011, according to the U.N. Commission of Inquiry, a body set up to monitor the conflict. "Detainees, including children, have been beaten, burned with cigarettes, and subjected to torture that exploits preexisting injuries," it said in a 2013 report. The commission concluded that many patients had been tortured to death inside the facility.

The Harasta Military Hospital, also in Damascus, moved its ward from the first floor to the seventh to prevent detainees from escaping, a defector said. "It was the only floor without an elevator, and we knew they couldn't jump out the window."

Investigators say the abuses could become central pillars in any eventual case for prosecution of the hospitals' doctors, as well as senior figures in the Syrian government.

In 601, Masri and Mustafa said, they saw high-ranking officers from the security branches accompanying doctors on their rounds. Sometimes the teams would pause by a prisoner to discuss his treatment. Other times the men would beat him.

The doctors were helped by service staffers in blue uniforms, many of them former supporters of the revolt who had been co-opted by their jailers. "Our best men had been broken by torture. If they didn't beat us, they risked a worse fate themselves," Masri said.

The guards went by nicknames to avoid identification. Four survivors said the most famous was known as Azrael, or the Angel of Death. They described him as a thickset man from Assad's coastal stronghold of Latakia who carried a stick laced with razor blades. They said he selected prisoners, most of them deathly ill, for a fate he called "justice." The detainees called it execution.

Masri recalled Azrael taking a lighter to a plastic bag and melting it drop by drop onto a prisoner's face until he died, apparently of a heart attack. Other prisoners said he used an iron rod to smash their bedmates' skulls.

Many died where they lay, slumped against their bedmates until morning came. For Mustafa in the winter of 2012, that meant sharing a bed until sunrise the next day with three corpses.

As the uprising outside morphed into a war, former prisoners say, their interrogators became obsessed with the notion of accomplices, torturing prisoners to extract the names of new suspects to arrest.

Documents signed by senior government and security officials acknowledged the upsurge in deaths, at times complaining that the bodies were building up.

"It's impossible to interrogate, torture and kill tens of thousands of detainees without a system in place," said Scott Gilmore, a staff attorney at the Center for Justice and Accountability. "Before the revolution, the regime was not generating thousands of dead bodies. Then all of a sudden it was. So what did you do with them?"

A December 2012 order signed by the head of Syria's military intelligence department instructed every security branch to send their dead to a military hospital's morgue. The document, obtained by the Commission for International Justice and Accountability, a Europe-based investigative unit, said that each body should be examined and logged.

A trove of these photographs was published around the world in 2014, after being smuggled out of Syria by a military police defector known only by his code-name, Caesar. Most were taken inside Hospital 601. Skeletal bodies of children as young as 11 bore signs of torture, with eyes gouged out and limbs drilled through and burned. Following Syrian government protocol, Caesar had methodically documented the deaths of some 11,000 people.

"You have to realize that these were just the photographs taken by a single man during a single period, and even then, they were only a fraction of what he'd actually recorded," said Nadim Houry, who examined the photographs for Human Rights Watch.

Assad recently described the images as "fake news," suggesting they had been doctored to suit the aims of human rights groups.

But defectors describe hauling numbered bodies into transparent bags in Hospital 601 and nearby military hospitals in Tishreen and Harasta. Investigators from the United Nations and private law firms have collected similar testimony from the cities of Homs, Aleppo and Daraa.

By late 2012, the system had buckled, and the December order berated individual military departments for failing to register their dead on time.

Those who survive are funneled back to nearby jails, Masri said. Others, like Mustafa, are released to a Damascus court packed with prisoners and dismissed from custody on the spot, after a judge acknowledges that they

had been forced to make false confessions under torture. The young man said he remembers falling into the arms of his sobbing parents.

Masri's discharge from 601 sent him back to Sednaya. Another year of torture followed, with nights spent packed next to other men in the darkness. He felt forgotten.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

2017 6:35 a.m. ET

Few wars have seen such a tangle of combatants as Syria's, from obscure and morphing rebel groups to Russians, Turks, Kurdish and Iraqi militias. From the chaos, one clear winner is emerging.

Returning to his ancestral Syrian town of Qusayr after years away, a man named Mohammed discovered a new militia patrolling the neighborhood. Patches on the men's camouflage uniforms called them the Islamic Resistance of Syria. Their identity became clearer when he found a notice on his house claiming it for Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group.

"Many houses have been confiscated with notices that they've been reserved for this or that family," Mohammed said.

Hezbollah, founded in the early 1980s to fight Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon, became involved in the civil war next door to protect its patrons in Damascus and a supply line of Iranian weapons. After years of growing engagement, including training thousands of mostly Shiite Muslim fighters and beginning to provide social services, Hezbollah is today stronger, more independent and in command of a new Syrian militia that its officials say is ready to be deployed to other conflicts in the region.

Hezbollah now fights alongside Russian troops, its first alliance with a global power. It was Hezbollah that devised the battlefield plan for Aleppo used by Syrian and Russian forces last year, according to Arab and U.S. officials who monitor the group.

Thanks to money and arms from Tehran, Hezbollah now stands almost on a par with Iran as a protector of President Bashar al-Assad's government, and as a sponsor of Shiite fighting forces in Syria.

"It's hard to see people rising through Syrian intelligence or military ranks without the blessing of

Today's WorldView

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In the winter of 2014, he dreamed he was taking a hot shower, its stream stripping back two years of dirt and leaving him clean. He woke to find a guard in his cell. "He told

Hezbollah or the Iranians," said Andrew Exum, until January a U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East.

With its growing might, this arch-foe of Israel, a group long labeled terrorist by the U.S., has gained a modicum of international recognition. It participated in negotiations sponsored by Russia following the rout of rebels from Aleppo. When China's special envoy to Syria visited Lebanon in December, he carved out time to see Hezbollah's foreign-relations chief.

Even before the Syrian civil war, Hezbollah had evolved beyond its guerrilla-group origins into a business and political enterprise that holds positions in Lebanon's government and runs social programs such as schools and clinics. Now it is poised to capitalize on what many Middle East analysts expect will be an eventual end to the Syrian war that leaves Mr. Assad in power. Syria will have \$180 billion of war-reconstruction needs, by a World Bank estimate. Hezbollah has experience at that. After a 2006 conflict with Israel, the group efficiently organized the rebuilding of battered Beirut suburbs.

"Hezbollah is well-positioned to make a lot of money" from Syrian reconstruction, said Matthew Levitt, director of the Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, a veteran of the Treasury and State departments.

U.S. and Israeli officials have watched the growth of Hezbollah with concern, worried it could draw on its Syrian recruits to pressure Israel from a new front along the Golan Heights, captured by Israel 50 years ago. In March, Hezbollah announced the formation of a Syria-based "Brigade for the Liberation of the Golan" devoted to wresting the heights back for Syria.

"Israel knows that what has happened in Syria has changed Hezbollah, which has developed from not just defending against Israel, but attacking it," said a senior official from an alliance of Hezbollah, Syria and Iran. "It has

me it was time to go," Masri said. "I cannot describe that feeling. It was too much, too big. Indescribable."

Back home in Damascus, he said, he remembers closing the bathroom door to stand alone for a moment, shutting his eyes to finally feel at peace. When he opened them, he saw a sheet-white, rawboned man staring back from the mirror.

now developed traditional and nontraditional means of war. It fights like a guerrilla army but also like a conventional one."

Israel hasn't waited for a Hezbollah attack in the Golan, sending aircraft to strike Iranian shipments of sophisticated arms to Hezbollah.

Premier Benjamin Netanyahu told President Donald Trump during a February U.S. visit that Hezbollah's expanded arsenal also endangers American warships in nearby waters, said diplomats briefed on the meeting.

The U.S. is well aware of Hezbollah's expanding capabilities and will continue working closely with partners in the region to address threats the militant group poses, a State Department official said, adding that disrupting Hezbollah's terrorist and military capabilities was a top U.S. priority.

Hezbollah's new clout is adding to fears among Gulf states that Iran's power also is growing, drawing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to agree to work with Israel. Their focal point is now Yemen, where Mr. Trump has agreed to provide a Saudi-led alliance with stepped-up U.S. military assistance to counter the Houthis, who were trained by Hezbollah and supported by Iran. The Gulf states, in turn, have tentatively agreed to try to bring the Palestinians to the negotiating table with Israel.

### Religious power

Hezbollah's role has implications for eventual postwar arrangements in Syria, given how its religious influence will likely compete with the secular politics of the Assad regime. Before the war, that government was improving relations with Saudi Arabia and once even considered a peace treaty with Israel. The improved ties have broken down, with the Saudis supporting Syrian rebel groups. Diplomats in the region say any normalization of relations after the war ends, likely with Mr. Assad still in power, will be even more difficult given Hezbollah and Iran's newfound clout in Syria.

"I started screaming," Masri said. He did not recognize himself.

Zakaria reported from Istanbul. Heba Habib in Stockholm and Hania Mourtada in Beirut contributed to this report.

Hezbollah has helped the Assad regime survive partly by propping up its undisciplined military, which is plagued by corruption and defections. In Syrian villages retaken from rebel control, Hezbollah fighters have been seen holding Syrian soldiers by the wrist or collar and forcing them to return appliances or furniture looted from homes.

Syrian civilians say Hezbollah fighters sometimes openly disrespect Syrian troops on battlefronts, a stark change from its previous deference. Cars with blacked-out windows and Lebanese license plates screech up to Syrian checkpoints, the Hezbollah commanders inside refusing to get off their phones during identification checks or to answer questions posed by their Syrian allies.

When Russia and Syria wanted to put priority on retaking Islamic State's capital of Raqqa last year, Hezbollah, along with Iran, insisted the focus instead be dislodging rebels from Aleppo to force them to the negotiating table, according to Mr. Exum and a Hezbollah official.

The strategy worked. The rebels evacuated Aleppo and agreed to participate in Russian-sponsored political negotiations now taking place in locations outside Syria.

When formed in the 1980s, Hezbollah was trained by Iran's Quds Force, an arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that manages Iranian clients across the region. Hezbollah gave Lebanon's disenfranchised Shiite community political power and won its loyalty by providing free schooling and health care in addition to protection.

Militarily, it remained a guerrilla force, better at launching rockets from the bushes than spearheading offensives on urban centers—until Syria's civil war began in 2011. After wading in to protect its Iranian arms flow, Hezbollah stepped up its military commitment to counter Sunni extremists such as Islamic State, which regards Shiite Muslims such as Hezbollah as infidels. Hezbollah expanded its arsenal by gaining access to Russian and

Syrian weapons under the cover of the civil war's chaos.

Shipments from Iran gave the Lebanese group precise and powerful armaments that it previously lacked, such as Russian-made Yakhont missiles, said a former State Department official. Cooperation with Russia on the battlefield further increased the flow of weaponry.

"Russian stocks are open to Hezbollah," said a Hezbollah official who travels frequently to Damascus. "Our fighters eat and sleep alongside theirs and we're sharing everything, always." While an end to Syria's civil war could change the dynamics, Middle East analysts generally think Hezbollah's expanded access to weapons is secure.

Damascus was once considered a Hezbollah proxy master, but Western diplomats say the Lebanese group is carving out its own zones of influence across Syria by training local fighters. They include Shiites and Alawites, the latter being adherents of a branch of Shiite Islam that includes the Assad family.

Western diplomats estimate the number of these fighters loyal to Hezbollah's command, which Hezbollah calls al-Ridha Forces, and known locally as "Hezbollah in Syria," in the tens

of thousands. Hezbollah officials say it is lower. Hezbollah's presence in Syria stretches 250 miles from the northern tip to the south, longer than the length of Lebanon.

Ryan Crocker, a former U.S. ambassador to both Iraq and Syria, said the autonomy Hezbollah enjoys in Syria arises partly because "Iraq is more important for Iran in many ways than Syria is," while to Hezbollah, next-door Syria is more important.

Messrs. Crocker and Exum said Hezbollah's strategy in Syria mirrors the Lebanese group's involvement in Iraq after the 2003 U.S. invasion. At that time, Hezbollah provided training inside Iran to Iraqi Shiite militiamen. Iran relied on Arabic-speaking Hezbollah officers to bridge a language gap that Iran's Farsi-speaking Quds Force couldn't overcome. A collateral result was to seed a Hezbollah social influence in parts of Iraq that persists.

In Syria, Hezbollah is playing for lasting political and social influence, Western and Arab diplomats say. The group has broadened its mandate from countering Israel to fighting Sunni extremist groups across the region to protect religious minorities—not only Shiites but also Christians. It has begun replicating inside Syria the social programs that brought it loyalty and political success at home.

Hezbollah has created a Syrian branch of its Imam al-Mahdi youth movement, a Boy Scouts-type group whose Facebook page shows videos of children getting coloring books, saluting at military parades and somersaulting over fire pits. Part of the idea is to funnel young people to Hezbollah-sponsored local fighting groups and to the larger ranks of Syrian civilians—accountants, hairdressers and farmers—who maintain a fierce dedication to what they call the resistance.

Among Hezbollah supporters in Syria, deference to the Damascus regime is eroding. Photos on the walls in Syrian towns show dead fighters, described as martyrs, against a backdrop of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Iranian revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. There are few photos of Mr. Assad.

Coffins of Syrians who fought with Hezbollah used to come home draped with both Syria's flag and Hezbollah's bright yellow banner showing a green hand holding up a rifle. Over the past year, they have started arriving with just the Hezbollah flag.

#### War spoils

In Qusayr, the Syrian town where Hezbollah has confiscated homes for its supporters, Hezbollah militants held a military parade in

November showcasing antiaircraft systems and tanks. "To host a military parade commending yourselves in another country is as bold as you can get," said a former State Department official. "It's telling your masters 'We're here now.'"

The boldness carries over to the negotiating table in talks to decide Syria's fate. Hezbollah has dangled offers to Syrian rebel groups weary of fighting. A pending deal with one called Saraya Ahl Alsham, in the southwest Syrian town of Qalamoun, would allow people who fled to return with a promise of protection from Syrian government prosecution or conscription. Hezbollah has said it would guarantee the agreement.

"Hezbollah is in charge of the whole region, and they control everything here," said Abu Ishak, a spokesman for Saraya Ahl Alsham. Tweaking an Arabic proverb to describe the Syrian regime's absence from the negotiating table, he said, "Hezbollah designs it, and the Syrian regime wears it."

—Noam Raydan and Rory Jones contributed to this article.

Appeared in the Apr. 03, 2017, print edition as 'a winner in Syria's civil war: Hezbollah.'



## With visit by Egypt's Sissi, Trump administration signals sharp policy shift

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

CAIRO — When President Trump hosts Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi on Monday in Washington, they will have a packed agenda: the fight against terrorism, the Middle East's multiple wars, the refugee crisis and Egypt's anemic economy.

But what is unlikely, at least publicly, is any discussion of the plight of Aya Hijazi.

She's an Egyptian American humanitarian worker from Falls Church, Va., who has been incarcerated by the Egyptian regime for nearly three years, accused of abusing children she was seeking to help through her nonprofit organization. Those charges are widely viewed as false.

The Obama administration could not pressure Sissi's government to release Hijazi, despite Egypt receiving \$1.3 billion in military aid annually. But President Barack Obama drew a line at inviting Sissi

to the White House. Under Sissi, repression has been widespread. Egypt's security forces have jailed tens of thousands and committed human rights abuses, including the torture and forced disappearances of critics and opponents.

Now, Hijazi has become a symbol of the sharp shift in U.S. policy by the Trump administration toward Sissi, placing security cooperation over human right concerns as the main barometer for engagement with authoritarian leaders. At home, Egypt is battling an Islamic State affiliate in its northern Sinai Peninsula and exerts regional influence in numerous crises where the United States is engaged, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the wars in Syria, Libya and Yemen.

Sissi's visit comes days after the Trump administration agreed to resume arm sales to Bahrain, removing human-rights-related conditions imposed by Obama. Bahrain, which has brutally repressed activists and its Shiite majority, is another vital U.S. ally in

the Middle East and is home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet.

*[Christians flee Sinai Peninsula in fear of Egypt's Islamic State affiliate]*

A White House statement on Friday made no mention of the Sissi government's human rights record. Trump, it said, "aims to reaffirm the deep and abiding U.S. commitment to Egypt's security, stability and prosperity." And the statement described Sissi thusly: "He's called for reform and moderation of Islamic discourse, initiated courageous and historic economic reforms, and sought to reestablish Egypt's regional leadership role."

Sissi's visit to the White House — the first by an Egyptian head of state since 2009 — will be viewed by supporters as a vindication of his rule and, critics say, could pave the way for more oppression of Egyptians. The Trump administration, they add, should have demanded that Sissi release Hijazi and commit to additional safeguards for civil society groups before extending him the invitation.

"If Trump is committed to an 'America first' foreign policy ... he should make sure Americans get out of prison," said Sarah Margon, Washington director at Human Rights Watch. Granting Sissi a White House visit, she added, is "huge leverage. To just open the door with nothing given by the Egyptian president beforehand is shocking, particularly when American interests are at stake."

Both Obama and President George W. Bush balanced a desire to advance human rights against the need to align with Egypt in the interests of national security. Bush pressed President Hosni Mubarak, who was ousted by the Arab Spring revolts in 2011, to implement democratic reforms. Obama temporarily suspended the delivery of major weapons systems to Egypt after its security forces killed more than 800 protesters in Cairo on Aug. 14, 2013.

