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FRANCE - EUROPE

5 takeaways from France's chaotic presidential debate

Nicholas Vinocur

PARIS — Eleven candidates for the French presidency faced off in a debate Tuesday that was more lively and more chaotic than previous encounters.

Frontrunners Marine Le Pen, François Fillon and Emmanuel Macron took to the stage alongside wild-card candidates such as Jacques Cheminade, who wants to colonize Mars, and Jean Lassalle, a centrist who has campaigned around France on foot.

The exchange veered from the comical to the hostile. Far-left candidates Philippe Poutou and Nathalie Arthaud showed little restraint when going after Le Pen and Fillon over their judicial troubles, a subject that remained largely untouched in the previous debate, in March, which featured just the five leading candidates.

Of the front-runners, Macron and Fillon fared relatively well and Le Pen avoided buckling despite criticism from nearly all the others. Benoit Hamon, the Socialist pick, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon stuck to their tactic of avoiding a direct showdown over the far-left vote.

Here are five takeaways from the debate.

1. The EU takes center stage, finally

For the first time in the campaign, the candidates tackled France's relationship with the European Union head-on — and sparks flew.

Five of those on stage — veteran leftist Mélenchon, anti-finance candidate Cheminade, anti-EU wildcard François Asselineau, sovereignist Nicolas Dupont-Aignan and Le Pen — all called for the renegotiation of EU treaties or pulling out of the bloc altogether. Asselineau attacked Le Pen at one point for flip-flopping over the euro, while he has called for immediate withdrawal from the EU.

Far-left candidates Poutou and Arthaud focused more on combating capitalism than Brussels. Only Hamon, Fillon and Macron took clearly pro-European positions, with the latter saying France needed the EU to "protect itself."

2. Le Pen under fire

In the first debate, Fillon was in the hot seat. This time it was Le Pen's turn. Early in the marathon debate, Macron leveled his sharpest attack yet on the National Front party chief, accusing her of fomenting nationalism and setting the stage for "economic war" with her plans for a withdrawal from the EU. "Nationalism is war. I come from those regions that are full of its graveyards," he said referring to the Somme, the site of bloody World War I battles.

Fillon followed up by pointing out that polls show most people in France want to keep the euro, predicting that Le Pen's plans would "collapse as soon as the French vote to keep the European currency." Minor candidates piled in: Poutou, who is polling below 1 percent, accused the National Front chief of hypocrisy over allegations that her party misused European Parliament funds to pay assistants.

Hamon also laid into the National Front chief, accusing her of "playing the victim" while she "scapegoated" minorities and Muslims.

Le Pen shrugged off most of the attacks. She fired most of her barbs at Macron, whom polls predict she will face in the election's final round on May 7. But as the debate dragged on, Le Pen showed signs of irritation. "Is this a debate or an interrogation?" she snapped when moderator Ruth Elkrief pointed out that she was facing more than one judicial investigation.

3. Dupont-Aignan's dash for the limelight

The leader of the *Debout La France* (Stand Up, France) movement was the debate's unknown quantity. Close to Le Pen on many issues, the Euroskeptic independent has nonetheless refused to rally behind her candidacy, threatening to siphon voters from the National Front. Polls show him winning as much as 5.5 percent of the vote in the election's first round on April 23.

Dupont-Aignan tried to make the most of his time in the limelight. He went after Fillon and Macron for having failed to solve France's problems during their time in government, accusing them of having run up debt and supported treaties he would "never" have signed.

Yet he failed to make a convincing case for himself, using his speaking time to snipe at other candidates, especially Macron for having worked at the Rothschild bank. After the debate Dupont-Aignan may remain an issue for the National Front — but he's unlikely to become a force to be reckoned with in the wider election.

4. No upsets

The frontrunners held their own and held off throwing knockout punches at each other.

Macron put on a better performance than during the first debate. He pounded home a message of optimism in his closing remarks, steering clear of the pragmatism that plagued his first outing.

Fillon was subdued but in control. He growled a few times when accused of wrongdoing by hiring his wife and children as parliamentary assistants, but avoided skirmishes. He retained a statesman's bearing that sets him apart from other contestants.

Mélenchon and Hamon, who are competing to represent the left in the election, stuck by their non-aggression pact. Of the two, Hamon was the more aggressive and Mélenchon, leader of the Untamed France movement, even concluded his remarks by calling for a "more cheerful" future.

5. Wildcard candidates spiced things up

Having 11 candidates on stage had the potential for fireworks, and the participants did not disappoint. Asselineau and Cheminade brought a whiff of outlandishness to the proceedings, with the latter calling European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi a "shady" financier and the former repeatedly invoking Switzerland as a role model for France.

Arthaud and Poutou, both representing minor far-left movements, railed against capitalism and corrupt government officials. Poutou defended his proposal to ban anyone from being fired and "expropriate" banks, while Arthaud declared that she had no intention of uniting the French people because she was on the side of workers against supporters of capitalism.

But by far the most refreshing performance was that of the centrist Lassalle. The gangly wildcard waved his arms, ignored calls to wrap up his slow, folksy interventions, hailed the debate as "magnificent" and thanked the moderators for having invited him. Lassalle won't have to worry about being elected president, but he certainly earned himself a cult following.

The quality that may sway France's election

The Christian Science Monitor

April 4, 2017 —When young voters in France were recently polled about the main attribute they expect of a president, the vast majority said listening. That quality of good leadership came out ahead of other concerns, such as a president's honesty, background, or policies. The poll may help explain why the current favorite to win the coming presidential election is Emmanuel Macron, a man whom supporters often describe as a good listener.

Mr. Macron, who is running as an independent, claims French politics is broken, a result of career politicians not keeping their promises or failing to listen to voters. He is right on that score. Neither of the traditional parties that have governed France for decades are expected to be represented in the run-off, which will be held May 7. His main opponent, far-right National Front candidate Marine Le Pen, is expected to win a plurality of votes in the first round on April 23, beating 10 other candidates, but then lose in a second-round face-off with Macron.

A former economy minister with little electoral experience, Macron is not simply a weather-vane politician. He is clearly pro-European Union and favors the free market. But after

consulting with local committees around France, he promised a "profound democratic revolution" that would strip away many powers of elite politicians. He calls his party En Marche! (In Motion!), which he claims is neither left nor right. If he wins, he would be France's youngest president.

Macron does not believe a politician should be a "savior" but rather someone who constantly earns the trust of voters. He described his ideas about leadership in a recent interview with the German daily Spiegel: "A president should not govern. He should transcend partisan lines, delegate to those responsible and appoint the right people. Nor should he act as though he were responsible for everything or as if he could handle it all on his own. Above all, a president is a guarantor of the institutions. He sets the overall direction."

His approach seems aligned with current theories about leadership. Harvard University scholar Barbara Kellerman, for example, describes a "transforming" style of leadership as one in which "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality." And in their courses on listening, Robert George of Princeton University and Cornel West of Harvard describe the highest virtues of a democratic society as "intellectual humility, openness of mind, and, above all, love of truth."

These virtues, the two professors wrote in a recent manifesto, "will manifest themselves and be strengthened by one's willingness to listen attentively and respectfully to intelligent people who challenge one's beliefs and who represent causes one disagrees with and points of view one does not share."

If Macron wins, he can thank young French voters. They are a generation that feels empowered by their digital connections and demand a listening president, one who engages closely with followers in finding a common purpose.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

France's rightward shift

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 that 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'arnarque 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.

To Draw Mainstream Voters, France's Far Right Needs 'Kosher Stamp'

Amanda Taub

But experts say the National Front's shift may be intended more as a message to non-Jewish voters looking for moral cover in supporting a party that vilifies their primary sources of fear and anger: Muslims and immigrants.

The National Front has long been widely viewed in France as toxic, but by declaring itself a shield for French Jews, it may have found an effective way to allow many voters to justify breaking a taboo. That reflects a concept known as "moral license." Framing the party as a champion of one minority enables voters to justify supporting its agenda in suppressing another.

The result is not a more racially tolerant National Front, but rather a party that has found nearly unprecedented success in persuading mainstream voters — many of whom may be quietly sympathetic to its anti-immigrant agenda — to embrace far-right ideas once considered off-limits.

"They are instrumentalizing us," said Jonathan Arfi, vice president of the Council of Jewish Institutions in France, which goes by the French acronym CRIF. "We are a small minority," he said, "but we have an important symbolic role to play."

Becoming a 'normal' party

Mr. Arfi can point to the precise month when the new age of anti-Semitism began in France: September 2000, the beginning of the second Palestinian Intifada, or uprising. That brought about attacks on Jews in France, particularly those who lived in poorer neighborhoods on the outskirts of large cities — areas that had gradually become dominated by Muslim immigrants from North Africa and their families. Since then, anti-Semitic violence has remained high.

But the French government and civil society were slow to respond to the attacks, Jewish leaders felt. For many years, Mr. Arfi said, politicians were in denial about the attacks, preferring to see them as an "imported conflict" rather than as resurgent French anti-Semitism, although he was careful to note that the response had improved in recent years.

"It was uncomfortable for them to see that in France, the country of human rights, you had anti-Semitism coming up again," said Simone Rodan-Benzaquen, the director of the American Jewish Committee's advocacy in Europe.

That the attacks came from immigrant and Islamist communities, Ms. Rodan-Benzaquen said, deepened that discomfort: "It requires admitting that a population that suffers racism also harbors it."

The situation created an opportunity for the National Front. The anti-Semitic attacks tracked with its narrative about the dangers of Muslim immigration: Mainstream parties had allowed the Islamist threat to grow by refusing to admit it was happening, and only the National Front could undertake the harsh measures needed to solve the problem.

It was also a way for the National Front to delegitimize charges of racism against Muslims, Mr. Arfi said. "They are trying to say 'these people are committing anti-Semitic attacks, so they cannot be victims of anything.'"

In 2014, Ms. Le Pen summarized her message to France's Jews in an interview with the French magazine Valeurs Actuelles. Her party, she argued, "is without a doubt the best shield to protect you against the one true enemy, Islamic fundamentalism."

In early 2016, the party began to publicize the support it had received from a new group, the Union of Jewish Patriots. It is not legally affiliated with the National Front, but was founded by Michel Thooris, a National Front city councilor in Carros and a member of the party's central committee.

Mr. Thooris said that he had made his peace with the National Front's legacy of anti-Semitism. "There are anti-Semitic personalities in the party," he said, "but it happens in every political party."

He had decided to support the party, Mr. Thooris said, because he believed it would offer protection from anti-Semitic violence. "It's the only political party that actually offers to fight against insecurity, the rise of radical Islamism," he said.

Still, no mainstream Jewish organization in France has endorsed the National Front, whose support among Jewish voters remains relatively low. But the group's message may be about more than recruiting Jewish voters.

"By saying they will protect the Jews against anti-Semitism, people understand that they mean they will be tough with the Muslims," Mr. Arfi said. "Everything is between the lines."

This message enabled Ms. Le Pen to retain the loyalty of the party's base, which remains drawn to anti-Semitism, said Cécile Alduy, a Stanford University professor who studies the discourse of the French far right and has written a book about Ms. Le Pen's speeches and language.

When Ms. Le Pen attacks "international finance" or "globalized money," she is referring to common tropes of anti-Semitism, Ms. Alduy said. "She doesn't need to say anything against the Jewish community," she said. "Her rhetoric still nourishes and revitalizes these stereotypes."

"It's the best of both worlds in a way for the National Front," Ms. Alduy said. "They don't have to play dirty because their audience understands them between the lines."

A 'moral license' for taboo behavior

A more important reason for the National Front's new stance on Jews may be its desire to attract mainstream voters who would otherwise consider it taboo to support the party.

To understand how this works, experts say, it helps to think about an unexpected analogue: the way people behave when they are trying to lose weight.

People on diets will say things like "Well, I was good yesterday, so I can cheat a little bit today," said Daniel A. Effron, a professor at London Business School who studies the psychology of moral behavior.

Social psychologists call that a licensing strategy, meaning that once people convince themselves they are "good," they can bend the rules in the future without losing that virtuous status.

It turns out that people employ the same kind of licensing strategy in political decisions.

In 2008, Mr. Effron, with his colleagues Jessica S. Cameron and Benoit Monin, recruited subjects who had voted for Barack Obama and asked them to consider a hypothetical: Imagine, they said, that you are a small-town police chief who needs to hire a new officer for a department plagued by racial tensions. Should you hire the white candidate, or the black one?

There was a twist. Half of the applicants were first asked whom they supported in the presidential election, effectively getting a reminder — and an opportunity to tell the research team — that they had voted for Mr. Obama over Senator John McCain.

People in that group were more likely to say that the police chief should hire the white officer than people who hadn't been reminded of their electoral choice.

Remembering a vote for a black presidential candidate was the racial equivalent of a dieter remembering a day of salads. It made people feel like they had "non-prejudiced credentials," Mr. Effron said, and could therefore indulge their unspoken desire to privilege the hypothetical white candidate.

Giving permission

Ms. Le Pen's emphasis on defending Jews — while retaining the party's core message of fear and anger — may have given potential supporters the same kind of "non-prejudiced credentials" that voting for Mr. Obama gave Mr. Effron's study subjects.

This may have helped to overcome one of the European far right's greatest problems: not that its message is unappealing — evidence suggests anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant attitudes are quite prevalent — but that voters feel uncomfortable openly embracing that message.

By recasting the National Front as a vote in defense of Jews rather than a vote to suppress Muslim immigrants, Ms. Le Pen is giving mainstream voters a way to embrace racial supremacist politics without feeling racist.

In order to convince the general public that times have changed and that the National Front is no longer taboo, Ms. Rodan-Bezenquen joked that the party needs "the kosher stamp."

In the past few years, the party has won more support than nearly any other far-right movement in Western Europe. Ms. Le Pen is tied for first in the presidential election polls, though she is projected to lose in a second-round runoff. And she is coming off remarkable success in the 2015 regional elections, in which National Front candidates won nearly a third of the votes nationwide.

Nicolas Bay, the party's general secretary, was up front about why he visited Israel last January. One goal of the trip, he said, was to "erase every ambiguity about the accusations of anti-Semitism against our party" by emphasizing its "special attentions for Jewish people."

I asked Mr. Thooris, the National Front central committee member who founded the Union of Jewish

French Patriots, about the moral license theory.

Did he think that the party's moral credentialing on Jewish matters — including the public support of groups like his — had helped dispel the broader public taboo against voting for the National Front?

"Yes," he replied. "It is undeniable."

BREITBART // French Media Attempts to Drive Wedge Between Marine and Marion Le Pen

By Chris Tomlinson

French anti-mass migration Front National presidential candidate Marine Le Pen told media that her niece, young firebrand Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, would not be a part of her cabinet – and now French media are determined to drive a wedge between the two politicians.

In an interview with magazine *Femme Actuelle* on 27 March, the Front National leader was asked if her niece Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who is popular with the conservative wing of the Front National, would have a role if she becomes the president of France.

Ms. Le Pen replied that she would not. Firstly because she did not want to be accused of nepotism as the pair are related, secondly because at 27 years old she felt Marion needed more experience, and lastly because she said Marion was a bit too "stiff" in her conservative views.

The French media seized on the comments with newspaper *Le Parisien* calling the different views of the politicians a "cold war". The paper outlined the fact that Marion, who sits in the French parliament as a deputy of Vaucluse, has a much more hardline position on gay marriage praising "the traditional and natural family", on a visit to Italy in March of last year.

Abortion has been another issue where Marion has said she would like to see people who get abortions performed pay back the money it costs for the procedure. When asked about this, Marine simply said it wasn't part of her presidential programme. Marion railed against the banning of pro-life websites earlier this year and slammed self-described feminists in the French parliament who supported the move.

On Monday, French media tried again to drive a wedge between the pair after Marion had commented on ending special retirement schemes because they were "too expensive". France Radio, whose headline read "Tensions in the National Front", contacted the campaign of Marine about the issue, despite it not being one of her 144 policy proposals, and the campaign told them that only Marine herself set official policy for the campaign.

Marine addressed the issue herself on Sud Radio Tuesday by stating she and her niece have differences on some issues. "While she expresses her position, her conviction, she is not the president of the National Front," Marine said adding: "I am president of the National Front."

Despite their differences on a few issues, Marion has continued to campaign for her aunt's presidential bid and looks to bring her traditionalist Catholic supporters to the polls in April.

Putin Is Soft on Terrorism

Emily Tamkin

On Monday afternoon, a bomb exploded in a St. Petersburg subway train, killing at least 14 people and injuring dozens more. The official response from the Russian government was initially muddled. The prosecutor-general seemed to confirm soon afterward that it was a terrorist attack, a label echoed by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, but President Vladimir Putin, also in St. Petersburg to meet with visiting Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, cautioned later that day that the motives were not yet known. The attack is now being investigated as an act of terrorism, though Russia has yet to offer confirmation.

For the Kremlin's state media, however, the battle drill was clear. Nonstop coverage of the "terrorist attack" was launched immediately, replete with photos of victims and an alleged attacker — later revealed not to be the perpetrator but a witness — as well as of a second device that was allegedly found and defused. Putin, too, despite his earlier caution, issued a statement on the condolence call from U.S. President Donald Trump, saying the two leaders agreed that "terrorism is an evil that must be fought jointly." Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov added an appeal for more international cooperation to combat terror. With Secretary of State Rex Tillerson expected to visit Moscow in the next few weeks, and with the Russian government still trying to distract from recent anti-corruption protests across the country, it is certainly no surprise to see the state media machine (and the government officials that fuel it) pivoting to the importance of the United States and Russia cooperating to fight terrorism — and the need for heightened security at a time of potential unrest. The Duma has already proposed banning political demonstrations "for awhile" because of the attack.

Russia's narrative opportunism will undoubtedly spark fresh rumors, among Russians and foreigners alike, that the attacks may have been staged. The rumors have been hard for the Kremlin to dodge since respected investigative journalists compiled substantial evidence that the 1999 Moscow apartment bombings were conducted by the Federal Security Service (FSB) in order to create a pretext for the second Chechen war that landed Putin in the presidency.

But the speculation about "false flag" operations distracts from the reality of the Kremlin's current positions on terrorist organizations and terror attacks. And this reality is chilling enough without any embellishment.

Since the 9/11 attacks, the Kremlin has endeavored to use the mutual desire to fight terrorism as a foundation for restored relations with Washington.

Since the 9/11 attacks, the Kremlin has endeavored to use the mutual desire to fight terrorism as a foundation for restored relations with Washington. This was the entreaty to the George W. Bush administration, the trap for the Barack Obama administration, and now the line of effort pursued with a Trump administration amenable to playing along with the idea that "terrorism" is the top threat to America, rather than Russia. Across the Middle East, Russia is expanding its military and diplomatic footprint, calling for "stability," which tends to mean the preservation of autocratic regimes, as a means of countering terror.

All these words stand in stark contrast to Russian actions. Moscow's escalating intervention in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has fueled a crisis that has destabilized the region. It has also seen the Kremlin partnering with a number of terrorist organizations. In Syria, for example — where it has been widely noted that the Kremlin's main goal is to preserve Assad rather than to fight the Islamic State — Russia has used Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran's Quds Force in their supposed fight against the Islamic State, with both groups acting as paramilitary forces for ground operations to take territory or leading local militias.

It has also been documented that, in addition to other forms of aid given to the Islamic State by Russia and Assad — which include Assad's purchases of oil from the Islamic State, allegations of intelligence sharing with Islamic State forces, and the fortuitous resupply of arms and ammunition from Russian stocks — the FSB has helped recruit fighters for the Islamic State and facilitated the movement of jihadis to Syria. Although some have said this was a "local initiative" to clean up the North Caucasus before the Sochi Olympics, there is reporting that this recruitment was happening via Russian assets across Europe as well.

This early support yielded clear results for the Kremlin. It is hard to ignore that the first group of Russian-speaking jihadis showed up in Syria at exactly the right time to help turn the war away from Assad and toward Iraq. They did so with the intelligence to act quickly and in alignment with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and other Sunni Islamic State leaders, many of whom were KGB-trained (an artifact from the Kremlin's long-term partnership with the Baath Party in Syria and Iraq). The arrival of the Islamic State was a key part of Russia's narrative that there were no moderate rebels to support against Assad.

There is evidence that Russia has been working with the Taliban in Afghanistan, as well. The Russians believe that empowering the Taliban, in particular with legitimacy and intelligence sharing, will take space away from the expansion of the Islamic State. However, this has also meant working against American interests as U.S. troops continue to fight the Taliban, al Qaeda, and the Islamic State alike.

The message from the Kremlin has become increasingly clear: If you want to be a terrorist, you have to be *our* terrorist (and you have to be outside of Russian territory).

The Kremlin has weaponized migration. It has weaponized information and built complex information architecture inside Western social and other media. It uses that information architecture to weaponize data in order to target discourse meant to isolate, influence, and recruit key demographics to causes and narratives that help the Kremlin achieve its objectives. Kremlin ideologues have described democracy and terrorism as similar forms of extremism. So perhaps it should come as no surprise that they have cultivated radicalization as another tool of hybrid warfare.

This is why, even in the wake of tragedy, calls for greater cooperation on terrorism from the Kremlin sound hollow.

This is why, even in the wake of tragedy, calls for greater cooperation on terrorism from the Kremlin sound hollow. There is no simple answer to how America can fight terrorism alongside a nation that views terrorist groups as just another tool in hybrid or conventional warfare alike. While the Kremlin has changed its nuclear doctrine to view nuclear weapons as "just another conventional weapon," its consistent capture of terrorist elements exposes its willingness to use any means necessary in the war against the West.

This array of tools has been cultivated because it gives Putin's Russia greater control in determining and negotiating the outcomes they want. Put differently, the Kremlin is comfortable using its "bad actor" status to get better deals for its far-weaker nation. As consistently noted in the recent Senate hearings on Russia, the Russians are not "ten feet tall." But until we are willing to see the full range of tools and tactics they are willing to use against us — and how they use them, in ways often unthinkable to us, to force the hand of their opponents — we aren't entering negotiations on fair footing or with clear eyes.

