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FRANCE - EUROPE

The
Washington
Post

EN LIGNE - Against all odds, a communist soars in French election polls

By James
McAuley

LILLE, FRANCE

— A specter is haunting Europe — the specter of Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

In the latest plot twist in France's highly contentious presidential election, Mélenchon — an outspoken 65-year-old leftist who often appears on the campaign trail via hologram and who has pitched his proposal to nationalize France's biggest banks and renegotiate its relationship with the European Union via free Internet games and YouTube videos — is now soaring in the polls. With less than two weeks before the election, his meteoric and unexpected rise is already sending jitters through financial markets and shock waves through an increasingly anxious electorate.

For months, analysts have likened the upcoming French election to "Europe's Stalingrad," a crucial turning point that will determine the future of a country and a continent. But while commentators worldwide have focused on the steady rise of the far-right, fiercely anti-immigrant National Front of Marine Le Pen, few have paid any attention to the leftist fringe of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who has vaulted into the picture in the past week and who shares with Le Pen the desire to drastically alter France's relationship with the E.U., the 28-state bloc it once designed.

Mélenchon is running as the candidate of the Unbowed France political movement, in an alliance with the French Communist Party. The latest polls show him narrowly trailing Emmanuel Macron, long seen as the favorite, and Le Pen, expected to qualify for the final round of the two-round vote but to lose to Macron in the end. In the final days of a truly unprecedented campaign, Mélenchon's unexpected surge is a reminder that radical change is in the air and that its extremist apostles — on the right or the left — may soon hold power.

Some have reacted with panic: Investors have begun frantically selling off French bonds, while the head of France's largest trade union has decried what he described as Mélenchon's "rather totalitarian vision."

But thousands of others have responded with joy.

Nearly 25,000 people assembled in this predominantly middle-class northern French city Wednesday night to hear Mélenchon, dressed in his signature Mao jacket, take the stage. With his distinct wit, erudition and rhetorical flair, he charmed his crowd, packed inside and outside a local sports arena, waving communist banners, Palestinian flags and signs adorned with the Greek letter phi, the campaign's official symbol.

"It's the people who make history," Mélenchon said, standing on a dais before thousands. "It's you! So we have to do it. Let's go, folks! Courage!"

Perhaps more than any of the other candidates, it is Mélenchon who best represents 2017's potential rupture with history, or at least the status quo. Central to his platform is the promise to abolish France's Fifth Republic, the system of government established by Charles de Gaulle in 1958.

What Mélenchon detests in this style of government is its monarchical presidency — designed for de Gaulle himself — which can dissolve parliament at will and is subject to few checks and balances. Mélenchon has pledged to found what he calls the "Sixth Republic," a vision that would "take us out of this presidential regime, notably with proportionality in all elections."

It is an idea that resonates widely — even among those who do not necessarily support Mélenchon's other more radical proposals, including taking France out of NATO and imposing a 100 percent tax on

all income earned over 400,000 euros (\$425,000).

"He's the only one who dares to say it, but there are so many others who agree with that," said Jacques Bruley, 25, an engineer with Lille's tram system. Bruley said that he was not a full Mélenchon supporter and had not yet decided whether he would vote for him but that this particular idea was an imperative.

"There's one person who holds an unconscionable amount of power. It's wild," he said of the presidency. "And when you talk about 'change,' it's Mélenchon who would really bring that kind of big change."

The reality is that "big change" is likely to come with or without Mélenchon: For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, neither the Socialists nor the Republicans — the vaguely center-left and center-right parties, respectively, that have governed France since 1958 — are likely to triumph at the ballot box. The contest will probably be a face-off between political outsiders: the independent Macron, the far-right Le Pen and, possibly, the communist Mélenchon.

Despite their ideological opposition, there are certain similarities between the platforms of Le Pen and Mélenchon. Both favor versions of economic protectionism to bolster a strong French state, and both would ultimately like to see France exit the E.U. — albeit for different reasons. Le Pen sees Europe as a threat to France's sovereignty and national identity; Mélenchon views Europe as an oppressive neoliberal regime that has forgotten the poorest members of society.

He proposes renegotiating France's membership in the bloc, and if things don't go his way, leaving altogether.

But many Mélenchon supporters do not recognize the similarity.

"I don't like the comparison," said Alexi Descamps, 25, an IT engineer in Lille. "[Le Pen] has a very

aggressive politics on immigration, and he doesn't. He's extreme left, and that's what we need — he's the only one who proposes a departure from capitalism."

[Marine Le Pen's tricky alliance with Donald Trump]

In a shocking turn of events, Mélenchon is in third place — behind Macron and Le Pen but ahead of François Fillon, the centrist conservative whose campaign has suffered in the wake of a public spending scandal. If Mélenchon does not qualify for the second and final round, which polls still suggest he will not, his supporters say they are not sure whom they will support instead — or even whether they will vote.

"Of course I will vote for whomever is not the extreme right," said Eva Alain, 20, an audiovisual student. "But if it's Fillon, it's impossible, and if it's Macron, it's difficult."

In recent months, Mélenchon — once a distant afterthought in the constant election predictions — has presided over a digital campaign that has successfully appealed to a wider base of voters, especially among the young.

He has more YouTube followers than all of his principal opponents combined, and he released an online video game titled "Fiscal Combat," in which players attack bankers and, at a higher level, Christine Lagarde, the French director of the International Monetary Fund, in the name of redistributing wealth to the masses. The game is a remake of "Mortal Combat," a 1990s video game familiar to many of his supporters.

Even so, if young people in France affiliate with a party, it is generally the party of abstention. According to a recent poll from the Ifop agency, the intent to abstain has risen to 52 percent among voters ages 18 to 25.

In the campaign's final days, the field is wide open.

BREITBART // Communist-Backed Eurosceptic In Contention for French Presidency

By Breitbart London

"I'm less of a hothead," said the bespectacled 65-year-old in a recent interview. "I'm becoming a reassuring figure."

In an election season marked by widespread disillusionment with the political class, the head of La France Insoumise (France Unbowed) is now among the top four candidates in the

April 23 first round of the two-stage vote.

Observers say strong debate performances showcasing a milder but still quick-witted Mélenchon

helped propel him into joint third place with the scandal-hit conservative candidate, Francois Fillon.

Suddenly part of a close-fought four-way affair, they are nipping at the heels of joint frontrunners Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front (FN) and centrist former Socialist Emmanuel Macron.

The two leaders of the first round will go through to a runoff on May 7.

Melenchon "invented political stand-up. He's become a showman," said former Socialist Party colleague Julien Dray. "This style keeps him from being too harsh. He's in teaching mode, the old professor giving lessons about the world and how to change it."

Melenchon also has an internet edge, boasting more than a million followers on Twitter and his own YouTube channel — a way to circumvent the traditional media, which he accuses of bias.

– **Stump rhetoric and social media savvy** –

And he has turned heads with simultaneous appearances at campaign rallies using holograms, a technological first for a French presidential campaign and a sign of renewed vigor.

**The
New York
Times**

EN LIGNE - Left-Wing Politician Shakes Up France's Presidential Race

Adam Nossiter

"What is the liberty of the employee who is fired for not working on Sunday?" he asked the crowd, delivering repeated thrusts at capitalism. "What is the liberty of 120,000 families whose water is cut off because they can't pay the bill?" His advisers depict him as a kind of French Bernie Sanders. Unlike Mr. Sanders, though, he has no vigorous party establishment to block his way.

"Masters of the earth, you have good reason to be uneasy!" Mr. Melenchon yelled at the festive, youthful crowd on Sunday, some wearing revolutionary Phrygian caps, as he stabbed the air with his fist and paced back and forth on the stage. "Give it up! Give it up!" the crowd yelled, a message clearly intended for Mr. Melenchon's opponents.

"There must be decent salaries," Mr. Melenchon shouted into the microphone. "That's why the minimum wage will have to go up!"

If this veteran of French politics — he started as a young Socialist senator in 1986 — pulls it off, France's election could end up a contest between two radical outliers. Both Mr. Melenchon and Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front gleefully promise a top-to-bottom shake-up, rejecting the country's European Union membership, blasting its budgetary and deficit

With the Socialist Party split between leftist and reformist camps under President Francois Hollande, its 49-year-old candidate Benoit Hamon is languishing at distant fifth place in the polls.

For many, Melenchon, after emphatically refusing to ally himself with Hamon, has emerged as the main voice on the left.

Often appearing at rallies wearing a Mao jacket, Melenchon speaks without notes as he rails against the "neoliberal" European Union and stumps for his tax-and-spend agenda.

But while he shares Le Pen's animosity toward the EU — they are both currently MEPs — Melenchon is her polar opposite when it comes to immigration.