Trump administration officials declined to say whether Trump would press his counterpart on human rights. The president's approach "is to handle these types

of sensitive issues in a private, more discreet way," one administration official said. "And we believe it's the most effective way to advance those issues to a favorable outcome."

Asked about Hijazi, White House officials said the president is aware of her case, but they did not commit to raising it with Sissi directly. "We will figure out the best way to raise this ... to maximize the chances her case is resolved positively," one official said.

Trump met with Sissi in September, two months before the 2016 election, and the two spoke by phone three days after Trump took office. Sissi was the first leader in the Arab world to congratulate Trump on his election victory, and Trump has publicly described Sissi as "a fantastic guy."

Sissi, a former military general, helped engineer the military coup that ousted elected Islamist President Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood movement in 2013. In the months after Morsi's overthrow, security forces cracked down on opposition protests, leaving more than 1,150 people dead.



## Diehl : What Trump should ask a brutal dictator as he welcomes him to the White House

Human rights advocates in both Cairo and Washington are bracing themselves for an ugly scene Monday: the love-in at the White House between President Trump and Abdel Fatah al-Sissi, the most repressive dictator in Egypt's modern history.

The Obama administration did not allow Sissi to set foot in Washington after he staged a bloody coup against a democratically elected government in 2013. His regime is holding, according to Egyptian and U.S. monitors, between 40,000 and 60,000 political prisoners, including thousands of secular liberal democrats. His security forces were responsible for 1,400 extrajudicial killings in 2016 alone, and 912 disappearances between August 2015 and August 2016, according to Moataz El Fegiery of Front Line Defenders. Eighty-five civil society activists have been banned from leaving the country and dozens of journalists are being held without trial, according to Bahey el-din Hassan of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies.

None of it matters to Trump, who has called Sissi "a fantastic guy" because of his supposed support for the war against the Islamic State — never mind that Egypt has been losing the battle against the jihadists in its own Sinai Peninsula.

Under Sissi, the Muslim Brotherhood, in particular, has been targeted. The State Department's human rights report accuses Sissi's government of stifling basic freedoms and enforcing its repression through torture, the disappearances of critics, and arbitrary arrests and killings.

A senior administration official told reporters Friday that Sissi's visit is intended to "reboot" the bilateral relationship and continue the "positive momentum." Trump aides spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the meeting.

The Sissi government is also hoping to get clarity on signals from the Trump administration and Congress that they may consider branding the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization.

Asked whether the administration favored blacklisting the Brotherhood, the administration official said the White House had not come to a decision.

"We, along with a number of countries, have some concerns about various activities that the Muslim Brotherhood has conducted

in the region," the official said. "But that's going to be a discussion that will unfold between us and Egypt."

Egyptian officials hope to attract more American investment to Egypt, but the continuation and expansion of U.S. military aid is the top priority.

Former foreign minister Nabil Fahmy said that would be at the top of Sissi's agenda, but he expressed concern about Trump's plans to significantly cut foreign aid. The State Department has indicated that Egypt could be affected.

"If the U.S. aims to counter terrorism, it is natural they cooperate with us," Fahmy said in a video feed posted to his Twitter account.

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When asked at the White House briefing on Friday whether the United States would continue the substantial foreign and military assistance to Egypt, the senior administration official could not

commit, adding that budget allocations were "still an ongoing process."

Human rights groups are urging the Trump administration to consider Hijazi, and the tens of thousands in prison, before sending more assistance to Egypt. The trial of Hijazi, who founded the Belady Foundation and faces allegations of trafficking and using children in protests, "has been marked by serious due process violations, including her groundless detention since May 2014," Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

"Giving more money to the Sissi government is to the detriment of U.S. and Egyptian interests," Margon said. "Neither side in this relationship seems interested in promoting human rights, but the gross abuses being committed by Egyptian authorities should compel Congress to keep limiting support."

Nakamura reported from Washington. Heba Mahfouz in Cairo contributed to this report.

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That leaves the human rights defenders clinging to one slender hope: that Trump will, at least, apply his "America First" principles to the case of Aya Hijazi, a 30-year-old U.S. citizen who has been imprisoned in Cairo for more than 1,000 days on crudely trumped-up charges. Her real crime, in the view of Sissi and his security forces, is that she is an American who tried to set up a nongovernmental organization in Cairo. The regime believes that U.S. NGOs are part of a secret plot to destroy Egypt — yes, really — and so has singled them out for repression even while pocketing \$1.3 billion in annual U.S. military aid.

That's where Trump's instincts ought to kick in. "If your priority is the defense of American security interests abroad above all, it is highly important that you bring this case up," says Sarah Margon, the Washington director of Human Rights Watch. "At a minimum an unjustly detained American ought to be on the agenda."

Hijazi's case is striking because there is no ambiguity in it. A former

resident of Falls Church and graduate of George Mason University, she married an Egyptian national and joined with him in founding a nonprofit for the not-so-subversive cause of helping Cairo's street children. On May 1, 2014, security forces burst into the tiny organization's headquarters without a warrant and arrested everyone they found, including the children who were there. Later Hijazi, her husband and several others were charged with sexually abusing the children and enlisting them in anti-government protests.

No evidence was ever produced to back up these sensational charges, which were splashed in the state-controlled press as more evidence of American plotting against Egypt. Instead, Hijazi's trial was postponed seven times over two years while she languished in a Cairo prison, in violation of Egypt's own law on pretrial detention. "It was a case that helped a lot of people make their political points," says Hijazi's brother, Basel. "She was young, she was American, she was establishing a new NGO, therefore she was an enemy. Then they forgot about it and she was left to rot in prison."

When a trial was finally held last year, the police who conducted the raid claimed they could not remember why they carried it out. The children who were allegedly

abused recanted their accounts, and one testified that he had been tortured into a false claim. Yet the judge refused to dismiss the case, or even grant bail. At the last hearing, on March 23, a host of Egyptian media appeared, apparently anticipating that Hijazi would be acquitted on the eve of Sissi's Washington visit. Instead, the judge abruptly postponed a verdict until April 16.

Might Sissi be carrying Hijazi's fate in his pocket as a chip to offer Trump, perhaps while pleading for a renewal of that \$1.3 billion in aid? Basel Hijazi can only hope so. "It's an easy win for all the governments involved," he says. That certainly would have been true had Hillary Clinton been elected president; she raised the Hijazi case with Sissi when she met with him during the fall campaign.

Sissi, however, can't do the right thing if Trump doesn't bother to ask for it — and the new president has so far offered no hint of interest in the Hijazi case, or in Sissi's relentless and vicious campaign against U.S. influence in Egypt more generally. Which is strange: You'd think a country that swallows billions in U.S. aid while blatantly persecuting Americans would raise the ire of a president who supposedly puts America first.



## Pakistan Approves Military Hero to Head Tricky Saudi-Led Alliance

Salman Masood  
and Ben Hubbard

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, led by Imran Khan, has been at the forefront of opposing the decision, saying it could widen the Sunni-Shiite divide in Pakistan and upset Iran, its majority-Shiite neighbor to the west. The party says it will raise the issue in the next session of Parliament later in April.

"We strongly advocate the policy of impartiality as far as conflicts in the Middle East and Muslim world are concerned," Mr. Khan said. "We under no circumstances should fall into any conflict and hence be watchful of the impacts of every decision or choice we make."

And on the country's rambunctious political talk shows, guests have been vigorously debating the appointment of Mr. Sharif, who was hugely popular for his successes against Taliban militants before retiring last year, with many expressing criticism and apprehension.

Pakistan is a predominantly Sunni country, like Saudi Arabia, but Shiites make up about 20 percent of the population and have often been targeted by extremist Sunni militants.

Saudi Arabia is a major donor to Pakistan and maintains close ties with its civil and military elite. It has appealed to Pakistan for military help with its campaign in Yemen against the Houthis rebels, who are aligned with Iran and belong to the Zaydi Shiite sect.

But Pakistan has so far stayed out of the operation, which is being conducted by Saudi Arabia and a smaller coalition of Arab countries. Egypt, too, has turned down requests for help in Yemen despite receiving considerable financial aid from Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan's Parliament passed a resolution in 2015 urging the government to stay neutral in Yemen, where more than 10,000 people have been killed, mainly in airstrikes, since Saudi Arabia began its campaign.

So far, the government has complied, but its inability to rally support behind the Saudi military effort has been embarrassing for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who lived in exile in the Saudi city of Jidda in the early 2000s. (Mr. Sharif, the prime minister, is not related to the former army chief.)

Now, the former army chief's presence at the head of the Islamic Military Alliance could signal a change in policy, analysts say.

Mr. Sharif's appointment "is a bit of a departure from Pakistan's more-or-less neutral position on the Iran-Saudi regional war," said Arif Rafiq, a political analyst. "As a result, it's been opposed by even the mainstream, nonsectarian political voices in Pakistan."

Mr. Rafiq said the impact on sectarian relations in Pakistan was still uncertain.

If the alliance "confronts Iran or Iranian-supported groups in places like Yemen, then it could trigger protests inside Pakistan," he said. "On the other hand, if it is merely a symbolic coalition that limits itself to Saudi territory or focuses on combating ISIS, then the negative impact would be minimal," he added, referring to the Islamic State, which is also known as ISIL.

Mr. Rafiq said the retired general might see himself more broadly as the leader of a military force defending the Muslim holy sites of Mecca and Medina against the Islamic State, which might be more acceptable for most Pakistanis.

"For Pakistanis, to have one of their own leading, it would be a great honor," he said.

The establishment of the Islamic Military Alliance was announced in December 2015 by Saudi Arabia's deputy crown prince and defense minister, Mohammed bin Salman. It had 34 state members at the start and has since acquired several others. The coalition fighting in Yemen is a smaller group of Arab countries.

Pakistan's approval of Mr. Sharif's appointment two months after its announcement suggested some hesitation by the government.

For Mr. Sharif, the controversy has taken some luster off the popular image he enjoyed after a successful campaign against Taliban militants that began in 2014, clearing militant strongholds in northwest Pakistan.

The general's popularity overshadowed that of the civilian government, which has been troubled by corruption allegations. He was widely perceived as influencing foreign policy decisions and relations with neighbors, and indirectly pressuring government over political matters.

Last year, there were widespread calls for the general to take over the government instead of retiring when his term expired in November.

Since the news broke of his future job, he has maintained his characteristic silence, frustrating critics who wonder what his appointment means and the objectives of the military alliance.

"As a retired military chief seeking a high-profile job that will likely involve a great deal of shuttle diplomacy, why is General Raheel not seeking the government's approval to address the media and respond to the misgivings in person?" an

editorial in Dawn, the country's leading English daily, asked on Tuesday. "Surely addressing the nation's concerns ought to be the priority."

The newspaper said the "clandestine manner" in which the government handled the general's appointment had created the impression of a "secret deal."

Nasser Janjua, the Pakistani national security adviser, said last week that Mr. Sharif would play a visible, proactive role in the military alliance. Mr. Sharif will "use his experiences and knowledge to remove internal misunderstandings among Muslim countries," Mr. Janjua was quoted as saying by local news media. He did not elaborate.

Pervez Musharraf, a former army chief who ruled Pakistan as president from 2001 to 2008, was hugely popular as a general but faced a backlash once he shed his uniform and dabbled in politics. Mr. Sharif's predecessor, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, was also highly regarded, but became a figure of controversy after he extended his military term as corruption allegations swirled around his family.

Mr. Sharif, on the other hand, remains untainted by charges of corruption or nepotism.

"I think Raheel Sharif will be forever remembered in Pakistan as the man who boldly took on the Pakistani Taliban," Mr. Rafiq, the analyst, said. "Many Pakistanis feel that he literally saved the country and restored its morale. This new position is unlikely to change those sentiments."

## EU Aid to Support Afghan Peace Deal With Warlord

Jessica Donati

Updated April 2,  
2017 6:30 p.m. ET

KABUL—The European Union is preparing to offer millions of dollars to support a peace deal between the Afghan government and an insurgent group led by a notorious warlord, a measure it hopes will encourage similar accords with other militants in the war-torn country.

The EU's top envoy to Afghanistan, Franz-Michael Mellbin, said the bloc would review a proposal from the Afghan government before deciding on the amount it will commit to help implement the peace agreement with the Islamist political and militant group, Hezb-e-Islami, which the U.S. has endorsed.

An initial EU commitment could fall between \$2 million and \$5 million, according to notes from a recent diplomatic briefing on the matter that The Wall Street Journal reviewed.

The militant group is led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was removed in February from a United Nations Security Council sanctions list following a request from Afghanistan. The security council's move paved the way for international donors to help implement the peace deal Afghanistan signed with Mr. Hekmatyar and his group in September.

It isn't immediately clear what the EU funds will be used for. "Hezb-e-

Islami will not have any control over the money," Mr. Mellbin said.

The peace deal included a provision to provide compensation to Mr. Hekmatyar and members of his group. The deal also calls for joint commissions to implement other provisions, for which contributions from international donors could pay.

The U.S. and its allies hailed the deal with Mr. Hekmatyar, who has lost much of his influence in recent years, as a symbolic step that could build trust in peace talks and

encourage other militants to join. There is little evidence, however, that the Taliban, who are gaining on the battlefield, are interested in talks soon.

The deal's implementation faces hurdles, including how to lift international sanctions targeting Mr. Hekmatyar and reintegrate the militants and their families into mainstream society.

Mr. Hekmatyar is still a U.S.-designated "global terrorist" and his group is designated by Washington as a foreign terrorist organization.

Afghan officials are hopeful the U.S.

will also contribute funds to support the deal. A State Department official said expectations of U.S. funding were inaccurate. The official said the department hadn't received any request to drop the terrorist designation for Mr. Hekmatyar or his group.

Previous efforts to rehabilitate militants have had little success. The United Nations Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program spent more than \$200 million on a six-year project to pay fighters before being suspended in 2015.

Critics of the peace deal have said compensating Mr. Hekmatyar and

his group could encourage others to take up arms in the hope of being bought off later.

"By pumping money to warlords like him, the U.S. and EU are creating a dire culture and that will have very dire consequences," said Nader Khan Katawazai, an Afghan lawmaker. "This will encourage more people to use violence to get rich. And there will be no accountability either."

Mr. Hekmatyar's group has carried out hundreds of attacks against Afghan and coalition forces in the past. One of the worst was an ambush near Kabul that killed 10

French soldiers in 2008. But his strength has waned in recent years.

Amin Karim, who represents Mr. Hekmatyar in Kabul, said the U.S. needed to remove him from its terror list and commit funding to the deal in order for the process to move forward.

"My objective is to bring peace," Mr. Karim said.

—Habib Khan Totakhil contributed to this article.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Leftist headed to narrow victory in Ecuador, defying Latin America's shift to right

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

(Reuters)

Leftist candidate Lenin Moreno claimed victory in the Ecuadorian presidential election late on April 2. Supporters of his conservative challenger took to the street in protest as Guillermo Lasso demanded a recount. Leftist candidate Lenin Moreno claimed victory in the Ecuadorian presidential election late on April 2. (Reuters)

QUITO, Ecuador — Ecuador plunged into crisis Sunday night after a disputed presidential vote, with leftist candidate Lenin Moreno headed to a narrow victory and his conservative opponent denouncing the results as fraudulent.

The race was a political barometer for the strength of long-dominant leftist parties in South America that have been in retreat after electoral losses. Ecuador's results appeared to buck that trend.

With more than 96 percent of the ballots counted, Moreno led 51 percent to 49 percent over right-wing challenger Guillermo Lasso, who insisted that he was the real winner. Clashes broke out in several cities, with voters screaming at one another in the streets and many fearing an escalating standoff.

Citing an exit poll by the respected Cedatos firm showing him winning by a comfortable margin, Lasso gave an emotional speech declaring victory as soon as voting closed. "Fight!" he told his supporters, well before the first official tallies were released. "We won't let them cheat us!"

At a rally soon after, Moreno told his cheering supporters that he had won, and the whipsaw effect continued through the evening. "Onward to victory!" he

shouted. "We'll continue changing Ecuador for the better."

On Twitter, President Rafael Correa said violence had broken out in Quito and several other cities. "What they can't accomplish at the polls, they're trying to achieve by force," wrote Correa, who has been in power since 2007 and was ineligible to run again.

Correa declared Moreno, his former vice president, the victor, even though election authorities have yet to do so. "The revolution has triumphed again in Ecuador," he said, dancing and singing onstage with Moreno at an evening rally.

But the government's opponents seemed in no mood to concede defeat, demanding a recount and vowing to challenge the results in court. "The government they are trying to install will be an illegitimate one," Lasso told his angry supporters, warning Correa, "You're playing with fire."

The results were also a reprieve for Julian Assange, whose asylum protection at Ecuador's embassy in London was on the line. Lasso said he would evict Assange within 30 days from the embassy, where the WikiLeaks founder took refuge in 2012. Moreno has said he will let Assange stay.

"I cordially invite Lasso to leave Ecuador within 30 days (with or without his tax haven millions)," Assange wrote in a Twitter post Sunday night, taunting Lasso with a reference to accusations the candidate has millions stashed in offshore accounts.

Lasso and his supporters began celebrating in the streets of the capital, waving flags and honking car horns wildly as soon as several exit polls showed him winning. Their euphoria switched to outrage when the official results showed Moreno

leading. Lasso's supporters gathered outside the headquarters of the country's election authorities, then broke through police barricades and surged toward the building, with television cameras showing them facing off against riot police with shields.