As concerns about a renewed terrorist threat echo through Russian media, we should be cautious — but not cynical — in watching how a new narrative on terrorism is used by the Kremlin.

The Trump administration should resist the impulse to make terrorism the top priority or a key area of bilateral outreach to Russia. One-on-one, the Kremlin knows how to use its unconventional tools to keep opponents off-guard and dominate negotiations. There tend to be surprises once you get to the table — often in the form of crises that only Russia and its unconventional tactics can solve. But it is far harder to get away with this in a multilateral format or with a well-informed opponent. Within the framework of a strong NATO alliance, for example, Russian aggression can be contained and balanced, and the Kremlin is always in a position of comparative weakness when their tricks and storytelling are seen for what they are.

Monday's attack was a tragedy for the victims. But there is no excuse to allow Putin to evade serious questions about Russia's partnerships with terrorist organizations abroad — partnerships that expose its backing of anti-Western, anti-American, and anti-NATO sentiment in armed abundance. As with many things, the Kremlin's narrative about fighting terror looks flawless on Russian television. But Americans must understand the reality behind this fiction, or risk getting blamed for the Kremlin's crimes.

Bloomberg

Europe's Addiction to Bailing Out Banks

Ferdinando Giugliano

Like repentant smokers, Europe's politicians have promised to quit bailing out banks. They're finding the habit hard to break.

The Italian government wants to rescue three banks which are struggling under the weight of non-performing loans. The trade-offs, as always, are complicated: financial stability now against financial stability later; shielding taxpayers from the costs of a rescue against protecting small investors from heavy losses. Yet the right balance can't mean saving every struggling bank every time.

Last December, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, Italy's fourth largest bank by assets, applied for an injection of public money -- a so-called precautionary recapitalization -- and the European Central Bank and the European Commission are examining its request. Two smaller regional lenders, Veneto Banca and Banca Popolare di Vicenza, have followed suit, as a first step towards a possible merger.

Note that Italy is playing by the rules. The EU's directive governing bank failures allows governments to inject fresh capital into a bank so long as it is solvent under normal circumstances and support is needed to prevent wider economic and financial disturbances. Precautionary recapitalization requires junior bondholders to face losses but, unlike a full-blown resolution, spares investors holding senior debt.

This procedure, in other words, allows exceptions to the EU's strictures against bail-outs. Regulators should be cautious in overseeing this loophole. Some governments will seek to exploit it to keep "zombie banks" alive. This temptation is particularly strong in Italy, where many retail investors were mis-sold bank bonds. The government is keen to rescue as many of them as possible to avoid a political backlash.

Keeping all banks alive would be very costly in the end. Aside from the effect on banks' incentive to manage themselves prudently, the financial system is going through an era of momentous change, as lenders face competition from nimbler fintech companies. Technological change means that the number of profitable banks in Europe is likely to shrink dramatically. Saving a lender today is no guarantee that you won't have to do the same tomorrow.

Balancing legitimate concerns over financial stability with the need to let more banks fail will be tricky. The answer lies in a stricter application of the rules. The regulators should be stringent in ensuring that bailed-out banks are viable. It's questionable that Banca Popolare di Vicenza and Veneto Banca, both short of capital, pass this test -- though the banks say the ECB regards them as eligible for precautionary recapitalization. In general, regulators should be more cautious about bigger, interconnected banks, and more relaxed about the smaller ones. In the case of Italy, this could mean rescuing MPS while letting the smaller banks be resolved.

The main objection to this approach is that it ingrains the problem of "too big to fail", which was exposed during the financial crisis. For this reason, banks should be made to speed up their work on drafting plans ("living wills") that allow regulators to wind them down without a significant impact on the rest of the system. Lenders that don't comply should be required to downsize. Until this process is completed, however, there's a good case for differential treatment.

By the way, letting a bank fail doesn't mean "hands off" -- the state still has to be involved. Guaranteed deposits would need to be protected. Where retail investors were truly mis-sold securities such as subordinated bonds without knowing the risks involved, the government should step in and compensate them. Bank workers who lose their jobs should be helped to retrain.

The main thing is that Europe's governments should get ready to accommodate the changes occurring in the banking industry, instead of blindly opposing them. The alternative is to see billions of euros go up in smoke, merely to delay the inevitable.

POLITICO Donald summit: Trump and Tusk may meet in Brussels

BY Saim Saeed

White House and European Council in talks about a tête-à-tête between the two.

The EU and the White House are in talks about a May meeting in Brussels between U.S. President Donald Trump and European Council President Donald Tusk, officials said Monday.

Trump is scheduled to attend a NATO leadership summit in Brussels on May 25, and then fly to Sicily for a G7 meeting.

The trip will be Trump's first visit to Europe as president.

In an interview with the Financial Times published Sunday, the U.S. president offered uncharacteristically positive comments about the EU. He admitted that he thought Brexit would prompt other countries to rush for the exit, leading to the bloc's unraveling, but that he no longer believes that's the case.

At one point during the interview, while referencing the EU, Trump added a cryptic aside: "I am meeting with them very soon."

On Monday, European Council officials confirmed that discussions are underway about a meeting with Tusk in Brussels which, if confirmed, would set up the first face-to-face meeting between the two Donalds.

In the U.S., Trump has long been known as The Donald. But at a European Council summit in Valletta in February, Tusk said that some EU leaders have begun calling him "Our Donald."

At that summit, some EU leaders voiced concern over the American administration's seemingly Euroskeptic attitude — something that clearly grated on European nerves. In response to White House claims that Trump was "a leader on Brexit," Juncker said: "If that continues, I'll call for Ohio to be independent and Texas to leave the United States."

Juncker has sounded more serious warnings against Trump's anti-EU rhetoric before, saying the collapse of the block could lead to a new war in the Western Balkans.

In the interview with the Financial Times, Trump admitted that he had expected the EU to start falling apart after Britain's vote to leave, but he said the EU now appeared to be more unified and he predicted Brexit would be a good thing for the U.K. and the EU. That view is still in stark opposition to the prevailing sentiment in Brussels, which regards the U.K.'s departure as tragic and Brexit overall as a lose-lose proposition.

"If you would have asked me that the day after the election . . . I would have said, 'Yeah, it will start to come apart.'" Trump told the FT. "But they have done a very good job and — I am meeting with them very soon — they have done a very good job in bringing it back together."

Trump insisted that he had a good meeting recently in Washington with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, though officials in Germany and throughout Europe saw the meeting as awkward and yet another sign of the growing gap among the transatlantic allies.

"I had a great meeting with Chancellor Merkel," Trump said in the interview. "I had a great meeting with her, I really liked her. She said the same thing to me. I spoke to her two days ago. She said the same thing to me, we had a great meeting and the press doesn't get it."

Pressed on the EU's resilience, Trump said: "It just seems to be that there is a different spirit for holding together. I don't think they had that spirit when they were fighting with the U.K. and [the] U.K. ultimately decided to go out . . . I actually think it is going to be a great deal for [the] U.K., and I think it is going to be really, really good also for the European Union."

INTERNATIONAL

The New York Times A New Level of Depravity, Even for Bashar al-Assad

The Editorial Board

For a world that too often seems impervious to the horrors of Syria's civil war, the photos and videos from Tuesday's chemical weapons attack, which killed dozens of civilians, bore witness to a new level of atrocity. People gasping for breath, turning blue, lying dead in the street — all victims of airstrikes apparently by President Bashar al-Assad's forces.

It was the deadliest chemical attack in years in Syria, a new marker for a leader with a record of brutality dating to 2011, when he turned his weapons on peaceful protesters. A second attack on Tuesday hit a clinic treating the victims.

Chlorine gas attacks have become almost routine in northern Syria, but medical workers and other witnesses, citing the symptoms this time and the high casualties, said even more lethal nerve agents and other banned toxins were probably used. Although Mr. Assad doesn't control the entire country, he has effectively won the war against his opponents even as a separate conflict — waged by the United States and others against the Islamic State — continues. So why this attack? Why now? It speaks to his depravity and that of his enablers, especially Russia and Iran.

Mr. Assad may think he can act with impunity now. After all, Russia, which intervened militarily in 2015 to save him from defeat by rebels, vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution in February that would have punished Syria for using chlorine-filled barrel bombs in 2014 and 2015.

Now comes the Trump administration, which has made clear that ousting Mr. Assad is not a priority and fighting the Islamic State takes precedence. President Barack Obama, after calling for Mr. Assad's ouster in 2011, shifted toward that same view, but only after repeated efforts to work with Russia on a political solution. Mr. Obama also had a record of condemning Mr. Assad's atrocities and urging that he and his allies be prosecuted for war crimes.

On Tuesday, Mr. Trump called the attack a "reprehensible" act "that cannot be ignored by the civilized world." The usually invisible secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, did better. He condemned Mr. Assad by name, said he must be held accountable and pointed out that Russia and Iran "also bear great moral responsibility for these deaths."

But the comments have little power, coming as they do after weeks of Mr. Trump voicing both distaste for America's traditional role as a promoter of human rights and praise of authoritarian leaders, like Vladimir Putin of Russia. Mr. Trump also blamed Mr. Obama for the new attacks, citing his "weakness and irresolution" in setting a red line in 2012 against chemical weapons and then doing "nothing." Has he conveniently forgotten September 2013 tweets telling Mr. Obama "do not attack Syria"?

In his statement, Mr. Trump ignored the fact that instead of taking military action, which Congress mostly opposed, Mr. Obama worked with Russia on a deal under which Mr. Assad agreed to dismantle his chemical munitions. Although much of the stockpile was destroyed, international inspectors later found Syria retained some capability.

More important, Mr. Trump did not say how he would respond now. He could start by supporting a strong resolution, with sanctions, at the United Nations Security Council. Given the close coordination between Mr. Assad and Russia, it is hard to believe Moscow's insistence that it had no military role in the strike. Regardless, Russia and Iran are complicit in the brutality.

President Trump's Real-World Syria Lesson

Thomas L. Friedman

The Iranian/Shiite onslaught against Iraqi Sunnis ran parallel with Assad's Shiite-Alawite regime in Syria, turning what started out as a multisectarian democracy movement in Syria into a sectarian war between Sunnis and Shiites. Assad figured that if he just gunned down or poison-gassed enough Syrian Sunnis he could turn their democracy efforts into a sectarian struggle against his Shiite-Alawite regime — and presto, it worked.

The opposition almost toppled him, but with the aid of Russia, Iran and Iran's Hezbollah militia, Assad was able to pummel the Syrian Sunnis into submission as well.

ISIS was the deformed creature created by a pincers movement — Russia, Iran, Assad and Hezbollah in Syria on one flank and Iran and pro-Iranian militias in Iraq on the other. When Trump said he wanted to partner with Russia to crush ISIS, it was music to the ears of Assad, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. Like everyone else, they figured they could manipulate Trump's ignorance to their advantage.

So, last week, someone named "Rex Tillerson" (who, I am told, is the U.S. secretary of state) declared that the "longer-term status of President Assad will be decided by the Syrian people" — as if the Syrian people will be having an Iowa-like primary on that subject soon. U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley made the same point even more cravenly, telling reporters that the United States' "priority is no longer to sit there and focus on getting Assad out."

Is there any wonder that Assad felt no compunction about perpetrating what this paper described as "one of the deadliest chemical weapons attacks in years in Syria," killing dozens of people in Idlib Province, the last major holdout for Syrian rebels.

Mind you, Donald Trump did not cause this Syria problem, and he is right to complain that it was left in his lap by the Obama team, which had its own futile strategy for dealing with Syria — trying to negotiate with Russia and Iran, the key players there, without creating any leverage on the ground.

But if you're looking for a culprit for why America has refused to intervene in Syria, you have to look both to your left and to your right.

"The only obstacle to putting real U.S. military leverage into Syria is democracy in America," explained the foreign policy expert Michael Mandelbaum, author of "Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era." "The American public simply does not want to spend the blood and treasure to produce what would probably be a less awful but still not good outcome in Syria." And that is a byproduct of the failed George W. Bush interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Alas, though, I now think doing nothing is a mistake. Just letting Assad keep trying to restore control over all of Syria will mean endless massacres. A negotiated power-sharing solution is impossible; there is no trust.

The least bad solution is a partition of Syria and the creation of a primarily Sunni protected area — protected by an international force, including, if necessary, some U.S. troops. That should at least stop the killing — and the refugee flows that are fueling a populist-nationalist backlash all across the European Union.

It won't be pretty or easy. But in the Cold War we put 400,000 troops in Europe to keep the sectarian peace there and to keep Europe on a democracy track. Having NATO and the Arab League establish a safe zone in Syria for the same purpose is worth a try. And then if Putin and Iran want to keep the butcher Assad in Damascus, they can have him.

It's either that, President Trump, or get ready for a lot more days like Tuesday. As I said, *every problem* is like Obamacare — never as easy as you thought to fix. The least bad alternatives can be forged only by a compromise in the middle, and, like your hotels, they'll all soon have your name on them.

Opinion | In Trump's world, is it okay to use chemical weapons? Now we will find out.

By Editorial Board

PERHAPS IT is just a coincidence that the worst chemical weapons attack in Syria since 2013 came only a few days after the Trump administration confirmed that it would not seek to remove blood-drenched dictator Bashar al-Assad from power. Like Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), we suspect not. Either way, the horrific assault Tuesday on a rebel-held town will test whether President Trump will tolerate flagrant crimes against humanity by the Assad regime. So far, the signs are not good.

Though not all the facts are in, the early evidence reported from the scene was ominous. In an early-morning raid, witnesses said, Syrian planes bombed the community of Khan Sheikhoun, in northern Syria, with chemical agents that, according to posted videos, caused victims to foam at the mouth and struggle for breath. Syrian sources reported that at least 58 people were killed, including 11 children, and hundreds of others affected. Some died when a second air raid targeted one of the clinics where people were being treated.

United Nations investigations have established that the Assad regime has dropped barrel bombs filled with chlorine gas on civilians on multiple occasions since agreeing in 2013 to hand over its chemical arsenal and abide by a treaty banning chemical-weapons use. The Tuesday attack appeared even more serious: Medical personnel on the scene cited symptoms consistent with exposure to nerve agents, such as sarin.

It was a sarin attack near Damascus in August 2013 that prompted President Barack Obama first to propose, and then to retreat from, punitive military action against the Assad regime. Mr. Obama later described himself as "very proud" of his decision, because it led to a deal that supposedly eliminated the Syrian chemical stockpile. Tuesday's attack underlined that Mr. Obama failed to accomplish even that goal, while his withdrawal from the scene opened the way to the destruction of the moderate Syrian opposition, the growth of the Islamic State and the intervention in Syria by Russia.

Now it is Mr. Trump's turn to decide whether to stand up to Mr. Assad and his Iranian and Russian sponsors. So far he is ducking: A statement issued in his name said the attack was "reprehensible" and "cannot be ignored by the civilized world," but then quickly pivoted to blaming the Obama administration for its "weakness and irresolution." Meanwhile, appearing irresolute, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declined to respond to a question about the attack before a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II; later he issued a statement weakly calling on Russia and Iran to hold the Assad regime accountable.

To its credit, the new administration excoriated Russia and China on Feb. 28 when they blocked a U.N. Security Council resolution sanctioning Syria for its documented use of chlorine. The two governments, charged U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, "turned away from defenseless men, women and children who died gasping for breath when Assad's forces dropped their poisonous gas. They ignored the facts. They put their friends in the Assad regime ahead of our global security."

Will Mr. Trump now do the same?

Trump's surprisingly functional Israel policy

By Annie Karni

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's mantra, throughout his career, has been never to give an inch without getting an inch in return.

But last week he announced that Israel would voluntarily impose some limits on future construction in the West Bank — and, according to Israeli news reports, he cited as the reason the imperative of getting along with President Donald Trump.

Pressure to slow settlement growth was not what some on the Israeli right anticipated under Trump. "The

era of the Palestinian state is over," declared Naftali Bennett, Netanyahu's hard-right education minister, after the Nov. 8 election.

Instead, Trump has taken a surprisingly nuanced approach when it comes to the Middle East: The same administration that threatened members of Congress who didn't support the doomed health care bill, in this case, is reaching out to both sides and appears to be making a serious effort at brokering Trump's "ultimate deal" — peace in the Middle East. Many are still skeptical that he can achieve a deal that has bedeviled ambitious American presidents for decades.

But for now, the early steps have been something of a coup for the struggling Trump administration. Crippled by major policy setbacks at home, it appears to have the Israeli government on a tighter leash — and heeling in a way that President Barack Obama, for the most part, never managed.

"The Israeli government has made clear that going forward, its intent is to adopt a policy regarding settlement activity that takes the president's concerns into consideration," said one White House official. "The United States welcomes this. The president is a renowned negotiator."

Foreign policy experts said Trump's approach in the Middle East has been surprisingly conventional.

"You wouldn't have a fundamentally different approach under a President Hillary Clinton, who would also be looking for a reset," said Ilan Goldenberg, director of the Middle East security program at the Center for a New American Security, who worked under former Secretary of State John Kerry on Middle East issues. "In an administration where every day is a new shock, and there is so much breaking of china, this is totally normal," with the added bonus that the Israelis are treading lightly, for now, careful not to get on the wrong side of Trump.

Trump has been trying to reset his predecessor's fractured relationship with Israel, while forging new relationships with Arab leaders. On Wednesday, Trump will welcome King Abdullah II of Jordan to the White House, where the leaders are expected to discuss, among other issues, how to advance peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the White House said.

Trump's lead adviser on Israel, Jason Greenblatt, a former lawyer for the Trump Organization with no foreign policy experience, impressed Israelis and Palestinians alike with the seriousness of his listening tour across the region, where he visited Palestinian residents of the Jalazun refugee camp, near Ramallah, as well as Palestinian students and business leaders.

The visit, which he documented extensively on Twitter, was welcomed by the left. "He took all of the meetings we would have wanted him to take," said Jessica Rosenblum, a spokeswoman for the liberal American Jewish lobbying group J Street.

At the White House, Greenblatt is considered a valued adviser, with an office on the first floor of the Old Executive Office Building, looking into the White House.

At the moment, Trump has more leverage over Netanyahu than his predecessor did in part because of the perception that he is a friend and ally to Israel. "When I become president, the days of treating Israel like a second-class citizen will end on Day One," Trump declared during a 2016 campaign speech before the Israel lobbying group AIPAC.

His son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who has been charged with brokering peace in the Middle East, among a host of other responsibilities, has a personal relationship with Netanyahu dating back to his childhood, thanks to his family's financial support for pro-Israel causes.

Obama, in contrast, undercut some of his own negotiating power with a call for a complete settlement freeze, including to accommodate population growth, early in his administration.

Israel hasn't officially started a new settlement in 20 years, but illegal outposts dot the West Bank. Obama's edict followed his 2008 campaign trip to Cairo, a visit that did not include a trip to Israel — a move that tainted his standing with the Israeli public from the starting block.

"The one thing any American president needs, to have influence, is a perception from the Israeli public that this guy is on their side," said Dennis Ross, who led President Bill Clinton's ill-fated peace push in the 1990s. "Obama never established that. Standing up to Obama was a good thing, politically. Now, if you have a problem with Trump, it's a bad thing politically."

Another benefit to Trump: With Congress controlled by the same party as the president, Netanyahu can't play the two branches of government against each other, like he did in 2015. At that time, his ambassador to Washington coordinated with then-Speaker John Boehner to plan Netanyahu's address before a joint meeting of Congress to criticize the Iran nuclear deal — without consulting the White House.

Added Ross: "What I'm struck by now is how Trump genuinely wants to see something happen. The Greenblatt visit was a very serious one, based on what I heard from both sides. Both sides saw a demeanor of someone who was learning as much as he could."

For Netanyahu, there is a strong impulse to get along with the new administration.

To be sure, Trump may be enjoying a grace period from an Israeli government that is eager to show it can get along with its new American allies in the White House. At home, he has told members of the right-wing Likud faction of his government that Trump was serious about slowing down construction of settlements, a person familiar with the conversations told POLITICO.

And he announced last week that new construction in the West Bank would be limited to within boundaries that have already been built, or sites directly adjacent to them, Haaretz reported. Israel would also no longer allow the construction of illegal outposts, under the new rules, and a committee that approves plans for settlement construction will meet once every three months, rather than weekly.

That alone is viewed as an effort on Netanyahu's part to show a good-faith effort that the Israeli government is slowing down the planning process, Ross said.

The Israeli embassy declined to comment for this story.

But some on the right are concerned that the anti-ideological American president, who wants a deal for a deal's sake and cares less about the terms, is moving in the wrong direction. Among the more hard-line American Jewish groups, there is a growing distrust, for one, of Yael Lempert, the National Security Council senior director for Israel and Palestinian Affairs, who also handled the Israel portfolio under Obama. The career diplomat traveled with Greenblatt to the region during his listening tour and is seen as a guiding hand in the administration's Middle East policy.

There is also eye-rolling about Greenblatt, who said in an interview with Washington Jewish Week, describing the complicated peace process: "If you take out the emotional part of it and the historical part of it, it is a business transaction." The quote was forwarded internally among right-wing groups who carped at his perceived naiveté.

But on the right, there is less fear of Trump's edict on settlements because of a sense of impermanence to Trump's open-mindedness toward the Palestinians and a two-state solution.

"The Israelis think this is a short-lived gambit," said a foreign policy operative in Washington familiar with the thinking of the Israeli government. "Trump right now is convinced that the Palestinians want a deal."

The operative added: "The attitude of the Israelis is, we need to get along for four years; he's fundamentally inclined to like us; and his approach will become better informed by experience in a few months."

That is how they explain the silence from political leaders close to the settler movement — including Bennett — in response to Netanyahu's settlement slowdown: They see potential loopholes and believe that, ultimately, Trump will be on their side.

"They may think there are loopholes here they can exploit," said Ross. "The settlers also know if they make an issue, they're going to alienate the Israeli mainstream, which sees Trump as sympathetic to their cause."