"Today as yesterday, I am delighted that France is a mix of races and all the children are our children," he has said.

An admirer of late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez as well as Bolivian leader Evo Morales, he advocates a policy of non-alignment

rules, and injecting France with huge doses of public spending.

The prospect of a Melenchon-Le Pen runoff, written off several weeks ago, no longer seems impossible. In a poll published in *Le Monde* on Friday, Mr. Melenchon had pulled to within two points of both Ms. Le Pen and her nearest challenger, the centrist Emmanuel Macron, a former economy minister.

Mr. Melenchon's advisers speak admiringly of Mr. Sanders. Their candidate's score among 18- to 24-year-olds has shot to 44 percent from 12 percent in one month, according to *Le Monde*. Among 25- to 34-year-olds it has almost doubled, to 27 percent. Analysts say Mr. Melenchon has the momentum at a time when others, like the mainstream right candidate François Fillon, stagnate or fall in the polls. "He's a total campaign warrior," the political scientist Pascal Perrineau said.

Mr. Melenchon has come so far so fast that the other candidates spent part of the last week attacking him for the first time. Even the widely unpopular incumbent, President François Hollande, called him "simplistic."

But as Mr. Hollande's mainstream Socialist Party has collapsed, Mr. Melenchon, an ex-Trotskyist, has been the big beneficiary, making the Socialists look like pallid imitators of

and wants France to withdraw from NATO.

While his supporters see him as a defender of the people against monied interests, to his detractors the candidate who wants to legalise cannabis is a populist firebrand and dangerous — Hollande called him a "peril" while the right-leaning *Figaro* daily called him the "French Chavez".

Born in Tangiers, Morocco, Melenchon, who studied philosophy, was a Trotskyist student activist before joining the Socialist party at age 25.

He became the youngest member of the Senate in 1986.

– **'Our country needs another voice'** –

Later he served as vocational education minister under Socialist premier Lionel Jospin from 2000 to 2002.

But in 2008, Melenchon fell out with then party leader Hollande and quit the Socialists, saying "our country needs another voice on the left".

his own robust promises to cut back the workweek, lower the official retirement age to 60, raise taxes on the rich and hire many more civil servants.

What remains of the once-powerful French Communist Party backs him; Mr. Melenchon is not unhappy. "Mr. Fillon reproaches me for being a Communist," he said on Sunday. "It's a reproach I find totally tolerable," he said, mockingly promising the right-wing Mr. Fillon a "handmade electoral jacket" in a reference to a recent scandal over his opponent's expensive clothing habits.

In a country winded by 10 percent unemployment, a plethora of unstable part-time job contracts for the young, a frozen job market and rising inequality, Mr. Melenchon's message has powerful resonance. His supporters — the campaign said 70,000 turned out Sunday — speak of him with a fervor that surpasses that of all the other candidates, with the exception of Ms. Le Pen.

Yet the racially diverse crowd at Mr. Melenchon's rally is nothing like the all-white, all-French one that comes to hear Ms. Le Pen.

"I work a lot and I'm badly paid," said Inti Gomez, 40, who said he was a night receptionist in a Toulouse hotel, existing below the poverty line as he supports three on a salary of about \$2,100 a month.

With his virulent attacks against bosses and austerity policies, he won 11 percent of the vote when he ran for president in 2012 as head of the *Parti de Gauche* (Left Party).

This time he has emerged as a charismatic alternative to Le Pen and the other "outsider", the pro-business Macron, vowing to scrap France's "monarchical presidency" and give far more powers to parliament.

While anger management may have softened Melenchon's image, the candidate insists he still has fire in his belly. "You can't propose what I am proposing with the look of a choir boy... Sometimes there's no choice, you have to kick the doors open."

And he certainly had fighting words last week when he said the French would "spit blood" if Fillon, Macron or Le Pen emerges victorious in May.

"Mr Melenchon may have tried to create a softer, more controlled image, but his true nature is there for all to see," said Fillon.

Although he works from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. every night, he had come out to hear Mr. Melenchon. "What's really hard is this inequality that I'm forced to submit to," Mr. Gomez said, bemoaning the fact that his education had gone for naught. "Change is possible," he said. "I'm just taking advantage of this collective joy."

René Amando, 60, said he had spent a lifetime working in chemical factories but retired early because his health had been damaged. "It's his attitude of refusal," Mr. Amando said, waiting for Mr. Melenchon to appear. "There is such a huge split between the big financiers and the people, who get poorer and poorer," Mr. Amando added. "He gives us hope for a new kind of society, a more socialized and humane society."

When Mr. Melenchon said that the "presidential monarchy must be abolished," he was tapping into an old French revolutionary tradition, one that sees revolution itself as an inherent good. The revolutionaries of 1789 France created a kind of civic religion around their revolution; Mr. Melenchon tries to do something similar. Even so, the crowd on Sunday appeared a little bewildered by his abstruse references to heretics who had suffered for their beliefs, his advocacy of an obscure Latin-American alliance he is keen on and his admonition to "not let

anybody exercise police power over thought.”

It roared though when he attacked President Trump over the missile attack on Syria. “No Frenchman can

accept a global gendarme who decided all by himself the good and the bad,” Mr. Mélenchon said.

**The
New York
Times**

UNE - After Economic Crisis, Low Birthrates Challenge Southern Europe

Liz Alderman

As couples grapple with a longer-than-expected stretch of low growth, high unemployment, precarious jobs and financial strain, they are increasingly deciding to have just one child — or none.

Approximately a fifth of women born in the 1970s are likely to remain childless in Greece, Spain and Italy, a level not seen since World War I, according to the Wittgenstein Center for Demography and Global Human Capital, based in Vienna. And hundreds of thousands of fertile young people have left for Germany, Britain and the prosperous north, with little intent of returning unless the economy improves.

Birthrates in the region have slid back almost to where they were before the crisis emerged in 2008. Women in Spain had been averaging 1.47 children per household, up from 1.24 in 2000. But those gains have all but evaporated. In Italy, Portugal and Greece, birthrates have reverted to about 1.3.

It adds to the growing concern about a demographic disaster in the region. The current birthrates are well under the 2.1 rate needed to keep a population steady, according to Eurostat.

Maria Karaklioumi, 43, a political pollster in Athens, decided to forgo children after concluding she would not be able to offer them the stable future her parents had afforded. Her sister has a child, and Ms. Karaklioumi is painfully aware that her grandmother already had five grandchildren at her age.

Although she has a good job and master's degrees in politics and economics, “there's too much insecurity,” Ms. Karaklioumi said.

Unemployment among women stands at 27 percent, compared with 20 percent for men.

“I don't know if I'll have this job in two months or a year,” Ms. Karaklioumi added. “If you don't see a light at the end of the tunnel, how can you plan for the future?”

Whether the demographic decline slows ultimately depends on the financial fortunes in the south, where most countries suffered double-dip recessions. Without significant improvement, the region is trending toward some of the lowest birthrates in the world, which will accelerate stress on pension and welfare systems and crimp growth as a shrinking work force competes with the rest of Europe and the world.

While dwindling populations threaten all of Europe, “the really serious problem is that some of the weakest countries are the ones with the least favorable demographics,” said Simon Tilford, the deputy director of the Center for European Reform in London. “Lower birthrates in the south will mean weaker growth and productivity, holding the birthrate down and producing more fiscal problems.”

Over time, he added, “it suggests that the already divergent economic performance between Northern and Southern Europe may become structural rather than cyclical.”

The lower birthrates have been aggravated by fiscal pressures that constrained countries from offering robust family support programs. Whereas France offers a monthly family benefit of 130 euros (about \$138) per child after the second child, Greece provides just 40 euros.

Countries have recognized the problem and recently snapped into action. Spain appointed a so-called sex czar in February to forge a national fertility action plan and address population declines in rural areas. Italy increased bonuses for having babies and backed labor laws granting more flexible parental leave.

Greece, as the weakest economic link, does not have the same options.

Struggling to manage a recovery after nearly eight years of recession, the government cannot make the fertility drop a top priority. Child tax breaks and subsidies for large families were weakened under Greece's austerity-linked international financial bailouts. State-

financed child care became meanstested and is hard to get for women seeking work. Greece now has the lowest budget in the European Union for family and child benefits.

Grandparents have traditionally been the primary source of child care in the south, but Greek austerity policies have reduced pensions so much that the family safety net is unraveling, said Dimitrios Karellas, the general secretary of the Labor and Social Welfare Ministry in Greece.

“We need to allocate more money to create the services needed for families and children,” Mr. Karellas said. “But it's hard to do amid the crisis.”