Ecuador's disputed outcome is one of several South American conflicts that have occurred in recent days, along with clashes in Venezuela and Paraguay.

Election observers from the Organization of American States and other groups had yet to make statements about the integrity of the vote. A respected nongovernmental organization, Participación Ciudadana, said its exit poll results showed a tie between the two candidates.

Correa's decade in power has left Ecuadorans sharply divided, and with his legacy on the line, his government threw its full weight behind Moreno, 64.

Lasso, 61, a former banker, offered Ecuadorans a message of change and bet that frustration about the country's sagging economy and Correa's heavy-handed style would lift him to an upset.

"We need new ideas. Everything is stagnant here," said Luzmila Muñoz, 47, a chemical engineer who voted for Lasso in a middle-class sector of Quito. "Ten years is enough," she said, referring to Correa.

Right-wing candidates have won recent presidential contests in Argentina and Peru, after a long period when left-wing populists such as Correa seemed invincible, using a commodity boom to cut poverty and cultivate a broad base of support.

But with prices for oil and other exports slumping, the region has shifted to the right, and many leftists

saw the mild-mannered Moreno as their best chance to break the trend. Moreno, who was shot during a 1998 carjacking, would be the first candidate who uses a wheelchair to win a presidential race in Latin America.

*[A leftist tries to hold the line in Ecuador as Latin America moves to the right]*

"He'll fight for equality, because he knows what it's like to be disadvantaged," said Janet Bravo, 40, who cast her vote for Moreno in the hillside neighborhood of Comité del Pueblo. Bravo, who owns a small office supply shop, said she has been able to save money in recent years because the government provided her two young children with free health care.

Moreno's campaign was counting on voters such as Bravo to be wary of what sort of change a Lasso win would bring to their lives.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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"I'm afraid we'll go back to the way things were before," said Erick Lara, 22, an Afro-Ecuadoran who is studying to be a chef. He credited the Correa government for promoting racial equality and said his mother was able to buy a home because of a government loan. "We have more opportunities now," he said.

Michael Shifter, president of Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington think tank, said Moreno's apparent victory showed that left-wing governments in South America may be more resilient than many believe.

"Although Ecuador's economic situation has recently worsened and there are serious questions about government corruption, most voters recognized advances in education,

health care and especially infrastructure," he said. "Moreno promised to give a new push and build on these gains."

But the disputed, narrow results suggested that Moreno would face immediate challenges in governing a badly divided country in a region that has turned increasingly volatile.

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL.**

## Pressure Heats Up on Venezuelan President, Even as He Backs Down

Anatoly Kurmanaev

Updated April 2, 2017 5:47 p.m. ET

CARACAS, Venezuela—President Nicolás Maduro's decision to scrap a court order that dissolved congress has brought Venezuela back from the brink of an unprecedented constitutional crisis, but has also exposed divisions within the government and limits to Mr. Maduro's increasingly authoritarian rule.

Prompted by a protest from Attorney General Luisa Ortega, the Supreme Court on Saturday reversed key parts of its ruling earlier in the week that essentially dissolved the opposition-controlled National Assembly, hours after Mr. Maduro said he and his top officials asked the judges to clarify the decision.

"This has put a lid on things," a former top official under Mr. Maduro said. "The government has won itself some time" to regroup.

A pro-democracy opposition rally held on Saturday after the Supreme Court issued the new ruling drew around 1,000 people, mostly party activists. Minor scuffles broke out after several hundred protesters tried to break through police barricades to

march on downtown Caracas.

By Sunday, life was back to normal in the capital, with people jogging on the capital's vacant streets or preparing for the long Easter holidays. Several opposition leaders have left the country on holidays or business, opposition officials said.

But beneath the apparent calm, Mr. Maduro's failed power grab—the culmination of earlier moves that include silencing the media, jailing opponents and postponing elections—has left the country with a weaker leader facing a spiraling economic crisis, said Felix Seijas, a Caracas pollster. It has also given oxygen to the demoralized opposition. "This crisis has weakened Maduro and given the opposition a golden opportunity after a long slide."

The Supreme Court's ruling on Wednesday created a political storm in Venezuela, with the opposition calling it a coup. Several Latin American governments recalled ambassadors for consultations. And Mr. Maduro suffered the biggest split in his four-year-old administration after Ms. Ortega, who had been a Maduro ally, said the ruling was illegal.

To deal with the crisis, Mr. Maduro has postponed a currency overhaul, seen by economists as crucial to begin stabilizing the economy, until at least late April, two people familiar with the matter said.

The ruling has also likely delayed Mr. Maduro's attempts to sign new oil deals with foreign companies and local businessmen to raise the much-needed cash for bond payments, two Venezuelan oil officials said. Although the Supreme Court's revised ruling still gives Mr. Maduro the right to create new oil joint ventures without congressional approval, those deals will now attract greater public and investor scrutiny, they said.

Ms. Ortega's unprecedented criticism also has torpedoed the government's carefully orchestrated show of unity, exposing deep divisions within Mr. Maduro's administration. The armed forces chief, Gen. Vladimir Padrino, had asked Mr. Maduro on Friday to revise the ruling that dissolved the assembly following the attorney general's speech, a person familiar with the substance of the meeting said.

A spokesman for the Venezuelan armed forces didn't respond to a request for comment.

"There are many people in the ruling party and the bureaucracy that are deeply unhappy with what Maduro is doing," said Nicmer Evans, a former member of the United Socialist party who now leads the dissident Socialist Tide faction. Ms. Ortega's speech marks a turning point for the government, he said.

Mr. Maduro will face more pressure within the ruling party and from neighboring countries to hold elections this year, opposition leaders said. Fearing what polls show to be almost certain defeat, Mr. Maduro has used his control of courts and electoral council to indefinitely postpone elections for state governors, raising questions about the fate of a presidential election due to take place next year.

Seeking to press its advantage, the opposition has called for a new protest on Tuesday to demand the election and scrapping of 56 other Supreme Court rulings they say have restrained the congress.

"The constitutional order remains broken," opposition lawmaker Juan Matheus said. "We will remain on the street until it is restored."

**The  
New York  
Times**

## In Ecuador, Lenín Moreno Headed for Victory in Presidential Election

Nicholas Casey and Maggy Ayala

Lenín Moreno, a 64-year-old former vice president of Ecuador, appeared headed to a second-round win in the country's presidential election on Sunday. It would be a rare victory for the Latin American left, which has recently suffered stinging election defeats.

With more than 90 percent of the votes counted, Mr. Moreno, a close ally of departing President Rafael Correa, had won 51 percent of the vote, while his opponent, Guillermo Lasso, a 61-year-old banker, had won 49 percent, according to early figures published by Ecuador's electoral commission.

While Mr. Moreno quickly declared victory on Sunday night, his opponent did not concede, saying all the votes needed to be counted.

The race was closely watched in the region, where, time and again, leftist stalwarts who rose to power on

populism and high commodity prices have seen their fortunes turn.

Liberal movements in Venezuela, Argentina and Bolivia have been rebuffed by voters in recent elections as their economies have stumbled. Brazil's leftist president, Dilma Rousseff, was brought down by impeachment last year.

In the end, it was the candidate named for the founder of Russian Communism who was favored to win.

Mr. Moreno has promised to push forward the so-called Citizens' Revolution of his predecessor, which funneled state funds back to the poor in the form of education, housing and infrastructure.

In a speech on Sunday, Mr. Moreno said it became clear during his travels that he had the support of ordinary Ecuadoreans. "Since before we claimed victory, we knew it, we felt it," he said.

Yet maintaining Mr. Correa's momentum could prove hard. There is the issue of oil revenues, for one, which have stagnated. The economy has ground to a halt after years of high growth.

There is also the figure of Mr. Correa himself, a strong-willed populist who ruled for a decade, created a new Constitution and lifted large sections of his nation out of poverty. Few expect that the mild-mannered Mr. Moreno can sustain his success.

"The economic orientation will change; the social emphasis will change," said Simón Pachano, a political analyst based in Quito, the capital.

Still, Mr. Moreno's vision differed sharply from that of his opponent, Mr. Lasso, who lost to Mr. Correa by a larger margin in 2013.

Mr. Lasso, from the port city of Guayaquil, had promised to cut back on what he called the excesses of

the previous president, including by reducing the public-sector work force and government spending. He also proposed cutting taxes for the wealthy and for businesses.

Each candidate faced a steep climb to the presidency. Mr. Moreno was criticized for being too close to Mr. Correa, whose decade in power ended with accusations of corruption involving public infrastructure projects. Mr. Correa earned a harsh reputation for attacking critics, suing journalists and, on his state television show, angrily reading the names of those who had sent tweets that reflected poorly on him.

But for many, Mr. Lasso was never able to overcome his history as banker in a country that has been rocked by financial crises and inflation.

His opponents hammered him throughout the campaign for his past positions in the government of Jamil Mahuad, the Ecuadorean president who moved the country onto the



United States dollar after a banking crisis destroyed its national currency, the sucre.

The financial collapse, known as the "bank holiday" in Ecuador, prompted a migration of more than 1.5 million people, most of whom sought work in the United States and Europe. The country limped by in negotiations with creditors for years until Mr. Correa took Ecuador into default, calling the foreign debt

"immoral."

More recently, an Argentine newspaper published what it said were documents showing that Mr. Lasso had shuttled financial gains he made during the country's economic crisis into an offshore account. Mr. Lasso denied wrongdoing, but Mr. Correa said the candidate was under investigation.

Mr. Moreno, by contrast, presented a softer image.

Known to be more humorous and conciliatory than Mr. Correa, he appeared in campaign stops in his wheelchair, which he has used since he was shot during a robbery in the late 1990s. He is probably best known for his social programs, which have helped people with disabilities in Ecuador.

"We can't lose what's been given to the poor," said Edwin Tatés, who works as a driver in Quito and voted for Mr. Moreno.

He added, "This government has had many errors, above all those of Correa, who has fought with everyone, but we need to change things for the good of the country, not to change the whole government."

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL.**

## Lenin Moreno Slightly Ahead in Ecuador's Presidential Vote

Ryan Dube

April 3, 2017

12:12 a.m. ET

QUITO, Ecuador—Ruling-party candidate Lenin Moreno had a slight lead over his conservative opponent in a tight election to succeed President Rafael Correa, according to election results with most of the votes counted.

With 95% of the votes counted late Sunday, Mr. Moreno had 51.11% support, compared with 48.89% for Guillermo Lasso, the national electoral council said on its website. It has yet to officially announce a winner.

A quick count by Participacion Ciudadana, a Quito-based nongovernment organization that promotes democracy, said there was a technical tie between the candidates.

Tensions mounted late Sunday as both candidates declared victory

following a contentious campaign that saw Mr. Lasso hit with rocks while leaving a soccer match and the opposition argue that the election of Mr. Moreno would push Ecuador toward a similar fate as crisis-ridden Venezuela.

Mr. Moreno, a 64-year-old former vice president who served with Mr. Correa, celebrated the results alongside the president and cheering supporters.

"We have won the election," he said. "This revolution will continue." Mr. Correa said Mr. Moreno's lead was irreversible.

Mr. Lasso, a 61-year-old ex-banker who promised to roll back taxes to boost economic growth, hasn't conceded, saying there was fraud and that Mr. Moreno's presidency would be illegitimate. He had claimed victory after three exit polls showed he won the race.

After official results showed he was trailing, he called on his supporters to peacefully defend their vote.

"They've crossed a line and that line that they've crossed is to try to abuse the popular will," he said in a speech. "You aren't going to allow it, and neither are we."

Televised images later showed Mr. Lasso's supporters chanting "no to fraud" outside the national electoral council's office in the coastal city of Guayaquil. Hundreds of his supporters broke through barricades surrounding the council's office in Quito to protest the results while waving Ecuadorean flags.

Cesar Monge, president of Mr. Lasso's CREO coalition, called on the council to hold off on announcing the winner, saying they found irregularities in some ballots.

"What we'll do in the coming hours is try to get to the bottom of all of this to really know what happened in the election," he said.

The opposition's calls for a recount are unlikely to succeed, said Sebastian Hurtado, president of Profitas, a Quito-based political-risk consulting firm.

"The government has the upper hand," he said. "They are going to try to wrap this up as quickly as possible."

If confirmed, Mr. Moreno's victory would extend the leftist government's decadelong hold on power, bucking a trend in Latin America that has seen the region's populist left lose power amid slower economic growth.

Political analysts had said Mr. Correa, who was legally barred from running for re-election, boosted Mr. Moreno's candidacy in the final days of the campaign by inaugurating several public-works projects, including hospitals and schools.

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL.**

## Colombia Pledges Aid for Survivors of Flood, Landslide

Kejal Vyas and Sara Schaefer Muñoz

Updated April 2, 2017 11:46 p.m. ET

MOCOA, Colombia—President Juan Manuel Santos on Sunday pledged hundreds of thousands of dollars in aid for victims of a flood and mudslide in remote Putumayo state that left more than 200 people dead, as emergency teams continued to extract bodies and search for survivors amid thick mud and wreckage.

The death toll as of late Sunday stood at 254, President Santos said in a message on his Twitter account, following his second visit to the decimated city of Mocoa, the capital of the state in southern Colombia.

In a televised speech Sunday night, the president lauded rescue teams for their tireless work and praised government and aid groups for quickly providing food, water and medicine.

"We offer the condolences and the sorrow of an entire country," he said, "We will leave Putumayo better than it was before. We will build up Mocoa, it will recover."

Amid the rescue efforts, distraught members of victims' families gathered outside the city's morgue to identify loved ones. Others desperately waved pictures and identification cards of the missing on national television.

Mr. Santos pledged the funds to rebuild the city, vowed to cover funeral expenses for the victims and offered financial assistance for families affected.

The president, whose approval ratings have slipped recently, was quick to highlight the efforts of state agencies to manage the disaster, saying health officials had immediately dispatched doctors, nurses, stretchers and more than 1,000 pounds of medicine to a field hospital and the main hospital in Mocoa. He said officials had brought

in 13 water trucks and set up 10 generators in the city, and on Monday would start a program of vaccinations in order to prevent the spread of disease.

Many residents feared the death count would rise further. Sandra Macuace, a 37-year-old primary schoolteacher, said she and her colleagues had so far been able to locate only 15 of the 70 children who attend their classes.

"We just don't know where the rest of them are," Ms. Macuace said as she inspected the rubble where the house of a friend who died in the flood once stood. "We are devastated," she said.

In one of the worst natural disasters Colombia has seen in decades, rows of houses were swept away in a flash flood after heavy rains that began here late Friday night. Three rivers that cut through this city of 50,000 quickly overflowed as residents slept, giving poor

neighborhoods that hug the river banks little time to react.

Witnesses felt buildings vibrate before an avalanche of water carrying mud and debris swept through, toppling homes and lifting trucks downstream.

Residents who live further away from the waterfront said they only noticed something unusual after hearing neighbors scream and plead for help.

Alexander Gomez, a 27-year-old construction worker, said his brother, sister-in-law and niece were killed as their house was completely taken away by the rush of water, rocks and debris. He spent all day Saturday looking for them until authorities notified him that their bodies had been recovered far downstream, he said.

Mr. Gomez, whose home was a little further inland, was unable to wake up his brother before Mr. Gomez and his own family had to flee to



higher ground. Mr. Gomez's house was also destroyed.

"Everything I had is gone," he said, holding back tears as he picked through muddy rocks, all that was left of his house.

Colombia's national disaster-response agency distributed food and water. A major power plant for Putumayo state was knocked out leaving hundreds of thousands without electricity, Carlos Negret, Colombia's public ombudsman, said on the country's national Caracol radio.

Residents burned trash and furniture to cook rice and soup, shoveled mud from their houses and watched dogs working with rescue teams sniff through rubble looking for

bodies.

"The whole country and society must work for these people who have lost everything, and do everything needed to re-establish their quality of life," Mr. Negret said.

As officials worked to identify the dead, frantic relatives called into radio stations around the country seeking information about loved ones. Townspeople lined up anxiously at the main cemetery, waiting for word about their missing family members.

"There are so many disappeared," said Robinson Correa, a firefighter who was one of more than 1,000 relief workers sent by the government to help Mocoa.

## The New York Times Mexico Ready to Play the Corn Card in Trade Talks (UNE)

Kirk Semple

American corn shipments to Mexico totaled nearly \$2.6 billion last year and are part of an elaborate agricultural trade relationship between the two nations that has helped to interlace their economies. But though the corn business is a tiny fraction of the overall \$525 billion in annual trade between the two countries, it has gained outside importance and become something of a symbol for the nations' economic codependence.

The prospect that the United States could lose its largest foreign market for corn and other key products has shaken farming communities throughout the American Midwest, where corn production is a vital part of the economy. The threat is particularly unsettling for many residents of the Corn Belt because much of the region voted overwhelmingly for Mr. Trump in the presidential election.

"If we lose Mexico as a customer, it will be absolutely devastating to the ag economy," said Philip Gordon, 68, who grows corn, soybeans and wheat on a farm in Saline, Mich., that has been in his family for 140 years.

Mr. Gordon said he planned to call Mr. Trump at the White House "and remind him we need trade."

"He's a businessman," Mr. Gordon said. "He understands how much support for him came from the agricultural community."

A Trump administration document that circulated on Capitol Hill last week appeared to present a more moderate approach to Nafta negotiations, seeking to preserve much of the existing agreement and recognizing the interconnectedness

of the two nations' economies, cultures and histories.