And while some former Obama administration officials believe that Trump is acting the same way Clinton would, many conservatives view Trump's approach to Israel as a classic example of Republican orthodoxy.

"What they've done is revert to Bush policy," said Elliott Abrams, a neoconservative foreign policy veteran who was briefly considered to serve as deputy secretary of state in Trump's administration. He was referring to the fact that there is, so far, no written agreement on settlements, and that the Trump administration does not view construction in Jerusalem as "settlement activity."

He also pointed out that the only new settlement that will be built is for people who were evicted from Amona, a highly sensitive and controversial spot because it was private land of Palestinians and the Supreme Court of Israel ruled that the settlement was illegal — and one that the Trump White House did not object to. A Trump administration official said of that settlement: "these particular settlement tenders were announced previously, before President Trump had a chance to lay out any expectations."

Abrams compared the deal to the agreement forged between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2003. “This is not shocking for a Republican administration,” he said. “There can be construction of new houses; there are no numerical limits; there is an effort to be sensible and moderate on the part of the government.”

The Obama policy, in contrast, he said, created a broad Israeli consensus against U.S. policy. “This is part of a new era of good feeling,” Abrams added. “They certainly want to have very smooth relations with the president. And the position the administration is taking — that we understand there will be construction and settlements, we just would like it to be restrained — helps Netanyahu a lot. Now he can say, we have to act in a responsible manner, because I’m protecting our relationship with the new president.”

Bloomberg

American Protesters' Cause Isn't Clear to Israel

Daniel Gordis

Israel’s left-leaning daily newspaper, Haaretz, sent an email alert last week with the tantalizing headline, “Why U.S. Jews will never be the same after mass AIPAC protests.” The reference was to a protest organized by a relatively new organization of mostly young American Jews called If Not Now, at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee’s recent policy conference.

If Not Now, which calls itself a “movement,” took its name from the Talmudic sage Hillel, who said, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me; and if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” Several hundred protesters (which If Not Now described as “more than a thousand”) marched, danced and sang outside the convention center in Washington where Aipac had gathered; a few chained themselves to the pavilion’s doors.

What the protest organization seeks is not clear. After all, inside the Aipac conference, Republicans and Democrats spoke and disagreed, as did members of Israel’s ruling Likud Party and the head of the opposition. If Not Now’s website states that its principles emerged during the 2014 Gaza War: “Stop the War on Gaza, End the Occupation, and Freedom and Dignity for All.” The Gaza war is over, while “freedom and dignity for all” remains equally uncontroversial and elusive.

As for *how* to “end the occupation,” If Not Now has no position. “The occupation is a daily nightmare for those who live it -- and it is a moral disaster for those who support it and who administer it,” its website says.

Millions of Israelis agree. Indeed, many of the Israelis at the conference (myself included) said exactly that. Yet Israelis, when asked why the occupation has not ended, point to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s proposed settlement, which Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat rejected. They know that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made an even better offer, which Mahmoud Abbas, Arafat’s successor, also rejected. Some are also aware that behind-the-scenes negotiations were taking place under Benjamin Netanyahu even in early 2014, but Abbas pulled the plug on those as well.

Why doesn’t If Not Now address any of those attempted deals? One real possibility is that they know nothing about the conflict. Why not learn? Because another possibility is that the members of the organization are interested in little more than venting anti-establishment rage at their parents’ generation, couched in the form of objection to Israeli foreign policy.

When the group protested at the Anti-Defamation League’s New York national headquarters last year, Jonathan A. Greenblatt, the ADL’s chief executive, told them that his organization also supports both an end to the occupation and a two-state solution -- and he invited them in to discuss their mutual work. The If Not Now protesters, however, refused the invitation. They preferred to stay in the lobby until they were arrested. That is not how serious people shape policy.

No less likely, however, is that these are not rebels without a cause, they are rebels with an insidious one. It is quite possible, even leaders on the left have noted, that If Not Now is one of several organizations masquerading as pro-Israel groups who wish to end the occupation, when what they really wish to end is Israel. That would explain the peculiar statement on If Not Now’s website: “We do not take a unified stance on BDS, Zionism or the question of statehood.”

That unwillingness to take a unified stance on Zionism or (Israeli?) statehood is a departure from American Jewish protests against the occupation a generation ago. Then, young liberal Jews seeking changes in Israeli policy went to great lengths to assure both Israelis and Americans Jews that their commitment to Zionism and Israel was absolute.

Today, things are drastically different. If Not Now is hardly the only “anti-occupation” voice unwilling to declare itself Zionist, unwilling to state unequivocally that it believes in the legitimacy of the Jewish state.

During the recent U.S. presidential primary season, Simone Zimmerman (also a co-founder of If Not Now) served as Bernie Sanders’ representative to the Jewish community for five days until he summarily fired her when he discovered she had posted obscenities about Netanyahu on her Facebook page. Now an unofficial spokeswoman for the Jewish progressive left, she recently made a brief video statement to Haaretz in which she noted that she considers the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement a “legitimate tactic,” even though BDS then had a clear statement on its website (since emended) asserting that Israeli occupation began not in 1967, but in 1948 -- meaning that the state itself is illegitimate.

The activist group Jewish Voice for Peace is yet another example. Haaretz recently posted a profile of executive director Rebecca Vilkomerson, “the Jewish voice at the heart of the boycott Israel movement.” As if to highlight her Jewish credentials, Haaretz noted “she spent three years in Israel, is married to an Israeli and has relatives in the West Bank.” That biographical curiosity and the name of her organization notwithstanding, Jewish Voice for Peace recently invited Rasmea Odeh, a Palestinian terrorist convicted of planting a bomb in 1969 that killed two Israelis (she has never expressed remorse) to speak at their conference. Also featured at the conference was a leader in the Black Lives Matter movement, Rachel Gilmer, who said, “Many liberal Zionists believe that the problem with Israeli apartheid is simply a few bad policies, or Netanyahu, or the wall, but the problem is with the ideological foundation of the state itself: Zionism. Zionism at its core is white supremacy.” How Jewish Voice for Peace intends to achieve peace is no secret, and If Not Now may not be very different.

Israelis are growing tired of what they see as widening and dishonestly masquerading anti-Israel sentiment among American Jews, and are beginning to push back. Israel just passed a law (controversial among American Jews but much less discussed in Israel) giving the government permission to refuse entry to foreigners, Jewish or not, who support a boycott of Israel.

At a Jewish town-hall meeting near Boston last week, a member of the audience spoke to four visiting members of Knesset, referring to Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014. “I cannot look the other way when three Israeli teenagers are brutally murdered,” she said, “and the response is to kill 2,300 Palestinians.” The four lawmakers, representing a broad swath of Israeli politics, all chastised her for that lopsided characterization of the conflict.

Likud’s Amir Ohana responded most pointedly: “War is horrible. I lost friends, I lost family. … But to say that the response to the murder of the three youngsters was the killing of 2,300 [Palestinians] is to ignore the thousands and thousands of rockets thrown from Gaza to Israeli citizens. Each and every one of them [was] targeted to kill us. And if I will have to choose between losing more lives of Israelis, whether they are civilians or soldiers, or losing you, I will sadly, sorrily, rather lose you.”

Haaretz was right that something is shifting, and may never be the same. What will change because of these protests, however, is not U.S. Jewry, but the relationship between American Jews and their Israeli counterparts. Growing groups of each community are now willing to disown the other. Given political and cultural trends in each country, the widening chasm may be inevitable -- but given how interconnected the flourishing of the two communities has long been, it could well also prove trouble for both.

Trump's fawning over a strongman like Sisi is a terrible look

By Timothy E. Kaldas

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's visit to the White House has caused a flurry of criticism, primarily concerning the warm welcome he received from President Donald Trump.

However, as Glenn Greenwald notes in The Intercept, the United States has been cozying up to violent, authoritarian leaders since long before Trump took office.

It's no secret that US foreign policy has always prioritized the security and material interests of the United States over any concern -- real or imagined -- for democracy or human rights abroad.

There remain, however, some real differences in the way the previous administration and Trump's engage with the Egyptian government's violence and human rights abuses.

Critics of the United States who claim Trump is in fact no different from Barack Obama in his support for Sisi and other strongmen in the region are missing important nuances in the policies of the two men as well as how they were perceived by the leaders with whom they interacted.

In October 2013, following the military coup against Egyptian President Mohamed Morsy and a months-long brutal crackdown on his supporters, the Obama administration took the unprecedented move of suspending a significant amount of military aid to Egypt.

Critics of the move were right to point out that the suspension of aid was only partial. They also noted that while the resumption of aid was officially predicated on Egypt making meaningful moves to re-establish democracy, then-Secretary of State John Kerry soon flew to Egypt to minimize the significance of the suspension, explaining it was not "punishment" for the crackdown.

In the end, the aid resumed in 2015 over security concerns without any meaningful moves toward more democratic governance in Egypt -- the official condition for resuming aid.

What remains worth noting, however, is that even if they don't superficially have the desired effect, these perceived slights did irk the Egyptian regime.

Since the coup, the relationship between Washington and Cairo has remained tense, with Egyptian government officials claiming United States was seeking to undermine the Egyptian state and refusing to consider or implement advice from US officials.

Cairo also sought to signal to Washington its displeasure by pursuing stronger ties with competing countries such as Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin was invited for a lavish state visit to Cairo in 2015 during which the streets were lined with his image and the flagship state-owned newspaper ran an image of the Russian leader topless carrying a rifle while calling him "a hero of this age."

If the condemnations from the Obama administration were truly seen as meaningless or irrelevant by Sisi, then Egypt would not have done this.

The reality is that leaders such as Sisi want to be able to engage in their human rights violations without criticism and while being considered respectable company in diplomatic settings rather than necessary brutes with which one must do business. They claim -- and likely often believe -- that their Western counterparts, who fail to appreciate the necessity of their actions, misunderstand them.

This feeling is exacerbated when they see Western governments prepared to suspend the rules of human rights when their own security is compromised, whether it is through black sites and torture under George W. Bush, the ongoing existence of Guantanamo Bay or the expansion of Obama's drone campaign.

Ironically, many in the Middle East would have more sympathy with a US foreign policy that was unapologetically self-interested, rather than one built on self-interest but proceeds to lecture others about human rights.

Many here see Trump's "America First" promise as the first honest articulation of US foreign policy in years. While Western allies are aghast at such raw selfishness in foreign affairs, Arab audiences have long been cynical, and perhaps rightfully so, in their assessment of the motivations of US foreign policy.

So ultimately, this White House will continue to prioritize America's material interests over any concern for human rights or democracy in the Middle East.

While in principle this may not be a deviation from longstanding US policy, the way in which Trump does so -- without even a modicum of concern for the respect for human rights and the dignity of citizens in the region -- will further embolden authoritarians.

To what extent they would consider whether a crackdown or political arrest was worth the headache in the past, they are no longer burdened with such considerations.

While the United States was fairly criticized for rarely putting teeth behind its words of criticism, it is likely we will come to miss the existence of those faint whispers of humanity, even when they were often overwhelmed by the brutal cynicism of realpolitik.

Egypt Is Trump Country

Shadi Hamid

In one of his first acts in office, President Donald Trump phoned his Egyptian counterpart, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. The symbolism was telling: Sisi wasn't just another Arab autocrat but one of the region's most repressive. The Trump-Sisi mutual appreciation society of two continues this week during President Sisi's much-hyped (in Egypt) visit to Washington.

The authoritarian instinct is easily recognizable among fellow travelers. Like liberalism, it too is universal, cutting across national boundaries. I, like many Americans, have relatives who are Trump supporters. The only difference is that they live in Egypt, which, like Alabama or Texas, is Trump country, at least among a certain group of so-called liberal elites. These "liberals" (who are liberals in some senses but not in others) and of course Sisi himself, did little to hide their enthusiasm for the Republican nominee. Most of my relatives enthusiastically backed the August 14, 2013 massacre of Muslim Brotherhood supporters. And this is what they like about Trump—that he seems to hate the Brotherhood just as much as they do.

on President Obama's watch, and Obama, beyond some initial rhetoric, did relatively little in response. Not too long after those tragic events (and the military coup against the country's first democratically elected president that preceded it), the Obama administration began normalizing and legitimizing the Sisi regime. Secretary of State John Kerry regularly heaped praise on Sisi, even as a crackdown on regime opponents intensified. There was a partial aid suspension, but senior U.S. officials repeatedly telegraphed to Egypt that there was little to worry about. Kerry, just *a month* after the partial aid suspension was announced in October 2013, reassured Egyptian officials that the "aid issue is a very small issue."

The partial aid suspension lasted 18 months, but to call it "partial" is probably overstating matters. During the suspension period, Egypt still received $1.8 billion in assistance, "representing 92 percent of the 1.3 billion per year annual rate during that period," according to the Project on Middle East Democracy's 2015 report on U.S. budget assistance. In other words, it's not correct to say that President Obama tried to use his leverage with the Egyptian regime, as former administration officials contend, because he never actually did.

This raises the question of whether Trump's embrace of Sisi is as radical as it seems. In one sense, it isn't. The Trump administration is merely, as with recent comments on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, explicitly confirming what had already, in effect, been Obama's policy. As the Egypt analyst Evan Hill notes, March 2015 was "a turning point," after which "internal repression escalated by almost every metric." But, in another sense, the shift under Trump is quite important, although hard to measure. At least under Obama, there was a pretense. At least under Obama, there was pressure to release the political prisoner and U.S. citizen Mohamed Soltan.

Even as his administration's support for liberal democrats in the Middle East was tepid, there was little doubting that President Obama, himself, was both a liberal and a democrat. Obama's problem was a traditional one: the longstanding tension between theory and practice, between what we, as Americans, did and who we wished

we could be. The difference, under Trump, is that *his* values—illiberal, populist, and even authoritarian—fit quite naturally with his view of American interests. The next time an American citizen is unjustly imprisoned in Egypt's notorious jails, he or she will have little reason to do what Mohamed Soltan did. While languishing in prison under inhuman conditions, Soltan wrote a letter to President Obama, asking him to stay true to America's values and to not forget his plight and the plight of tens of thousands of other prisoners (including at least one other U.S. citizen):

For months, every day I woke up thinking: Today is going to be the day Americanness counts. Today will be the day those promises my president made me will materialize, today will be the day the Egyptian authorities will have no choice but to treat me like a human being.

There was no guarantee that Obama would step in. But at least Soltan could hope, and at least Soltan had reason to hope. My worry is that the next time an American citizen is unjustly imprisoned in Sisi's Egypt, he or she will begin drafting a similar letter to President Trump, but then quickly realize that the American president will likely not be listening.

The Failure of Trumpcare Is Good News for the Iran Deal

Emily Tamkin

The collapse of the Republican healthcare bill is good news not only for President Barack Obama's signature domestic achievement, but also for one of his central foreign policy accomplishments — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Two years ago I argued that the Iran deal would be the foreign policy equivalent of Obamacare and today that looks more likely than ever. Both face similar political dynamics and are extraordinarily complicated to unwind, meaning that in the near term they will most likely stay in place. However, lack of focus on implementation or quiet steps by a new administration to actively weaken and undercut them could result in their long-term collapse.

The JCPOA and Affordable Care Act were both extraordinarily complex and imperfect agreements because they had to meet the needs of so many stakeholders and also tackled incredibly complex subject matters. The Trump administration felt this challenge as it tried to negotiate new legislation that met the needs of both the Freedom Caucus and moderate Republicans while facing unified opposition from Democrats and major concerns from insurers, hospitals, doctors, and most importantly, the American public.

The Iran deal is similarly complicated. It is not just a deal between the United States, and Iran but also includes the world's other great powers — China, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Russia. If the United States walked away from the agreement it would need these countries' support to meaningfully reimpose sanctions, and unless Iran was seen as clearly at fault, it would be unlikely to get that support. The result would an Iran deal "death spiral" with a new world in which the sanctions regime against Iran is dramatically weakened even as the limitations imposed by the nuclear agreement come off.

Moreover, the Trump administration has a broad international agenda that will be difficult to accomplish without cooperation from these countries. Taking a step to unilaterally walk away from such a high-profile agreement would undercut America's credibility in other spheres and make it more difficult to negotiate with these partners on other more pressing matters.

Congress is the other key stakeholder and still has the power to kill the nuclear agreement by passing new sanctions that violate the JCPOA. But it is unlikely to muster the votes to do so. Just as the House voted under the Obama administration time and again to repeal the Affordable Care Act, it also had no problem generating overwhelming support for draconian sanctions on Iran because it knew they would never become law. The Obama administration would always negotiate out the worst elements and eventually come to agreement on a middle ground approach that gave it leverage with Iran but did not threaten the JCPOA or ongoing negotiations.

Under President Donald Trump, Congress has suddenly become much more measured. The bipartisan Iran sanctions legislation introduced in both houses right before last week's American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference was quite tame. Both pieces of legislation could worsen the environment and undermine trust between Iran and the United States. Both could use some fixes, which would make them less likely to violate the nuclear agreement. And passing anything before having greater clarity on the Trump administration's broader strategy is a mistake. But neither piece of legislation explicitly violates the nuclear agreement.

In 2015, 42 Democrats in the Senate took a major risk by choosing to support the agreement when it was first signed. They now have the ability to filibuster any legislation that they believe would kill the JCPOA and are not going to reverse their positions. On top of that, Democrats who opposed the deal and a number of Republicans also acknowledge that given the complexities of unwinding it, legislation that would be seen as a clear violation is not a good idea. Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Bob Corker has publicly acknowledged as much, and notably during Speaker Ryan's speech to AIPAC last week he railed against the nuclear agreement but ultimately called for tough enforcement — not repeal.

The JCPOA and Obamacare are also similar in that both were ultimately about central ideological fights between Obama and a Republican Congress that ultimately are not as high of a priority for Trump. At its core, Obamacare became an argument about differing worldviews, with Republicans arguing for less government involvement in healthcare and Democrats arguing for a greater government role. The nuclear agreement was a proxy for a broader ideological debate about America's role in the world, and specifically Obama's view that the United States should diplomatically engage with its adversaries — a view harshly opposed by congressional Republicans.

Unlike congressional Republicans, Trump never made repealing Obamacare his central domestic message, instead focusing on economic nationalism, trade, and immigration. And this prioritization showed during the effort to repeal it, when the White House allowed Speaker of the House Paul Ryan to drive the process. Indeed, left to its own devices without a push from Congress, the Trump administration may never have pursued this legislative initiative in the first place.

In the same way, while Trump railed against the Iran deal during the campaign, he rarely called for undoing it, instead focusing his primary foreign policy messages on terrorism, getting U.S. allies to pay more for their own defense, and better relations with Russia. And since coming into office — while placing Iran "on notice," and aside from one stray tweet from the president — the Trump administration has continued to state that it will enforce the nuclear agreement. Indeed, even as Vice President Mike Pence railed harshly against Iran during his speech in front of AIPAC last week, he was careful to not imply in any way that the administration was walking away from the nuclear deal.

Still, like Obamacare, the Iran deal is far from completely safe and could be quietly undermined. The Trump administration could try to undermine Obamacare through a number of steps such as discouraging enrollment, not enforcing the individual mandate, cutting subsidies, or weakening support for the insurance exchanges. This could over time cause Obamacare to collapse.

The Iran deal is in a similar spot. The administration could discourage economic investment in Iran that was expected as part of the nuclear agreement. Under the Obama administration, the Treasury and State Departments went out of their way to explain the terms of the agreement to international business executives so that they would understand and avoid some of the major risks associated with investing in Iran while steering clear of violating the many sanctions still on the books. The Trump administration is not going to pursue this type of proactive outreach, but the real question is whether the Treasury Department starts to reinterpret sanctions relief under the nuclear deal in ways that discourage investment in Iran.

Indeed, Iran was already quite frustrated with the pace of sanctions relief under Obama. Much of this was Iran's fault, as Iranian President Hassan Rouhani sold the deal to his public and Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini by exaggerating the economic benefits. However, in the aftermath of Trump's election there has also been greater hesitance by companies to invest, and if that continues or is exacerbated it may lead to frustration on the Iranian side that eventually results in Iran walking away.

The Trump administration could also kill the agreement over time through the way in which it negotiates with Iran over small violations that will inevitably occur. The JCPOA establishes a joint commission that includes all of the parties to the agreement, which meets regularly and ensures implementation is on track. In a number of cases early in implementation Iran was technically in violation and the Obama administration used the joint commission to quickly and quietly call Iran out and force it to come into rapid compliance. But in a similar scenario, the Trump administration might instead loudly and publicly confront Iran in a manner that causes it to escalate and undermines the agreement.

There is also the possibility that as the Trump administration takes a harder line with Iran in regard to its regional behavior and also reduces the level of diplomatic engagement, tensions in areas outside the nuclear agreement could lead to an escalation that eventually leads to the deal's collapse. The Trump administration is rightfully looking for ways to push back on Iran's support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia militias in Iraq, and Houthi rebels in Yemen, and will take a more aggressive approach than the Obama administration did. This by itself should not threaten the nuclear agreement, but if it leads to a highly escalatory incident that launches the United States and Iran into direct military conflict, the effects could include the collapse of the JCPOA.

The risk of this type of miscalculation increases as the overall environment gets worse. While Congress and the Trump administration have been careful to not explicitly try to kill the deal, the recently introduced legislation and the intense rhetoric towards Iran at AIPAC sewed further mistrust. And thus far the new administration does not appear to be keeping open a diplomatic channel with Iran, which is a major mistake. The Trump administration should reconsider and keep open a dialogue between Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and his Iranian counterpart, Javad Zarif.

Ultimately, neither the Iran deal nor the Affordable Care Act are guaranteed to succeed. Both will face significant pressures in the years ahead from an administration that has not bought into either. And in the case of the JCPOA, Iranian decision-making and domestic politics also remain major wildcards. But supporters of the Iran deal should be reassured by the early experiences in trying to overturn Obamacare. Turns out it is much easier to rail against a complex deal you oppose then unravel and replace it with something better.