Demographic challenges are not confined to Southern Europe. Germany has battled a population drop since the 1970s, when higher education and new career opportunities for women lowered fertility rates. After Communism, birthrates in Central and Eastern Europe also fell.

In the new millennium, an economic expansion helped reverse those dynamics. But the financial crisis “hit Europe when birthrates in many countries had just started to rise again,” said Michaela Kreyenfeld of the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany.

The impact is evident in communities across the European south, where smaller towns are increasingly hollowed out and schools emptied.

In Tempi, a verdant region in central Greece, many primary schools and kindergartens have closed since 2012 as parents had fewer children and young Greeks left the country, said Xanthi Zisaki, a municipal councilor. Kindergarten enrollment has also slumped elsewhere in Greece and around Spain and Italy.

While migration from small towns is nothing new, “the financial crisis is clearly the problem,” Mrs. Zisaki said. “There are simply fewer children every year.”

The economic issues also amplified existing trends. Working women were already postponing childbirth. As the recession dragged on, they delayed even more for fear of jeopardizing work opportunities, a situation that has exacerbated fertility problems.

Progress on gender equality eroded in Greece during the crisis, according to the European Parliament. Women reported being regularly rejected for jobs if they were of childbearing age, or having contracts that were involuntarily converted to part time if they became pregnant.

As the crisis persisted, Anastasia Economopoulou, 42, pushed back her dream of having several children. She was fearful of losing her job as a saleswoman at a retail branding company after managers said they did not want women who would get pregnant.

Eventually, she turned to in vitro fertilization treatments at Dr. Mastrominas's clinic. But her salary slumped by 30 percent as company sales fell, and her husband's by more, cutting the number of treatments she can afford.

“I asked them not to put in many embryos because we can only manage one,” she said.

For a country like Greece, some see the shifting demographic trends as a blessing in disguise.

“As long as Greece has high unemployment, it may be good luck that there's not a baby boom,” said Byron Kotzamanis, a demography professor at the University of Thessaly.

“If there was,” he added, “we might have more problems right now.”

But such optimism will not make up for the frightening consequences for countries struggling to replenish people.

“If we don't fix this, in 20 years we'll be a country of old people,” said Mr. Karellas, the welfare official. “The fact is, it's a disaster.”

**THE DAILY
BEAST**

Mediterranean Migrant Rescuers Need Rescuing

Barbie Latza
Nadeau

REGGIO

CALABRIA, Italy—Becoming a victim is surely a rescuer's worst

nightmare. But on Sunday in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya, NGO charity rescue vessels started tweeting very distressing

messages that seemed to foreshadow a very serious situation.

The first came from the German NGO Jugend Rettet, whose rescue vessel Iuventa was chock full of

migrants, including seven pregnant women, from multiple rescues over a 40 hour period in which nearly 7,000 migrants and refugees were saved from drowning in multiple operations.

They also sent out emails to media they knew, urging them to try to get the word out that they were in dire need.

Their steering had gone under the weight of their human cargo and there were more rubber dinghies on the horizon as dark clouds signaled a coming sea storm. They had used all their life jackets, too, meaning even those who had been rescued from deadly rubber dinghies were at risk again.

Then the German NGO Sea Eye, which was making its way to help the Iuventa faced similar challenges trying to pluck as many people at risk of drowning from the increasingly rough seas as they could without putting their own rescue vessel at risk. They, too, started facing navigational challenges as seas worsened and their passengers shifted nervously.

Jugend Rettet first tweeted: "MAYDAY RELAY MAYDAY RELAY MAYDAY RELAY! all stations ALL! This is Jugend rettete! We are in distress! Position: 33°14'N 012°26'E."

Then another tweet: "Iuventa + @seayeorg need urgent [sic] help. Several hundred people in rubberboats nearby. Both NGOs in distress. Bad weather on its way!"

Then, another: "#Iuventa and @seayeorg are unable to move due to the high amount of people on board and nearby us in rubberboats! We need help"

The German NGO ships had come to the aid of the Mobile Offshore Aid Station or MOAS. They, too, were at capacity but there were more stranded rubber dinghies and dangerous wooden fishing boats full of people.

MOAS had spent the previous night monitoring several boats with more than 1,000 people they could not assist because their own boat, the Phoenix, was full. "Dramatic situation unfolding in #Med. #MOAS crew caring for 453 people aboard; assisting 1000+ people on rubber boats around," their crew tweeted.

Later they witnessed a rubber dinghy butted up to a merchant vessel that did not have the capacity to rescue them, so the migrants and refugees were essentially holding on for dear life.

By late Sunday night, many of the migrants had been offloaded from the over-capacity rescue vehicles to other vessels, including passing merchant ships that were summoned to the maritime emergencies. The three rescue boats in distress were limping toward land despite a continuing number of distress calls

from the migrant boats still out at sea.

On land, Doctors Without Borders' MSF Prudence brought 649 people to shore, including four young children and several men who had suffered gunshot wounds at the hands of the traffickers in Libya. Of the 60 women, several had reported torture. Their ship will head back out for more rescues on Monday.

The busy weekend comes on the heels of an investigation by a local Italian prosecutor into funding of the NGO charity ships with an eye to removing them from service. The NGOs have denied wrong doing, insisting that their purpose is to fill the vacuum created by "an absent Europe" that is seemingly leaving the migrants to sink or swim.

BREITBART // Orban Easter Speech: 'Battlefield Europe... Stop Mass Migration. The Future of Europe Is at Stake'

By Victoria Friedman

"Today we live in a time when international politics is a battlefield," Prime Minister Orbán said on Easter Sunday. "The independence and freedom of European nations are at stake. And at the centre of the battlefield is migration."

"This is what our future stands or falls on," he said, "the fate of Europe. The question is whether the character of European nations will be determined by the same spirit, civilisation, culture and mentality as in our parents' and grandparents' time, or by something completely different."

Discussing how his government has come under criticism following the implementation of stricter border controls and asylum policies in the ongoing migrant crisis, Mr. Orbán observed that "those calling themselves liberal and left-wing – who are supported with the money, power and networks of international forces, with George Soros at the

forefront – claim that taking action against migration is wrong, impractical and immoral".

Contrasting that with the wishes of the Hungarian people, Orbán said: "...we want to preserve the foundations of Europe. We do not want parallel societies, we do not want population exchanges, and we do not want to replace Christian civilisation with a different kind. Therefore we are building fences, defending ourselves, and not allowing migrants to flood us."

– 'National Governance Under Pressure' –

The Hungarian government, led by Orbán's Fidesz party, is also coming under attack from the European Union, the U.S. State Department, and nongovernmental organisations for its commitment to implementing legislation on transparency for foreign NGOs and universities operating in the country – issues the prime minister referred to as "secondary battlefields":

"National governance in Hungary is under continuous pressure and attack ... the most important thing at stake is whether we will have a parliament and a government that will seek to serve the best interests of the Hungarian people, or a parliament and a government that will seek to serve foreign interests."

Affirming that conflicts with external forces was a part of defending a nation's sovereignty, the conservative Central European leader said: "If we were to accept that Brussels or other political and financial centres should dictate to us, or that Hungarian or American billionaires should tell us how things should be in our country, then we would have no conflicts."

– George Soros –

The prime minister singled out several times during the interview Hungarian-born billionaire and open borders financier George Soros, whose lobbyists Orbán claims are agitating European, the EU, and the

U.S. governments to put pressure on Hungary over its domestic policies.

"George Soros must not be underestimated: he is a powerful billionaire of enormous determination who, when it comes to his interests, respects neither God nor man. We want to protect Hungary, and so we must also commit ourselves to this struggle."

"[He] is spending endless amounts of money to support illegal immigration. He wants to keep the pressure on Hungary: the country which expects even the likes of George Soros to observe its laws."

When it comes to personal attacks against him, Orbán, a great admirer of the late British prime minister, quoted Margaret Thatcher:

I always cheer up immensely if one is particularly wounding because I think, well, if they attack one personally, it means they have not a single political argument left.

POLITICO Brussels' Brexit plan: Treat the UK like Norway

By Simon Marks and Hans von der Burchard

Brussels is contemplating another way to keep U.K. trade going with the EU after Brexit that would also keep Britain under the EU umbrella — go the way of Norway.

The European Commission's Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier's team already floated the idea of a zero-tariff interim deal that preserves trade in goods, like German cars or French wine exports to the U.K, but

would exclude trade in services and hit the U.K. hard on banking or aviation.

Brussels now has a plan B: The U.K. could temporarily become a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) while both sides transition into their future relationship, a senior Commission official told POLITICO.