Still, people involved in agricultural trade on both sides of the border said they were not about to rest easy on the basis of the document, which even the White House seemed to disavow.

"It's really hard to track with this president," said Todd Hultman, a grains analyst at DTN, an agriculture news and data service based in Omaha. "The campaign rhetoric has been really over the top. But what actions are really going to come from the White House is still a mystery."

Mr. Trump has repeatedly asserted that Mexico has been the big winner under Nafta, and the United States the loser. But many leaders in the agricultural and food industries in the United States — not just in the corn market — hope Mr. Trump does not disrupt the agreement too much.

"When you mix politics with economics, you hope that economics influences your political decisions and not vice versa," said Luis A. Ribera, associate professor of agricultural economics and director of the Center for North American Studies at Texas A&M University.

Many leaders in the American agriculture industry say Nafta has been a boon for farmers in the United States, particularly because it opened up new foreign markets and helped to expand agricultural exports more than fourfold since the agreement was signed.

In 2016, the United States exported nearly \$18 billion of agricultural products to Mexico, the third-largest market for these American exports,

"Many people haven't even been reported missing yet because when a whole family gets wiped away, there may not be anyone to report them," he said, watching a bulldozer pull tree trunks out from a building. "We have to go through Mocoa district by district."

Residents from this part of Putumayo are used to heavy rainfall. But few had seen a torrential downpour with so much force before.

Mr. Santos, blaming the disaster on erratic weather caused by climate change, said the rainfall between Friday evening and Saturday morning was nearly the equivalent of what the region typically experiences during the entire month of March.

He called the storm, which comes after heavy rains in Peru last month killed dozens of people, the most intense precipitation southern Colombia has seen in 25 years.

The disaster is reminiscent of the massive landslides in Armero, in central Colombia, in 1985 that claimed 23,000 lives. Officials said on Sunday that they are working quickly to set up programs to protect children and ensure they aren't lost or separated from their families as they were in the 1985 disaster.

according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

Mexico is not only the leading destination of American corn, but it also imports more dairy products, poultry and wheat from the United States than any other nation, and is one of the top importers of American pork, soybeans and beef, the department says.

Mexico imported about 13.8 million tons of American corn last year, according to the Mexican government. Nearly all — about 12.7 million tons — was yellow corn, which is largely used for livestock feed, supplementing about 3.5 million tons of homegrown yellow corn.

The remainder of corn imports were of the white variety, which is used mostly for human consumption and is a key ingredient in tortillas. Mexico is essentially self-sufficient in white corn. The country produced 22.2 million tons last year and imported about 1.1 million tons of American white corn to make up for lucrative white corn exports to South Africa and other countries, according to the Mexican government.

And just as international supply chains in automobiles, aerospace and other industries crisscross the border, the same is true of agricultural products. Mexican calves — possibly fed American corn — are exported to the United States, where they are further fattened and then butchered for meat that may be exported for sale abroad, including to Mexico.

Farmers and agricultural industry representatives say that American farmers are already reeling from higher production costs and declining commodity prices, and that Mr. Trump's threats on trade and

immigration have injected more uncertainty.

"There's a lot of volatility in agricultural markets to begin with," said Barbara Patterson, government relations director of the National Farmers Union, "and shutting off our borders or losing access to trading partners has farmers concerned."

The loss of Mexico as a market for agricultural products, farmers say, could presage job losses and bankruptcies.

"We'd like to see careful consideration and a cautious approach," Ms. Patterson said.

Formal talks to renegotiate Nafta are still at least several months away. Still, corn producers, as well as their counterparts elsewhere in American agriculture, have begun to lobby elected officials and the administration.

"Soup to nuts: corn, dairy, meat, specialty products, fruit — they're all pretty much gathered together," said Tom Sleight, president and chief executive of the U.S. Grains Council. Producers, he said, are seeking to remind the administration of the importance of trade and Mexico to agriculture's bottom line.

The administration's threats have already begun to sour longstanding business arrangements between American sellers and Mexican buyers.

"Relationships are getting frosty with our customers right now," Mr. Sleight said. "Usually it's been a very symbiotic relationship, but recently it's gotten a little more difficult. Mexicans are saying, 'Why are you doing this to us? We've been your best customers.'"

The Mexican government has not delayed in exploring other markets

in which to purchase corn. A top agricultural official from Argentina visited Mexico City last month to discuss the possibility of increasing sales of Argentine yellow corn to Mexico. Officials from Mexico's Agriculture Ministry are planning a trip to Argentina and Brazil this month to discuss increasing corn purchases from those countries.

Last month, Mexico's deputy economy minister told The Financial Times that Mexico was exploring the possibility of allowing duty-free access to Argentine and Brazilian corn imports.

Developing new import arrangements with South America will not be easy, officials said. New

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.**  
COMMENTS

Malaysia allowed three North Korean suspects in the Feb. 13 killing of Kim Jong Nam, half-brother of dictator Kim Jong Un, to leave the country on Thursday night. In return Pyongyang released nine Malaysian diplomats and family members it had prevented from going home. The deal means the North Koreans

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.**  
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When President Trump hosts Chinese President Xi Jinping this week at Mar-a-Lago, trade will be high on the agenda. If Mr. Trump hopes to come away a winner, he'll need the right objectives. That means focusing on China's mercantilist practices without jeopardizing the benefits of mutual trade and investment.

Support for this policy comes from two recent economic studies that debunk the claim that imports from China—particularly after its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001—have hollowed out large areas of the U.S. and made Americans worse off.

The two new papers address the work of MIT economist David Autor and co-authors David Dorn and Gordon Hanson, who have published several papers on Chinese imports. Their much-quoted study, "The China Syndrome: Local Labor Market Effects of Import Competition in the United States," looked at 722 geographic areas from 1990-2000 and 2000-2007. It found that "rising imports cause higher unemployment, lower labor force participation, and reduced

relationships would have to be brokered, and costs to import may also be higher, officials say, in part because there are fewer established transportation routes between Mexico and the Mercosur countries of South America.

Mexican officials say, however, that an increase in trade between the regions might lead to more competition, which could increase efficiency and lower costs.

The showdown on Nafta has also inspired Mexican agricultural officials and producers to step up programs that would increase domestic corn production and revive a sector undercut by the agreement, said Alejandro Vázquez Salido,

## North Korean Killers Go Free

April 2, 2017 5:24 p.m. ET 38

who allegedly planned the killing, including four who fled Malaysia within hours, will never be held accountable in a court of law.

If there's a silver lining in this affair, it's that Pyongyang burned some valuable bridges. Malaysia has been a convenient base for dodging United Nations sanctions.

As the Journal reported last week, in 2014 the U.N. flagged Malaysia

director of Aserca, a Mexican government agency that supports farmers and promotes the marketing of Mexican agricultural products.

Some economists blame Nafta for causing widespread unemployment in the Mexican agricultural sector by opening the floodgates to heavily subsidized American agricultural products, especially corn. A 2014 study estimated that 1.9 million agricultural jobs were wiped out, mainly those of small family farmers, helping to drive more illegal immigration into the United States.

Mr. Vázquez said that even before Mr. Trump began to attack Nafta and Mexico, the Mexican authorities had begun to discuss plans to

Korea Partners, a company that sent North Korean workers to construction projects in Africa, as a possible sanctions violator. Malaysian authorities didn't respond to the U.N. and began to investigate MKP only after the Kim assassination. One reason may be that MKP hired and gave stakes to politically connected Malaysians. Other such companies are now being probed.

substitute imports with national production. "But these new challenges, these new policies that we're facing, are having us move in that direction faster than we were," he said.

Mr. Trump has knocked Mexicans "out of our comfort zone," forcing agriculture officials to find ways for Mexico to be less dependent on American imports, Mr. Vázquez continued. "We're starting to move where we should've moved a long time ago: trying to produce internally what we're importing."

Until recently, Malaysia was one of the few countries that allowed North Koreans to visit without a visa. Yet Pyongyang rewarded Kuala Lumpur by using nerve gas in an international airport and then holding diplomats hostage. Other governments that help Kim Jong Un make money should learn a lesson: There's no honor among killers.

## Editorial : The Truth About the China Trade Shock

April 2, 2017 5:25 p.m. ET 77

wages in local labor markets that house import-competing manufacturing industries."

Jonathan Rothwell, senior economist at Gallup and a visiting scholar at George Washington University Institute of Public Policy, studied the effects of China trade on the same areas during the same two time periods. His findings, published in "Cutting the Losses: Reassessing the Costs of Import Competition to Workers and Communities," are different because his methodology is different.

The Autor team compared changes across the two time periods, but Mr. Rothwell analyzed the two time periods separately. He did this to account for macroeconomic trends, which were not the same in both times for all places. For example, the dot.com boom followed by a bust in places like San Jose, California shows a downturn in the second period compared to the first but that had little to do with China.

Mr. Rothwell's results show that foreign competition did not affect workers in manufacturing any more than domestic factors like automation, bad management or right-to-work, low-tax states. The economist finds "the risk of layoff and unemployment to workers in

trade-exposed sectors is comparable—or even lower—than the risk to workers in non-traded sectors and that these risks have not increased during the period of more intense competition with Chinese imports."

A second recent study—"Firm Reorganization, Chinese Imports, and US Manufacturing Employment" by Columbia Ph.D. candidate Ildikó Magyari—looks at the impact of Chinese imports on U.S. companies. It finds that trade with China reduced costs and allowed firms to expand "their total manufacturing employment in industries in which the US has a comparative advantage relative to China, even as specific" parts of the same company got smaller.

Although Chinese imports may mean job losses in one part of the company, Mr. Magyari writes, "these losses were more than offset by gains in employment within the same firms. Contrary to conventional wisdom, firms exposed to greater Chinese imports created more manufacturing and nonmanufacturing jobs than non-exposed firms." Somewhere David Ricardo is smiling.

Both studies conclude that competition from China increased

the value of U.S. workers. As Ms. Magyari notes, using Census Bureau data, companies that faced competition and reorganized, expanded employment "by 2 percent more per year as they hired more (i) production workers in manufacturing, whom they paid higher wages, and (ii) in services complementary to high-skilled and high-tech manufacturing, such as R&D, design, engineering, and headquarters services."

An import surge does hurt some workers in some industries, and the Chinese surge after its entry into the World Trade Organization was bigger than most. But the evidence suggests that its impact was also a net benefit to many U.S. workers and firms, and that's without taking into account the benefit to consumers from lower prices for clothing and other daily goods. In any event that surge is now over and the U.S. economy has adjusted.

Mr. Trump is right to press Mr. Xi on intellectual property and cyber theft, high tariffs, favoritism to "national champions" and other bad practices. He shouldn't worry about trade in general or the size of the trade deficit.

## Rogin : Inside the Kushner channel to China

Ahead of Thursday's summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping, the Trump administration is engaged in a relatively conventional process involving interagency teams debating the messaging, policies and priorities for the U.S.-China relationship. But separate and above that operation sits a key channel for high-level interactions between the White House and Chinese leadership, run by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

The Kushner channel was established shortly after the election with the help of former secretary of state Henry Kissinger. In a series of meetings with top Chinese officials, Kushner and other Trump aides set the tone and broad agenda for the coming summit, well before the current policy process began. When Trump meets with Xi at Mar-a-Lago, the leaders could codify those early discussions, with huge implications for the United States, China and the Asia-Pacific region.

Kushner's goal, according to White House and transition officials, is to broaden and improve the relationship, despite several persistent challenges. That drive runs counter to the views of other top officials who want to confront Beijing on various issues, as Trump promised during the campaign.

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In mid-November, Kissinger met Kushner, national security adviser

designate Michael Flynn and the president-elect at Trump Tower. Trump asked Kissinger to travel to Beijing and deliver a verbal message to Xi saying that everything was on the table in terms of bilateral cooperation. Kissinger met Xi in Beijing on Dec. 2, and Xi sent back a private reply conveying China's wish to set up an early meeting of the two presidents.

That same day, Trump took a congratulatory phone call from Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, prompting a rebuke from the Chinese foreign ministry. But despite public tensions, private wooing between the two sides continued. Kissinger met with top Trump aides, including Kushner, on Dec. 6 and encouraged them to meet with Chinese state councilor Yang Jiechi. Yang and Ambassador Cui Tiankai came to Trump Tower for two meetings with top Trump officials Dec. 9 and Dec. 10, hosted in Kushner's office.

(Deirdra O'Regan/The Washington Post)

Jared Kushner is President-elect Donald Trump's son-in-law but he's also one of his key confidants. Here's a closer look at the man who is expected to be a senior adviser to the president in Trump's White House. Here's a closer look at the man who is expected to be a senior adviser to the president in Trump's White House. (Video: Deirdra O'Regan/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

In the meetings, Yang laid out a list of Chinese requests. China wants the Trump administration to adopt its concept of "a new model of great

power relations," Xi's proposal to avoid conflict and focus on cooperation. China also wants Trump to endorse Xi's signature "One Belt, One Road" initiative, China's massive regional infrastructure and development project. China also seeks U.S. noninterference in issues it considers core interests, including Taiwan, Tibet and its internal affairs.

In exchange, the Chinese are prepared to offer as-yet-unspecified investment proposals to help advance Trump's domestic agenda of creating jobs. Kushner and Cui have kept in close communication and the Chinese leadership has come to rely on the Kushner channel, which was used to help arrange the coming summit.

Kushner separately met with the leader of the Anbang Insurance Group in mid-November, as his family's company pursued a real estate investment from the Chinese company. Those negotiations were put on hold last week amid criticism about a potential conflict of interest.

Inside the administration, there's concern Kushner is too eager to warm relations with China. He is seen as allied in that effort with other top officials, including economic adviser Gary Cohn and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. Senior officials who want to pursue a tougher, more aggressive China approach include chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon, National Trade Council Director Peter Navarro, policy adviser Stephen Miller and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross.

One White House official said that Kushner is not reflexively pro-China

and is keenly aware that Trump made confronting China on security and trade a pillar of his campaign.

"Jared's view on China is that everything is negotiable; he as a real estate guy thinks there are win-win solutions for everything," the official said. "He's also a politically savvy guy and he knows that a lot of these things affect his father-in-law's political standing."

Some warming of the relationship is already evident. Kushner was one of many aides who persuaded Trump to back down and reaffirm his commitment to the one-China policy in his February phone call with Xi. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson seemed to mimic Chinese talking points after meeting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing in March.

Observers following the summit will focus on what is sure to be tough language from the president on some specific issues. On North Korea and the South China Sea, the administration is projecting a traditional hawkish Republican security policy. On trade, Trump seems to be sticking to a nationalist America-first economic agenda.

But if Trump also endorses China's model for the relationship, its regional expansion and by omission its internal repression, that will not only signal a new era for the relationship but also show that Kushner is the most important figure in U.S.-China relations.

## China Learns How to Get Trump's Ear: Through Jared Kushner (UNE)

Mark Landler

Mr. Kushner first made his influence felt in early February when he and Mr. Cui orchestrated a fence-mending phone call between Mr. Trump and Mr. Xi. During that exchange, Mr. Trump pledged to abide by the four-decade-old "One China" policy on Taiwan, despite his earlier suggestion that it was up for negotiation.

Now Mr. Trump wants something in return: He plans to press Mr. Xi to intensify economic sanctions against North Korea to pressure the country to shut down its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. He has also vowed to protest the chronic trade imbalance between the United States and China, which

he railed against during his presidential campaign.

China's courtship of Mr. Kushner, which has coincided with the marginalization of the State Department in the Trump administration, reflects a Chinese comfort with dynastic links. Mr. Xi is himself a "princeling": His father was Xi Zhongxun, a major figure in the Communist revolution who was later purged by Mao Zedong.

Not only is Mr. Kushner married to the president's daughter Ivanka, but he is also one of his most influential advisers — a 36-year-old with no previous government experience but an exceptionally broad portfolio under his father-in-law.

"Since Kissinger, the Chinese have been infatuated with gaining and

maintaining access to the White House," said Evan S. Medeiros, a senior director for Asia in the Obama administration. "Having access to the president's family and somebody they see as a princeling is even better."

Former American officials and China experts warned that the Chinese had prepared more carefully for this visit than the White House, which is still debating how harshly to confront Beijing, and which has yet to fill many important posts in the State Department. Several said that if Mr. Trump presented China with an ultimatum on North Korea, it could backfire.

"China will either decide to help us with North Korea, or they won't," Mr. Trump said in an interview with The Financial Times that was published

on Sunday. "And if they do, that will be very good for China, and if they don't, it won't be good for anyone."

The president said that he had "great respect" for the Chinese leader, but that he would warn him that "we cannot continue to trade if we are going to have an unfair deal like we have right now."

Shortly after winning the election, Mr. Trump said he might use the "One China" policy, under which the United States recognizes a single Chinese government in Beijing and has severed its diplomatic ties with Taiwan, as a bargaining chip for greater Chinese cooperation on trade or North Korea.

Mr. Trump had thrown that policy into doubt after taking a congratulatory phone call from the

president of Taiwan. That caused consternation in Beijing, and Mr. Xi refused to get on the phone with Mr. Trump until he reaffirmed the policy.

After the two leaders finally spoke, the White House said in a statement that the men had “discussed numerous topics, and President Trump agreed, at the request of President Xi, to honor our One China policy.” Mr. Trump insisted on that wording, according to a person briefed on the process, because he wanted to make clear that he had made a concession to Mr. Xi.