Bloomberg

Why Modi Isn't Another Putin or Trump

Mihir Sharma

Over the past year, Russia's Vladimir Putin has emerged as the ideological patron of a certain brand of conservatism worldwide. Politicians from France's Marine Le Pen, to Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, to Donald Trump appear drawn to Putin's vision of a world marked by weaker transnational power blocs, fewer meddlesome liberals and a harder line against radical Islam.

"A new world has emerged in these past years," Le Pen said after meeting Putin at the Kremlin recently. "It's the world of Vladimir Putin, it's the world of Donald Trump in the United States, it's the world of Mr. [Narendra] Modi in India, and I think that probably I am the one who shares with these great nations a vision of cooperation and not a vision of submission."

Now, of course, the word "submission" signifies here not only a revolt against organizations like the European Union and NATO -- both of which Le Pen has promised to withdraw from if she becomes France's next leader -- but is also a political dog whistle, code for Islam. But, let's take Le Pen's analysis at face value for a moment. Are Trump, Putin and Modi linked in this manner, and are they all natural partners of Europe's far right?

They certainly have much in common. All three men share a notion that political Islam needs to be tackled more harshly. They all promise prosperity and economic dynamism, although so far they've discovered that stoking cultural nationalism is easier than creating jobs. They've all sold their populations on a patriotic nostalgia, the idea that it's necessary to return to a golden age in which the state was stronger, and so was the nation. And the major villain in their various narratives of national decline is, usually, a liberal cosmopolitan elite.

But much of that is true, also, of China's Xi Jinping. Yet he's not on the list. Why not? The answer lies, of course, in the additional, crucial glue in this conservative "alliance": the shared idea that internationalism is a trap to be avoided, that globalization impoverishes rather than uplifts, and that global institutions are inherently dangerous.

Xi's China is hardly a paragon of virtue when it comes to upholding global norms. But it has unquestionably benefited from globalization. Xi himself has warned repeatedly against slowing the pace of global integration. This makes sense for China. It seeks to create more space for itself in existing global institutions, rather than to undermine them, since that would enhance its growing power. Indeed, it seeks to create more such institutions rather than fewer.

And that's why Narendra Modi doesn't belong on Le Pen's list either. He certainly doesn't believe in "submission," but no Indian leader can any longer afford to turn his back on the world. It's not just the fact that India needs enormous amounts of investment in infrastructure. Or that its feeble manufacturing sector needs to export if it's to employ even a fraction of the million workers a month entering the labor force. It's simply that, as with China, India sees that it can only raise its own national profile through global cooperation and global institutions.

For decades, India was "the country of no," stubbornly resisting many forms of internationalism. Whether addressing human rights questions, or negotiations over trade and climate change, the Indian delegation tended to say "no" first and ask questions later. But that's changed in the past decade. The Paris agreement on curbing carbon emissions, for example, came together partly because Modi sought to use it as an example of Indian global leadership.

Even more importantly, Modi doesn't want to return to the past. Putin remembers when half the world looked to Moscow, and may want that world back. Trump may seek the tribute due a sole superpower, which the U.S. no longer seems to receive. Goodness knows what earlier Britain Brexiteers want to recover, probably some time when Lord Nelson was alive and nobody else had factories.

Modi likes to praise the virtues of ancient Hindu civilization (sometimes to comic excess). But, like Xi, he isn't interested in a past in which the West dominated the world. He wants to build a future in which Asia does. And this, I suspect, isn't at all what someone like Le Pen has in mind when she speaks of "a new world emerging." Talk of a global turn toward conservatism is all very well. But let's not exaggerate what it means for international relations.

Bloomberg

Trump Needs a Plan to Deal With China

The Editors

On the eve of their first-ever meeting this week, Chinese leader Xi Jinping has one great advantage over U.S. President Donald Trump: He knows what he wants. By contrast, U.S. policy toward China looks confused and contradictory. Until and unless this changes, not much progress will be made on critical issues in the most important bilateral relationship in the world.

China's president craves stability as he manages a slowing economy and oversees a major leadership transition this fall. China needs the world trading system to remain open; it would prefer that countries stick to their ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions. Above all, it would like the room to pursue its strategic goals at home, in the region and around the world.

In the Trump administration, various advisers appear to be fighting over how and to what extent the U.S. should pursue trade complaints Trump raised on the campaign trail. Trump has had to reverse himself on the question of Taiwan, even as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson quietly walked back tough statements about the South China Sea dispute. The decision to abandon the Trans-Pacific Partnership has gravely damaged

U.S. credibility. Huge proposed cuts to the State Department would hamper its ability to engage in regional diplomacy.

To have any chance of altering Chinese behavior, Trump needs a stronger and more coherent message. That means, first, identifying and prioritizing a set of clear, reasonable demands -- and then pushing them consistently across a broad front.

This has to start with North Korea, which launched another ballistic missile test on the eve of the talks. Rather than demand that China single-handedly rein in Kim Jong Un's regime, the administration needs to make clear that Chinese unhelpfulness threatens cooperation on any other bilateral issue. It should then test China's sincerity by demanding action on specific Chinese companies and banks involved in illicit trade with North Korea. The U.S. should be willing to discuss China's own priorities, including restarting talks between Washington and Pyongyang, but demand to see progress on sanctions first.

On trade, the administration should be similarly focused. Rather than issuing empty threats about imposing 45 percent tariffs or declaring China a currency manipulator -- for which there's a shaky case at best -- the U.S. should look for ways to limit Chinese access to the U.S. market on a case-by-case, sector-by-sector basis. Massive Chinese investment in strategic industries such as semiconductors may deserve extra scrutiny; buyouts of Hollywood studios don't pose a similar threat. Accelerating negotiations on a bilateral investment treaty is in the interest of both sides.

Again, credibility depends on consistency -- which is especially important to U.S. allies in the region. Whatever the flaws in former President Barack Obama's "rebalance" strategy in Asia, it at least accelerated U.S. diplomatic engagement with Asian governments and citizens, visibly increased America's military presence in the region, and affirmed the U.S.'s commitment to trade. The Trump administration needs to work swiftly to rebuild and nurture these relationships, which have been eroded in just a few short months.

None of this will produce a quick breakthrough or grand bargain. At best, it will result in a series of incremental victories -- and then only if China sees that the administration is unwavering in its demands. That's surely more, however, than can be expected of the current approach.

The New York Times

How Trump Can Solve His Chinese Puzzle

Gideon Rachman

China is now the world's largest manufacturer, largest exporter and largest market for vehicles, smartphones and oil. In 2014, the International Monetary Fund announced that China had become the largest economy in the world, measured by purchasing power. By then, China had also become the biggest export market for 43 countries in the world; the United States was the biggest market for just 32 countries. And this year, Germany announced that China is now its largest trading partner.

This shift of economic power, a process I call "Easternization," has increased China's geopolitical clout. All of America's most important partners in the Asia-Pacific region, including Japan, Australia and South Korea, still look to the United States for protection. But their most important economic relationships are all now with China. That gives Beijing real leverage, which Mr. Xi's government is increasingly prepared to use.

Some traditional American allies show signs of defecting. During a visit to Beijing last year, the president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, announced a "separation" from the United States and a new relationship with China. Filipino officials cite Chinese loans, infrastructure investment and fruit imports to explain why their country has modulated its criticism of Beijing's maritime claims in the South China Sea. As the defense minister said this week, "any product that we produce, they will buy."

China is also more prepared to use economic and diplomatic threats against American allies. To put pressure on Seoul not to cooperate with the deployment of an American antimissile shield, Beijing recently canceled contracts with prominent South Korean companies.

Even Australia is feeling the heat. On a recent trip there, China's prime minister, Li Keqiang, warned Australia not to take sides in any dispute between America and China — a remarkable intervention, given that Australians fought alongside Americans in two world wars, as well as the Korean and Vietnam wars. But no Australian government can afford to ignore Beijing's wishes, given China's significance as a trading partner and investor. In 2015, a Chinese company bought a 100-year lease on the port of Darwin on Australia's northern coast — to the consternation of the Obama administration, which had chosen the location for a new Marine Corps training facility.

Neither South Korea nor Australia has yet gone as far as the Philippines, but there is a serious debate in both countries about their future relations with the United States. Their doubts will only increase thanks to Mr. Trump's frequent questioning of such alliances.

"I believe in relationships," he told The Financial Times last weekend. "And I believe in partnerships. But alliances have not always worked out very well for us. O.K.?"

Faced with a delicate situation in Asia, America must adopt intelligent policies that reassure its partners. Unfortunately, Mr. Trump has done the precise opposite: targeting countries that run big import surpluses with the United States with a review of "trade abuses" and threatening retaliatory measures. That move is a threat not just to China, but also to vital allies like South Korea and Japan.

The president has also shown an unnerving unpredictability on security issues. His strong hints that the United States would entertain the idea of a first strike on North Korea's nuclear facilities will not be welcome in Seoul, which is just 35 miles from the North Korean border and could be devastated by retaliatory strikes. Mr. Trump has also demonstrated a willingness to risk war with China over both Taiwan and the South China Sea, conflicts that none of America's allies (with the possible exception of Japan) would welcome.

As tensions mount, nations in the region must feel able to trust Mr. Trump's judgment and his word. So far, the president has given them little reason to do so. Any suggestion now of a trade war with China — or worse, a shooting war — would horrify most of Asia. So, too, would any hint of a grand bargain with Beijing that involved trading away American allies' interests in return for trade concessions for the United States from China.

In his meeting with Mr. Xi this week, Mr. Trump needs to send a carefully balanced message — not easy for a president who doesn't do nuance — to reassure America's Asian allies that it will stand by them, and stand up to China without taking reckless steps. If the president fails to offer such reassurance, America's position in Asia will continue to erode.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The Challenge at Mar-a-Lago: Wooing China to Drop Its Tariffs

By Bill Lane

There's a Civil War story about a farmer who wakes up one morning to find his house wedged between large Yankee and Rebel armies. In an effort to extricate himself from the predicament, he puts on blue pants and a gray coat before walking outside under the white flag of truce. But he doesn't get far. The Confederates shoot him below the waist while the Union troops shoot him above it.

That's the risk of trying to split the difference—a lesson worth keeping in mind this week as President Trump meets China's President Xi Jinping. Some of Mr. Trump's supporters want him to restrict imports from China sharply. Yet many Americans fear that doing so may spark a trade war. So how to avoid putting on the blue pants and the gray coat?

The answer is economic growth. Presidents Trump and Xi, as the leaders of the world's two largest economies, must certainly realize that robust growth at home would be the best answer to their respective critics. Better to coordinate policies to stimulate prosperity than to cause a confrontation and risk an economic downturn.

A central issue during the meeting this week will be America's bilateral

trade deficit with China of about $350 billion—more than half of the overall U.S. trade deficit. Whether one is a free trader, a managed trader or a protectionist, there is no denying that trade between the U.S. and China is out of balance. The average American spends 17 times as much on Chinese products as the other way around.

Economists come up with all sorts of benign-sounding reasons for this imbalance: China saves too much; the U.S. doesn't save enough; Americans simply like to buy inexpensive stuff. Others suggest more sinister causes: currency manipulation, trade barriers or cheating. But regardless of whether the U.S.-China trade imbalance is economically sustainable, the 2016 election demonstrated that it isn't politically sustainable.

That's where the opportunity comes. President Trump has a chance to recenter America's economic relationship with China not by the saber but through flattery and mutual respect.

Beijing joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, nearly two decades ago, on terms that made sense then. Since that time, however, no country has more enthusiastically embraced economic change. Mr. Trump encourages America to do big things, yet China has been practicing what he preaches—from the Three Gorges Dam to its network of high-speed trains. America's top universities are full of the best and brightest Chinese students. These massive investments in infrastructure and education have made China dramatically more competitive.

But global trade rules haven't changed. As an industrial powerhouse, China no longer needs to hide behind double-digit tariffs. In the old days, these weren't considered a big deal because new rounds of negotiation under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade were held every decade or so to revise the rules. The expectation was that greater trade liberalization would be coming.

Today revising WTO rules is perceived as too difficult, so the world is stuck with an outdated framework. This particularly affects trade with the countries that have changed the most—China in particular. What's surprising is that Beijing knows it, but has generally taken the attitude of "why change unless you have to?"

President Trump should point out that China has options. It can further open its markets to the U.S. via bilateral, regional, multilateral or, best of all, unilateral action. But Beijing has to act with a sense of urgency, as the status quo is no longer politically acceptable.

President Xi made eloquent comments at January's economic summit in Davos about the virtues of free trade. President Trump insists he is a free-trader, too, albeit with caveats. Maybe this is the right time for the two leaders to cut a deal to slash Chinese trade barriers. This would give Chinese consumers increased access to U.S. products, while Mr. Trump could claim a victory for American exporters and their workers. And the whole world would benefit as the U.S. and China—the twin engines of global economic growth—start pushing once again in the same direction.

THE DAILY BEAST

Why Playing Nice With China at Mar-a-Lago Is Dangerous

Gordon G. Chang

Most everything people believe about U.S.-China relations is wrong. At this late date, Washington should raise tensions, not try to lower them.

It's been called a "blind date." In the two-day event that starts Thursday in an ornate resort along Florida's Gold Coast, Donald Trump must save his faltering presidency; Xi Jinping hopes to assure his increasingly dictatorial rule.

They meet at Mar-a-Lago. There, the leaders of the world's two most powerful countries shake hands for the first time, and just about everything is on the line.

Most meetings of American and Chinese leaders are planned well in advance and highly scripted. This summit is anything but. And it is more important than any since Richard Nixon went to Beijing four decades ago.

The worst outcome this time, at least from America's long-term perspective, is what most everyone seems to want: that Trump and Xi develop "good personal chemistry," issue joint statements, speak of long-term cooperation. But the United States has much to lose with more talk of "friendship."

In short, it's time for Trump to dump policies that sound good to the ear but no longer work. Instead, he should ignore convention, disrupt settled Sino-U.S. ties, and even raise tensions.

Yes, raise tensions.

The mantra in Washington has always been to do the opposite. In the George W. Bush era, the goal was "a relationship that is candid, constructive, and cooperative." In the Obama years, the objective was to "find common ground" and "manage differences." The idea has always been, whatever the formulation, that America's relations with Beijing were "too big to fail."

As a result of this perception, the U.S. did not confront Chinese actions that could only be described as dangerous and unacceptable. Naturally, Beijing saw a green light to continue such conduct.

Take China's relations with its only formal ally, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Sometime around the beginning of this decade, a Chinese enterprise affiliated with the People's Liberation Army supplied North Korea's military with at least six transporter-erector-launchers for the KN-08 intercontinental ballistic missile. The Obama administration raised an inquiry with Beijing, and the Chinese said they merely provided the chassis for the TELs, as the missile carriers are known. The explanation was implausible as the Chinese vehicles are wider than most of the roads in North Korea's logging areas.

Supplying the TELs was significant. The KN-08 is Pyongyang's first long-range missile that is, practically speaking, a usable weapon: the Chinese vehicles mean the KN-08 can hide before launching. The North's other long-range missiles take weeks to transport, assemble, fuel, and test and as a result can easily be destroyed while still on their pads.

Beijing's proliferation, unfortunately but predictably, has continued. China is the most likely source—either directly or through one of its client states—of the plans for its JL-1 submarine-launched missile. The solid-fuel missiles North Korea tested Aug. 24 and Feb. 12 appear to be modeled on the Chinese one.

Chinese enterprises have in recent years also sold uranium hexafluoride and components—vacuum pumps, valves, and computers—for the North's nuclear weapons program.

In short, China has provided technology, equipment, and components to a regime that continually threatens to launch nukes against the American homeland. In these circumstances, it is hard to see how there can be "common ground" with Beijing.

Trump's response to China, as he told the *Financial Times*, is to take unilateral actions to end the threat. Nonetheless, he is still holding out the possibility of working with Beijing.

Every new administration seeks China's help, and most everyone agrees with that approach. "A lot of the problems between China and the U.S. have no solution really," Gal Luft of the Washington-based Institute for the Analysis of Global Security admitted to Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*. "But they can be managed."

Should they? Americans believe "good" relations with a nation are "friendly" relations. That's wrong. Good relations are those that protect America's interests and those of its allies and friends. As James Fanell, a former U.S. Navy intelligence officer with the Pacific Fleet, tells The Daily Beast, America should have a "results-oriented relationship with China."

"President Trump must make it unambiguously clear that China's behavior is unacceptable and will be challenged by the full weight of the United States and the rest of the international community," he said, commenting on the upcoming Mar-a-Lago meeting.

Telling that to Xi Jinping undoubtedly will upset him, but his feelings are not our concern. What is our concern is that the U.S. is running out of time when it comes to, say, North Korea. Within perhaps as few as four years, the Kim regime will have a missile that can deliver a nuclear warhead to the lower 48 states. As Charles Burton of Brock University told me last week, "The most challenging issue in Mar-a-Lago for Trump is North Korea."

But Korea is not the only item on the agenda of course. The U.S. is also running out of time when it comes to other areas of disagreement, such as China's building garrisons on three of the islands it reclaimed in the Spratly chain in the South China Sea. Moreover, last month it ordered an American B-1 bomber to leave international airspace over the East China Sea, an act tantamount to claiming sovereignty over that body of water. China's "unsafe" intercepts of the U.S. Navy and Air Force in the global commons are continuing at a fast pace.

For commercial purposes, China and Russia are cyberattacking in tag-team fashion American corporations, taking hundreds of billions of dollars a year in intellectual property. Beijing is allowing its banks to participate in money-laundering and other nefarious activities.

China is increasingly closing off its internal market to American companies with its Made in China 2025 initiative and its new Cybersecurity Law, and it is, with predatory intent, flooding the world with subsidized steel, aluminum, and other exports, devastating industries around the world, including those in the United States.

Bad actors never want to be opposed, confronted, or contained. They always promote cordial relationships with their victims and bystanders so they can achieve their aims. Trump raising tensions, therefore, is the right direction even if it is not by itself a "strategy."

He made the right strategic moves in December and January by boosting the status of a friendly free society. He accepted a congratulatory phone call from Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen and in subsequent interviews said he did not feel bound by Washington's One-China policy.

In February, unfortunately, Trump backed down from that groundbreaking and resolute stance. In a phone call with Xi he said he accepted that policy after all. America's China watchers and policymakers were relieved that the new president, by acceding to Beijing's demands, was making a meeting with the Chinese leader possible.

"I think both leaders recognize they're dealing with probably *the* most important country from each side's standpoint," said former American diplomat Stapleton Roy. "Therefore, if things go wrong, it has very serious potential consequences."

Agreed. But at this late date "going wrong" from the American perspective is the Florida meeting ending in smiles, talk of mutual respect, and continued Chinese bad acts jeopardizing the U.S. and the international community.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Why President Trump Should Break the 'One China' Spell

During China's recent "Two sessions," in which some 5,000 governing elites gathered in Beijing to rubber-stamp the agenda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Wang Hongguang, a retired Chinese general, publicly dared the United States to deploy a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD) in Taiwan. He boasted that the deployment would provide the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) with an excuse to use force to "liberate" the island.

Wang had earlier dared the U.S. to deploy Marines to guard the site of the American Institute in Taiwan, the de facto American Embassy on the island. He has threatened to use harsh countermeasures to retaliate against the government of Tsai Ing-wen, even though she had nothing to do with the decision to deploy the Marines in Taipei.

Wang's threats came at the time of a major shift in President Trump's tone and stance toward China. He has recently retreated from his strong rhetoric against the Chinese Communist regime and from his pre-inauguration position that the U.S doesn't "have to be bound" by the so-called One China policy.

Trump's flip-flop on the One China policy has caused unnecessary confusion in Asia. It has weakened the administration's moral position and credibility and has arguably given Beijing the upper hand in the cross-Strait relationship.

In my view, the One China policy is a trap that has been plied by Beijing to legitimize and strengthen the CCP dictatorship, squeeze Taiwan's international space, and force Taiwan to kneel at Beijing's feet. President Trump should take a fresh look at the One China policy, and honor the "right" China.

The contentious One China policy arose from the reality of two Chinas: the Republic of China (ROC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The United States recognized the ROC in 1913, two years after the Chinese overthrew the Manchus' Qing Dynasty, in 1911. With Stalin's support, the Chinese Communists won the civil war and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949. The ROC, led by its authoritarian ruler Chiang Kai-shek, retreated to Taiwan.

In the late 1960s and early '70s, President Nixon was anxious to get out of Vietnam and counter the Soviets' global expansion during the Cold War. Henry Kissinger persuaded Nixon to betray and abandon the ROC — America's long loyal ally in Asia — by recognizing the PRC government as the sole legitimate government of China. Thus America willingly accepted the One China policy. In 1979, the U.S. Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act to maintain unofficial relations with the ROC. Later, President Reagan gave the "Six Assurances" for the ROC's security, all of which were designed to keep the cross-Strait status quo.

Most American experts on China argue that this policy has worked well because it has helped maintain the regional peace. But I believe that the One China policy is seriously flawed and should be reviewed and modified. This policy has helped Beijing fundamentally shift the power balance in its favor, resulting in the creation of an authoritarian behemoth that impinges on the right of the Taiwanese people to self-determination and that poses a severe threat to both regional and global peace. Beijing has demanded the recognition of One China as a prerequisite for entering into diplomatic relations and joining international organizations, and it has successfully excluded Taiwan from the current international system.

This is unfair to the people of Taiwan. The ROC has always been an outstanding member of the international community. It made enormous sacrifices during World War II and great contributions to the Asian economic take-off. Even in the wake of America's abandonment of Taiwan and Beijing's relentless pressure, the ROC has peacefully transformed itself into a democratic country and become a beacon of freedom in Asia.

By contrast, since the Communist regime in Beijing first entered the international community under the One China policy, it has taken advantage of American markets, capital, and technology to rise to its position as an evil empire. Instead of respecting international law and order, as Kissinger assured it would, Beijing has sought to reshape the international order in ways that ensure the PRC's dominance. The CCP brutally cracks down on any dissent by its citizens and also undermines international peace and stability by bullying countries in the region, including Taiwan. Worse, the regime even boasts about its capability to nuke America.