Joining EFTA, which governs free trade between Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, would

allow the U.K. to apply for membership in the European Economic Area (EEA). That grants free access to the EU's single market. The option — often dubbed the "Norway model" — would preserve current trade ties with the EU and spare the U.K. from negative economic consequences until future trade relations with the EU are sorted out, the official said. It would also retain ties in the area of services.

"It's an interim solution that causes the smallest possible disturbance for business on both sides of the Channel," one European diplomat added. Like Norway, the U.K. would not be part of the customs union, which means it could strike its own trade deals with countries around the world.

Such a plan, however, is a toxic idea for many hard-line Brexiteers because it would require the U.K. to accept the four founding EU

freedoms of goods, services, people and capital. One of the central themes motivating many people to vote for Brexit was taking back control of immigration policy.

Britain would also have to continue paying Brussels in exchange for access to the EU market.

Norway will have paid €1.3 billion to the EU between 2014 and 2021. Iceland on the other hand, because of its size and economic wealth, paid just €49.4 million. Switzerland is part of EFTA but not the European Economic Area. It has a separate free-trade agreement with the EU.

The U.K. also would have to fully implement EU laws and regulations — while losing any say in drafting or vetoing them.

“It still means accepting supranational jurisdiction,” said Guntram Wolff, director of Bruegel, an influential Brussels-based think tank. Although EFTA’s members are not directly bound by the European Court of Justice, the Luxembourg-based EFTA court, which largely follows the jurisdiction of the ECJ, does have oversight.

“The EFTA court judges on the basis of EU law, so it’s not as if you were really leaving the realms of EU jurisdiction,” said Andrés Delgado, a trade lawyer from the Max Planck Institute Luxembourg, a state-financed research institution located near the ECJ.

The upside

Still, officials in Brussels hope that once the reality of a “hard Brexit” —

of which British manufacturers and industry associations already warn — comes closer, the U.K. might become open to the Norway option, at least as a temporary solution.

Such hopes have been spurred as the British government is backtracking from its earlier hardline stance on Brexit. Late last month, British Prime Minister Theresa May indicated that free movement of EU citizens post-Brexit could be permitted as both sides “implement” their future relationship. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson last week opened up to allowing free movement for EU citizens after Brexit.

“Ideally I think it could be done, what with goodwill and imagination, it could be done,” Johnson told reporters in Athens, referring to free movement of EU nationals.

A Norway-like deal would be good for Brussels too.

It would ease fears of legal problems at the World Trade Organization. Although the Geneva-based international trade body allows setting up new interim agreements such as Barnier’s zero-tariff option for a “reasonable length of time,” there’s a concern that other countries might challenge the interim agreement if negotiations on a succeeding trade deal drag on.

“An EEA-type transition would help avoid complaints during the transition phase,” the senior Commission official said.

Testing the political waters

The deal also could be good for the current EFTA quartet, and some of its members are open to adding a temporary fifth member.

“We would maintain an open-minded stance in the event of an application for EFTA membership,” said Oda Helen Sletnes, Norway’s ambassador to the EU. “Overall, it is in Norway’s interest to maintain as close trade policy cooperation with the U.K. as possible, with as good a level of access to the British market as possible.”

And some analysts noted that a British application to EFTA would be a reunion of sorts.

“The U.K. was a founding member of EFTA and remained therein for some 12 years [until 1972], so you can imagine it probably wouldn’t take too long for them to be readmitted as a member,” EFTA spokesman Thorfinnur Omarsson said.

Asked about the chances of a transitional Norway-style relationship, a government spokesperson in London did not rule out such a possibility.

“We have been clear that we believe a phased process of implementation, in which both Britain and the EU prepare for the new arrangements that will exist between us, will be of mutual benefit,” the spokesperson said. “The exact structure and detail of such a process will be subject to the negotiations.”

The European Commission said it wanted “an orderly withdrawal agreement, taking into account the future relationship between the EU

and the U.K.,” according to a spokesperson.

An imperfect solution

The proposal comes with some kinks for the EU.

British membership in EFTA would also give it a judge inside the EFTA court, which would raise concerns about a conflict of interest. Should a complaint arise during the years of the transitional agreement — for instance surrounding the behavior of a British bank — London could end up jeopardizing the enforcement of EU law.

“There would be a British judge with all the weight of the U.K. behind it,” said Wolff of the Bruegel think tank.

Peter Chase, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, said he was also skeptical about Britain joining both EFTA and the EEA while only looking for a temporary solution for keeping trade ties with the EU.

“Bear in mind that in order to do this, treaties will need to be signed and ratified,” he said. “It will be going to a lot of effort ... Right now the U.K. is unilaterally terminating its relationship with the other 27 member states of the EU.”

“Is it really going to go into another treaty and terminate that a few years down the line?”



Europe Is Still a Superpower

Emily Tamkin | 3 days ago

Sixty years after the Treaty of Rome, many view Europe as a spent force in global politics. Conventional wisdom states that world politics today is unipolar, with the United States as the sole superpower. Or perhaps it is multipolar, with China, India, and the rest rising to challenge Western powers. Either way, Europe’s role is secondary — and declining. The European Union, it is said, is too weak to avoid withering away in the face of Russian subversion, mass migration, right-wing revolt, British plans to leave, slow growth, and anemic defense spending.

Of course, it’s easy to spot signs of disarray. Modern Europe is messy, and its institutions and policies are imperfect. Some of the threats facing the EU are real: slow growth and austerity, for instance, within the eurozone. Others, like rising right-

wing nationalism and migration, are less so, for reasons I will discuss at the conclusion.

Yet amid all the hyperbole and hysteria, a basic point gets missed. Europe today is a genuine superpower and will likely remain one for decades to come. By most objective measures, it either rivals or surpasses the United States and China in its ability to project a full spectrum of global military, economic, and soft power. Europe consistently deploys military troops within and beyond its immediate neighborhood. It manipulates economic power with a skill and success unmatched by any other country or region. And its ability to employ “soft power” to persuade other countries to change their behavior is unique.

If a superpower is a political entity that can consistently project military, economic, and soft power transcontinentally with a reasonable

chance of success, Europe surely qualifies. Its power, moreover, is likely to remain entrenched for at least another generation, regardless of the outcome of current European crises. In sum, Europe is the “invisible superpower” in contemporary world politics. Here’s why.

Before turning to Europe’s specific military, economic, and soft power assets, let’s dismiss the nearly universal belief that Europe is too decentralized to act as a superpower. Europe is not a sovereign state. Yet in practice, it generally acts as a single force in world politics.

We ignore European unity at our peril. Most observers analyze Europe as 28 separate countries — even though doing so generates geopolitical nonsense. To see why, consider one recent example: Russia’s foreign-policy options after its invasion of Ukraine triggered

Western sanctions. Many predicted that China’s rising economic weight meant the Kremlin would surely turn to Beijing. In July 2015, leading newspapers across Eurasia ran the same story (originally from *Agence France-Presse*) reporting that “China has emerged as Russia’s largest trading partner as Moscow turns east, seeking markets in Asia in the face of Western sanctions.”

Yet Russian President Vladimir Putin quickly discovered the futility of a Russian pivot to Asia. While the premise is, strictly speaking, true — China is Russia’s top trading partner — it accounts for only 14 percent of Russia’s trade. Just three European countries combined — Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands — account for more than 20 percent, and Europe as a whole for over half. No realistic increase in trade with China could offset European dominance.

Treating Europe as disunited was geopolitically naive. Even though EU

law imposes no legal obligation to implement sanctions, Europe acted — and paid more than 90 percent of the costs of the Western policy response to Russia. European power and unity are the glue that has held together this Western policy for the past two years.

This is only one example of how, despite its fragmentation, Europe effectively projects power in those areas that count most for global influence. Certainly, European governments often disagree among themselves, sometimes vociferously and in public. Yet policy coordination, both formal and informal, permits European governments to act as a unit to influence the outside world. Three modes of European coordination are critical: common EU policies, coordination, and tacit policy convergence.

First, EU member states often share a formal mandate to cooperate. Governments are generally obligated legally to act together in the name of the European Union on trade, regulatory, environmental, monetary, neighborhood policy, development, EU enlargement, the free movement of people, and border controls. When serious disagreements arise, countries often resolve them through constructive abstention, in which some governments set aside their own concerns and permit the EU to exercise its collective power in areas of greatest importance to others.

Second, even when EU law does not formally mandate uniformity, European governments often form “coalitions of the willing.” After 60 years, Europe has entrenched a continental network of informal norms, procedures, and institutions that quietly encourage policy coordination. European foreign and defense policies illustrate how this system of voluntary solidarity works. Member states take foreign-policy positions in common, which can be implemented by the EU high representative and common diplomatic service, or by coalitions of national governments acting on their own. EU governments coordinate national positions in international organizations, including the United Nations. Not all governments need to participate for these actions to be successful. Again, constructive abstention permits governments to signal disagreement in principle with decisions that nonetheless go forward in practice — as occurred, for example, in recent decisions involving the former Yugoslavia and Libya, or recent efforts to dampen migration across the Mediterranean.