Since that call, Mr. Cui has continued to cultivate the Kushner family. Later in February, he invited Ivanka and the couple’s daughter, Arabella, to a reception at the Chinese Embassy to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

Inside the White House, the most visible sign of Mr. Kushner’s influence on China policy came in March at the beginning of a meeting of the National Security Council’s “principals committee” to discuss North Korea.

He was seated at the table in the Situation Room when Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, walked in. Seeing no chairs open, General Dunford headed for the backbenches, according to two people who were there. Mr. Kushner, they said, quickly offered his chair to General Dunford and took a seat along the wall.

While administration officials confirm that Mr. Kushner is deeply involved in China relations, they insist that Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson

has taken the lead on policy and made many of the decisions on the choreography and agenda of the meeting at Mar-a-Lago.

In March, Mr. Tillerson made his first trip to Beijing as secretary of state, during which he and Mr. Xi discussed the planning in a 30-minute meeting. He was criticized afterward for repeating the phrases “mutual respect” and “win-win solutions,” which are drawn from the Chinese diplomatic lexicon and have been interpreted to assert a Chinese sphere of influence over the South China Sea and other disputed areas.

A senior American official said that Mr. Tillerson applied his own meaning to those phrases — “win-win,” he said, was originally an American expression — and was not accepting China’s definition. He said the secretary had adopted a significantly tougher tone in private, particularly about China’s role in curbing North Korea’s provocations.

Mr. Kushner has passed on proposals he got from Mr. Cui to Mr. Tillerson, who in turn has circulated them among his staff in the State Department, officials said. But the department’s influence has been reduced as many positions remain unfilled, including that of assistant secretary for East Asian affairs. Though Mr. Tillerson has kept a low profile, officials said he was trying to develop his own relationship with Mr. Trump at regular lunches and dinners.

Mr. Kushner’s involvement in China policy prompted questions after reports that his company was

negotiating with a politically connected Chinese firm to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in his family’s flagship property, 666 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

On Wednesday, amid the glare of negative publicity, Mr. Kushner’s company ended negotiations with the firm, the Anbang Insurance Group.

Another question hanging over the meeting is whether the hard-liners in the White House will wield their influence. Mr. Trump ran for the presidency on a stridently anti-China platform, accusing the Chinese, wrongly, of continuing to depress the value of their currency, and threatening to impose a 45 percent tariff on Chinese imports.

The architects of that policy — Stephen K. Bannon, the chief strategist, and Peter Navarro, the director of the National Trade Council — have said little publicly about China since entering the White House. But on Thursday, Mr. Trump predicted that the meeting would be “very difficult” because, as he said on Twitter, the United States would no longer tolerate “massive trade deficits.”

By inviting Mr. Xi to Mar-a-Lago, Mr. Trump’s “Southern White House,” the president is conferring on him the same status as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, who spent two days in Florida, playing golf with the president and responding to a crisis after North Korea tested a ballistic missile. Such a gesture is particularly valuable, experts said, given that China is not an ally like Japan.

Mr. Xi does not play golf — as part of his anti-corruption campaign, he cracked down on Communist Party officials’ playing the sport — so he and Mr. Trump will have to find other ways to fill the 25 hours that the Chinese president will be at the club. On Thursday evening, Mr. Trump and his wife, Melania, will host Mr. Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan, for dinner.

There are obvious parallels between the Mar-a-Lago meeting and the 2013 summit meeting at Sunnylands in California, Walter Annenberg’s 200-acre estate, where President Barack Obama and Mr. Xi got acquainted over long walks in the desert landscape and a dinner of grilled porterhouse steaks and cherry pie. But there are important differences, too.

By the time Mr. Obama met with Mr. Xi in California, they had already met once before, when Mr. Xi was vice president. Mr. Xi held extensive meetings with Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., traveling with him around the United States. Some former officials said the Mar-a-Lago meeting might reveal the disparity in experience between the two leaders and their teams.

“Sunnylands was difficult because Xi was new, while Obama had his sea legs,” said Mr. Medeiros, the former Obama administration official. “What’s interesting is that the polarity here is reversed. Xi has his sea legs; Trump does not.”

## The New York Times

### Editorial : A Cornerstone of Peace at Risk

One of the big security decisions facing the Trump administration in the next few months is what to do about Russia’s violation of a 30-year-old treaty that bans intermediate-range missiles based on land. How the administration reacts will say a lot about how it views the threat from Russia and will have a profound effect on European security.

An American decision to withdraw from the treaty, known as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, or I.N.F., would be disastrous. The treaty, a cornerstone of an international arms control regime that has prevented nuclear war, was signed in 1987 by President Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader. It prohibits the testing, production and possession of ballistic and cruise missiles, with either nuclear or conventional

warheads, that can travel between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. Sea-based missiles and air-launched missiles are not affected.

Despite signing the pact, the Russians, in recent years, have increasingly complained about its limits and have argued that countries like China, India and Pakistan, which have active missile programs, do not have similar constraints. Many American experts consider such arguments specious, given Russia’s huge nuclear and missile inventory.

In 2014, the Obama administration concluded that Russia had violated its treaty obligations by developing a prohibited cruise missile. The dispute became even more dangerous when it was determined that the Russians in December “deployed a land-based cruise missile that violates the spirit and intent” of the treaty, as Gen. Paul Selva, the vice chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee in March.

Efforts by the Obama administration to persuade Russia to move back into compliance failed. While American experts don’t consider the new missile a significant military threat, there is no doubt that President Vladimir Putin of Russia saw the new missile as another way to stoke fears in the members of NATO, an alliance which President Trump has recklessly sown doubts about.

The Trump administration is now reviewing the overall American nuclear posture, and there could be a decision “very, very soon” on what to do about the I.N.F. violation, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Friday in London, where he discussed the matter with British officials. Mr. Mattis has argued, “If Russia is permitted to violate the treaty with impunity, such actions

could erode the foundations of all current and future arms control agreements and initiatives.”

In anticipation of the missile deployment, the Obama administration funded a new multibillion-dollar initiative to station American troops and those from other NATO members on a rotating basis in European countries near the Russian border, and to expand training exercises and other cooperation. This should be continued and perhaps expanded.

Other possible responses include stationing additional air- and sea-launched missiles — which are not covered by the treaty — with NATO allies in and around Europe and increasing funding for missile defense programs. The point would be to increase pressure on Russia to find some kind of diplomatic solution to the missile treaty dispute.



All of this is playing out in a confused environment in which Russia has been accused of interfering in the American election

and Mr. Trump has been an apologist for Mr. Putin, while the Pentagon and the intelligence community are ringing alarm bells

about the Russian threat. How Mr. Trump handles the treaty violation will say a lot about whether he is

prepared to confront Mr. Putin's malign meddling.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Dionne : The right's jarring drift toward Russia

It is jarring to see pro-Trump conservatives indifferent or even hostile to investigations of Russian intervention in the 2016 campaign. Just a few years ago (it feels like an eternity), conservatives were jumping all over President Barack Obama for his Russian "reset" and his first-term eagerness to negotiate with Moscow.

Even further back, conservatives hailed President Ronald Reagan's description of the Soviet Union as "an evil empire." Reagan ran a brilliant ad during his 1984 reelection bid that showed a bear roaming through the woods. Without mentioning the words "Russia" or "Soviet Union," an announcer intoned:

"There is a bear in the woods. For some people, the bear is easy to see. Others don't see it at all. Some people say the bear is tame. Others say it's vicious and dangerous. Since no one can really be sure who's right, isn't it smart to be as strong as the bear? If there is a bear."

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The drift on the right toward Vladimir Putin is remarkable. An Economist-YouGov poll in December found that while only 9 percent of Trump voters had a favorable view of Obama, 35 percent had a favorable view of

Putin. In February, Gallup reported that the proportion of Republicans viewing Putin favorably rose from 12 percent in 2015 to 32 percent this year.

Not surprisingly, given what Putin did to defeat Hillary Clinton, his favorability among Democrats dropped, from 15 percent in 2015 to 10 percent now. But note how unpopular Putin was with Democrats in both surveys. What's striking is that a three-point gap between the two parties in 2015 is now at 22 points.

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

Russian President Vladimir Putin "holds a grudge" against Hillary Clinton, according to the intelligence report on Russian meddling in the U.S. election. Here's why. Vladimir Putin "holds a grudge" against Hillary Clinton, according to the intelligence report on Russian meddling in the U.S. election. Here's why. (Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

It's true that Moscow's intervention in Western politics goes back a long way. Throughout the Cold War, the Soviets gave strong support to communist parties around the world.

Putin, of course, will lend support to any political movement — right or left, separatist or nationalist — that disrupts the West. But he seems especially interested in creating a new international political alliance focused on conservatives and the far right.

He is casting himself as a strong supporter of religion and conservative values, and as an opponent of gay rights. Late last month, Putin staged a highly public audience in Moscow with Marine Le Pen, the far-right candidate in this spring's presidential election in France. Of course, Putin denied he was trying to influence French voters.

Putin is active in the United States, too. In a recent Time magazine article titled "Moscow Cozies Up to the Right," Alex Altman and Elizabeth Dias reported on Russia's efforts to build ties with America's Christian conservatives and the gun lobby.

These days, any liberal who raises alarms about Trump's relationship with Russia confronts charges of McCarthyism, hysteria and hypocrisy. The inclination of many on the left to assail Putin is often ascribed to partisan anger over his success in undermining Clinton's candidacy.

There's no doubt that liberals are angry, but ask yourself: Shouldn't everyone, left, right and center, be furious over Russia's efforts to inject calumny and falsehood into the American political bloodstream?

As last week's Senate Intelligence Committee hearing revealed, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), one of Trump's 2016 primary opponents, was also targeted by Russia. Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) was right in what he told MSNBC's Chris Hayes last week: Russia is trying to spread fear among American politicians in

both parties that if they dare criticize Putin's regime, as Clinton did when she was secretary of state, they risk being attacked in the same way she was.

Moreover, the problem with McCarthyism was not that it was directed against a totalitarian regime. Liberals, social democrats and democratic socialists were overwhelmingly anti-Soviet, too. McCarthyism was about lies and false charges — often against those on the left who were actually opposed to the Soviet Union. Doesn't that sound a bit like the fake news stories aimed at Clinton?

It is not in the least hysterical to wonder about the behavior of Trump's first national security adviser, Michael Flynn, who was once paid by Putin's propaganda network Russia Today. It is not McCarthyite to ask why Trump has spoken with such warmth about a Russian autocrat or taken so many positions (on NATO and the European Union, for example) that can be fairly seen as more in line with Russia's interests than our own.

And as Clint Watts of the Foreign Policy Research Institute told the Senate, Trump's choice to "parrot" Russian-inspired conspiracy theories made Putin's disinformation campaign all the more effective.

Yes, there is a bear, and we need to know what it has done to our democracy.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Editorial : Tweaking a 'disaster

PRESIDENT TRUMP campaigned hard against the North American Free Trade Agreement, at one point declaring that the tariff-slashing pact with Canada and Mexico, in effect for 23 years, "has been a disaster for our country" and "has to be totally gotten rid of." On another occasion, he pledged "to immediately renegotiate the terms of that agreement to get a better deal for our workers. And I don't mean just a little bit better, I mean a lot better." If our neighbors to the north and south did not agree to renegotiate, Mr. Trump added, then he would serve notice of American intent to exit the deal.

Now that his administration has revealed its draft NAFTA agenda, in the form of a letter to Congress from the acting U.S. trade representative, it would appear that Mr. Trump's bark had little relationship to his bite. In tone, the document is conciliatory. Its preamble takes note of the extensive trading relationships that have flowered under NAFTA, and speaks of the great "potential . . . benefit" to the United States of "improving" it. In substance, it is conventional: a list of implicit but clear allusions to long-standing U.S. concerns such as domestic-content rules for the North American motor vehicle industry and Canada's protection of its dairy farms. One controversial point was a reference to "snap back" tariffs as a remedy

for undue "import surges" to the United States. But even that mechanism has precedent in the terms of past trade deals, such as the ill-fated Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Speaking of TPP, which Mr. Trump also denounced, it actually would have accomplished a good deal of what the president now says he wants for the United States with respect to Canada and Mexico. The NAFTA partners agreed, in return for the benefits, economic and strategic, of what they hoped would be a U.S.-led market-building plan spanning a vast region of the world. Now that TPP has died, thanks in no small part to Mr. Trump's attacks on it during 2016, it's not clear what inducements he can offer Ottawa

and Mexico City to make those same concessions again.

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Indeed, the president's hostile and bombastic rhetoric — especially toward Mexico — has probably made it more difficult for the NAFTA countries to deal with the United States, when the talks do commence some months from now. This is true even where the administration raises valid issues, such as its suggested update to automotive industry domestic-content rules, which may not necessarily reflect new supply

chains linking Asia and North America, or the rise of a large Mexican auto industry.

Mr. Trump's protectionism during

## The New York Times

Paul Krugman

The fiasco perfectly encapsulated what's looking more and more like a failed agenda.

Business seems to have decided that Mr. Trump is a paper tiger on trade: The flow of corporate relocations to Mexico, which slowed briefly while C.E.O.s tried to curry favor with the new president, has resumed. Trade policy by tweet, it appears, has run its course.

Investors seem to have reached the same conclusion: The Mexican peso plunged 16 percent after the election, but since Inauguration Day it has recovered almost all the lost ground.

Oh, and last week a draft proposal for revising the North American Free Trade Agreement circulated around Congress; instead of sweeping changes in what candidate Trump called the "worst trade deal" ever signed, the administration appears to be seeking only modest tweaks.

This surely isn't what working-class Trump supporters thought they were voting for. So why

the campaign was so over the top that any moderation now that he's in power is a relief. But the damage from his rhetoric won't be easily undone. Even by the notoriously

demagogic standards of trade politics, Mr. Trump's vilification of NAFTA may set a record for being simultaneously inflammatory and — we now know — hollow.

## Krugman : Trump Is Wimping Out on Trade

can Trumpist trade policy be summarized — to quote The Times's Binyamin Appelbaum — as "talk loudly and carry a small stick"? Let me give two reasons.

First, back when Mr. Trump was railing against trade deals, he had no idea what he was talking about. (I know, you're shocked to hear that.)

For example, listening to the Tweeter-in-chief, you'd think that Nafta was a big giveaway by the United States, which got nothing in return. In fact, Mexico drastically cut its tariffs on goods imported from the U.S., in return for much smaller cuts on the U.S. side.

Or take Mr. Trump's repeated claims that China gains a competitive advantage by manipulating its currency. That was true six years ago, but it's not true now. These days China is actually intervening to keep its currency up, not down.

Talking nonsense about trade didn't hurt Mr. Trump during the campaign. But now he's finding out that those grossly unfair trade deals he promised to renegotiate aren't all

that unfair, after all, leaving him with no idea what to do next.

Which brings me to Trumptrade's second big obstacle: Whatever you think of past trade agreements, trade is now deeply embedded in the economy.

Consider the case of automobiles. At this point it makes little sense to talk about a U.S. auto industry, a Canadian auto industry or a Mexican auto industry. What we have instead is a tightly integrated North American industry, in which vehicles and components crisscross the continent, with almost every finished car containing components from all three nations.

Does it have to be this way? No. Slap on 30 percent tariffs, and after a few years those national industries would separate again. But the transition would be chaotic and painful.

Economists talk, with considerable justification, about the "China shock": the disruptive effect on jobs and communities of the rapid growth of Chinese exports from the 1990s

through 2007. But reversing globalization now would produce an equally painful "Trump shock," disrupting jobs and communities all over again — and would also be painful for some of the big corporate interests that, strange to say, have a lot of influence in this supposedly populist regime.

The point is that at a deep level Trumptrade is running into the same wall that caused Trumpcare to crash and burn. Mr. Trump came into office talking big, sure that his predecessors had messed everything up and he — he alone — could do far better. And millions of voters believed him.

But governing America isn't like reality TV. A few weeks ago Mr. Trump whined, "Nobody knew that health care could be so complicated." Now, one suspects, he's saying the same thing about trade policy.

## The Washington Post

## Trump's U.N. ambassador emerges as fierce but unnuanced voice on foreign policy

<https://www.facebook.com/anne.gearan>

Addressing a New York foreign policy salon last week, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley adopted a folksy tone as she hinted that the Trump administration is backing away from years of U.S. insistence that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must leave office.

"I'm not going to go back into, 'should Assad be in or out?'" Haley said during a question-and-answer session at the Council on Foreign Relations. "Been there, done that, right?" she added.

Her point was that Assad has hung on through six years of conflict, and while the United States would prefer otherwise, he is likely to remain. She called him an obstacle, but said Russian support for Assad does not preclude potential U.S.-Russian cooperation to try to end the war.

It was the latest example of Haley, a former South Carolina governor with no prior foreign policy experience,

acting as a tough-talking bellwether of President Trump's foreign policy.

As the new administration applies some of Trump's campaign rhetoric to the real world, Haley also has been out front on other issues, including Russian intervention in Ukraine. She used her first open address at the U.N. Security Council, just two weeks into the Trump presidency, to spell out that the United States considers the Russian annexation of Crimea illegitimate, and that sanctions on Russia won't be lifted anytime soon.

(Reuters)

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said President Trump's tweets are "chatter I don't focus on" during an appearance on CBS's "Face the Nation" on Apr. 2. Haley on Trump tweets: 'It's chatter I don't focus on' (Reuters)

A few days before, she told her new colleagues that the United States under Trump would be "taking names" of nations that try to use the United Nations to thwart U.S. goals and interests.