Standing up for democracy has long been a core element of American foreign policy, not only because the U.S. has a moral obligation to support democratic countries who share the same values but also because such support will make America and the world more secure.

The One China policy forced on Washington by Beijing has not been adjusted to take into account the ROC's democratic governance. At the same time, an underlying assumption of the policy, namely, political reform and peaceful transition, has not materialized. In short, the policy is out of date and not in the long-term best interest of the U.S., and it should be updated accordingly.

America's difficulty in refining the ambiguous One China policy has over time allowed Beijing to hijack and distort the term. For example, the U.S. only acknowledged Beijing's One China position in the 1972 first joint communiqué of the PRC and the U.S., without expressly accepting it. But in the 1979 joint communiqué of the PRC and the U.S., the U.S. recognized Beijing as the sole legitimate government of China, and further, in these nations' third joint communiqué, in 1982, the U.S. was pushed to admit that it had no intention of pursuing a policy of "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan." President Clinton went to so far as to state that the U.S. would not support Taiwan's independence. Presidents Bush and Obama also took a similar position. Today, the PRC and America have, in practice, recognized of the One China policy as legitimate. Step by step, Beijing has fully cast its One China spell on the U.S.

The grave danger caused by the United States' ambiguous, often self-contradictory statements and practice regarding One China is that they fail to draw a red line to guarantee Taiwan's security in a legally binding agreement; this could offer an opportunity for Beijing to invade the island in the future. The U.S. did not secure Beijing's commitment to abandon the use of force against Taiwan. In 2005, the Communist regime passed the so-called anti-secession law, explicitly stipulating that it will use force against Taiwan's "independence provocation." But that term's meaning remains totally subject to the regime's interpretation. Today, more than a thousand missiles are pointing at the island across the Taiwan Strait, but Beijing considers it a serious "provocation" if the ROC even mentions THAAD as a possible means of defending itself from a potential attack

Even if the One China policy was justified 40 years ago, the geopolitical conditions calling for it no longer exist: The Soviet Union collapsed long ago, and the new Moscow has formed a strategic alliance with Beijing; Vietnam now sides with the U.S. in opposing China's aggressive behavior in the South China Sea, and the PRC has become a formidable power challenging the America's global leadership.

I believe the best way to break the One China spell is for the U.S. to refuse to accept Beijing's sovereignty over Taiwan and to formally recognize the ROC as a legitimate government by signing an agreement with it. The agreement should incorporate the updated and expanded components in the Taiwan Relations Act and President Reagan's "Six Assurances" to reflect Taiwan's democracy and America's commitment to its defense. Such strategic and moral clarity will deter Beijing's aggression and achieve peace through strength in the region.

To conclude, I want to quote a fellow citizen of China: "As a mainland *shitzen* (sh** + citizen), I do not give a sh** who is in power, but I am happy to see Taiwan not be swallowed by the CCP, because it is far better to let some people live free than have us all suffer under slavery."

I hope President Trump has this Chinese *shitzen*'s political wisdom to break the One China spell, which would help him make America greater.

The U.S. Needs a New China Debate

By William Galston

When President Trump meets this week with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, he should keep in mind that the relationship between Washington and Beijing will shape international relations for decades. The talks will focus on urgent matters, especially North Korea's nuclear program and the massive bilateral trade imbalance. But even-larger issues loom in the background.

For four decades, U.S. policy has been guided by the idea that China's integration into the global economic, diplomatic and security architecture would serve both countries' interests. Does this proposition remain valid?

Changes in China's conduct have forced this question onto the agenda, as argued in a February task-force report sponsored by the Asia Society and the University of California, San Diego. Since 2008 Beijing has embraced protectionism, boosting state-owned enterprises, discriminating against foreign-owned firms and pushing multinationals to transfer intellectual property to Chinese entities as the price of admission to the Chinese market.

On foreign policy, the report says, "China started asserting territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea and East China Sea in an increasingly coercive manner that rattled the region and raised questions about its ultimate intentions." The Chinese government, expecting a leadership transition in North Korea, increased its support to Pyongyang and rejected strong action against Kim Jong Un's nuclear program for fear of destabilizing his regime. At home China cracked down on foreign media and nongovernmental organizations while ratcheting up pressure on internal dissent.

Despite these troubling developments, the task force adheres to the long-dominant view that relations between the U.S. and China can be mutually beneficial or, as the Chinese often put it, win-win. To this end, its report identifies policies the Trump administration can use to "defend US interests and encourage China to act in ways that respect the interests of the United States and other countries."

We are not fated to replay the Thucydidean drama between Athens and Sparta that made conflict inevitable, it concludes: "A rising power need not become an adversary of the established power if its rise is restrained in manner and if the established power is open to sharing responsibility with the rising power."

A 2015 report from the Council on Foreign Relations takes a different view. Authors Robert Blackwill and Ashley Tellis argue that American administrations have enabled China's rise even though the original justification for this policy—Soviet containment—no longer applies. U.S. support for China's entry into the global trading system, for example, has "accelerated its rise as a geopolitical rival." Now we are faced with the high probability of a "long-term strategic rivalry between Washington and Beijing." Over the coming decades, China will remain America's "most significant competitor." This competition, Mr. Blackwill and Ms. Tellis argue, is playing out on many fronts.

A core Chinese aim—the pacification of its "extended geographic periphery"—cannot succeed unless Beijing delegitimizes the U.S. alliance system in Asia. China wants to recover from America the "primacy" it once enjoyed in Asia as a "prelude to exerting global influence." The U.S. cannot have it both ways, they contend, accommodating Chinese concerns about America's ability to project power while continuing to defend vital national interests in the region.

These facts warrant a fundamental reorientation of U.S. policy toward China, Mr. Blackwill and Ms. Tellis conclude. Washington should focus more on meeting the strategic challenge and be "less preoccupied with how this more robust US approach might be evaluated in Beijing."

A Pew Research Centerreport released on April 4 suggests that the American people would support a tougher stance toward China. Although their worries about Chinese economic competition have declined over the past five years, their concern about China's military power has increased. Fifty-eight percent of Americans, including 52% of Democrats, support the use of force to defend our Asian allies against a Chinese attack.

Mr. Xi is as determined to make China great again as Mr. Trump is to make America great again. The difference is that while the American president defines greatness principally in domestic terms, the Chinese president sees greatness in regional—even global—terms. Canceling the Trans-Pacific Partnership has already given China the opportunity to write the economic rules for East Asia. If Mr. Trump accepts 19th-century spheres-of-influence thinking, an outlook to which he often seems drawn, the Chinese could regain hegemonic power throughout the region.

Which of the competing perspectives summarized here should guide America's policy toward China in the coming decades? I don't know, but a debate is necessary. Ducking basic questions and muddling through will mean the victory, by default, of current assumptions, with dire consequences for the United States if the challengers turn out to be right.

For Trump, NAFTA Could Be the Next Obamacare

By Michael Grunwald

In his apocalyptic campaign speeches, Donald Trump routinely cited two catastrophic messes he would clean up as president: Obamacare and NAFTA. Then his push to undo Obamacare became his first policy fiasco in the White House.

Now Trump may be poised to repeat history with NAFTA.

Health care and trade don't have much in common beyond complexity and political sensitivity. But there are striking similarities between Trump's approach to Obamacare and his approach to the North American Free Trade Agreement, the 23-year-old pact with Mexico and Canada that he's called the worst trade deal in history. The parallels include his over-the-top dystopian attacks on their disastrous stupidity, his over-the-top utopian pledges to replace them with a terrific alternative to be named later, and his blithe confidence that his negotiating partners would give him what he wanted.

The demise of the Republican bill to repeal and replace Obamacare has inspired a lot of mockery about "the closer," about Trump's inability to flex his "Art of the Deal" negotiating muscles in the Washington arena. But the failure of Trumpcare was mostly a failure of substance, not tactics. It was doomed not by Trump's incendiary tweets or tone-deaf demands but by the impossibility of reconciling his exuberant promises with real-world plans, as well as his inability to compel cooperation or compliance from people who don't work for him.

Ever since the Republican health care bill cratered, Trump's aides have been strategizing about how to avoid a similar debacle in the future. But a close look at the politics and the details suggests that NAFTA talks could easily turn into Trumpcare 2.0. Like Obamacare, NAFTA is an imperfect deal, but not the unmitigated disaster that Trump pretends it is—and, as with Obamacare, any fix would involve difficult trade-offs through a painstaking process that would create winners and losers. It's another issue where there's no way for the president to wave a wand and make everyone happy, especially when so many people like the status quo.

In fact, a major overhaul of NAFTA could prove to be even more elusive than the repeal of Obamacare. Congressional Republicans scuttled repeal even though they all opposed Obamacare—and most of them do not oppose NAFTA. Even more daunting, before Trump even tries to sell Republicans on an improved NAFTA deal, he'll have to forge that deal with Canada and Mexico. And it's hard to imagine why Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto would risk the wrath of his people by granting concessions to the American politician who called them rapists and demanded a border wall to keep them out of the U.S.

Last week, a draft surfaced of the Trump administration's letter to Congress laying out its goals for renegotiating NAFTA, featuring a much more measured tone than Trump used while blasting trade deals on the campaign trail. That doesn't mean he's abandoned his contentious approach to trade. The letter carefully left his options open, and when he signed two symbolic trade-skeptical executive orders last Friday, he echoed some of his campaign bombast about foreign negotiators fleecing dumb Americans. Still, when the NAFTA venue shifts from public proclamations to backroom negotiations, Trump might struggle to achieve even modest progress for U.S. businesses and workers, much less the fantastic victories he's promised.

As a guide to why NAFTA will be so hard to renegotiate, the administration's draft letter to Congress is a good place to start. The letter, written by acting U.S. Trade Representative Stephen Vaughn, includes a historical summary of NAFTA that's typical for that kind of official notification. But its boilerplate language about the effects of the deal—what happened after the U.S., Canada and Mexico agreed to eliminate all tariffs and duties on one another's goods—is remarkable given the president's portrayal of the deal as a colossal blunder.

"Since 1993, U.S. trade with Canada and Mexico has more than tripled," the letter says. "The two countries account for 29 percent of total U.S. goods trade, and are among the largest export markets for manufacturing, the first and third largest markets for agricultural goods, and the second and third largest sources of imports."

That doesn't sound like a ringing case for repeal. It sounds more like what NAFTA was supposed to do when it was started under President Ronald Reagan, negotiated under President George H.W. Bush, and ratified under President Bill Clinton. And that's why so many U.S. farmers, retailers and manufacturers like it so much. The U.S. already had relatively low tariffs in the 1990s, so NAFTA helped open up new markets to the north and south for farmers and other exporters, while reducing prices for importers who could then pass savings on to consumers. It also created a vibrant North American manufacturing supply chain where auto parts zip back and forth across borders as they're assembled into truly North American cars that can compete globally. It's true that some U.S. factories and jobs have moved to Mexico, but there's been a worldwide shift of lower-cost production toward lower-wage countries, and it's not clear how much trade deals have accelerated that globalization. In any case, U.S. manufacturing output is now at an all-time high.

So Trump's hyperbole about the sheer insanity of NAFTA could create expectations problems as well as reality problems as he seeks to renegotiate it. And those problems should be familiar at this point in his presidency, because he encountered them after similar hyperbole about Obamacare.

Trump constantly trashes Obamacare as a nightmare for everyone it touches, but it's working quite well for the vast majority of Americans who get insurance through their employers, Medicare or Medicaid, and even for most Americans insured through the law's troubled exchanges. Overall, Obamacare has expanded coverage to 20 million uninsured Americans, created powerful new protections for insured Americans, shifted the incentives of the health care system toward rewarding quality, and helped reduce the growth of medical costs to the lowest level in half a century. There have been real problems with rising premiums and fleeing insurers on the exchanges—the marketplaces where individuals can comparison-shop for policies—and those problems have gotten worse since Trump's election (and some official sabotage) has thrown the future of the exchanges in doubt. But those problems affect only 3 percent of Americans—and most of them receive Obamacare subsidies that protect them from premium hikes.

Trump has always ignored these facts in his speeches. But they complicated his effort to abolish Obamacare while fulfilling his pledges to "increase access, lower costs, and provide better health care," which were all things that Obamacare was already doing. The Republican repeal bill was wildly unpopular, in part because it included massive Medicaid cuts in order to finance a massive tax cut for the wealthy, but any bill that reversed Obamacare's coverage expansions and insurance protections would have stripped away some benefits that Americans like—and any bill that didn't would have alienated conservative Republicans. For all the furor over Trump's futile efforts to get his party to fall in line, his basic challenge was that Obamacare wasn't really horrific, and his sugary promises to replace it with something awesome for everyone weren't really realistic.

The administration's draft letter on renegotiating NAFTA reflects similar challenges. For example, Trump has complained that one of the biggest deficiencies of the deal is its failure to address currency issues, but not one of the letter's 49 goals for improving it mentions currency issues. There was also nothing about requiring the new NAFTA to reduce U.S. trade deficits, something White House trade adviser Peter Navarro had suggested would be necessary in any U.S. trade deal.

Instead, the letter suggests that the overarching purpose of the renegotiations should merely be modernizing NAFTA to deal with issues that didn't exist when it went into effect, and strengthening it to reflect the standards in more recent U.S. trade deals. "For example, digital trade was in its infancy in 1994," the letter says. "Labor and environment were an afterthought to the Agreement." The eight-page draft also cites intellectual property rights, state-owned enterprises, and trade in services as areas where NAFTA ought to be updated to reflect 21st-century realities.

Well, guess what? After years of intense negotiations, the Obama administration already finalized a deal in which Canada and Mexico accepted new protections for digital trade, tougher labor and environmental safeguards, stronger intellectual property rules, new limits on state-owned enterprises, and freer trade in services like law, consulting, accounting and wealth management where U.S. firms tend to excel. But that deal was the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Asia-oriented trade agreement that Trump scuttled on his third day in office. Several former Obama aides pointed out that despite Trump's attacks on TPP as an existential threat to the United States, much of his administration's list of goals sounded like a rehash of TPP's achievements.

"A lot of it looks very familiar," says Wendy Cutler, who oversaw the TPP talks as Obama's deputy U.S. trade representative.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer said last week that the letter is just a draft and does not reflect current administration policy. But there have been numerous signs that Trump's aides do not share his view of TPP as an irredeemable mess. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross have both suggested the concessions that Mexico and Canada made in TPP could be "the starting point" for renegotiating NAFTA. "We're obviously not going to throw out the baby with the bathwater," Ross said.

The problem is, Trump may have done just that when he killed TPP. The U.S. did not have to give up much to Canada or Mexico in exchange for those earlier concessions, because Canada and Mexico were eager for increased access to Asian markets through TPP. But that is not something the U.S. can offer through revisions to NAFTA. And the draft letter to Congress suggested the Trump administration will also seek big additional concessions, like a more level playing field on border taxes, a revised dispute settlement process, new "rules of origin" with advantages for U.S. factories, and new advantages for U.S. contractors in government procurement.

Why would Canada or Mexico agree to any of that? Both countries are largely happy with NAFTA as it stands. And it's not clear what Trump could offer them to sweeten the deal. Canada's top priority in any renegotiation would probably be a relaxation of "Made in America" rules for U.S. government contracts, but Trump has vowed to make those requirements much more stringent. Mexico has expressed a desire for changes that would make it easier for its citizens to cross the border, but it's hard to square that desire with Trump's demand for an impregnable wall.

Meanwhile, Trump is unpopular in Canada and absolutely reviled in Mexico. Peña Nieto already

canceled a meeting with the president after a spat over the border wall, and his left-leaning political opponents are advocating a much more hostile stance against the U.S. Any Mexican leader who cut an unfavorable deal with Trump—or maybe any deal with Trump—would sign his political death warrant, while there could be obvious election-year benefits to rejecting Trump's demands in a public way. The politics of trade are complicated in the U.S., too, so there's no assurance that Trump could even get a deal through Congress, but first he'd have to get a deal.

"Trade negotiations only work if the other guy can sell it in his own country," says Jeffrey Schott, a senior fellow at the trade-friendly Peterson Institute for International Economics. "Mexico is going to have to get something out of this."

Trump and his aides have suggested that he won't need to offer any goodies to a weaker country like Mexico. He thinks he'll be able to dictate the terms of the new deal by threatening to impose new border taxes or even to walk away from NAFTA if his negotiating partners don't cave, as he often did in the real estate world. And unlike his predecessors, Trump truly seems willing to abandon NAFTA if he can't refashion it to his liking—the final way this saga could echo the Obamacare saga.

Now that the GOP health care bill has cratered, the Trump administration has two basic options for how to proceed. One would be to accept that Obamacare is here to stay and push for tweaks to help stabilize the exchanges and minimize the disruptions to families. The other option would be to sabotage the exchanges, let Obamacare implode, and blame Democrats for the resulting chaos, which Trump keeps saying would be much smarter politics. That's not necessarily true at a time when Republicans control Washington; if millions of Americans suddenly lost their coverage, they might wonder why the president seemed so eager for that to happen. But regardless of who gets blamed, it could happen, and a lot of Americans could get hurt.

If Trump fails to bully the Mexicans into massive NAFTA concessions, or even a face-saving NAFTA update reinstating the TPP concessions, he will face a similar choice: Muddle through with the status quo, or walk away and blame others for the chaos. Getting a divided Congress to approve a revised NAFTA would be a daunting legislative challenge, but abandoning NAFTA would be quite simple; Trump would just need to give six months' notice. He would be risking the demolition of North American supply chains, fury from farmers and consumers, a potential trade war, and a potential recession. To add insult to self-inflicted injury, tariffs would revert to their pre-NAFTA levels, which were much higher in Mexico and Canada than in the U.S. So in a sense, threatening to withdraw from the deal would be like pointing a gun at his own head and threatening to shoot.

Again, though, Trump could do it if he were willing to face the consequences. Jeb Bush famously derided him as a "chaos candidate," and there are certainly signs that he might be a chaos president. At the same time, even though the public keeps voting for political change, it tends to get skittish about policy change, and especially policy chaos. It's not clear yet how willing Trump will be to risk a backlash.

What is clear is that Trump's frequent promises to help Americans lose weight by eating ice cream will eventually crash into reality. It's easy to promise that the next NAFTA will include major Mexican concessions and no Mexican retaliation before the negotiations begin, just as it was easy to promise that Republicans were preparing a wonderful replacement to Obamacare before the plan became public. But just as Trump recently discovered that health care was more complex than he realized, he'll soon discover that trade deals can be complex, too. Not even superpowers get to dictate the outcomes.

Of course, politics can be even more complex, abroad as well as at home. It's the mechanism countries use to translate the words of their politicians into policies. The words might not mean much when Trump tosses them around in his speeches, but they matter a lot when they're part of a law like Obamacare or a global agreement like NAFTA. And while candidates get judged by words, presidents get judged by results.

ETATS-UNIS

The Silence of Rex Tillerson

Eliot A. Cohen

One would not expect the secretary of defense routinely to inspect the sentries and walk point on patrols, but, in effect, that is what the secretary of state has to do. He is the chief executive of a department numbering in the tens of thousands, and a budget in the tens of billions; but he is also the country's chief diplomat, charged with conducting negotiations and doing much of the detailed work of American foreign policy. Americans expect him as well to serve as the president's senior constitutionally accountable adviser on such matters, and as the expositor of an administration's foreign policy.

It is not unprecedented for a president to install a business executive as secretary of state. After all, George Shultz, one of the outstanding 20th-century occupants of that office, came to Foggy Bottom from Bechtel. But then again, Shultz had a rich array of experiences under his belt in addition to a successful business career—he had taught economics at MIT and the University of Chicago, and served as both secretary of labor and the first director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Tillerson resembles Shultz in what is, by all accounts, sterling character—honest, considerate, soft-spoken, but effective at managing a large business. There is no reason to doubt his integrity or good judgment. But in his first few months as secretary of state his performance suggests both his limits (which he may transcend) and more fundamental proclivities of the Trump administration (which he almost certainly cannot).

During his short tenure the following has happened: His top pick for deputy secretary of state was shot down at the last minute in a bit of palace intrigue; his boss has proposed slashing his department's budget by 29 percent; his press operation at the State Department went dark for several weeks, after which the interim spokesman made a (good) statement in support of Russian demonstrators and was promptly moved; he decided to get rid of the usual press entourage on his inaugural overseas trip to Asia; he nearly skipped a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, pulling back in the nick of time to spend only a few hours on the ground in Brussels; he has been preceded on a visit to Iraq by the princeling of the Trump administration, Jared Kushner, whose remit includes China and Middle East peace, among other things. And on the great issues of American foreign policy—nothing.

It is the conceit of professors that the world could easily be run by academics; of soldiers that generals can sort most things out; of business people that what one most needs is someone who has had to meet a payroll. In the case of the Trump administration the bias seems to be towards military people who the president thinks look like killers or are supposed to have monikers like "mad dog," and for really wealthy folks from the private sector, with an apparent fondness for New York money people.

This is nonsense. The higher offices of state require all kinds of qualities rarely assembled in one individual, among them, yes, basic management skills, but also sensitivity to domestic politics, intellectual depth, a certain degree of vision, substantive knowledge of often recondite issues, interpersonal skills at wheedling, coaxing, intimidating and persuading, and a public persona. Running Exxon Mobil is good preparation for only some of the things a secretary of state must do. And so far, Secretary Tillerson is doing poorly.

The cut to the State Department's budget has yet to be fully spelled out, but judging by what we know, even with regard to enduring funding—that is to say, setting aside such special items as the Ebola relief program of the Obama administration—it will take a massive hit, at least until the administration encounters the realities of congressional opposition. Tillerson has been silent

on this subject; indeed, he was not even in the country and was thus unable to pull his people together as they watched the Trump meat cleaver come swinging in their direction.

Worse, he was either unwilling or unable to publicly make the case for diplomacy as the indispensable arm of American foreign policy. Instead, the definitive word came from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Mick Mulvaney, who on March 15th said:

There's no question this is a hard-power budget. It is not a soft-power budget. This is a hard-power budget. And that was done intentionally. The president very clearly wants to send a message to our allies and our potential adversaries that this is a strong power administration.