Yet, in one form or another, European governments have launched dozens of joint military

operations since the end of the Cold War.

This coordination extends to collective European military operations. While no formal mandate exists, missions often lack a formal EU imprimatur and involvement limited to those who wish to participate. Yet, in one form or another, European governments have launched dozens of joint military operations since the end of the Cold War. Impasses like the 2003 Iraq War, when European governments so strongly disagree that they pursue opposing policies on a prominent global issue, are extremely rare.

Third, even when the EU neither mandates nor coordinates a policy response, the convergent national laws, strategies, and interests of European states more often than not generate compatible and mutually reinforcing policies. European governments have overlapping international institutional memberships and legal obligations. Almost all are NATO members, which means they conduct common planning and training and accept collective defense obligations. They adhere to the same treaties governing asylum, human rights, the environment, development, and many forms of U.N. cooperation. All are friendly with the United States. They share national embassies. In the soft-power realm, the ability of Europeans to educate foreign students, set global constitutional norms, and garner a worldwide following for athletic achievements contribute to a common European influence in the world — even if the EU explicitly coordinates little of it.

At a more fundamental level, all European countries are democratic and economically interdependent, and they share largely uncontested (indeed, often invisible) borders. Hence they coexist without posing any mortal threat to one another. With the highly unlikely exception of a Russian attack on NATO, they face no such immediate security threats from other great powers, either. This relatively benign environment affords Europeans the luxury of focusing their geopolitical influence on other, more distant matters. This differs strikingly from the situation of, say, China, which must prepare for potential military conflict with almost all of its regional neighbors — Korea, Japan, Taiwan, India, Russia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other South and Southeast Asian states, not to mention the United States — and keep its army in reserve to maintain domestic order.

For these reasons, we should recognize Europe as a single superpower in projecting military,

economic, or soft power — whether or not it acts formally as one.

Let’s begin with “hard” military power. While Europe’s ability to project coercive force to compel others to acquiesce to political demands does not match that of the United States, it is more active and capable than any other global power. The oft-repeated phrase that “Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus” is a great sound bite but a misleading policy analysis.

The conventional starting point for measuring military capability is the money each country spends on defense. On this score, the United States, which accounts for more than 40 percent of global military spending, heads the list. After that, most analysts list China, with the second-highest national spending and more than 2 million active duty soldiers, followed by Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, India, Japan, France, Germany, and South Korea.

Here again the failure to aggregate Europe clouds our geopolitical vision. If we unify European military activities, it comes in second. European military spending accounts for 15 to 16 percent of the global total. China runs third, with under 10 percent, and Russia spends less than 7 percent, less than half as much as Europe.

At current growth rates, China’s annual military spending (or perhaps that of other rising powers) will not surpass that of Europe for at least a few decades, and the United States for one or two generations — even on the optimistic assumption that Chinese growth continues.

To be sure, this isn’t quite a one-to-one comparison, since Europe’s militaries make their spending decisions separately. Some inefficiencies result when, say, France and Italy separately purchase and maintain their own aircraft carriers. Yet studies suggest that efficiency losses due to decentralized production and procurement — a problem that also bedevils the United States and China, with their domestic interservice rivalries and political pork-barreling — is much smaller than one might think. The most promising area for reform (consolidation of national defense industries) generates no more than 7 percent (about 14 billion euros) savings. This is real money, but too small a number to significantly alter Europe’s relative international standing. Moreover, the “bang for the buck” of the weapons Europe procures remains competitive, as evidenced by the fact that it consistently ranks as the world’s No.

1 arms exporter, outstripping even the United States and Russia.

Yet even Europe’s advantage in annual defense spending understates the entrenched military advantages that it (like the United States) enjoys over any rising power. Usable military capability is not a simple function of defense spending in a given year, but investment in stocks of defense technology, materiel, training, and experience sustained over generations. The average age of equipment in the U.S. military varies from 10 to 25 years, and the life cycle of a fighter like the F-18, introduced just after the Vietnam War, will be nearly a century.

For China to challenge Europe or the United States on an equal basis, Beijing would need to outspend the West not for one year, but for decades — something that delays the projected point where (at current trends) it would surpass the West close to the end of the 21st century. All scenarios whereby China (or another rising power) advances more quickly require increases in military spending of at least 15 percent per year. That in turn means that China must either triple its economic growth rate (unlikely) or increase military spending tenfold as a percentage of the gross domestic product (a strategy that, Chinese leaders are well aware, bankrupted the Soviet Union).

A final reason for Euro-optimism is that Europe maintains enduring alliances. The United States and Europe are irrevocably — yes, even in the age of President Donald Trump, as recent reassuring words to NATO partners by Vice President Mike Pence and cabinet officers demonstrate — allied with one another and with 28 other NATO countries. This bloc commands almost 60 percent of global military spending. Europe, like the United States, maintains security partnerships and bases across the globe, as well as close relations with dozens of countries around the world.

By contrast, Russia and China can call on few allies. Beijing offers modest military training and some assistance to Cambodia, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Syria, and a few African countries; maintains a security partnership with Pakistan; and has only one ally: North Korea.

These advantages are not just theoretical. European militaries actually do more in the world than those of any country except the United States. Only Europe and the United States have deployed tens of thousands of combat troops outside of home countries almost continuously since the end of the Cold War. During the past decade,

European deployments have averaged 107,000 soldiers per year on land, plus a considerable naval presence. By contrast, China has deployed almost no combat soldiers abroad, and India has done so only within U.N. missions. Recent Russian activities have been limited to brief forays in neighboring parts of the former Soviet Union and air and naval support for its sole remaining Middle Eastern ally.

They have participated in a vital way to U.S.-led missions, including Iraq and Afghanistan. In the latter, more than 25 percent of the fatalities suffered by Western forces were Europeans from 23 countries.

Europeans do not just participate; they lead. They have headed military operations in Macedonia, Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Somalia, and Mali. They have led naval operations off the Horn of Africa and in the Mediterranean. They have conducted support or monitoring missions in Sudan, South Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Indonesia, Iraq, Moldova, Kosovo, Georgia, Niger, the Palestinian territories, Ukraine, and the Baltic States. They have led U.N. missions, including in Lebanon. They have participated in a vital way to U.S.-led missions, including Iraq and Afghanistan. In the latter, more than 25 percent of the fatalities suffered by Western forces were Europeans from 23 countries. The world, and the burden on the United States, would be quite different without all this European activity.

Despite their powerful military, many claim that Europeans could do more in the world if only their governments would spend more on defense — perhaps the 2 percent of the GDP that NATO leaders promised a few years ago. Yet little evidence suggests that more men and materiel — or greater centralization in EU institutions — would generate much more or better European military activity. While Europe did suffer the indignity of asking the United States to resupply it in Libya, it is difficult to see why, as many argue, the Europeans should develop more military capacity across the board. The need for resupply did not affect the outcome of Libya, and it is unlikely to do so elsewhere either, since the United States and Europe have agreed on every military intervention but one since the early 1990s. (The second Iraq War was a lonely exception.) One is hard-pressed to think of any recent case in which a significant group of European states (let alone a majority) desired to launch a strong military or diplomatic mission, but failed to do so for lack of military might.

Europe's preeminent economic clout

Europe possesses impressive military assets, yet the main drivers of its global influence lie elsewhere. Europeans tend to be skeptical about using military force in wars of choice, and have therefore chosen to specialize in nonmilitary tools of statecraft. Their capacities here often exceed those of the United States.

Europe's comparative advantage in civilian power is as vital to global peace and security as U.S. military might. To be sure, a century ago military might was widely viewed as the most essential of global power resources. Yet today it is rarely decisive. It is simply too expensive and uncertain, relative to the potential gains. No direct conflict has occurred among "great powers" since the Korean War. Smaller wars are also steadily becoming both less common and less costly. When they get involved, great powers tend to lose more than they win. Syria is troubling, but it is an exception to a much larger trend away from interstate war.

Countries now typically find nonmilitary means to manage the most important global problems: not just territorial issues, but economic interdependence, development, environmental degradation, global health, human rights, migration, and even terrorism and crime. Among the most important nonmilitary capabilities is economic power. It is hard to see military power playing much of a role in dealing with most such problems. Though Europe maintains a robust military, it makes sense for it to specialize in a type of power that the United States cannot project.

One European specialty is economic power projection. To induce political concessions, European countries manipulate access to their markets, condition economic assistance and exchange, and exploit regulatory and institutional dominance. Thus, a basic source of European economic power is the raw size of its economy.