Frequently mentioned as a potential future Republican candidate for higher office, Haley has adopted a higher profile than most Trump Cabinet officials, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

Her fierce public denunciation of what she calls the ritualized "bashing of Israel" at the United Nations has made her a darling of many U.S. supporters of Israel, especially on the political right. She got a rock-star welcome when she addressed the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's meeting in Washington last week.

"I think they're a little lukewarm," former George W. Bush adviser Dan Senor quipped as he introduced Haley to thunderous applause at AIPAC.

Haley is expected to focus on U.N. treatment of Israel as well as reforming what she says are expensive and often pointless U.N. peacekeeping missions when the United States holds the rotating leadership of the Security Council this month.

On Israel, Haley has drawn criticism from longtime Mideast experts for what many see as an unnuanced view of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. At AIPAC, she counted as victories that a report likening Israel actions to apartheid had been withdrawn last month and that Palestinian statesman Salaam Fayyad's appointment to a U.N. post was revoked after she expressed objections.

The treatment of Fayyad "shows a naive and narrow focus that was extremely disturbing," said Gerald Feierstein, a former senior official at the State Department.

The Security Council presidency will not allow Haley to immediately undo the Obama administration action that allowed passage in December of a measure condemning Israel over West Bank settlements.

"Everyone at the United Nations is scared to talk to me" about the new U.S. administration's strong objection to that measure, she told AIPAC. "I want them to know that, look, that happened, but it will never

happen again," she said. "We're not going to put up with it."

The applause for that was loud, but it was even louder a few moments later.

"I wear heels, but it's not a fashion statement," she said. "It's because if I see something wrong, I'm gonna kick 'em every single time."

The Security Council presidency is a debut of sorts, although Haley has been ambassador since late January. Nations typically use the presidency to showcase issues of special concern, and although the platform rarely attracts wide notice, the U.S. turn comes early in an administration whose priorities and approach to many global issues are still unclear.

Trump's post-election remark that the United Nations is "just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time" put the institution on edge. He added that the 70-year-old world body would be just a "waste of time and money" if it didn't reform, but stopped short of saying the

United States should pull out altogether.

Haley's message is nearly as blunt, but it is not yet clear how she will make good on any of the swagger or threats. She plans a news conference at the United Nations on Monday to lay out the program for the month.

"The thing about clubs is they have rules, and they have a culture, and there is a constant pressure to comply with the rules of the club, and soon enough, members are doing things a certain way because that's the way they've always done them," Haley said at CFR. "I'm working to change the culture."

The Trump administration has said it intends to cut U.S. support for the U.N. budget overall, and Haley has pointed specifically to what she said is an unsustainable level of U.S. support for peacekeeping operations.

"I think that the United States has always been the moral compass of the world. And I think we are

generous by nature. And we want to see people safe. We don't want to see people starve," Haley said in a weekend interview with Fox News geared to the start of the U.S. term. "We don't want to see people treated — mistreated — by their governments. But you do have to say, 'What can we do?' We can't be all things to everyone."

Haley has charmed some U.N. diplomats and won cautious respect from others, including a senior European diplomat who noted that while his smaller country pays a larger per capita share of the U.N. peacekeeping budget than does the United States, he accepts her point.

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She cheered a Security Council vote Friday that extended the decades-old U.N. peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo

with a troop contingent that she said would save millions.

But Foreign Policy reported that Haley had lost a test of wills during the closed-door discussions, when she had demanded a larger cut and threatened to withhold U.S. support for extending the mission. The result was a compromise, diplomats said.

At the Council on Foreign Relations, Haley said this is not the first time she has sought to challenge the status quo. "I was the first minority governor and, a real shock, the first girl governor as well" when elected in South Carolina in 2011, she said. "I was definitely an outsider."

Haley, 45, is the South Carolina-born daughter of Indian immigrants.

"Challenging the rules of the club didn't make me popular at the State House, but it was necessary then, and it's necessary now," she said.

## ETATS-UNIS



### Editorial : Our Dishonest President

By The Times Editorial Board

It was no secret during the campaign that Donald Trump was a narcissist and a demagogue who used fear and dishonesty to appeal to the worst in American voters. The Times called him unprepared and unsuited for the job he was seeking, and said his election would be a "catastrophe."

Still, nothing prepared us for the magnitude of this train wreck. Like millions of other Americans, we clung to a slim hope that the new president would turn out to be all noise and bluster, or that the people around him in the White House would act as a check on his worst instincts, or that he would be sobered and transformed by the awesome responsibilities of office.

Instead, seventy-some days in — and with about 1,400 to go before his term is completed — it is increasingly clear that those hopes were misplaced.

In a matter of weeks, President Trump has taken dozens of real-life steps that, if they are not reversed, will rip families apart, foul rivers and pollute the air, intensify the calamitous effects of climate change and profoundly weaken the

system of American public education for all.

His attempt to de-insure millions of people who had finally received healthcare coverage and, along the way, enact a massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich has been put on hold for the moment. But he is proceeding with his efforts to defang the government's regulatory agencies and bloat the Pentagon's budget even as he supposedly retreats from the global stage.

"It is impossible to know where his presidency will lead or how much damage he will do to our nation."

These are immensely dangerous developments which threaten to weaken this country's moral standing in the world, imperil the planet and reverse years of slow but steady gains by marginalized or impoverished Americans. But, chilling as they are, these radically wrongheaded policy choices are not, in fact, the most frightening aspect of the Trump presidency.

What is most worrisome about Trump is Trump himself. He is a man so unpredictable, so reckless, so petulant, so full of blind self-regard, so untethered to reality that it is impossible to know where his presidency will lead or how much

damage he will do to our nation. His obsession with his own fame, wealth and success, his determination to vanquish enemies real and imagined, his craving for adulation — these traits were, of course, at the very heart of his scorched-earth outsider campaign; indeed, some of them helped get him elected. But in a real presidency in which he wields unimaginable power, they are nothing short of disastrous.

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Although his policies are, for the most part, variations on classic Republican positions (many of which would have been undertaken by a President Ted Cruz or a President Marco Rubio), they become far more dangerous in the hands of this imprudent and erratic man. Many Republicans, for instance, support tighter border security and a tougher response to illegal immigration, but Trump's cockamamie border wall, his impracticable campaign promise to deport all 11 million people living in the country illegally and his blithe

disregard for the effect of such proposals on the U.S. relationship with Mexico turn a very bad policy into an appalling one.

In the days ahead, The Times editorial board will look more closely at the new president, with a special attention to three troubling traits:

**1 Trump's shocking lack of respect** for those fundamental rules and institutions on which our government is based. Since Jan. 20, he has repeatedly disparaged and challenged those entities that have threatened his agenda, stoking public distrust of essential institutions in a way that undermines faith in American democracy. He has questioned the qualifications of judges and the integrity of their decisions, rather than acknowledging that even the president must submit to the rule of law. He has clashed with his own intelligence agencies, demeaned government workers and questioned the credibility of the electoral system and the Federal Reserve. He has lashed out at journalists, declaring them "enemies of the people," rather than defending the importance of a critical, independent free press. His

contempt for the rule of law and the norms of government are palpable.

**2His utter lack of regard for truth.** Whether it is the easily disprovable boasts about the size of his inauguration crowd or his unsubstantiated assertion that Barack Obama bugged Trump Tower, the new president regularly muddies the waters of fact and fiction. It's difficult to know whether he actually can't distinguish the real from the unreal — or whether he intentionally conflates the two to befuddle voters, deflect criticism and undermine the very idea of objective truth. Whatever the explanation, he is encouraging Americans to reject facts, to disrespect science, documents, nonpartisanship and the mainstream media — and instead to simply take positions on the basis of ideology and preconceived notions. This is a recipe for a divided country in which differences grow deeper and rational compromise becomes impossible.

**3His scary willingness to repeat alt-right conspiracy theories,** racist memes and crackpot, out-of-the-mainstream ideas. Again, it is not clear whether he believes them or merely uses them. But to cling to

disproven “alternative” facts; to retweet racists; to make unverifiable or false statements about rigged elections and fraudulent voters; to buy into discredited conspiracy theories first floated on fringe websites and in supermarket tabloids — these are all of a piece with the Barack Obama birther claptrap that Trump was peddling years ago and which brought him to political prominence. It is deeply alarming that a president would lend the credibility of his office to ideas that have been rightly rejected by politicians from both major political parties.

Where will this end? Will Trump moderate his crazier campaign positions as time passes? Or will he provoke confrontation with Iran, North Korea or China, or disobey a judge's order or order a soldier to violate the Constitution? Or, alternately, will the system itself — the Constitution, the courts, the permanent bureaucracy, the Congress, the Democrats, the marchers in the streets — protect us from him as he alienates more and more allies at home and abroad, steps on his own message and creates chaos at the expense

of his ability to accomplish his goals? Already, Trump's job approval rating has been hovering in the mid-30s, according to Gallup, a shockingly low level of support for a new president. And that was before his former national security advisor, Michael Flynn, offered to cooperate last week with congressional investigators looking into the connection between the Russian government and the Trump campaign.

“ Those who oppose the new president's reckless and heartless agenda must make their voices heard.”

On Inauguration Day, we wrote on this page that it was not yet time to declare a state of “wholesale panic” or to call for blanket “non-cooperation” with the Trump administration. Despite plenty of dispiriting signals, that is still our view. The role of the rational opposition is to stand up for the rule of law, the electoral process, the peaceful transfer of power and the role of institutions; we should not underestimate the resiliency of a system in which laws are greater than individuals and voters are as powerful as presidents. This nation survived Andrew Jackson and

Richard Nixon. It survived slavery. It survived devastating wars. Most likely, it will survive again.

But if it is to do so, those who oppose the new president's reckless and heartless agenda must make their voices heard. Protesters must raise their banners. Voters must turn out for elections. Members of Congress — including and especially Republicans — must find the political courage to stand up to Trump. Courts must safeguard the Constitution. State legislators must pass laws to protect their citizens and their policies from federal meddling. All of us who are in the business of holding leaders accountable must redouble our efforts to defend the truth from his cynical assaults.

The United States is not a perfect country, and it has a great distance to go before it fully achieves its goals of liberty and equality. But preserving what works and defending the rules and values on which democracy depends are a shared responsibility. Everybody has a role to play in this drama.

This is the first in a series.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Epstein : Trump and the Plutocrat's Hubris

Joseph Epstein

April 2, 2017 4:09

p.m. ET

In the petit-bourgeois, confidently philistine milieu in which I grew up, plutocratic values held a firm purchase. When the men gathered in the living room after dinner, money talked—that is, those who had found the greatest financial success tended to dominate the conversation. Since Lou Riskin had made a killing in the mail-order business, the assumption was that he had penetrating things to say on the subject of urban renewal. Saul Levine had run the most successful Buick agency in the city, therefore definitely worth listening to him hold forth on welfare.

When I hear Donald Trump talk, I think of how much at home he would have felt in those living rooms. The guy's a multibillionaire, cleaned up in real estate, so why shouldn't he know about health care, immigration, life in the inner cities? Or if he doesn't know, no reason why with a bit of quick study he can't find out enough to put everything in order.

My father was a moderately successful businessman—for a kid who never finished high school, an immensely successful one—but too well-mannered to wish to dominate

these living-room discussions. Yet he had no argument with the underlying rules of the game. As an adolescent, I heard several of his business homilies: If you work for a man for a dollar an hour, always give him two dollars worth of effort; you make your money not in selling, but in buying right; you can't argue with success.

That last bit was the only one that, as I grew older, began to get on my nerves. What, I would ask my father, is better to argue with? How the success was achieved, what went into it, who suffered because of it? By success my father meant financial success. Not that he didn't recognize achievement in science, athletics, entertainment. The money game, though, was the real one, and not the least satisfying thing about it was the tidy means of keeping score: How much, in hard cash, did one come out with in the end?

I am someone who finds it difficult to think about money for more than two minutes at a time. I cannot marshal the concentration even to read the financial statements about my own investments. When they arrive, I scramble down to the bottom line to learn what I made or lost during the past month. I rather envy those who have earned enough money to sit out forever

from the financial wars, but I do not envy them sufficiently to drop the things that interest me more in order to emulate them. Moneymaking seems a useful skill, but not much more. I've known too many ninnyes who seem to have mastered it to be in thrall myself.

A strong argument can be made that, contra Trump, success in business is too narrow to transfer to other realms. Orderly thought is needed for success of any kind. So, too, the clarity to get outside oneself to grasp the larger forces involved in any complicated transaction. Confidence helps, to be sure. But making a wad in real estate, mail order or auto sales does not impart any special advantage in understanding the complexities of health care, African-American culture or foreign policy—as Mr. Trump and his billionaire-laden cabinet are discovering.

President Trump's first weeks in office demonstrate the hubris of the plutocrat. The defeats began with his releasing an immigration order neither well thought out nor even quite legal. He obviously did not investigate thoroughly the men he hired for key positions in his campaign ( Paul Manafort ) or his administration ( Mike Flynn ). On health care, he evidently had no

notion of the variety of views within his newly adopted party.

I've not read “The Art of the Deal,” nor do I plan to do so during this life, but I should imagine that the heart of any effective negotiation is finding common interests among those at the bargaining table. In business, the paramount common interest is obvious: money, profit all round. In politics, it turns out, much more is usually entailed.

In government, unlike business, many things cannot be delegated. Careful study may be sufficient for determining where to build a new hotel, but an understanding of varied, often subtle human motives is required to compose and pass a complex piece of legislation.

That financial success does not easily, or always, transfer into other realms is now obvious. Let us hope that the evidence on display during the early days of his administration will soon humble even so arrogant a man as our new president. Donald Trump and those who support him ought to think about arguing with success, at least as the plutocrats construe it.

*Mr. Epstein's books include “Frozen in Time: Twenty Stories” and “Wind Sprints: Shorter Essays.”*



# Vote on Supreme Court Nominee Neil Gorsuch to Test Red-State Democratic Senators (UNE)

Kristina Peterson

Updated April 2, 2017 8:39 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—Senate leaders sparred Sunday over this week's coming vote on Judge Neil Gorsuch's nomination to the Supreme Court, a battle that puts Democrats in red-leaning states in the position of choosing between a Republican-nominated judge and their own party's wish to block President Donald Trump.

On Monday, the 20-member Senate Judiciary Committee is expected to vote largely along party lines to send Judge Gorsuch's nomination to the Senate floor. That will intensify the scrambling for votes on both sides ahead of the full Senate's consideration later in the week.

Judge Gorsuch needs 60 votes to clear a procedural hurdle in the Senate, where Republicans hold 52 seats. If Republicans can't secure the necessary eight Democratic votes, they have threatened to change Senate rules so they can confirm him—and future high-court justices—with a simple majority. One party forcing a change to the chamber's rules is referred to as the "nuclear option."

"We're going to get Judge Gorsuch confirmed," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) said on Fox News Sunday. Asked if he is ready to change the Senate rules, Mr. McConnell said: "We'll know through the course of the week," adding: "It's in the hands of Democrats."

- Trump Touts Party Unity Days After Threatening Dissident Lawmakers

President Donald Trump signaled Sunday that he wasn't abandoning efforts to dismantle and replace the Affordable Care Act.

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- Donald Trump Racks Up Few Wins So Far

As President Donald Trump endures another tough week and his poll numbers hit record first-year lows, strategists say he needs some clean wins to shore up his nascent administration.

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- Senate Braces for Fight as Panel Votes on Trump Supreme Court Nominee

The Senate Judiciary Committee will vote Monday on whether to support Neil Gorsuch's nomination as the Senate braces for an increasingly acrimonious fight.

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President Trump pressed his unsubstantiated claims that his campaign was improperly spied on, referencing a media report about the names of Trump campaign officials being "unmasked" in intelligence reports.

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## TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

The Senate Democrats' leader, Chuck Schumer of New York, said Republicans shouldn't destroy the chamber's precedent over high-court judges.

"It looks like Gorsuch will not make the 60-vote margin," Mr. Schumer said Sunday on NBC. "When a nominee doesn't get 60 votes, you shouldn't change the rules, you should change the nominee."

About three-dozen Democrats, outraged that Republicans refused even to hold a hearing last year for former President Barack Obama's high-court nominee, have indicated they would vote to block Judge Gorsuch.

Three Senate Democrats have said they would vote for him. Joe

Donnelly of Indiana became the third Sunday, joining Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota. All three are from states Mr. Trump won easily and are up for re-election in 2018.

Many senators from states that Mr. Trump carried more narrowly have pledged to block his court nominee, including Bob Casey of Pennsylvania and Debbie Stabenow of Michigan.

The approach of the red-state Democrats, who are dividing in the final week over how they will vote, will affect the course of the Gorsuch confirmation fight—especially whether Democrats can sustain a filibuster—and the Senate's longtime reputation as one of the last remaining political arenas to compel bipartisan consensus.

Sen. Claire McCaskill, a Missouri Democrat up for re-election in 2018, comes from a state Mr. Trump won easily. At the same time, Mr. Trump's presidency has unleashed a fierce backlash from liberal Democrats in Missouri and nationwide who are pressuring their elected officials to give no ground to the president. On Friday, Ms. McCaskill sided with the liberals and said she would oppose the nominee.