Mulvaney's thought has at least a kind of Neanderthal directness to it. One would never have heard any such thing out of George Shultz, who had fought in World War II. Soft power has its limits—I just wrote a book partly on that point, in fact—but to think that there is a useful message sent to friend or foe in deprecating diplomacy is idiotic. And throughout, not a public word from the secretary of state.

Tillerson's aversion to the press does not reflect a becoming modesty, or even a canny desire to pop the big surprises on them only when he is ready. It reveals, rather, that he does not yet understand his job. For a democracy's foreign policy to succeed it must be understood and argued out. That task the secretary of state has hitherto avoided. If he shuts out the diplomatic press corps—the wonkiest of them all, and the easiest to deal with in Washington—he is only asking for more trouble for himself and the administration.

Sooner or later, someone needs to explain what Trump's foreign policy is beyond the macho swagger expressed by Mulvaney, whose hard-power experience has consisted chiefly of earning the enmity of John McCain for trying to slash military budgets as a congressman. At the moment there is no Trump foreign policy doctrine, no coherent explanation of the world as seen by the Trump team, and the broad outlines of their policy for dealing with it**.** There are threats leveled at North Korea, which will either have to be backed up by force or retreated from in humiliation. There is a far warmer reception for an Egyptian dictator than for a fairly elected German chancellor. There is foreign policy conducted as though the United States government were a Middle Eastern court, where the ruler's family counts for more than the sovereign's foreign minister. And there is the invocation of America First, a slogan with a rancid history, as the president knows very well.

Perhaps this will end. Perhaps Secretary Tillerson will find a voice. Perhaps he will somehow lay out a vision of foreign policy that reconciles America's interests and its values, that reassures allies and promises a steady hand in the years to come. Perhaps he will charm the press as some of his predecessors have. Perhaps he will come to be seen as *primus inter pares* in shaping U.S. foreign policy. For the moment, however, his silence is as dismaying and depressing as the chirping of Trump's tweets and the sound of Mr. Mulvaney pounding his unbemedalled chest.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Susan Rice's White House Unmasking: A Watergate-style Scandal

The thing to bear in mind is that the White House does not do investigations. Not criminal investigations, not intelligence investigations.

Remember that.

Why is that so important in the context of explosive revelations that Susan Rice, President Obama's national-security adviser, confidant, and chief dissembler, called for the "unmasking" of Trump campaign and transition officials whose identities and communications were captured in the collection of U.S. intelligence on foreign targets?

Because we've been told for weeks that any unmasking of people in Trump's circle that may have occurred had two innocent explanations: (1) the FBI's investigation of Russian meddling in the election and (2) the need to know, for purposes of understanding the communications of foreign intelligence targets, the identities of Americans incidentally intercepted or mentioned. The unmasking, Obama apologists insist, had nothing to do with targeting Trump or his people.

That won't wash.

In general, it is the FBI that conducts investigations that bear on American citizens suspected of committing crimes or of acting as agents of foreign powers. In the matter of alleged Russian meddling, the investigative camp also includes the CIA and the NSA. All three agencies conducted a probe and issued a joint report in January. That was after Obama, despite having previously acknowledged that the Russian activity was inconsequential, suddenly made a great show of ordering an inquiry and issuing sanctions.

Consequently, if unmasking was relevant to the Russia investigation, *it would have been done by those three agencies*. And if it had been critical to know the identities of Americans caught up in other foreign intelligence efforts, the agencies that collect the information and conduct investigations would have unmasked it. Because they are the agencies that collect and refine intelligence "products" for the rest of the "intelligence community," they are responsible for any unmasking; and they do it under "minimization" standards that FBI Director James Comey, in recent congressional testimony, described as "obsessive" in their determination to protect the identities and privacy of Americans.

Understand: There would have been no *intelligence* need for Susan Rice to ask for identities to be unmasked. If there had been a real need to reveal the identities — an *intelligence need based on American interests* — the unmasking would have been done by the investigating agencies.

The national-security adviser is not an investigator. She is a White House staffer. The president's staff is a *consumer* of intelligence, not a generator or collector of it. If Susan Rice was unmasking Americans, it was not to fulfill an intelligence need based on American interests; it was to fulfill a *political desire based on Democratic-party interests*.

The FBI, CIA, and NSA generate or collect the intelligence in, essentially, three ways: conducting surveillance on suspected agents of foreign powers under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), and carrying out more-sweeping collections under two other authorities — a different provision of FISA, and a Reagan-era executive order that has been amended several times over the ensuing decades, EO 12,333.

As Director Comey explained, in answering questions posed by Representative Trey Gowdy (R., S.C.), those three agencies do collection, investigation, and analysis. In general, they handle any necessary unmasking — which, due to the aforementioned privacy obsessiveness, is extremely rare. Unlike Democratic-party operatives whose obsession is vanquishing Republicans, the three agencies have to be concerned about the privacy rights of Americans. If they're not, their legal authority to collect the intelligence — a vital national-security power — could be severely curtailed when it periodically comes up for review by Congress, as it will later this year.

Those three *collecting* agencies — FBI, CIA, and NSA — must be distinguished from other components of the government, such as the White House. Those other components, Comey elaborated, "are *consumers* of our products." That is, they do not collect raw intelligence and refine it into useful reports — i.e., reports that balance informational value and required privacy protections. They read those reports and make policy recommendations based on them. White House staffers are not supposed to be in the business of controlling the content of the reports; they merely act on the reports.

Thus, Comey added, these consumers "can ask the collectors to unmask." But the unmasking authority "resides with those who collected the information."

Of course, the consumer doing the asking in this case was not just any government official. We're talking about *Susan Rice*. This was *Obama's right hand* doing the asking. If she made an unmasking "request," do you suppose anyone at the FBI, CIA, or NSA was going to say no?

That brings us to three interesting points.

The first involves political intrusion into law enforcement — something that the White House is supposed to avoid. (You may remember that Democrats ran Bush attorney general Alberto Gonzales out of town over suspicions about it.) As I have noted repeatedly, in publishing the illegally leaked classified information about former national-security adviser Michael Flynn's communications with Russian

ambassador Sergey Kislyak, the *New York Times* informs us that "Obama advisers" and "Obama officials" were up to their eyeballs in the investigation:

Obama advisers heard separately from the F.B.I. about Mr. Flynn's conversation with Mr. Kislyak, whose calls were routinely monitored by American intelligence agencies that track Russian diplomats. The *Obama advisers* grew suspicious that perhaps there had been a secret deal between the incoming team and Moscow, which could violate the rarely enforced, two-century-old Logan Act barring private citizens from negotiating with foreign powers in disputes with the United States.

The *Obama officials* asked the F.B.I. if a quid pro quo had been discussed on the call, and the answer came back no, according to one of *the officials, who like others asked not to be named discussing delicate communications*. [Translation: "asked not to be named committing felony unauthorized disclosure of classified information."] The topic of sanctions came up, they were told, but there was no deal. [Emphasis added.]

It appears very likely that Susan Rice was involved in the unmasking of Michael Flynn. Was she also monitoring the FBI's investigation? Was she involved in the administration's consideration of (bogus) criminal charges against Flynn? With the subsequent decision to have the FBI interrogate Flynn (or "grill" him, as the *Times* put it)?

The second point is that, while not a pillar of rectitude, Ms. Rice is not an idiot. Besides being shrewd, she was a highly involved, highly informed consumer of intelligence, and a key Obama political collaborator. Unlike the casual reader, she would have known who the Trump-team players were without needing to have their identities unmasked. Do you really think her purpose in demanding that names be revealed was to enhance her understanding of intelligence about the activities and intentions of foreign targets? Seriously? I'm betting it was so that others down the dissemination chain could see the names of Trump associates — names the investigating agencies that originally collected the information had determined *not* to unmask.

Third, and finally, let's consider the dissemination chain Rice had in mind.

The most telling remark that former Obama deputy defense secretary Evelyn Farkas made in her now-infamous MSNBC interview was the throw-away line at the end: *"That's why you have all the leaking."*

Put this in context: Farkas had left the Obama administration in 2015, subsequently joining the presidential campaign of, yes, *Hillary Clinton* — Trump's opponent. She told MSNBC that she had been encouraging her former Obama-administration colleagues and members of Congress to seek "as much information as you can" from the intelligence community.

"That's why you have the leaking."

To summarize: At a high level, officials like Susan Rice had names unmasked that would not ordinarily be unmasked. That information was then being pushed widely throughout the intelligence community in unmasked form . . . particularly after Obama, toward the end of his presidency, suddenly — and seemingly apropos of nothing — changed the rules so that all of the intelligence agencies (not just the collecting agencies) could have access to raw intelligence information.

As we know, the community of intelligence agencies leaks like a sieve, and the more access there is to juicy information, the more leaks there are. Meanwhile, former Obama officials and Clinton-campaign advisers, like Farkas, were pushing to get the information transferred from the intelligence community to members of Congress, geometrically increasing the likelihood of intelligence leaks.

By the way, have you noticed that there have been lots of intelligence leaks in the press?

There's an old saying in the criminal law: The best evidence of a conspiracy is success.

The criminal law also has another good rule of thumb: Consciousness of guilt is best proved by *false exculpatory statements*. That's a genre in which Susan Rice has rich experience.

Two weeks ago, she was asked in an interview about allegations by House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes (R., Calif.) that the Obama administration had unmasked Trump-team members.

"I know nothing about this," Rice replied. "I was surprised to see reports from Chairman Nunes on that count today."

the Atlantic Susan Rice's Careful Dance on Trump Surveillance

David A. Graham

Former National Security Advisor Susan Rice told MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell Tuesday she did not spy on President Trump or members of his team for political purposes, and that she had not leaked information gleaned from intelligence reports about them.

But while she refused to confirm it directly, citing classified information, Rice seemed to imply she requested that members of the Trump team whose names were redacted in intelligence reports be "unmasked," or identified, as a report Monday from *Bloomberg View*'s Eli Lake asserted. The stories focus on "incidental collection," when an American is caught up in surveillance of a foreign target, in which case the American's name is redacted but can legally be revealed at the request of certain officials, including the national security adviser.

"There were occasions when I would receive a report in which a U.S. person was referred to, name not provided," Rice said. "Sometimes in that context in order to understand the significance of the report and assess its significance, it was necessary to request the information as to who that person was."

For example, Rice said, if a hypothetical report dealt with an American trying to sell bomb-making equipment to foreigners, she would want to know whether the American was a "kook" or a credible person, in which case the report would be taken more seriously. She said any unmasking request had to run through an established intelligence-community protocol. Rice also said she never requested reports, but sometimes asked for unmasking in reports sent to her by intelligence officials.

At one point in the interview, Mitchell seemed on the verge of asking Rice point-blank if she had requested unmasking of any Trump team officials, but then added, "in order to spy on them?"

"Absolutely not for any political purposes, to spy, expose, anything," Rice said, adding there was "no equivalence between unmasking and leaking."

She said she had not leaked any information about Michael Flynn, who succeeded her as national-security adviser before being forced to resign for lying to Vice President Mike Pence about his conversations with the Russian ambassador. "I leaked nothing to nobody, and never have, and never would," Rice said. She said she learned only through press reports that Flynn had been lobbying for the Turkish government without disclosing his activity. She would not say whether she had any suspicions about Flynn.

As for Trump's allegation he had been subject to surveillance, ordered by President Obama, prior to the election, Rice said, "There was no collection or surveillance on Trump Tower or Trump individuals, and by that I mean directed by the White House or targeted at Trump individuals."

Rice spoke to PBS's Judy Woodruff in March, and gave an answer that appears contradictory and misleading about any surveillance. Woodruff asked Rice about House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes's statements that Trump transition team members were caught up in incidental collection.

"I know nothing about this," Rice told Woodruff. "I was surprised to see accounts from Chairman Nunes on that today."

As Rice was speaking to MSNBC on Tuesday, Representative Adam Schiff, Nunes's Democratic counterpart on the House Intelligence Committee, announced the reports Nunes viewed would soon be made available to both the House and Senate intelligence committees.

On Tuesday, MSNBC's Mitchell noted that some Republicans were suggesting Rice be subpoenaed about collection of Trump officials. Rice declined to say whether she would be willing to testify, saying, "Let's see what comes."

Rice's repeated statements she could and would not reveal classified information point to the central ambiguity in this story. Over time, a very loose image has emerged of what might have been collected or might not have. But that image is severely constrained by the fact that most of the relevant information is classified, and Nunes himself has been accused of improperly revealing classified information. The low-information landscape has made for a fertile partisan battle, but makes it challenging to understand what

really happened and who is telling the truth.

It is not clear, for example, whether Trump officials' communications were incidentally collected through conversations with surveillance targets, or were simply mentioned in conversations that were collected. There's also no reliable information on how many times, and when, Rice requested unmasking of Trump officials, nor of whether other officials also requested unmasking.

Trespassing on Internet privacy: Our view

The Editorial Board

President Trump certainly has an odd idea of what it means to be a populist. Not only did he back a plan that would have stripped millions of people of their health insurance, he has undermined the notion that people might have some shred of privacy while on the Internet.

On Monday night, Trump quietly put his name to a bill stripping consumers of Internet privacy protections drafted by the Federal Communications Commission. The move, which breezed through the GOP-controlled Congress, thwarts an effort by the FCC and previous Congresses to give consumers more choice over how extensively they are tracked online and how this information is used.

It is hard to imagine anything more anti-populist than this measure. The law will allow large corporations to profit by pummeling people with advertisements. It will also increase the sense of millions of Americans, many of them Trump voters, that their lives are being influenced by forces beyond their control.

Perhaps nothing underscores these developments more than the glee with which the Data & Marketing Association greeted the law's passage. The group praised the move as beneficial to its members. It also asserted that consumers actually want to be tracked, so they will see ads that are "relevant" to their preferences and buying habits. The group even assigned a value — $1,200 per year, per consumer — for the privilege of being tracked.

There might well be some consumers who want to see relevant ads. And under the FCC's rules, they could have chosen to be tracked. The "opt in" policy that the FCC had proposed was, in fact, exactly the approach that would have served consumers well.

But most people we know do not want to be stalked around the Internet with sales pitches every time they make a purchase or conduct a search. Nor do they want to have to set up virtual private networks as a defensive measure, or worry about how else their data might be used.

Industry groups and consumer activists are engaged in a raging debate about whether existing law prevents service providers from selling data to third parties, such as potential employers or insurance companies.

To the extent there is wiggle room for service providers to sell data, the new law will only encourage them.

Not only does the law overturn specific FCC rules, it sends a broad anything-goes message from the powers that be in Washington.

To be sure, the FCC rules had their flaws. They set off a kind of turf war between the FCC and the Federal Trade Commission, the agency that normally handles privacy matters. And they would have applied only to service providers such as AT&T, Comcast and Verizon, and not to search engines, social media platforms and such.

Even so, the rules would have been a start. Their demise is the latest example of the Trump administration courting the vote of everyday Americans while selling them out to corporate interests. Perhaps that explains why the president did this particular signing with such little fanfare.

Opinion | No, Republicans didn't just strip away your Internet privacy rights

By Ajit Pai and Maureen Ohlhausen

April Fools' Day came early last week, as professional lobbyists lit a wildfire of misinformation about Congress's action — signed into law Monday by President Trump — to nullify the Federal Communications Commission's broadband privacy rules. So as the nation's chief communications regulator and the nation's chief privacy enforcer, we want to let the American people know what's really going on and how we will ensure that consumers' online privacy is protected.

Let's set the record straight: First, despite hyperventilating headlines, Internet service providers have never planned to sell your individual browsing history to third parties. That's simply not how online advertising works. And doing so would violate ISPs' privacy promises. Second, Congress's decision last week didn't remove existing privacy protections; it simply cleared the way for us to work together to reinstate a rational and effective system for protecting consumer privacy.

Both of us warned two years ago that the FCC's party-line vote to strip the Federal Trade Commission of its jurisdiction over Internet broadband providers was a mistake that would weaken Americans' online privacy. Up until that decision, the FTC was an effective cop on the privacy beat, using a consistent framework for protecting privacy and data security throughout the entire Internet ecosystem. Indeed, under that framework, the FTC carried out more than 150 enforcement actions, including actions against some of the nation's largest Internet companies.

But in 2015, the FCC decided to treat the Internet like a public utility, taking away the FTC's ability to police the privacy practices of broadband providers. This shifted responsibility from the agency with the most expertise handling online privacy (the FTC) to an agency with no real experience in the field (the FCC). As we feared, this 2015 decision has not turned out well for the American people.

During the Obama administration, the FTC concluded that "any privacy framework should be technology neutral" because "ISPs are just one type of large platform provider" and "operating systems and browsers may be in a position to track all, or virtually all, of a consumer's online activity to create highly detailed profiles." But the FCC didn't follow this guidance. Instead, it adopted rules that would have created a fractured privacy framework under which ISPs would have been subject to one standard and content providers would have been subject to another. The Obama FTC, in a unanimous bipartisan comment, criticized this approach as "not optimal." In Washington-speak, that's a major rebuke.

The FCC's regulations weren't about protecting consumers' privacy. They were about government picking winners and losers in the marketplace. If two online companies have access to the same data about your Internet usage, why should the federal government give one company greater leeway to use it than the other?

Some argue that Internet service providers should be treated differently because they have access to more of your personal information than companies such as Google and Facebook. But that's not true. As Peter Swire, President Bill Clinton's chief counselor for privacy and President Barack Obama's special assistant for economic policy, explained in a paper he co-wrote for Georgia Tech's Institute for Information Security and Privacy, "ISPs have neither comprehensive nor unique access to information about users' online activity. Rather, the most commercially valuable information about online users . . . is coming from other contexts," such as social-media interactions and search terms.

Others argue that ISPs should be treated differently because consumers face a unique lack of choice and competition in the broadband marketplace. But that claim doesn't hold up to scrutiny either. For example, according to one industry analysis, Google dominates desktop search with an estimated 81 percent market share (and 96 percent of the mobile search market), whereas Verizon, the largest mobile broadband provider, holds only an estimated 35 percent of its market.

As a result, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Congress decided to disapprove the FCC's unbalanced rules. Indeed, the FTC's criticism of the FCC's rules last year noted specifically that they "would not generally apply to other services

that collect and use significant amounts of consumer data."

Put simply, the Chicken Little-like reaction doesn't make any sense, particularly when compared with the virtual silence when the FCC stripped away existing privacy protections in 2015. But we understand that more needs to be done to protect online privacy. The American people deserve a comprehensive framework that will protect their privacy throughout the Internet. And that's why we'll be working together to restore the FTC's authority to police ISPs' privacy practices. We need to put the nation's most experienced and expert privacy cop back on the beat, and we need to end the uncertainty and confusion that was created in 2015 when the FCC intruded in this space.

In short, the Obama administration fractured our nation's online privacy law, and it is our job to fix it. We pledge to the American people that we will do just that.

Consumers will still have choices: Opposing view

Robert McDowell

Relax. Privacy protection laws are not going away. And it's still against the law for anyone to sell your most sensitive personal information to the highest bidder.

Saying otherwise makes for sensational headlines, but American consumers deserve better than fear-mongering. They deserve strong, consistent and sensible public policy that protects their privacy regardless of what type of Internet company possesses their data.

Most consumers are unaware that a 2015 Federal Communications Commission decision stripped the Federal Trade Commission's power to protect the privacy of customers of Internet service providers. To make matters worse, in 2016 the FCC imposed new, different privacy regulations only on ISPs, not other types of Internet companies.

How does that make sense? Do we really think it's good for consumers to allow Internet company A to use some of their data but not Internet company B, even with the same exact data? Or, what happens when consumers want to file a complaint: Do they contact the FTC or FCC?

In short, the FCC's privacy regime created more questions than it answered.

Under existing privacy laws, thousands of online companies — apps, search engines, websites — use consumer data each day, driving the digital economy. Moreover, almost every U.S. ISP has committed to a set of principles consistent with the FTC's effective and long-standing privacy rules.

Consumers will continue to have strong privacy protections. Providers will still inform their customers about their privacy policies and practices, and customers will continue to have choices about how providers use their data.

Those who argue that American consumers now have no online privacy protections are just plain wrong.

Even better, the chairs of the FCC and the FTC recently committed to create one set of strong and practical privacy rules that apply evenly across the entire Internet ecosystem. That's the smart public policy consumers deserve.

What's gotten into Chuck Schumer?

By Paul Callan

*(CNN)*What's gotten into Chuck Schumer? Throughout his Congressional career, the New York Democrat who's now the Senate minority leader has been a pragmatic liberal willing to work with colleagues on both sides of the legislative aisle.

On St. Patrick's Day, conservative Republican Congressman Peter King warmly introduced Schumer at New York's Friendly Sons of St. Patrick dinner as a fighter for New York on issues relating to homeland security.

King suggested that by the time Schumer finished his speech, many in the relatively conservative audience of 1,200 tuxedoed, mostly Irish-American men (and one woman: the Irish ambassador), would believe Sen. Schumer to be Irish.

After Schumer, whose ancestors came from Eastern Europe, quite far from the Emerald Isle, harvested warm laughter with self-deprecating humor and stories of his humble Brooklyn roots, King's remarks proved to be right on the mark.

Schumer's Gorsuch opposition strategy

Many in New York who have watched Schumer progress to his current position of power and influence are mystified that this pragmatic politician would lead a Supreme Court confirmation opposition battle that will most likely result in a loss and the destruction of the Senate's long-honored tradition of filibuster.

With a gusto matching Teddy Roosevelt's approach to San Juan Hill, the senator is rallying his Democratic troops to fight the Gorsuch nomination using the filibuster weapon, a weapon they are likely to need in future Supreme Court battles.

Republicans say their response will be to invoke the "nuclear option," a parliamentary maneuver utilized by former Democratic Senate Majority leader Harry Reid of Nevada to foil Republican efforts to block President Obama's nominees to the federal courts and other offices.