The conventional wisdom again misleads us. According to a recent poll of citizens in 40 countries, almost everyone in the world believes either that China is already the world's dominant economy, or that the United States still maintains primacy. Only 5 percent think of the EU as a "leading economic power." Yet those 5 percent have a point. By the simplest measure of economic power, nominal GDP, the EU is nearly the same size as the United States and 63 percent larger than China.

This may surprise those who have read widespread reports that China now has the world's largest GDP. Such analyses are deceptive because they employ "purchasing power parity" (PPP), a statistical

measure developed by international development agencies to measure individual poverty and wealth in poorer economies where services and labor are cheap. PPP-based gross national product statistics deliberately inflate developing country income in ways that exaggerate the international value of exports and imports, high technology, modern weapons systems, foreign aid, and most other elements of international economic influence. The more appropriate standard for measuring a country's aggregate economic clout is its nominal GDP. By this measure, China will not surpass the EU or the United States for decades.

Recent newspaper headlines about the dominance of China and the United States are misleading because they, again, disaggregate Europe into 28 individual countries, rather than treating it as unified. The EU is, in fact, the world's second-largest economy. Even more importantly, it is the world's largest trader of goods and services.

Since exports can be a source of vulnerability as well as strength, a more focused measure of trade power is dependence on foreign markets. The more trade dependent a country is, the less powerful it is. Europe is slightly more trade dependent than the United States but far less than China. What about recent increases in Chinese foreign direct investment that have triggered so much media attention? As it turns out, Europe remains the world's leading foreign investor.

To be sure, if you sell natural resources in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, or Australia, Chinese investment is a big deal. Otherwise, we should remember that most global investment still takes place among developed countries, where China's role remains modest.

Yet even this underestimates Europe, because effective economic power depends not just on the relative size of its economy but on average *per capita* income. The poorer its citizens, the fewer resources governments can extract from them. In poorer countries, development is often the primary imperative, foreign-policy spending a luxury, and the overall level of autonomous technological sophistication low. While the aggregate income of China ranks in the top three, its *per capita* income ranks 74th (between Saint Lucia and Gabon). Azar Gat, an Israeli scholar, estimates that developed governments like those in Europe extract three or four times as much for foreign-policy purposes as the governments of developing countries like China. One example is the ability to tax. Revenue as a percentage of

GDP is almost twice as high in the EU as in China.

Europe does not hesitate to exploit its preeminent economic position. EU enlargement — driven largely by perceptions of economic advantage — has been in recent decades the most cost-effective political tool of influence in the hands of any Western country. Over 60 years, the EU has expanded from six to 28 members, encouraging countries to adopt democratic, legal, and market reforms along the way. Though enlargement is now more difficult politically, it continues in the western Balkans.

Europe further leverages its regional market power through a "neighborhood policy" of bilateral agreements with nearby countries from Morocco to Moldova. It supports the World Trade Organization and imposes conditionality on its preferential trade agreements. Inward visa-free travel and migration are important *quid pro quos* in negotiations with neighbors. To the chagrin of U.S. and Chinese companies, Europe dominates global regulation, forcing its trading partners to adopt relatively high European product standards — a phenomenon Columbia Law professor Anu Bradford calls a hegemonic "Brussels effect."

Other European economic instruments are less visible but no less important. One example is foreign aid. Europe provides 69 percent of global official development assistance (ODA), compared with 21 percent for the United States and far less for China. Europe, like the United States, offers the bulk of its total aid in the form of grants, whereas China tends to provide net ODA but export credits and government loans — financial flows that must be repaid and are thus less valuable to recipients. Yet even if you include both, Europe's financial presence dominates that of the United States and China.

European foreign aid has played a decisive role in promoting Western strategic objectives. For example, Europe's 10 billion to 15 billion euros of annual economic aid and the promise of freer trade and energy arrangements constitute 90 percent of Western aid and trade with Ukraine. Ukraine remains troubled, yet without Europe's economic commitment the government in Kiev would have surely gone bankrupt and fallen back into the Russian geopolitical sphere.

Another example of a uniquely effective instrument of European economic power is the imposition of economic sanctions. Ukraine again illustrates the point. As with aid and trade policies, 90 percent of the cost of recent Western sanctions against

Russia falls on Europe. This reflects Europe's unique clout as the largest trading partner not just of many countries in the former Soviet Union, but nearly every country in the Middle East and Africa. It is hard to imagine sanctions working anywhere in the world without Europe's active participation. The United States, by contrast, hardly trades with most of these countries, and thus it lacks the capacity to levy effective sanctions on its own. For example, Washington sanctioned Tehran continuously for 35 years with little effect. After Europe signed on to tough sanctions in 2013, Iran agreed to a nuclear deal within two years.

"Soft power" measures the ability to advance foreign-policy goals by disseminating and manipulating ideas, information, and institutions that help persuade other countries to act in particular ways. Soft power is employed by various means, and the EU belongs among the world's most effective manipulators of many of them.

One important type of soft power is the construction of multilateral institutions that are attractive to join. Today, Europeans are the world's leading supporters of global and regional institutions. Their commitment begins with the EU itself and its ring of agreements with regional neighbors, but Europe also has a decisive influence in managing economic interdependence, human rights, the environment, development, and health at a global level. Typical is the United Nations: Though the United States generally takes credit for being the largest contributor to the international body, once we aggregate Europe's contribution, it is far more influential. Without European pressure, institutions like the International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organization, and other global institutions would not exist in their current form. By imposing conditionality in exchange for membership or collectively rewarding compliance, other governments become committed to institutional rules Europe has designed, thereby influencing the policies of individual states.

Europe also employs subtler modes of exercising soft power. One is through education. Europe is one of the two educational superpowers. Twenty-seven of the world's top 100 universities are in Europe, compared with 55 in the United States, one in Russia, and none in China. Europe exceeds the United States in educating foreign students, hosting almost twice as many students from outside the EU as non-Americans at U.S. universities, and over 10 times

more students than non-Chinese studying in China.

There are signs that opening up European institutions of higher learning to outsiders has been influential. For example, legal scholars have observed that the values and institutions found in most newly drafted national constitutions do not reflect American or Chinese practices, but distinctively European ones. These include social welfare rights, internationally recognized human rights, parliamentary government, and restrictions on money in politics.

Beyond purely political values, Europe garners broad global admiration for its social, cultural, and lifestyle values. Among the top two dozen global tourist destinations, more than half are European. More profound is European dominance of almost all polls of global respect. Last year, for example, *Forbes* magazine asked 40,000 people worldwide which countries were the most "reputable": a composite measure of happiness, cleanliness, lack of corruption, tolerance, and other qualities. Of the top 20 countries, 15 are European. By contrast, the United States ranks 28th and China 57th.

Language? Here too, Europeans enjoy enduring advantages, since the world's second languages are mostly European. English, of course, is a dominant second language across the globe, while French and Spanish also play important roles. The languages of other great powers, notably Mandarin and Russian, have quite limited sway.

Even in Southeast Asia, Chinese ranks low as a second language, outside of diaspora Chinese communities.

Pop culture? To be sure, the United States has one great advantage. Every one of the top 20 worldwide grossing films ever made came from Hollywood. Yet sports is a similar form of popular mass entertainment with comparable global cachet — and Europe is the world's dominant sports superpower. Five of the top seven most-watched professional sports in the world — soccer, basketball, cricket, field hockey, table tennis, tennis, and volleyball — are played at the most prominent and intensive professional level in Europe rather than in the United States or China. The most prestigious European professional soccer generates more income and enjoys more worldwide visibility than any other sports franchises anywhere. European soccer grosses almost twice as much as the NFL and college football together in the

United States. One also sees the breadth of Europe's dominance of sports at the Olympics.

In the Summer Games, Europe takes home more medals than the United States, Russia, and China together; in the Winter Games, Europe has always won more medals than the entire rest of the world combined.

The underlying determinants of global influence — military capabilities, nominal and per capita income, trade and investment competitiveness, the intrinsic attractiveness of symbolic ideas and institutions — are changing far more slowly than headlines suggest. Europe today is the world's invisible superpower — rivaling and, in many cases, surpassing the United States and China. It has the resources to retain this status for decades and generations to come.

Today formal and tacit cooperation among European states functions so reliably that only in the rare cases that it fails to occur does the wider world take note. Europe, like other superpowers, is often distracted by seemingly intractable internal disputes and crises. Today they include migration, right-wing radicalism, Brexit, Russian resurgence, and slow growth under the euro. Yet these threats to the European project are less dire than they appear at first glance.