"I am not comfortable with either choice," Ms. McCaskill wrote in a Medium post Friday. "While I have come to the conclusion that I can't support Neil Gorsuch for the Supreme Court—and will vote no on the procedural vote and his confirmation—I remain very worried about our polarized politics and what the future will bring, since I'm certain we will have a Senate rule change that will usher in more extreme judges in the future."

On Sunday evening, Sen. Jon Tester of Montana also said he would vote against Mr. Gorsuch.

In 2013, when Democrats controlled the chamber, they changed rules to enable cabinet appointments and lower judicial nominees to be confirmed with just a simple majority, but they left in place the higher threshold for Supreme Court picks.

If the Senate is able to confirm Supreme Court nominees with a simple majority, centrists in both parties fear that future presidents whose party also controls the Senate will have no incentive to pick a nominee aimed to garner bipartisan support.

Presidents "will go to the extremes because the base will demand it and we'll end up with a Supreme Court that has far more extreme justices on both sides of the aisle," Sen. Bob Corker (R., Tenn.) said last week.

Senate Democrats wavering on Mr. Gorsuch have cited a similar argument in his favor.

The "most unique political body in the world, the U.S. Senate, will be no more than a six-year term in the House, and I don't think anyone wants to be here for that," Mr. Manchin said shortly before he announced his support for Mr. Gorsuch. "I'm doing whatever I can to preserve the 60-vote rule."

Other Democrats have said voting to block Mr. Gorsuch is necessary, given his judicial record, and called on Republicans to not change the rules.

"I got the feeling that he will vote against the little guy for the big corporations," said Sen. Bill Nelson (D., Fla.).

While Supreme Court fights in the Senate are nothing new, most presidents until recent years nominated at least one justice during their term who found little opposition. The last three nominees to be approved to the court—Justices Samuel Alito, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan—drew several "no" votes but had no trouble getting past the filibuster threat. Democrats say the Republican roadblock of Mr. Obama's nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, escalated the partisan tensions over the high court.

Liberal groups, also incensed over Mr. Trump's comments and actions since taking office and bolstered by his low approval ratings, are demanding that Democratic senators work to deny the president a Supreme Court victory.

The People's Defense, a coalition of groups aimed at blocking Judge Gorsuch, held nationwide protests Saturday. The group also launched a six-figure digital ad campaign in March calling on senators to oppose Judge Gorsuch. Sen. Michael Bennet (D., Colo.), who represents Judge Gorsuch's home state, and Sen. Angus King of Maine, a registered Independent who caucuses with the Democrats, haven't yet said how they would vote.

—Byron Tau and Dante Chinni contributed to this article.

## POLITICO Democrats close in on 41 votes to block Gorsuch

By Seung Min Kim

Neil Gorsuch almost certainly will end this week confirmed as a Supreme Court justice. And the Senate's rules — indeed, the institutional character of the chamber — seem just as sure to end up severely eroded.

Senate Democrats are quickly closing in on the 41 votes needed to block the nomination of President Donald Trump's first pick for the Supreme Court. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and his GOP ranks aren't backing down in the face of the filibuster threat, continuing to insist that Gorsuch will be installed as the next high court justice, whether Democrats like it or not.

Story Continued Below

The competing postures mean the Senate is hurtling toward the use later this week of the so-called nuclear option — changing the chamber's rules with a simple majority so that Supreme Court filibusters can be cut off with just 51 votes, rather than the long-required 60-vote threshold.

Democrats say Gorsuch, who is expected to be approved by the Judiciary Committee on Monday, has only himself to blame for not earning their support.

"When Gorsuch refused to answer the most rudimentary questions in the hearings, after there were many doubts about him to begin with ... there was a seismic change in my caucus," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said

Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press." "And it's highly, highly unlikely that he'll get 60."

As of Sunday, 37 Senate Democrats had confirmed they would vote to filibuster Gorsuch, according to a POLITICO tally. Just three Democrats — Sens. Joe Donnelly of Indiana, Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, all moderates up for reelection next year — have said they support the federal appellate judge from Colorado.

Technically, enough Democrats remain undecided to stave off a successful filibuster: Democratic Sens. Michael Bennet of Colorado, Chris Coons of Delaware, Dianne Feinstein of California, Angus King of Maine (King is an independent who caucuses with Democrats), Patrick Leahy of Vermont, Robert Menendez of New Jersey, and Mark Warner of Virginia. Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) opposes Gorsuch's confirmation but hasn't endorsed filibustering him.

Still, the broad expectation on Capitol Hill is that Gorsuch will be the first Supreme Court nominee successfully filibustered since Abe Fortas for chief justice in 1968. For instance, Warner — who has expressed concerns about Gorsuch's decisions and his conservative track record — has said he would vote the same way on cloture as he would on confirmation, leaving Gorsuch's current path to 60 votes exceedingly narrow.

More announcements from Democrats are expected after the

Judiciary Committee clears Gorsuch's nomination on Monday, King said on CBS' "Face the Nation" that he'll likely announce his decision on Tuesday or Wednesday.

"I don't think we know," whether eight Democrats will help Republicans break a Gorsuch filibuster, McConnell said on "Fox News Sunday." But he added: "What I'm telling you is that Judge Gorsuch is going to be confirmed. The way in which that occurs is in the hands of the Democratic minority."

The confrontation is years in the making.

Republicans point to Democrats' repeated use of the filibuster for judicial nominees under the George W. Bush administration, including Miguel Estrada, who would have been the first Latino to sit on the influential D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals. Democrats also tried to block Samuel Alito, but 72 senators helped advance the now-Supreme Court justice past the procedural hurdle.

The so-called Gang of 14 helped defuse the nominations war under Bush by agreeing not to filibuster judicial nominees except under extraordinary circumstances. But in 2013, Senate Democrats invoked the nuclear option for all presidential nominees except for the Supreme Court after Republicans, then in the minority, repeatedly blocked nominees from President Barack Obama.

Republicans further inflamed the situation last year by essentially

ignoring Merrick Garland, whom Obama nominated in March 2016 to replace the late Justice Antonin Scalia, because it was an election year. In January, Trump nominated Gorsuch as his pick for Scalia's seat.

Schumer insisted Sunday that because neither side got — or, without the use of the nuclear option, will get — its preferred nominee to replace Scalia, Republicans should work with Democrats to pick a more consensus candidate.

"Our Republican friends are acting like, you know, they're a cat on the top of a tree and they have to jump off with all the damage that entails," Schumer said Sunday. "Come back off the tree, sit down, and work with us and we will produce a mainstream nominee."

But substantive talks toward a compromise have not materialized. And senators from both parties are now acknowledging the inevitable: not just the nuclear option but a continued demise of the unique traditions of the Senate.

"We find ourselves where both sides of the aisle have basically taken this place into the ditch," Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) told reporters last week. "Every time one side gets the advantage, they say if the other side were in our position, this is what they'd do. So we continue to spiral down."



### Editorial : Gorsuch merits confirmation

One way or another, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell reiterated Sunday, Neil Gorsuch will be confirmed this week to a lifetime appointment on the Supreme Court.

Democrats have good reason to be outraged by the Republicans' rush to confirm President Trump's nominee. The vacancy left by Justice Antonin Scalia's death in February 2016, nearly nine months before the election, was rightfully President Obama's to fill, and Obama nominated a judge — Merrick Garland — with sterling credentials and moderate views.

Yet the Republican-controlled Senate let the Garland nomination

die after 293 days, without a vote or even a hearing. No wonder many Democrats are thirsting for payback.

The fact is, however, that elections have consequences, and McConnell's cynical gambit paid off. Trump won. Republicans held the Senate. Even if Democrats filibuster, McConnell is prepared to change Senate rules and leave the Democrats unable to block Gorsuch, who deserves to be evaluated on his own merits.

By traditional measures, Gorsuch is a reasonable heir to the seat held by Scalia, an iconic "originalist" who interpreted the Constitution's words in the way they were understood by the Founders. Importantly,

Gorsuch's confirmation would leave the ideological balance on the court roughly where it was before Scalia's death.

Our custom on the Editorial Board is to evaluate Supreme Court nominees based on their academic and legal credentials, personal integrity, position within the broad judicial mainstream and respect for legal precedent (which should be healthy but not mindless).

Gorsuch's credentials are impeccable: Columbia, Harvard, Oxford, federal and Supreme Court clerkships and a decade on the federal appeals bench. He received a "well-qualified" rating, the highest available, from the American Bar

Association. On principles and independence, he has gotten an array of glowing references, including from some Democrats and liberals. Extensive vetting has unearthed no hint of personal scandal.

As for his judicial philosophy, the 49-year-old judge from Colorado would not be on our short list for the high court. While in the broad mainstream, he veers too close to the right bank for our taste, particularly on issues involving discrimination, government protection of the powerless and, presumably, reproductive rights. But he is no fire-breathing extremist.

The question of Gorsuch's respect for precedent is somewhat murkier. Even more than past nominees, he wiggled away at his confirmation hearings from questions about whether previous landmark cases were rightly decided. It was a struggle to get him to say anything substantive even about rulings going back decades, though he did allow that *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 decision striking down public school segregation, was "one of the shining moments in constitutional history."

Gorsuch's record on the bench suggests that, on some key issues,

he might well show the independence the nation needs at this moment in its history.

The nominee's suspicions about courts giving too much deference to executive branch power could lead him to rule against a president who seeks to exceed his authority. Gorsuch has received high marks, including from Obama's acting solicitor general Neal Katyal, for defending courts as the ultimate authority to say "what the law is." At his hearings, Gorsuch declared as strongly as he could his independence from the man who nominated him, saying that "nobody

is above the law in this country, and that includes the president."

Gorsuch has protected the Fourth Amendment rights of suspects against law enforcement overreach. And his strong defense of religious freedom doesn't stop with owners of businesses, as in the controversial Hobby Lobby case: He has also defended those rights for Native American and Muslim prisoners. Where cases have touched on free speech and press issues, he has ruled in line with well-established First Amendment principles.

As the Gorsuch nomination heads for a vote Monday in the Senate Judiciary Committee, objecting to Republican obstructionism is fair game. So is disagreeing with the nominee's legal philosophy. But insisting he is unfit for the bench is not.

Overall, Gorsuch is about the best choice the country can expect from this president; in fact, the nomination was one of the least objectionable things Trump has done since taking office.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Home stretch for Trump's Supreme Court nominee could forever alter the Senate (UNE)

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

The battle to confirm Judge Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court is set to come to a head this week and will probably reshape how the Senate confirms future justices, prompting senators and other observers to warn that subsequent battles over court nominees could be even more heated.

Gorsuch's nomination to replace Antonin Scalia, with whom he shares an "originalist" philosophy of constitutional interpretation, is unlikely to tip the ideological balance of the Supreme Court. And Gorsuch's three days of confirmation hearings last month never captured the national attention afforded to previous nominees.

But with the Senate Judiciary Committee scheduled to refer him to the full Senate on Monday, lawmakers are about to embark on the final — and perhaps most bitter — round of debate.

Three days of formal debate begin Tuesday with Republicans planning to confirm Gorsuch by Friday. That timeline would give the 49-year-old federal appeals court judge a chance to join the high court in late April and to participate in the final cases of this year's term, which ends in June.

The Republican-controlled Senate is likely to confirm him, but only if it changes the chamber's rules. Democrats are vowing to filibuster Gorsuch, a tactical roadblock that can only be overcome with the votes of 60 senators. Republicans hold 52 seats, and only three moderate Democrats so far say they plan to vote for Gorsuch.

(Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said he thinks Democrats will attempt to filibuster the Supreme Court nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch, but that Gorsuch will be confirmed regardless, on March 28 at the Capitol. McConnell says Democrats can't stop Gorsuch confirmation (The Washington Post)

On Sunday, Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said that it is "highly, highly unlikely" that Republicans will get the 60 votes needed to end a Democratic filibuster. Appearing on NBC's "Meet the Press," Schumer added that it "is up to Mitch McConnell and the Republican majority" to set the rules and tenor for the confirmation vote.

But McConnell (R-Ky.), the Senate majority leader, disagreed, telling "Fox News Sunday" that Gorsuch will "ultimately be confirmed. Exactly how that happens ... will be up to our Democratic colleagues."

If Democrats successfully filibuster Gorsuch, McConnell and his caucus are likely to agree to change the chamber's rules and end filibusters on Supreme Court picks. That would extend a rule change made by Democrats in 2013 that punished Republicans for years of attempts to block President Barack Obama's nominees by ending filibusters for all executive branch appointments and lower-court picks.

Last year, Republicans refused to hold hearings or votes for Judge Merrick Garland, Obama's choice to replace Scalia, arguing that the next president should get to pick the replacement. The move infuriated Democrats — and has been a major factor in generating such unified opposition to Gorsuch.

Martin B. Gold, a former floor adviser and counsel to Senate majority leaders Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) and Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), who

has written a book on Senate floor procedure, warned that this week's expected change in Senate rules is likely to put even more importance on the partisan control of the Senate.

"Between the Democrats taking offense at what the Republicans did on Garland and Republicans taking offense to what Democrats are doing to Gorsuch, you wonder who's going to put the weapons down, or if they'll always stay drawn," Gold said. "And if the partisan makeup flips, you wonder if a president will ever get anyone confirmed."

In interviews before Gorsuch's confirmation hearings last month, several Republican senators agreed that Gorsuch was a safe conservative choice who would maintain the balance of the court and make future fights to fill vacancies even more critical.

(Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

President Trump urged Senate Republicans to consider going "nuclear" and changing the Senate rules. But what does that actually mean, and how would it change the Senate? What is the 'nuclear option,' and how would it change the Senate? (Video: Peter Stevenson/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

"I have no doubt that from the Democrats' perspective, the next vacancy will be Armageddon. They will fire every attack they can marshal at whoever the nominee is," said Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.).

Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) agreed, saying that the next confirmation fight will be "a bloodbath."

The predictions by Cruz and Flake assume that the next Supreme Court vacancy will be caused by the departure of aging liberal justices,

such as Ruth Bader Ginsburg or Stephen G. Breyer, or by Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, the court's most frequent swing vote.

The Gorsuch battle has not generated as much interest or concern among liberal organizations as among conservative groups, which have spent nearly \$10 million on a television ad campaign designed to pressure moderate Democrats.

Adam Jentleson, senior strategic adviser to the liberal Center for American Progress, said that progressives may not have felt as compelled to fight the Gorsuch nomination this year. But next time, he said, "We should prepare by being ready to wage the battle of ideas as aggressively as possible."

The partisan dynamic could be "flipped in the future — and that's the key thing," he said. "There's probably not much more that would be more motivating [to Democrats] than the terrifying prospect of Trump appointing an extreme conservative to the court to tip the balance for a lifetime. So, I think that with conservatives there's a false sense of security that that's something that plays to their advantage. I don't think that will end up being true."

Carrie Severino, chief counsel of the pro-Gorsuch Judicial Crisis Network, which is bankrolling the multimillion-dollar ad campaign, said Schumer and Democrats are promoting a "historic level of gridlock." She said her conservative organization has been opposed to judicial filibusters in both Republican and Democratic administrations and that only Democrats have ever used threats of a filibuster against Republican nominees.

JCN's ad campaign appeared to help convince two moderate Democratic senators, Heidi

Heitkamp (D-N.D.) and Joe Manchin III (D-W.Va.), last week to say that they will support Gorsuch. On Sunday, Sen. Joe Donnelly (D-Ind.), also targeted by JCN's effort, became the third Democrat to announce support for Gorsuch. But another moderate, Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.), announced he would vote against Gorsuch and support the filibuster because, "I cannot support a nominee who refuses to answer important questions." In all, 10 Democrats facing reelection next year in states that Trump carried in the November election have been targeted by the ad campaign backing Gorsuch.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Trump's budget would hit rural towns especially hard — but they're willing to trust him (UNE)

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

DURANT, Okla. — At the Boys and Girls Club in this rural city in southern Oklahoma, the director is unsure how he will stay open if President Trump's proposed budget goes through, eliminating money for several staff positions.

Similar conversations are happening at the Oklahoma Shakespearean Festival's after-school arts program, which relies on National Endowment for the Arts grants that Trump wants to eliminate. And at the county senior center, which already lost its state funding and could lose all or most of its federal funding, too. And at the Farm Service Center, which supports 1,200 local producers and is staffed with employees whose positions were targeted in the budget.

In this town of 16,000 — located near the Texas border in Oklahoma's Bryan County, where Trump won 76 percent of the vote — excitement about Trump's presidency has been dulled by confusion over an agenda that seems aimed at hurting their community more than helping it.

The president's proposed budget would disproportionately harm the rural areas and small towns that were key to his unexpected win. Many red states like Oklahoma — where every single county went for Trump — are more reliant on the federal funds that Trump wants to cut than states that voted for Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

Durant has already undergone years of state budget cuts, as Oklahoma has been unable to balance its increasing costs with declines in the oil industry, tax cuts and generous corporate tax credits. That has made federal funds even more vital to the city, especially for

The decisions by Heitkamp and Manchin earned swift rebukes from liberal organizations. NARAL Pro-Choice America, an abortion rights group that helps mobilize Democratic voters, warned that it would not endorse any Democrat who supports Gorsuch. On Sunday, the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, a liberal political group that campaigns for Democratic candidates, ran full-page ads in North Dakota and West Virginia newspapers criticizing the senators' choice.

The Daily 202 newsletter

programs that serve the poor and working class.