In November 2013, Reid and his Democratic allies held a majority in the Senate -- but not the three-fifths (60 votes) needed to close debate. Using a parliamentary maneuver that Republican Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi considered but abandoned, the Democrats proceeded by a simple majority vote to "blow up" the filibuster as it applied to nominations other than those to the Supreme Court.

With the same majority, they proceeded to approve President Obama's log-jammed nominees. They did this despite ominous warnings that the chickens would come home to roost if the Republicans ever achieved a Senate majority because the same maneuver could also be used against a Democratic minority.

Gorsuch widely seen as well qualified

The prophecy will come true if, as expected, the Gorsuch nomination is approved later this week by a slim majority vote of the Senate. Gorsuch is widely viewed as an exceptionally bright and well qualified nominee to fill the seat of the now deceased conservative justice, Antonin Scalia.

Though Democrats are claiming that he is "out of the mainstream," Gorsuch has routinely joined his liberal judicial colleagues in unanimous decisions where he says the law is clear. He is a self-described textualist with an extensive judicial history of conservative decisions but none that could be legitimately described as "nutty" or "extreme."

Like most judges, he makes occasional errors but nothing suggests a pattern of impropriety. Perhaps most importantly, his confirmation will not alter the current ideological composition of the court since he is a conservative replacing a conservative.

Why Schumer is provoking the nuclear option

The real mystery is why Schumer would provoke the nuclear option, forfeiting the remaining shreds of the filibuster in a fight he likely cannot win. He will really need the filibuster on the next nomination, which may involve filling the seat of a retiring liberal like Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg or the court's swing vote, Justice Anthony Kennedy.

Schumer has not lost his mind or his pragmatic streak.

Nor is he folding under pressure from the Democrats' "progressive" left wing. The Senate majority leader is preparing for the midterm elections in November of 2018, when 34 Senate seats are up for grabs.

In the fallout from the nuclear option and the Gorsuch confirmation, the strategic Schumer will criss-cross the country raising barrels of cash by reminding the Democratic base that without the protection of the filibuster, the party will be defenseless against the Republican Senate majority.

He will raise the specter of the evil Donald Trump packing the court with heartless conservatives who

will crush progressive initiatives for the next 20 years. He will urge the wealthiest members of the Democratic base to give early and give often to avoid Trump Armageddon.

In the end, if Schumer plays the nuclear option correctly, he may turn potential disaster into his opportunity to become the most powerful and influential Senate majority leader since Lyndon Johnson.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

The Dumbest Filibuster

Throughout its history, the United States Senate has experienced disgraceful filibusters (Strom Thurmond against the 1957 Civil Rights Act), entertaining filibusters (Huey Long in 1935 reciting a fried-oyster recipe) and symbolic filibusters (Rand Paul making a point about drone strikes in 2013). But the filibuster that Chuck Schumer is about to undertake against Judge Neil Gorsuch's nomination to the Supreme Court is perhaps the institution's dumbest.

It won't block Gorsuch, won't establish any important jurisprudential principle, and won't advance Democratic strategic goals — indeed the opposite. A Gorsuch filibuster would be an act of a sheer partisan pique against the wrong target, with the wrong method, at the wrong time.

The Democratic effort to portray Judge Gorsuch as out of the mainstream has fallen flat. He has the support of President Barack Obama's former solicitor general Neal Katyal. He got the American Bar Association's highest rating. He's been endorsed by *USA Today*. He will receive the votes of at least three Democratic senators. Some radical.

From the moment of his announcement by President Donald Trump to the very last question at his confirmation hearings, Gorsuch has been an exemplary performer, whose deep knowledge has been matched by his winning temperament. The attack on him as an enemy of the little man is based on a few decisions where he clearly followed the law, even though it resulted in an unsympathetic outcome.

Much has been made of a case involving a driver for TransAm Trucking who had pulled over on the side of the road in freezing temperatures and, fearing for his safety, drove off in defiance of a direct order of a supervisor. Days later, he was fired. Alphonse Maddin claimed that the company had violated a whistleblower protection under federal law. In a dissent from the decision of the Tenth Circuit, Gorsuch carefully argued that the statute's protections didn't apply to the trucker, although he stipulated that "it might be fair to ask whether TransAm's decision was a wise or kind one."

If Schumer upholds the filibuster against Gorsuch — and it looks like he has the votes — Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell will almost certainly exercise the so-called nuclear option eliminating the filibuster for Supreme Court nominations. Schumer portrays this as an act of procedural vandalism against the Senate, although he has no standing as vindicator of Senate tradition.

First, a partisan filibuster against a Supreme Court nominee is unprecedented (Lyndon Johnson's nominee for chief justice, Abe Fortas, was successfully filibustered by a bipartisan coalition). Second, Democrats already nuked the filibuster for other nominations besides the Supreme Court back in 2013, with Chuck Schumer's support at the time. Finally, Democrats talked openly about how they'd use the nuclear option if Republicans filibustered a Supreme Court nomination from a prospective President Hillary Clinton.

In short, Democrats are departing from the Senate's longtime practices and excoriating the GOP for responding with a tactic that Democrats themselves pioneered. Process questions are always a festival for partisan hypocrisy. This is still a bit much. Regardless, Ed Whelan of the Ethics and Public Policy Center notes that there isn't much of a rationale for keeping the filibuster for Supreme Court nominees if it has already been eliminated for all other nominations.

Putting all this aside, a Gorsuch filibuster doesn't even serve Schumer's narrow interests, besides placating the left-wing #resistance to Trump that is demanding it. It would be shrewder for Schumer to keep his options open for a future nominee. If there's another vacancy, perhaps Trump will nominate a lemon, or the Republicans won't be so united, or the higher stakes of a conservative nominee replacing a liberal justice will create a different political environment. In these circumstances, it's possible to imagine Democrats filibustering and Republicans not managing to stick together to exercise the nuclear option.

Maybe, but now we may never know. Because Chuck Schumer is about to make Senate history — for astonishing shortsightedness.

the Atlantic

The 'Nuclear Option' Won't Dramatically Change the Senate

Clare Foran

The Senate is headed toward a showdown when President Trump's Supreme Court nominee comes up for a final confirmation vote.

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is expected to invoke the so-called "nuclear option," changing Senate rules so that Republicans can approve the nomination of Neil Gorsuch by a simple majority vote. The looming clash is the latest evidence that Congress has become increasingly divided along party lines, and threatens to pave the way for presidents to nominate ever-more partisan judges to the Supreme Court. Even so, implementing the tactic won't dramatically alter the way the Senate operates on its own.

The Senate already requires only a simple majority to confirm most presidential appointments. That has been the case since 2013 when Democrats controlled the chamber and then-Majority Leader Harry Reid triggered the nuclear option. At the time, the rules change spared Supreme Court nominations, an exception that McConnell is now poised to do away with it. But ending that exception now still only represents an incremental change in the way the upper chamber has operated in recent years.

"The idea that this will forever change the Senate is nonsense," said Josh Chafetz, a law professor at Cornell University, citing the simple majority threshold for other judges and presidential appointees in place for the past four years.

A key distinction between the Senate and the House of Representatives is that any senator can assert themselves and threaten to prolong debate by initiating a filibuster, which requires 60 votes to overcome. That ensures that the minority party has more power, and is one of the reasons why, at least in theory, the Senate is supposed to function as a more deliberative body.

CNN's Chris Cillizza warns that if the Senate invokes the nuclear option on Supreme Court nominees, "the idea that the Senate is fundamentally different in its operations than the House" will be "gone, or at least badly damaged." Instead, Cillizza argues the Senate "will be a place where majority makes might, and where the idea of reaching across the aisle is essentially a non-starter."

But ending the filibuster for high court nominations won't do away with all, or even the most significant, guardrails that foster deliberation and ensure that minority voices have a say in the Senate. As *Vox* notes: "If the nuclear option is used this week, the change would only apply to Supreme Court nominations. It will *not* be used to eliminate the filibuster for legislation. No one is seriously discussing that at this point."

"Concerns that a nuclear option on the Gorsuch nomination will make the Senate become like the House, in which the majority rules, are really overblown," said Gregory Koger, a political science professor at the University of Miami and author of *Filibustering: A Political History of Obstruction in the House and Senate*. "As long as the ability to filibuster legislation is maintained, that's the important thing for the soul of the Senate as a place where ideas are thought out, moderated, and debated."

"This is more like one extra step on a ladder we've been climbing for a while now."

Senate Republicans have a number of incentives to preserve the filibuster for debating policy and considering legislation. To start, Republicans will one day be in the minority again, and won't want to eliminate a tactic that can be used by the minority party to stall, or encourage amendments to, legislation. Beyond that, senators who feel squeamish about any aspects of Trump's legislative agenda likely won't want the responsibility that would come with a newly-empowered majority in the

Senate. If the filibuster didn't exist for legislation, Republicans might be able to more easily advance legislation along party lines, but that would also make it more likely that they alone would shoulder the blame for any fallout.

The Supreme Court nomination may also seem like a higher stake scenario to McConnell, who took the unprecedented step of supporting a blockade on consideration of President Obama's pick for the same seat, Merrick Garland, last year in the hopes of keeping it open for a Republican president to fill. The relative infrequency with which Supreme Court nominations come up for consideration in the Senate compared to legislation may make the majority party hesitate to implement the nuclear option beyond the high court nomination process.

Even in light of all that, invoking the nuclear option to end the filibuster for Supreme Court nominations remains a significant, and historic, decision. It would mark both a change in Senate rules, and an escalation of partisanship. It's difficult to fully predict the potential consequences of such a move, but confrontational tactics by one political party are likely to be met with retaliation by the other. The decision could also have a profound impact on the Court itself, especially since it creates a powerful incentive for presidents to nominate more partisan judges when their party controls the Senate.

"It's an important indicator of how partisan we've gotten, even in the Senate," said Burdett Loomis, a political science professor at the University of Kansas. "But the Senate has already been highly polarized for a while now. This is more like one extra step on a ladder we've been climbing for a while now, than some kind of nuclear bomb that will fundamentally change the Senate."

The Supreme Court as Partisan Tool

The Editorial Board

Even though the Supreme Court has been an active player in American politics — Bush v. Gore leaps quickly to mind — the process of choosing its members has been seen as mattering more than the partisan combat in Congress. With rare exceptions, nominees to the court have been largely insulated from the escalating political warfare over the judiciary, and have been approved.

Justice Antonin Scalia, a conservative standard-bearer, was confirmed with 98 votes. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a liberal icon, got 96. Even Clarence Thomas, whose confirmation hearings marked a flash point in sexual and racial politics, drew no filibuster.

Now, however, partly as a result of its own actions, but more important as a result of increasing polarization in Washington and the nation as a whole, the court is devolving into a nakedly partisan tool. How did this happen? Some of the blame rests with the Democrats. Many of them over the years have played to their base by casting cost-free votes against Republican nominees. Republicans like to say that Democrats' 1987 blocking of Robert Bork marked the beginning of the politicization of Supreme Court nominations, but Democrats did give Mr. Bork a vote. The polarization of the court itself, with a pronounced rightward swing among its conservatives, has also helped turn confirmations into political battles.

But the lion's share of the blame now belongs to one man — Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader. In blocking even a hearing for Judge Merrick Garland, President Barack Obama's moderate and eminently qualified candidate, as well as dozens of Obama nominees for other positions, he deeply degraded the nominating process. There was a time when the leaders of the Senate were responsible stewards of republican traditions and ideals. Not Mr. McConnell, whose determination to steamroll and humiliate political opponents exceeds any other consideration.

Which brings us — and the nation — to the unfolding mess in the Senate over President Trump's nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch. On Monday, Senate Democrats secured the votes needed to filibuster Judge Gorsuch's nomination, a procedural mechanism the Senate minority party can use to stall or block a vote by the majority. Whether Democrats will or will not remains to be seen. But many of them are still furious, and rightly so, that Mr. McConnell and the Republicans stole the seat after Justice Scalia died by denying Judge Garland a vote for eight months.

For their part, the Republicans, who want to confirm Judge Gorsuch this week, need 60 votes to overcome the filibuster. They're a few votes short, so they have threatened a new weapon: using their 52-vote majority to eliminate the filibuster, allowing them to confirm Judge Gorsuch with a simple majority, "up or down" vote. Such a move — known as the nuclear option — would end the filibuster not just for Judge Gorsuch's confirmation, but for all Supreme Court nominees. It would also mean that the only Senate votes still subject to the filibuster rule would be on legislation.

That leaves it to Democrats to consider whether the filibuster is worth saving. Whether legitimately outraged at Mr. McConnell's treatment of the Garland nomination or opposed to Judge Gorsuch on the merits, if they lose the filibuster now — as they will — then it is not available to use against another Trump nominee, who may be objectionable not only to Democrats but to a few Republicans, as well. Yes, the Republicans could possibly strip the filibuster away the next time, too. But surely having some slight chance of being able to deploy it to stop a renegade justice is better than having no chance at all. And the danger some Democrats appear to fear of seeming naïve by clinging to a goal of bipartisan support for the court seems less acute than the certainty of their appearing ineffectual in a futile effort to block the Gorsuch appointment.

What matters, of course, is not some arcane voting process in the Senate. What matters is that Americans believe they are governed by law, not by whatever political party manages to stack the Supreme Court. That is what Mitch McConnell has driven the Senate to put at risk — a very great risk indeed — and it may, in the end, fall to the court itself to find a way to rise above the steadily encroaching tide of factionalism.

Donald Trump's Presidency Is an Assault on Women

Emily Tamkin

Don't be fooled by talk of women's empowerment. His white, male, chauvinistic administration is setting equality back decades — and making the world a more dangerous place.

There is no shortage of appalling imagery from the Trump White House when it comes to gender diversity and women's issues, from this picture of six white, male members of President Donald Trump's team signing the Global Gag Rule to withhold federal funds from organizations that even discuss abortion with patients, to images like this one, in which Vice President Mike Pence and a room full of male legislators discuss defunding maternity care under the proposed (and now dead) Republican health care act. Both Trump and Ivanka's stunningly tone-deaf attempts to hold female-focused events (the president literally asked his audience last week whether they'd heard of Susan B. Anthony) only underscore the administration's failure thus far to address — or even to simply avoid steamrolling — the interests of women. But while these gaffes are alarming from a feminist standpoint, they also reflect a broader failure to ensure the representation of women in senior government posts and to recognize women's critical role in the political and economic stability of the United States. In this, they signify a more worrisome turn toward less effective government and a darker future for Americans.

As this sad story unfolds in Washington, the debate over the treatment of women in Silicon Valley has neared fever pitch (again). Susan Fowler's exposé of sexual harassment and poor management at Uber shocked few with experience in the industry, and was quickly followed by Liza Mundy's damning deep dive into the treatment of women in tech in the cover story for this month's *Atlantic*. It's far from the first sector to come under fire for its exclusion of women. For decades, companies have enlisted consulting firms, psychologists, and sensitivity

trainers to make sure their workforces reflect a more equitable gender balance. But it is hard to ignore the contrast between the likes of Google and Twitter scrambling to hire female engineers and create cultures of inclusion and the U.S. federal government's apparent tack in the other direction, with the latter showing little concern for what will be far-reaching and hard-to-reverse negative consequences.

The right-wing narrative voiced by the likes of radio conspiracy theorist

Alex Jones would have you believe the push for gender equality in the workplace is another symptom of a politically correct culture run amok

Alex Jones would have you believe the push for gender equality in the workplace is another symptom of a politically correct culture run amok, in which qualified male candidates are passed over for less capable female ones and productivity is reduced to accommodate working mothers who suck up resources with maternity leave and flexible schedules. But the industries that continue to pursue gender diversity are not, by and large, doing so to meet popular expectations or to project feel-good optics. Rather, they have come to recognize that gender balance and other forms of diversity have a perceivable positive impact on business outcomes.

There is every reason to believe that this concept, confirmed by dozens of studies, applies to the business of government as well, and that having equal, or at least larger, numbers of women within the decision-making apparatus in Washington will improve domestic and foreign policy. With alarming questions around the Trump administration's ties to Russia and white supremacist groups dominating headlines and political agendas, it's tempting to place gender — a "soft" issue in comparison — at the bottom of a long list of grievances. But the overwhelmingly male leadership structure Trump is putting in place — with only an estimated 27 percent of appointments of women thus far, compared with 43 percent under President Barack Obama — also deserves attention.

There are various theories as to why gender diversity enhances decision-making and management, some more controversial than others. Among certain feminists and post-feminists one would be wise to limit one's speculation as to whether women make better diplomats, or are more likely to push for cooperation over conflict. (While there is some evidence to support these claims, there are plenty of counter-examples as well. Hillary Clinton, Samantha Powers, and Susan Rice's support for Obama's intervention in Libya comes to mind.)

In truth, we don't know exactly why gender balance, and specifically representation of women above a 30 percent threshold within a group, is so beneficial.

There is obvious math to support the contention that drawing from 100 percent of a talent pool will yield better results than drawing from only half.

There is obvious math to support the contention that drawing from 100 percent of a talent pool will yield better results than drawing from only half. It also stands to reason that a more diverse group will bring a broader range of perspectives to a problem set, leading to more rigorous thinking and a broader range of solutions. But setting aside the why, data clearly show that gender diversity leads to greater innovation, reduced fraud, and improved retention rates across organizations. Each of these would serve the U.S. government well.

These were among the factors that led the George W. Bush administration to integrate aspects of gender equality into its foreign policy. In the early 2000s, Bush, working closely with his wife, Laura, adopted women's rights as part of his neoconservative platform of democratization and human rights, arguing that the representation of women in governments in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the promotion of women's rights more generally, was morally incumbent on the United States and an important driver of peace and stability. (Whether one believes that administration's policies actually advanced women's rights is, of course, a different question.)

Under Obama, Secretary Clinton articulated a similar but more emphatic philosophy in what became known as "the Hillary doctrine," by which, to quote Clinton herself, "the subjugation of women is a threat to the common security of our world and to the national security of our country." Clinton's philosophy was based on the idea, supported by extensive research, that countries with higher rates of female education and literacy, lower maternal death rates, and greater protections against domestic violence and sexual assault are less likely to engage in violent conflict and have higher gross domestic products and other economic indicators. Gender inequality, on the other hand, is highly correlated with military conflict, human rights abuses, and economic decay. Clinton and Obama correspondingly increased the budget of the Office of Global Women's Issues (formerly the Office of International Women's Issues) tenfold and created a number of new councils and positions dedicated to the promotion of women's rights. (Requests from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's transition team for detailed information on the Office of Global Women's Issues and other gender-focused programming at State rang alarm bells back in December as to its future, but thus far the office remains in place).

Unlike the management studies regarding gender-diverse corporate boards and management teams, the connection between the societal oppression of women and suboptimal economic and security outcomes has primarily been applied to U.S. *foreign* policy, i.e., to whether and to what extent Washington should be spending money on promoting the rights of women abroad. But in the era of Trump, one can imagine the dangers of poor gender balance at the cabinet or political-appointee level being mirrored by a broader decline in the status of women, a development that, again, research has shown to have a detrimental effect on development and security.

It is easy to see how this could unfold and become mutually reinforcing. A leadership cadre with fewer women (not to mention socially conservative men) is less likely to approve legislation or implement policies that support and empower women at home or abroad, and a society in which women are discriminated against is less likely to promote women to positions of power.

Compounding the trickle-down effects of a dearth of female leadership in the Trump administration is the tone set by the commander in chief.

Compounding the trickle-down effects of a dearth of female leadership in the Trump administration is the tone set by the commander in chief. Utterances like the infamous "Grab 'em by the pussy," spoken offhandedly or otherwise, can only undermine the progress and status of women in the United States, with all the negative effects that result. (Trump's more recent statements that his cabinet is "full of women" — not to mention *Breitbart News*' recent piece, "In Trump's NSC, Women Run the Show" — are deeply unconvincing counterpoints in their tokenism and obvious misrepresentation of the true distribution of power in the White House.)

This toxic combination will have impacts far beyond those few women who serve in Trump's government, or even women more generally, and are likely to encompass downward trends in productivity, economic growth, and even a greater likelihood of violent conflict abroad for the United States. This is not to mention the prospects for little girls growing up with a dearth of female role models in government and fewer opportunities by way of reduced maternity care, less access to reproductive health services, and growing acceptance of misogyny and sexual harassment in American society. These girls will, in turn, shape these factors for decades to come. (As the mother of a girl born between Trump's election and inauguration, this one hits particularly close to home.) One can only hope that they will see the Trump administration's attitude toward women as something to rebel against — as inspiration for greater political involvement and activism — setting the stage for a longer-term shift toward a gender equality that will serve the interests not just of women, but of the United States and the world with which it must continue to coexist.

Los Angeles Times

Trump's War on Journalism

By The Times Editorial Board

In Donald Trump's America, the mere act of reporting news unflattering to the president is held up as evidence of bias. Journalists are slandered as "enemies of the people."

Facts that contradict Trump's version of reality are dismissed as "fake news." Reporters and their news organizations are "pathetic," "very dishonest," "failing," and even, in one memorable turn of phrase, "a pile of garbage."

Trump is, of course, not the first American president to whine about the news media or try to influence coverage. President George W. Bush saw the press as elitist and "slick." President Obama's press operation tried to exclude Fox News reporters from interviews, blocked many officials from talking to journalists and, most troubling, prosecuted more national security whistle-blowers and leakers than all previous presidents combined.

But Trump being Trump, he has escalated the traditionally adversarial relationship in demagogic and potentially dangerous ways.

Most presidents, irritated as they may have been, have continued to acknowledge — at least publicly — that an independent press plays an essential role in American democracy. They've recognized that while no news organization is perfect, honest reporting holds leaders and institutions accountable; that's why a free press was singled out for protection in the 1st Amendment and why outspoken, unfettered journalism is considered a hallmark of a free country.

Trump doesn't seem to buy it. On his very first day in office, he called journalists "among the most dishonest human beings on earth."