Far-right parties are unlikely to triumph in any continental political system, let alone spark a mass withdrawal from the EU. In these political systems, government is by coalition and referendums are rare. In the Netherlands, euroskeptic parties are set to be excluded from government. In France, Marine Le Pen has little chance of prevailing in the decisive second round of the upcoming presidential election and her party sends only two representatives to the *Assemblée Nationale*. Euroskeptic parties rule Hungary and Poland, yet have shied away from the suicidal step of withdrawing from the EU.

British leaders resolutely claim to be moving forward with a "hard Brexit." However, Prime Minister Theresa May's public negotiating plan proposes to retain (under another name) almost all existing types of cooperation with the EU except future free movement of people. (External trade policy remains in limbo, perhaps as a bargaining chip.) One important example is NATO. Britain intends to maintain its defense alliances, so there is little reason to expect its active participation in military "coalitions of the willing" to change.

The migrant crisis is receding. EU and national policies have successfully reduced migration to a third of its 2015 peak. That would be impossible without leadership from Brussels, and a further round of common EU policies appears to be in the works. In Ukraine, where 10,000 people died in 18 months just a few years ago, a resolute Europe-led Western policy of aid, sanctions, military preparedness, and diplomatic engagement has helped reduce the death toll to a trickle.

Perhaps the most troubling future threat comes from slow growth and austerity within the eurozone. An EU without the euro as we currently know it might well be more popular and stable than it is today.

Perhaps the most troubling future threat comes from slow growth and austerity within the eurozone. An EU without the euro as we currently know it might well be more popular and stable than it is today. Yet even the euro appears stable for the moment, and growth rates are trending up. As with the other crises, Europe may well muddle through.

Whatever the outcome, these crises seem to have had surprisingly little impact on Europe's status as a global superpower. Most of Europe's core formal institutions — including the single market, environmental and other public regulation, the common trade policy, agricultural policy, foreign aid, common border controls — remain essentially untouched. They are not major targets of euroskeptic criticism. Other European superpower policies — including those in foreign, defense, anti-terrorism, anti-crime, foreign aid, sanctions, diplomatic, and development policies — require only informal coordination, "coalitions of the willing," or tacit cooperation. Recent sanctions on Russia and Iran show that European governments are acting decisively even when diverted by crisis. All these policies will endure whether or not European governments reform their economies, further centralize or decentralize policymaking, increase defense spending, or adopt any other of the various policy prescriptions floating around Europe.

We should not be distracted by sensationalist headlines. Sixty years ago, when European leaders met to sign the Treaty of Rome, one of their shared goals was to strengthen Europe's global position. They have succeeded and, looking forward, there is little reason to doubt they will continue to do so.

The
New York
Times

UNE - Erdogan Claims Vast Powers in Turkey After Narrow Victory in Referendum

Patrick Kingsley

The constitutional change will allow the winner of the 2019 presidential election to assume full control of the government, ending the current parliamentary political system.

The ramifications, however, are immediate. The “yes” vote in the referendum is a validation of the current leadership style of Mr. Erdogan, who has been acting as a de facto head of government since his election in 2014 despite having no constitutional right to wield such power. The office of Turkey’s president was meant to be an impartial role without full executive authority.

The result tightens Mr. Erdogan’s grip on the country, which is one of the leading external actors in the Syrian civil war, a major way station along the migration routes to Europe and a crucial Middle Eastern partner of the United States and Russia.

Many analysts were surprised by the close result, saying they had expected Mr. Erdogan to achieve a larger majority because he had held the referendum within an atmosphere of fear.

Since a failed coup last summer, Turkey has been under a state of emergency, a situation that allowed the government to fire or suspend about 130,000 people suspected of being connected to the failed putsch, and to arrest about 45,000.

The campaign itself was characterized by prolonged intimidation of opposition members, several of whom were shot at or beaten while on the stump by persons unknown.

The opposition questioned the legitimacy of the referendum after the election board made a last-minute decision to increase the burden needed to prove accusations of ballot-box stuffing. At least three instances of alleged voter fraud appeared to be captured on camera.

“We are receiving thousands of complaints on election fraud,” said Erdal Aksunger, the deputy head of the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party, known as the C.H.P. “We are evaluating them one by one.”

The new system will, among other changes:

- Abolish the post of prime minister and transfer executive power to the president.

- Allow the newly empowered president to issue decrees and appoint many judges and officials responsible for scrutinizing his decisions.

- Limit the president to two five-year terms, but give the option of running for a third term if Parliament truncates the second one by calling for early elections.

- Allow the president to order disciplinary inquiries into any of Turkey’s 3.5 million civil servants, according to an analysis by the head of the Turkish Bar Association.

Academics and members of the opposition are concerned that the new system will threaten the separation of powers on which liberal democracies have traditionally depended.

“It represents a remarkable aggrandizement of Erdogan’s personal power and quite possibly a death blow to vital checks and balances in the country,” said Professor Howard Eissenstat, a Turkey expert at the Project on Middle East Democracy, a Washington research group. “Judicial independence was already shockingly weak before the referendum; the new system makes that worse.”

Mr. Erdogan’s supporters deny that the new system will limit political and judicial oversight. If opposition parties win control of Parliament, they could override the president’s decrees with their own legislation, while also asserting greater control over judicial appointments, supporters of the new Constitution contend.

The victorious “yes” camp also argues that a strong, centralized government will make Turkey better able to tackle its many challenges, including a troubled economy, the world’s largest population of Syrian refugees, two terrorism campaigns, a civil war against Kurdish insurgents and the Syrian war across Turkey’s southern border.

“A new page opens in our history of democracy with this vote,” Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, an Erdogan loyalist, said in a victory speech on Sunday night. “Be sure, everyone, we will use this result as best as we

can — for the wealth and peace of our people.”

The fearful environment in which the referendum campaign was held has led watchdogs to question its fairness. In addition to the vast purges of perceived opposition members, the authorities also often prevented “no” campaigners from holding rallies and events. And Mr. Erdogan and his supporters often implied that their opponents were allied with terrorist groups or those suspected of plotting last year’s failed coup.

Analyses of television coverage showed that the “yes” campaign received disproportionately more airtime than its opponents.

“It’s been a completely unfair campaign,” said Andrej Hunko, a German lawmaker assigned by the Council of Europe to observe the election.

Hundreds of election observers were also barred from monitoring the vote, and thousands of Kurds displaced by fighting in southeastern Turkey may not have been able to vote because they have no address, according to the Independent Election Monitoring Network, a Turkish watchdog.

Despite this, Mr. Erdogan’s victory fell far short of the 20-point majority that he and his supporters had expected. “This is a little bit bittersweet,” said Cuneyt Deniz, an Erdogan supporter celebrating in Ankara. “We were expecting above 60 percent.”

The result revealed a deeply divided country, nearly half of which now feels highly embittered. “I am incredibly sad right now,” said Yesim Kara, 37, a “no” voter in Istanbul. “Dark days are ahead.”

Mr. Erdogan’s victory “will enhance the stability of the government, but it will weaken social stability,” said Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the director of the Ankara office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, a research group.

“The new social contract that is being built in Turkey is being based on a very weak foundation,” he added.

Few could agree about how Mr. Erdogan would respond, and he offered no conclusive clues in his victory speech.

In one breath, he appeared to reach out to his opponents, calling the results the “victory of everyone who said yes and no.” But in the next, he promised to reinstate the death penalty — which would end any hopes that Turkey will join the European Union — and mocked his opponents’ intent to appeal the result.

“Don’t beat the air,” he said. “It is too late now.”

Some believe Mr. Erdogan may initially try to rebuild relations with the West, which were severely damaged during the referendum campaign as he sought to manufacture diplomatic crises to energize his base at home.

After Germany and the Netherlands blocked Turkish officials from campaigning in those countries, Mr. Erdogan said both nations had shown Nazi-like behavior, drawing a rebuke from leaders like Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany.

Mr. Unluhisarcikli said he expected a victorious Mr. Erdogan to lead “a charm offensive toward Europe and the U.S. to gain validation of the new system — and such a charm offensive might include correcting some of the democratic backsliding that we’ve seen in Turkey.”

“On the other hand, if his charm offensive is not reciprocated,” Mr. Unluhisarcikli added, “then he might start initiating a Plan B, which involves tightening his grip on Turkish society.”

But Professor Eissenstat said it was unlikely Mr. Erdogan would spend any time repairing relationships with the opposition.

“Some people have imagined that Erdogan might reboot after a ‘yes’ victory and reach out to the opposition,” he said. “I don’t think that is likely. The purges will continue; Erdogan’s instinct is to crush opposition, not co-opt it.