"It's very easy to look at a laundry list of things that exist and say, 'Cut, cut, cut, cut,' and say, 'Well, this is wasteful spending' without really understanding the true impact," said Durant City Manager Tim Rundel, who grew up in poverty in northwest Arkansas. "The bottom line is a lot of our citizens depend on those programs."

'It's the only bright spot'

Betty Harris, 77, gets choked up when she talks about her husband, who died in May, and her son, who died in February. Her two daughters live in Oklahoma City and visit once a month or so. There are two things that get her to leave her home: a quilting circle with friends and daily visits to the senior center.

The center offers lunch for two bucks, exercise classes, gospel singalongs, tax preparation help, monthly boxes of food for low-income seniors, a meal delivery program and a staff that can patiently explain Medicare or how to operate a cellphone. If someone doesn't show up, the others quickly figure out why.

"It's the only bright spot," said Harris, who used to work for AT&T. "It makes me get dressed and get out of the house."

Harris voted for Barack Obama when he first ran for president in 2008 because she liked his promise of change. But he disappointed her in a number of ways, including, in her eyes, being too sympathetic to Muslims. She voted for Republican Mitt Romney in 2012 and Trump last year.

She likes the president's promises to crack down on illegal immigration, which she thinks has hurt the job market, and to bully

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That pressure may have been a factor for Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.), who has also been targeted by JCN but said on Friday that she will vote against Gorsuch. In an essay to constituents, she said it had been "a really difficult decision for me."

Another potential "yes" vote, Sen. Angus King (I-Maine), said on Sunday that he will not announce his decision until Tuesday or

Wednesday, but suggested that he is leaning against Gorsuch.

Filibustering a Supreme Court nominee "doesn't strike me as out of line with Senate tradition," King told CBS's "Face the Nation," noting that during his four and a half years in office he has needed to cast votes to end filibusters 400 times "on all matter of big and small things."

Robert Barnes contributed to this report.

manufacturers into staying in the country. She said both of her daughters were out of work for months because they worked for companies that moved overseas.

(Video: Jenny Starrs/Photo: Melina Mara/The Washington Post)

But Harris is upset by the president's proposed budget, which would dramatically cut funding for the Robert T. Davis Senior Center, managed by the Bryan County Retired Senior Volunteer Program. Harris said she gives each president 10 strikes before she withdraws her support.

"I have high hopes for Trump, but if he's going to be cutting these kinds of programs, that's going to be one," Harris said. "And we'll see. I hope I don't get up to 10, but I will give him one for that."

Trump wants to eliminate the federal Corporation for National and Community Service, which provides the county volunteer program with about \$35,000 each year. This money goes to pay for supplemental insurance and mileage for volunteers who serve in the area, deliver meals to the county's homebound and drive the elderly to medical appointments, including taking veterans to the closest VA medical center, 100 miles away in Dallas. The center also indirectly receives federal funds to pay for meals, which also could be cut.

The center has already lost the \$28,000 it used to receive each year in state funding, and United Way recently announced it would reduce its annual contribution from \$10,000 to \$7,500, said Executive Director Sheila Risner. She cut her salary, cut the hours of another employee and pared back some services, including reducing the number of trips to Dallas.

As lunch trays were cleared away one recent afternoon, a table of seniors debated the proposed cuts.

Bert Briedwell, a 74-year-old who is retired from an engineering consulting company and voted for Clinton, agrees with giving more funding to the military — but not at the expense of programs such as this one.

"What would God say if you said, I'm going to take all of this money away from the poor and give it to airplanes?" said Briedwell, a member of the Choctaw Nation, which is headquartered in Durant. "We have enough of that already."

Clyde Glenn, 79, responded that there is a lot of waste in social programs.

"If North Korea shoots a missile and it hits the United States and knocks out our power grid, then you'll be saying: 'How come nothing works no more?'" said Glenn, a Navy veteran who owns rental properties in the area and voted for Trump.

"Look at all of the missiles we got — you don't think we can take on North Korea?" Briedwell fired back. "My God, Clyde."

One of the women at the table sighed: "You got him going now."

Jackie Garner, a bookkeeper at the senior center who volunteered to reduce her hours so it wouldn't have to cut even more services, jumped in to say that the Christian community should be doing more to care for those in need, as God instructed his followers — not the government.

"At my house, if we don't have that money, we don't have that money. We don't go out and spend money that we don't have," said Garner, 57. "We try to find alternative ways to make the things that are important happen. I expect the



government to do the same. It's our tax dollars. We need to be good stewards."

"I see what you're saying, hon," Briedwell said, "But don't you agree with me? Why take it and give it to the military that's the strongest military in the world?"

As the debate continued, Glenn shook his head and said: "It used to be that when somebody won a sports game, a politic game, whatever, the loser must be gracious and let it go. . . . He won. So let's accept that and let it go and see what he can do."

'We just don't have the resources'

A drive along Durant's Main Street reveals the problems facing many small towns — problems that Trump promised to fix.

"This is our Main Street, going right through the heart of Durant, and you're going to quickly see why some of our citizens are somewhat frustrated," said Rundel, the city manager, as his pickup truck rumbled over potholes that often extend through layers of patches to a historic brick road below.

Four workers are assigned to patch the city's nearly 200 miles of road, which Rundel compares to applying a temporary bandage to a gaping wound. There's just never enough money left in the annual \$30 million budget to tear up and replace Main Street and other main roadways. It would take at least \$20 million to update the roads, he said.

"We just don't have the resources," Rundel said.

It would cost another \$10 million to \$20 million to update the city's generations-old water treatment and sewer systems, the life of which has been extended by city workers willing to come up with creative fixes and build their own parts. Trump's budget promises "robust funding for critical drinking and wastewater infrastructure," but it also would eliminate a \$498 million grant and loan program that helps rural communities that are smaller than Durant upgrade their water and wastewater systems.

Heading east on Main Street — past the "world's largest peanut" outside City Hall — takes you over railroad tracks and into a deeply impoverished neighborhood. One in four Durant residents lives in poverty.

In 2014, President Barack Obama designated the Durant-based Choctaw Nation as a "Promise Zone" and the recipient of a rush of federal funds that enabled an expansion of Head Start programs for young children and Internet

access for more than 425 public housing residents. An eco-friendly steel mill is slated to open this fall, providing as many as 300 new jobs, thanks to a New Markets Tax Credit of \$21 million that encourages building in areas with high unemployment rates.

Durant is already home to a number of industrial plants — including a Big Lots distribution center and a glass factory — and has been growing. But to continue to add all of the jobs Trump promised, Rundel said the city has to strengthen its strained infrastructure.

Trump promised that within 100 days of taking office he would introduce legislation to "spur \$1 trillion in infrastructure investment over ten years." He has yet to do so. And when his aides discuss infrastructure, they talk more about toll roads, pipelines and major airports than crumbling Main Streets.

John Czwartacki, a spokesman for the Office of Management and Budget, pushed back at the idea that the budget hits rural areas especially hard.

"President Trump was elected to represent all Americans — rich and poor, rural and urban," he said. "His administration and his budget prioritize American security and economic success, while at the same time recognizing that we must be mindful of every tax dollar spent, given our nearly \$20 trillion national debt."

There is hope among many Trump supporters that the possible budget sacrifices will be worth it.

Rick Munholland, 64, owns a tire shop near the train tracks on Main Street and said customers often ask to purchase tires made in the United States, which are difficult to find. He wants to see more jobs in the area, fewer undocumented immigrants and a reduction in his monthly health-insurance premiums, as it costs \$2,800 a month for a small-business plan that covers him, his wife and one employee.

"Working people like me can't afford it. Now, if you're low-income, they can get it for nothing — but the low-income gets taken care of regardless," Munholland said. "God bless America, but it has gone to the dogs."

'These things are vital'

When Crystal Tate was in middle school, she attended a week-long program that took her and other low-income students to visit college campuses in Oklahoma and Texas, introducing them to a world that can be foreign and intimidating.

The trip was organized by Talent Search, a program offered through the decades-old federal program TRIO, which helps first-generation, low-income students get into college and graduate by providing the support they may not be receiving at home.

Trump wants to cut TRIO and another initiative called GEAR UP by \$193 million, saying many such programs are redundant and there is limited evidence that some of the initiatives work — assertions that Tate and university officials wholeheartedly reject.

Tate is now 21 and a junior at Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant, studying to become a teacher. She pays for college with a combination of Pell Grants, which the president has pledged to protect, and other scholarships. She lives with her grandparents in Boswell, about 30 miles away, so that she can coach girls' sports teams there.

Out of Tate's graduating high school class of 17, six attempted college or a trade school and only two stuck with it, including her. She plans to be the first college graduate in her immediate family.

"School was a place where I felt at home, where I felt like I could be part of something bigger than myself," said Tate, who did not vote in November. "And in order for me to further my ability to be something better than myself, I knew that college would have to happen."

For students trying to break out of poverty, the cuts come from multiple directions.

The Durant public school system superintendent has seen state funding dramatically decline since 2009, and he is worried his classrooms will suffer if Trump directs more federal funds to school vouchers and urban charter schools.

The Durant-based Oklahoma Shakespearean Festival offers a summer theater camp and after-school theater, dance and music classes to local students, many of whom come from poor families. The festival used to receive \$150,000 a year in state and federal funds, which have been slashed to \$26,000 a year, including NEA grants that Trump wants to eliminate.

And the Boys and Girls Club of Durant watches over about 200 children and teenagers each day after school and during the summer in a former middle school that is being renovated. More than half of the students are Native American and 20 percent live with their grandparents or in foster care.

"From 3 o'clock to 6 o'clock in the evening is the worst time for kids — that's when kids get in trouble, get into vandalism, when young ladies get pregnant," said Executive Director Larry Long, 69, who attended a Boys and Girls Club in Missouri as a child. "We keep them busy."

Long has to hustle to keep the club safe, clean and operating. About one-third of funding comes from the federal government, while the rest comes from donations, fees paid by families and other sources.

Long would lose three of his part-time employees if Trump eliminates the Senior Community Service Employment Program, which pairs low-income people over the age of 55 with government-subsidized jobs at nonprofits and public agencies. The Trump administration says the \$434 million program has failed to transition enough of these workers into unsubsidized jobs.

What's getting cut in Trump's budget

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Trump has also proposed cutting all federal funding for AmeriCorps VISTA, which provides staff during the summer, and reducing funding for the federal work-study program, which pays some of the club's college-aged workers.

One of the senior workers, Sharon Green, said she learned about the potential cuts while watching PBS, which could also lose federal funding.

"These things are vital," said Green, 72, a retired accountant. "There's no way that they should have cuts — I mean, there are many other places where they could cut, it looks like to me."

Green will not say whom she voted for but said, "I didn't have any concerns along these lines for my party. I did vote, and I am proud of the way that I voted, and I don't believe we would have seen the cuts coming. Who's to know?"

On a recent afternoon, Long interrupted the students' late-afternoon meal of pigs-in-a-blanket to introduce a reporter. A mention of the president prompted excited applause from the children, and a small group of boys at one table started chanting: "Trump! Trump! Trump!"

## Trump Aides' Disclosures Reveal Surge in Lucrative Political Work (UNE)

Steve Eder, Eric Lipton and Andrew W. Lehren

Much of the new business has come through "super PACs" and political nonprofit groups whose fund-raising has soared since the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision in 2010. While such groups were once a modest sideline to campaign and lobbying work, the new campaign spending rules have allowed wealthy donors and their entourages to displace campaign managers and party leaders as the leading political power center.

More such business has come from private foundations and ideologically oriented media companies linked to donors like the Mercers, who have invested in websites, documentaries and other endeavors to battle traditional news organizations. They have also formed political advisory operations to steer their giving and promote their influence.

The figures reveal the extent to which private political work has bolstered the financial fortunes of Trump aides, who have made millions of dollars from Republican and other conservative causes in recent years, according to an analysis of the disclosure forms by The New York Times after they were transformed into a computerized database by the Center for Public Integrity.

"It has been a bonanza for the consulting class," said Walter Shapiro, a fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, where he studies political spending and campaign finance. "And in this era of dark money, people have gotten very, very rich."

To be sure, Democrats take care of their own, as well. When President Barack Obama took office in 2009, his senior adviser, David Axelrod, reported an income of more than \$1 million, listing consulting services for Democratic candidates and other political clients. Others, like Robert Gibbs, the press secretary, reported income from working on the Obama campaign.

For the Trump aides, one potential drawback is that they will now take government salaries, which for many will amount to a cut in pay as they refrain from outside work to avoid conflicts. When their time in the administration ends, however, they could find even more riches waiting for them.

The arrangement has been especially lucrative for insiders and key operatives with links to the biggest donors, and those closest to Mr. Trump, despite his campaigning on an anti-establishment message and his disparagement of business as usual in Washington.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment from the aides included in this article.

The list of income sources for those in Mr. Trump's White House reads like an encyclopedia of conservative wealth and influence. Many of Mr. Trump's aides have earned money from right-leaning media organizations like Breitbart and Fox News, or from a firm set up by Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, to manage his speaking and television appearances. Several aides received payments from organizations backed by major conservative benefactors such as the Kochs or the Mercers. Others were paid for work on Republican campaigns, including Mr. Trump's or that of Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, a onetime rival.

Few Trump advisers are as plugged into the old and new worlds of political money as Kellyanne Conway, counselor to Mr. Trump. As a Republican strategist and pollster who ran a consulting firm, Ms. Conway earned more than \$800,000 from her firm and reported 75 sources of income.

Among the clients that paid her at least \$5,000 were the Tea Party Patriots, a group founded in 2009 to oppose Mr. Obama's health care and spending initiatives, and the Judicial Crisis Network, a nonprofit group that has spent millions of dollars, raised from wealthy donors, in an effort to reshape the federal court system.

She advised nearly a dozen candidates on their campaigns, including Mr. Trump and Mike Pence, now the vice president. Ms. Conway also earned money from speaking appearances at conservative think tanks like the Alabama Policy Institute and the John Locke Foundation.

Like many of her colleagues, Ms. Conway also profited from at least two Mercer endeavors: A super PAC called Keep the Promise, and Cambridge Analytica, which claims to provide "psychographic" profiles that can predict the political leanings of each American adult.

By contrast, Reince Priebus, Mr. Trump's chief of staff, who toiled in the party machinery as chairman of the Republican National Committee, reported a more conventional, if still lucrative, financial picture. In addition to earning \$396,000 from his law firm, Mr. Priebus earned a salary last year of \$225,000 from the committee and an additional \$175,000 in bonuses. (The party did appear to offer Mr. Priebus at least one perk: rent payments totaling \$57,000.)

Stefan C. Passantino, a top White House ethics lawyer, disclosed 70 income sources for his legal services, including groups like the Texas Conservatives Fund, along with more traditional corporate clients like Delta Air Lines and Icahn Capital, the investment firm headed by the billionaire Trump adviser Carl Icahn.

K. T. McFarland, an aide in three Republican White Houses who was appointed deputy national security adviser in the Trump administration, reported \$64,000 from Fox News, where she served as a security analyst.

And Sebastian Gorka, a deputy assistant to the president, took in tens of thousands of dollars for his book "Defeating Jihad: The Winnable War," as well as his work for Fox News and Breitbart.

The Mercers are major investors in Breitbart News, and the filings provide a kind of map to the family's sprawling influence in Mr. Trump's White House.

Those who have worked with the father-daughter donor powerhouse have described their charity as having a political bent: to fix what they see as the mistakes of the Obama presidency. That has meant providing funding to institutions, nonprofit organizations and businesses that promote small government, lower taxes and undoing the welfare state.

Breitbart has functioned as a platform to spread a right-wing vision around the world. In addition to Cambridge Analytica, the Mercers have also spent millions on the Media Research Center, a conservative group that says its sole mission is "to expose and neutralize the propaganda arm of the left."

According to records, the Mercers' foundation also donated at least \$2 million to the Government

Accountability Institute, an organization founded by Mr. Bannon and the writer and political consultant Peter Schweizer.

With his own links to Breitbart and the Government Accountability Institute, as well as other ventures, Mr. Bannon has especially close ties to the Mercers. He reported a financial stake worth \$1 million to \$5 million in Cambridge Analytica, a stake he is now seeking to sell.

Citizens United, a conservative group that was the plaintiff in the landmark Supreme Court case of the same name, and is run by the political operative David Bossie, received \$3.5 million from the Mercer Family Foundation between 2012 and 2014, according to the most recent public records. Mr. Bannon, Ms. Conway and Mr. McGahn all disclosed receiving pay from the group or its affiliates — in the case of Mr. Bannon, totaling \$100,000.

The disclosures also, for the first time, provide some visibility into how much Mr. Trump has been paying some of his most loyal employees, who have now moved with him to the White House.

Jason Greenblatt, a lawyer at the family company who now serves as the White House special representative for international negotiations, was paid \$1 million by the Trump Organization, the filing says. Keith Schiller, who now oversees Oval Office operations, reported income totaling \$294,000 for his security work for the Trump Organization, the campaign and a separate security firm, which worked for the campaign, too.

Fred Wertheimer, the founder of Democracy 21, a nonprofit group that advocates changes in campaign finance laws, said the large payouts were yet another reason that Congress needed to revamp laws to require greater disclosure of political fund-raising and spending.

"This is an industry, a Washington industry, that is embedded into the political system, and the consultant class is making a fortune regardless of what views or candidates they represent," Mr. Wertheimer said. "And it is a major factor in the cost of campaigns, and it is a group of people who are probably the biggest opponents of campaign finance reform in the system."