Since then he has regularly condemned legitimate reporting as "fake news." His administration has blocked mainstream news organizations, including The Times, from briefings and his secretary of State chose to travel to Asia without taking the press corps, breaking a longtime tradition.

" He apparently hopes to discredit, disrupt or bully into silence anyone who challenges his version of reality. "

This may seem like bizarre behavior from a man who consumes the news in print and on television so voraciously and who is in many ways a *product* of the media. He comes from reality TV, from talk radio with Howard Stern, from the gossip pages of the New York City tabloids, for whose columnists he was both a regular subject and a regular source.

But Trump's strategy is pretty clear: By branding reporters as liars, he apparently hopes to discredit, disrupt or bully into silence anyone who challenges his version of reality. By undermining trust in news organizations and delegitimizing journalism and muddling the facts so that Americans no longer know who to believe, he can deny and distract and help push his administration's far-fetched storyline.

It's a cynical strategy, with some creepy overtones. For instance, when he calls journalists "enemies of the people," Trump (whether he knows it or not) echoes Josef Stalin and other despots.

But it's an effective strategy. Such attacks are politically expedient at a moment when trust in the news media is as low as it's ever been, according to Gallup. And they're especially resonant with Trump's supporters, many of whom see journalists as part of the swamp that needs to be drained.

Of course, we're not perfect. Some readers find news organizations too cynical; others say we're too elitist. Some say we downplay important stories, or miss them altogether. Conservatives often perceive an unshakable liberal bias in the media (while critics on the left see big, corporate-owned media institutions like The Times as hopelessly centrist).

" The news media remain an essential component in the democratic process and should not be undermined by the president. "

To do the best possible job, and to hold the confidence of the public in turbulent times, requires constant self-examination and evolution. Soul-searching moments — such as those that occurred after the New York Times was criticized for its coverage of the Bush administration and the Iraq war or, more recently, when the media failed to take Trump's candidacy seriously enough in the early days of his campaign — can help us do a better job for readers. Even if we are not faultless, the news media remain an essential component in the democratic process and should not be undermined by the president.

Some critics have argued that if Trump is going to treat the news media like the "opposition party" (a phrase his senior aide Steve Bannon has used), then journalists should start acting like opponents too. But that would be a mistake. The role of an institution like the Los Angeles Times (or the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal or CNN) is to be independent and aggressive in pursuit of the truth — not to take sides. The editorial pages are the exception: Here we can and should express our opinions about Trump. But the news pages, which operate separately, should report intensively without prejudice, partiality or partisanship.

Given the very real dangers posed by this administration, we should be indefatigable in covering Trump, but shouldn't let his bullying attitude persuade us to be anything other than objective, fair, open-minded and dogged.

The fundamentals of journalism are more important than ever. With the president of the United States launching a direct assault on the integrity of the mainstream media, news organizations, including The Times, must be courageous in our reporting and resolute in our pursuit of the truth.

Los Angeles Times

Trump's Authoritarian Vision

By The Times Editorial Board

Standing before the cheering throngs at the Republican National Convention last summer, Donald Trump bemoaned how special interests had rigged the country's politics and its economy, leaving Americans victimized by unfair trade deals, incompetent bureaucrats and spineless leaders.

He swooped into politics, he declared, to subvert the powerful and rescue those who cannot defend themselves. "Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why I alone can fix it."

To Trump's faithful, those words were a rallying cry. But his critics heard something far more menacing in them: a dangerously authoritarian vision of the presidency — one that would crop up time and again as he talked about overruling generals, disregarding international law, ordering soldiers to commit war crimes, jailing his opponent.

Trump has no experience in politics; he's never previously run for office or held a government position. So perhaps he was unaware that one of the hallmarks of the American system of government is that the president's power to "fix" things unilaterally is constrained by an array of strong institutions — including the courts, the media, the permanent federal bureaucracy and Congress. Combined, they provide an essential defense against an imperial presidency.

Yet in his first weeks at the White House, President Trump has already sought to undermine many of those institutions. Those that have displayed the temerity to throw some hurdle in the way of a Trump objective have quickly felt the heat.

Consider Trump's feud with the courts.

He has repeatedly questioned the impartiality and the motives of judges. For example, he attacked the jurists who ruled against his order excluding travelers from seven majority Muslim nations, calling one a "so-called judge" and later tweeting:

Just cannot believe a judge would put our country in such peril. If something happens blame him and court system. People pouring in. Bad!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) February 5, 2017

It's nothing new for presidents to disagree with court decisions. But Trump's direct, personal attacks on judges' integrity and on the legitimacy of the judicial system itself — and his irresponsible suggestion that the judiciary should be blamed for future terrorist attacks — go farther. They aim to undermine public faith in the third branch of government.

The courts are the last line of defense for the Constitution and the rule of law; that's what makes them such a powerful buffer against an authoritarian leader. The president of the United States should understand that and respect it.

Other institutions under attack include:

1**The electoral process.** Faced with certified election results showing that Hillary Clinton outpolled him by nearly 3 million votes, Trump repeated the unsubstantiated — and likely crackpot — assertion that Clinton's supporters had duped local polling places with millions of fraudulent votes. In a democracy, the right to vote is the one check that the people themselves hold against their leaders; sowing distrust in elections is the kind of thing leaders do when they don't want their power checked.

2**The intelligence community.** After reports emerged that the Central Intelligence Agency believed Russia had tried to help Trump win, the president-elect's transition team responded: "These are the same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction." It was a snarky, dismissive, undermining response — and the administration has continued to belittle the intelligence

community and question its motives since then, while also leaking stories about possibly paring and restructuring its ranks. It is bizarre to watch Trump continue to tussle publicly with this particular part of the government, whose leaders he himself has appointed, as if he were still an outsider candidate raging against the machine. It's unnerving too, given the intelligence services' crucial role in protecting the country against hidden risks, assisting the U.S. military and helping inform Trump's decisions.

3**The media.** Trump has blistered the mainstream media for reporting that has cast him in a poor light, saying outlets concocted narratives based on nonexistent anonymous sources. In February he said that the "fake news" media will "never represent the people," adding ominously: "And we're going to do something about it." His goal seems to be to defang the media watchdog by making the public doubt any coverage that accuses Trump of blundering or abusing his power.

4**Federal agencies.** In addition to calling for agency budgets to be chopped by up to 30%, Trump appointed a string of Cabinet secretaries who were hostile to much of their agencies' missions and the laws they're responsible for enforcing. He has also proposed deep cuts in federal research programs, particularly in those related to climate change. It's easier to argue that climate change isn't real when you're no longer collecting the data that documents it.

In a way, Trump represents a culmination of trends that have been years in the making.

Conservative talk radio hosts have long blasted federal judges as "activists" and regulators as meddlers in the economy, while advancing the myth of rampant election fraud. And gridlock in Washington has led previous presidents to try new ways to circumvent the checks on their power — witness President George W. Bush's use of signing statements to invalidate parts of bills Congress passed, and President Obama's aggressive use of executive orders when lawmakers balked at his proposals.

What's uniquely threatening about Trump's approach, though, is how many fronts he's opened in this struggle for power and the vehemence with which he seeks to undermine the institutions that don't go along.

It's one thing to complain about a judicial decision or to argue for less regulation, but to the extent that Trump weakens public trust in essential institutions like the courts and the media, he undermines faith in democracy and in the system and processes that make it work.

" He sees himself as not merely a force for change, but as a wrecking ball. "

Trump betrays no sense for the president's place among the myriad of institutions in the continuum of governance. He seems willing to violate long-established political norms without a second thought, and he cavalierly rejects the civility and deference that allow the system to run smoothly. He sees himself as not merely a force for change, but as a wrecking ball.

Will Congress act as a check on Trump's worst impulses as he moves forward? One test is the House and Senate intelligence committees' investigation into Russia's meddling in the presidential election; lawmakers need to muster the courage to follow the trail wherever it leads. Can the courts stand up to Trump? Already, several federal judges have issued rulings against the president's travel ban. And although Trump has railed against the decisions, he has obeyed them.

None of these institutions are eager to cede authority to the White House and they won't do so without a fight. It would be unrealistic to suggest that America's most basic democratic institutions are in imminent jeopardy.

But we should not view them as invulnerable either. Remember that Trump's verbal assaults are directed at the public, and are designed to chip away at people's confidence in these institutions and deprive them of their validity. When a dispute arises, whose actions are you going to consider legitimate? Whom are you going to trust? That's why the public has to be wary of Trump's attacks on the courts, the "deep state," the "swamp." We can't afford to be talked into losing our faith in the forces that protect us from an imperial presidency.

THE DAILY BEAST

Too Many Donald Trump Disasters to Count

Michael Tomasky

Any one of these would be a Benghazi-level disaster for a president who hadn't won the office by defining disgusting down.

It happened again this week. In fact it happens nearly every day, and it's one of the most infuriating things about this infuriating era.

On Monday, three stories came out that under any other president, certainly under Barack Obama, would have been three-day mini-scandals—at least. But under Trump, they're either so dwarfed by the running narratives (Russia; shambolic White House; tweets) or so unsurprising coming from him that it's hard not to just shake our heads and move on.

These little scandals drive home to me what may be the single starkest lesson of these first 70-whatever days of Trump: that the right-wing media has enormous agenda-setting power in this country.

Item one: Trump welcomes to the White House one of the biggest human-rights abusers in the world and says he's done a "fantastic job." Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi has put tens of thousands of people in prison. Whatever Egypt was under Mubarak and then under Morsi, which was bad enough, it's now worse.

Now, I'm not going to get on too high a horse here. Presidents from both parties have tolerated Egyptian authoritarianism for decades, and while Obama did suspend military aid to the country for a time after al-Sisi overthrew Morsi, it was restored in 2015. So no American president has exactly come down hard on Egypt.

But inviting a thug like that to the Oval Office, and praising him to the stars, is sending a signal. Remember the circumstances under which al-Sisi gained power. There was the initial uprising against Mubarak in Tahrir Square. Out he went. There were actual elections, and in came Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. Then the people said, "No, this is not what we had in mind," and they gathered in Tahrir Square again. In other words, the people of Egypt were exercising what meager power they had to say, "We are desperate for reform and real democracy." And then in comes this guy to pulverize it.

Item two: The Forward reveals that Sebastian Gorka, Trump's chief counterterrorism adviser, once praised a very far-right—and anti-Semitic—Hungarian militia. I won't dive too deep on the details here; you should read them from the reporter who unearthed them, Lili Bayer. A little morsel: One captain in the militia referred to Jews as "Zionist rats" and "locusts." This is far from being Gorka's first controversy.

Item three: Records released over the weekend and first spotted by Pro Publica showed that Trump can pull money out of his businesses any time he wants—with zero public disclosure. A "Trust Certification Change" was made to the documents governing the status of Trump's finances on Feb. 10, after he took office, stipulating that the trust "shall distribute net income or principal to Donald J. Trump at his request." He owns more than 400 businesses, and according to Pro Publica, Trump can take profits or *the businesses themselves* anytime he pleases. Imagine the potential for corruption that sets up.

In the pre-Trump world, any of these three would have ignited huge fireworks.

Imagine that Obama had hosted in the Oval Office a left-leaning dictator, say Hugo Chavez or his successor, Nicolas Maduro, of Venezuela. Obama did in fact meet Chavez once, but not in the Oval Office. It was at a Summit of the Americas in Trinidad. Obama shook Chavez's hand and the right wing tore into him for days.

Now imagine that Obama's chief counterterrorism adviser had far-left associations. Say he'd been photographed wearing a hammer and sickle button, as Gorka was wearing a medal associated with Hungarian Nazi collaborators. That person would have been out of the job two scandals ago.

And finally, imagine that Obama had done something squirrely about his personal finances just three weeks after taking office. The ideas that Obama was personally corrupt and might be using the presidency for personal gain—for starters—would have taken root immediately.

Why? Rush Limbaugh and Alex Jones and Breitbart and The Blaze and all their numerous imitators across the web and the AM radio dial would instantly have pounced and started ranting. And then Fox would have picked it up. Limbaugh et al. would say absolutely anything, without regard to factual truth, which is how those myths about Obama attending a madrassa and all those things got started. Fox had to play it

a little bit straighter, but the message was basically the same.

So when some bit of news came out about Obama—for instance, that he went to school in Indonesia when he was a little child—it took only a few creative turns of the screw for the school to become a madrassa. And while they may not have Obama to kick around anymore, the pattern is still the same, as we're seeing now with this story on Susan Rice, who is established to have done absolutely nothing wrong but now has the banshees screaming police state (and who is herself here the victim of a leak seemingly solely intended to smear her and drag her through the mud for a few days).

The left has no remotely equivalent attack machinery. It doesn't exist because there's no market for it. It wouldn't work. Liberals just don't have the same hunger for red meat. They have *a* hunger for it, but not the same hunger, not anywhere near.

End result? Obama ends up ensnared in all kinds of phony scandals that don't really exist. Poor Shirley Sherrod, a totally blameless woman, loses her Agriculture Department job after Andrew Breitbart lies about her and right goes into hysterics about her alleged (but in fact nonexistent) reverse racism. Sebastian Gorka, a man who praised a far-right and anti-Semitic militia—and it doesn't seem like anyone doctored that tape—continues to report to work.

The Trump administration already has racked up so many scandals, failures, and sleazy deals that I guess it's inevitable that some of them slip by. But just keep this propaganda imbalance in your mind. It explains why these near-daily controversies just fade away. Imagine where he'd be in the polls if all of these got the attention they deserve!

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

The President is this Presidency's Worst Enemy

The conservative commentariat is full of suggestions these days for how Donald Trump can salvage his first 100 days.

F. H. Buckley, the organizer of "Scholars and Writers for Trump," writes in the *New York Post* that the president should "split" the GOP, align himself with Democrats, and embrace Canadian-style single-payer health care.

Ross Douthat of the *New York Times* says Trump should get a brain trust that can guide him on the right policies, since he seems not to have many of his own.

Similarly, my National Review colleague (well, boss) Rich Lowry penned a widely discussed piece for *Politico*, "The Crisis of Trumpism," in which he argued that Trump's basic problem is that he has no idea what he wants to do or how to get it done. "No officeholder in Washington," Lowry writes, "seems to understand President Donald Trump's populism or have a cogent theory of how to effect it in practice, including the president himself."

These and other constructive criticisms all strike me as reasonable (except for that Canadian health-care thing, which is bonkers). But they're misdiagnosing the malady at the core of the Trump presidency.

In the months after he secured the nomination, Trump and his surrogates promised skeptics that he would not be a hands-on policy guy. Instead, he'd rely on congressional leadership and, later, Mike Pence to do the major lifting, while the president would go around giving speeches to Make America Great Again.

Douthat is right that Trump could use a brain trust. But some of us were told that Pence or Reince Priebus or Paul Ryan would serve that role. Certainly they've tried. Moreover, there are countless policy agendas sitting on the shelf for Trump to choose among.

Why so much chaos, then? A common answer you hear from all corners is "the tweeting" — the horrible, horrible tweeting. But when you talk to people with more hands-on experience in, or with, the Trump White House, the better answer is that the tweeting is just a symptom.

Trump brings the same glandular, impulsive style to meetings and interviews as he does to social media. He blurts out ideas or claims that send staff scrambling to see them implemented or defended. His management style is Hobbesian. Rivalries are encouraged. Senior aides panic at the thought of not being part of his movable entourage. He cares more about saving face and "counterpunching" his critics than he does about getting policy victories.

In short, the problem is Trump's personality. His presidency doesn't suffer from a failure of ideas, but a failure of character.

For the last two years, when asked how I thought the Trump administration would go, I've replied, "Character is destiny." This wasn't necessarily a prediction of a divorce or sexual scandal, but rather an acknowledgment of the fact that, under normal circumstances, people don't change. And septuagenarian billionaires who've won so many spins of the roulette wheel of life are even less likely to change.

It's true that Trump has racked up some wins — a few relatively easy executive orders and the Supreme Court nomination of Neil Gorsuch, who'll wind up taking the late Antonin Scalia's seat one way or another.

Good news is not defining his term, though. Trump's off-the-cuff claim that President Obama "wiretapped" him ate up a third of his first 100 days and hurt his standing with allies and voters alike. If you believe that this was some brilliant 4-D chess gambit hatched at Mar-a-Lago, you must believe that plummeting to 35 percent approval was part of the plan, too.

The president is this presidency's worst enemy, and there's no sign of improvement ahead.

Trump detests apologizing or expressing regrets for his actions. He'd rather just change the subject or attack. He likes demanding that other people apologize for the same reason that he won't: He sees admitting error as a personal defeat.

But in politics, apologizing is a way to ask for a fresh start, not just from others but from yourself. If he apologized for his rocky start and asked for a do-over, Trump could replenish some of his squandered political capital. I hope he does, but I won't bet that way because, again, character is destiny.

the Atlantic

Why Trump Supporters Still Don't Blame Trump

Olga Khazan

When President Trump's plan to repeal Obamacare fizzled, his supporters seemed to blame anyone but him.

Soon after the House of Representatives pulled its health-care bill late last month, NPR's Lulu Garcia-Navarro asked two Trump voters, "who do you blame for what just happened?"

"I mean, the president sold himself as a deal-maker ... We have a Republican president, a Republican Congress. Yet they couldn't close the deal. Do you blame President Trump?" Garcia-Navarro asked.

"No," responded the Trump voter, Becky Ravenkamp. "I don't think blaming anybody is the solution. I think part of what we're seeing is that the Republicans are starting to get their wings. It's going to take them a little while to figure out how to come together and how to create policy."

Stat News heard similar responses when its reporters fanned out across Trump Country. The president's supporters said things like, "We just need to give President Trump time," or "He did all he could, I think."

In Little Rock, Arkansas, a retired nurse named Ramona Bourdo, told Reuters, "He can't wave a magic wand. I've not lost confidence in him."

And it's not just health care. The AP found Trump voters across the country applauding his refugee ban even though it was in legal turmoil. One Trump voter in Durant, Oklahoma, where the president's proposed budget cuts would hit especially hard, told the *Washington Post*'s Jenna Johnson he thinks we should "let it go and see what he can do."

“If you voted for Trump quite recently, you’re not going to want to say he cocked everything up”

Trump is escaping his supporters’ wrath for now, but his string of high-profile policy flubs raises the question, what *would* spur his fans to turn on him? Will Trump’s supporters—especially newly converted Republicans—ever blame him?

It’s possible, political-psychology experts say, but it likely won’t happen for at least a year, and he would have to do something that affects his supporters in a very negative way.

First of all, liberals and conservatives alike are quite reluctant to blame presidents they voted for. As the psychologist Robert Abelson put it, beliefs are like possessions, and people generally want to hold on to theirs. It makes a difference how “sophisticated”—informed—and “reflective”—open minded—a given voter is, but people tend to ignore facts that don’t sit well with their political identities.

We do this in two ways, says University of Oxford professor James Tilley. In the first, selective evaluation, we go easier on the decisions made by our own leaders and parties—think of Obama voters who can never admit there are problems with Obamacare. In the second, selective attribution, we acknowledge there are problems, but we blame it on someone other than the leaders we like—*Obamacare was a Republican policy, after all!*

In a study, Tilley found this second process—selective attribution—is stronger. People are more willing, in other words, to find someone else to blame than they are to squint and try to see their party’s bad policies in a rosier light.

And who do Republican voters blame when the entire government is stacked with Republicans? Why, Congress, naturally. Sure, some House members and senators might belong to your same party, but at least you aren’t responsible for their electoral victories—some schmucks in Janesville are. “If you voted for Trump quite recently, you’re not going to want to say he cocked everything up,” says Tilley. “But here’s a guy, Paul Ryan, I didn’t actually vote for him, but here’s a chance to blame someone else.”

Indeed, people seemed much more willing to blame Congress for the American Health Care Act than they were to blame Trump. Stat’s interview subjects thought the GOP put together the bill too hastily, while one Republican man in Kingston, New York, told the *New York Times*, “I liked the idea of repealing Obamacare, but I thought the Republicans would actually have a plan.” Not Trump, that is; The Republicans.

Americans might be less likely to hold the government responsible for things than Brits are, Tilley says, since America relies on the private sector for some things, such as health care, that are responsibilities of the state in other countries. (This is one reason why governments love to privatize things, he says—it’s so much easier to the duck blame when it’s Anthem, rather than the Department of Health and Human Services, that won’t pay a colonoscopy bill.)

One thing going for Trump is how divided the American public has become. Thomas Rudolph, who researches political psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, explains that over the years there’s been an increase in something called trait polarization. “In 1980, you would still think the Republican nominee [for president] was intelligent even if you were a Democrat,” he said. “That has changed.” Now, Trump’s most hardcore Republican supporters are likely to think he’s the smart, capable one, and that Democrats are a bunch of horrible idiots—and vice-versa for ardent liberals. (Of course, both Trump and Hillary Clinton are “very accomplished people,” Rudolph said.) Regardless, this level of partisan rancor increases the odds Trump’s supporters will stick by him, since they see few attractive options on the other side.

There’s typically a few-month honeymoon period for new presidents, Rudolph says. But their policy failures have a cumulative effect, he added, so “a few years from now, he could start losing support even among people who like him.”

Months from now, things might get really bad. When policies start to affect people in very clear, direct ways—premiums go up, jobs dry up—eventually “the person who gets the blame is the president, whether he deserves it or not,” says Kevin Arceneaux, a political scientist and director of the Behavioral Foundations Lab at Temple University. That’s why Obama was blamed for Obamacare—and why Trump’s strategy of blaming Obama for the law might not work for long.

“Calling it Obamacare works while [Obama]’s in office,” Arceneaux said, “but once he’s not in office, that will lose its punch among those [independent] floating voters. Their question will be, ‘why haven’t you fixed things? I don’t see Obama anywhere around here.’”

Even among his supporters, that is, Trump’s hall pass has a time limit, and the clock is ticking. As one Trump supporter put it to the *Post,* the president has 10 strikes before he’s out, in her mind: “I have high hopes for Trump, but if he’s going to be cutting these kinds of programs, that’s going to be [strike] one.”