“The question is whether further centralization of power and increased repression can bring stability and allow Erdogan to reboot a troubled economy,” added Professor Eissenstat, a lecturer at St. Lawrence University. “The record of the past 10 years is that the opposite is true.”

Mr. Yildirim, the prime minister, suggested in his speech that the

government was unlikely to step back from its various vendettas at home and abroad. "Our struggle

with internal and external enemies will be intensified," he said.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

UNE - Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan Declares Victory in Referendum to Expand Presidential Powers

Margaret Coker, Ned Levin and Yeliz Candemir

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared victory in a close vote on constitutional changes that would concentrate more power in his office and usher in some of the most radical changes since the 1923 founding of the republic.

The referendum was marred by allegations of fraud, with opposition leaders vowing to demand a recount. Opponents of Mr. Erdogan on Sunday night were massed in protest in Ankara, the capital, even as supporters of the president were holding congratulatory demonstrations elsewhere in the city.

Turkish markets rallied on Monday as investors cheered the victory and the country's main BIST-100 stock index opened 0.74% higher at 90,731 points.

The Turkish lira, strengthened by as much as nearly 3% to 3.6371 against the dollar, its strongest level in two weeks, as investors and analysts predicted less political uncertainty following the referendum. The lira had slumped almost 4% against the dollar this year to date, after plunging by as much as 10% against the greenback in January, making it the world's worst-performing currency.

The president said the proposed constitutional amendments would give him the tools to grapple with terrorism, economic woes and the conflict in neighboring Syria. But in the short term, they are likely to create greater domestic instability.

The contested results could lead to heightened tension with Europe, where officials have expressed wariness about a further concentration of power for Mr. Erdogan, who has led Turkey for 14 years and could now stay on as head of state for another decade.

The outcome is unlikely to immediately affect Ankara's

relations with Washington and the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization, analysts said. Turkey is a member of NATO and plays an important role in the alliance's fight against Islamic State.

Unofficial results showed Mr. Erdogan's "yes" side garnering 51.2% of the vote, and 48.8% opposed, with 100% of the ballots counted, according to the state-run Anadolu news agency. Official tallies aren't expected for at least 10 days, according to the head of Turkey's election board, as they investigate widespread allegations of ballot tampering and other irregularities leveled by the major opposition parties.

Speaking to the nation late Sunday, Mr. Erdogan called his win an expression of the national will after a bitterly fought race that essentially became a referendum on his political legacy. His supporters turned out in droves, spurred by the allure of his policies that blend social conservatism and Islam with electoral democracy, as well as a populist dedication to modernizing health care and social services.

Opponents of the changes had argued otherwise. They believe the constitutional changes would deliver a serious blow to a democratic system already under intense strain and set Turkey on a path to authoritarianism. They complained that the campaign has been unfair in part due to the restrictions caused by the continuing state of emergency called after last summer's failed coup. Since then, authorities have arrested more than 40,000 people, including dozens of opposition lawmakers and local elected officials, dismissed more than 120,000 civil servants and other government employees and closed roughly 140 media outlets.

Mr. Erdogan's rivals vowed to challenge the results. The head of the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, said he would demand a recount. Kemal Kilicdaroglu alleged that upward of

2.5 million of the approximately 48 million votes cast could have been tampered with. Other opposition parties reported ballot stuffing by the "yes" side. The unofficial vote tallies show the two sides separated by approximately 1.1 million votes.

The sizable number of dissenters in Sunday's contest signaled the depth of unease with the government's post-coup crackdown and revealed the deep polarization in this nation of 80 million. Many secularists, liberals and ethnic minority Kurds opposed constitutional changes that they fear will enshrine a majoritarian practice of democracy that marginalizes millions of Turks from political life.

The reforms will radically alter Turkey's governing structures—but not overnight. The current system of a parliamentary government headed by a prime minister will be abolished as soon as the country holds its next national election, now set for 2019.

After that, expanded executive powers would rest with the president, who would be able to impose decrees, appoint vice presidents and cabinet members without legislative oversight and wield significant influence over judicial appointments.

Meanwhile, the state of emergency remains in effect and parliament has no power to challenge any of the decrees passed by Mr. Erdogan and his National Security Council. The most recent extension of emergency powers expires this month, and Mr. Erdogan has indicated he would extend them again.

The constitutional advisory body of the Council of Europe—a multilateral human-rights and democracy organization of which Turkey is a member—has said that the amendments could lead to a "one-person regime." Mr. Erdogan's supporters dismiss those concerns.

"Criticism of the changes to the system have targeted Erdogan, because he is so strong," said Reha Denemec, an adviser to the Turkish

president. "It's impossible to have a dictatorship where there are polls."

Mr. Erdogan argued that the more concentrated decision-making would help boost Turkey's economy, which has been in a slump, and improve the government's ability to protect citizens against terror threats from Islamic State and the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party.

His message of strength resonated with many voters.

Fatima Demirci, a 59-year-old homemaker in Istanbul, said she voted "yes" because she thought it would bring more stability and prosperity. "Don't the youth today know what Turkey once was? We waited in lines to buy cooking oil," she said.

During the campaign, Mr. Erdogan courted the support of nationalists by criticizing U.S. policies in Syria and taking swipes at Europe, among other things, threatening to bus Syrian refugees to the EU.

In the final days of the race, Mr. Erdogan repeatedly derided the "no" campaign as the preference of those aligned with terrorist groups and outlawed Kurdish militants, whose insurgency against the state since the 1980s has led to tens of thousands of deaths.

Mr. Erdogan's main base of support is pious Muslims who believe their religion should harmoniously infuse governance and life. They point to their leader's unbroken streak of winning seven straight elections as proof that democracy is successful in Turkey.

The opposition, however, said the referendum showed the opposite—that democracy has become critically endangered.

During the referendum campaign, election monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said the continuing state of emergency raised concerns "about whether appropriate conditions are in place to hold a referendum."

POLITICO Uncertain road ahead as Erdoğan claims victory

Zia Weise

ISTANBUL — It was a nail-biting count, beginning with a large Yes lead gradually erased as a No result

inched closer as the evening wore on.

Yet in the end, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan narrowly emerged as the winner of Turkey's

referendum, at least according to his own declaration — and for now. As the president's supporters swarmed the streets in celebration, opposition

parties said they would contest the result amid allegations of fraud.

According to the state-run Anadolu news agency, the government's proposed constitutional amendment

passed with just 51.3 percent of the votes, handing Erdoğan sweeping new powers — but not the resounding victory he had been hoping for.

By 10 p.m. Sunday night, the result was not official: More than 1 percent of ballots had yet to be counted. And after polls closed, the electoral board announced that any ballots without the official authentication stamp would also count towards the final result — prompting the opposition to cry foul.

Meral Aksener, the leader of a breakaway faction of ultranationalists who have campaigned against both Erdoğan and Aksener's own party, the Nationalist Movement Party [MHP], denounced the decision as "a great scandal."

The largest opposition party CHP said that "illegal acts" had been carried out, with the party's deputy chairman, Erdal Aksünger, saying the result of the historical referendum was "completely invalid."

Meanwhile, the pro-Kurdish opposition party HDP announced they would object to as many as two-thirds of ballots, saying that they suspected "manipulation in the range of three to four percent."

The government, however, made no

mention of the country's division.

Erdogan struck a conciliatory tone in his victory speech, saying: "Today is a victory for all Yes and No supporters, all of Turkey and citizens abroad."

He did not reference the fraud allegations but warned: "We expect other countries, especially our allies, to respect Turkey's decision."

Binali Yıldırım, who after Sunday's result may be remembered as Turkey's last prime minister, declared victory for Yes before all the ballots were counted.

"There are no losers in this referendum," he said, speaking from the balcony of the governing party's Ankara headquarters. "No one should be heartbroken."

Unless challenged in court, the result marks a watershed moment for Turkey: having secured the public's approval, parliament will soon set about transforming the country's parliamentary system into a presidential republic. The changes are expected to come into effect by 2019.

Questions about the vote's legitimacy

Though a neck-and-neck race was predicted by pollsters, observers called the narrow margin remarkable given the Yes side's dominance of the news media and use of state

resources for the campaign, while the No camp faced intimidation.

"People will say: 'You had all the state resources, you control the media, you tied the opposition's hands. Is that the best you can get?'" said Asli Aydintasbas, a fellow at the European Council for Foreign Relations. A narrow margin would lead people to "say all sorts of things," she added.

Votes were expected to split roughly along party lines, but the Yes side appeared to fall short: Together, the two parties backing Yes — the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the ultranationalist MHP — won 61.4 percent of the vote in the most recent elections in November 2015, compared with just 51.3 percent voting for Yes on Sunday.

Several provinces who had supported AKP in the last elections voted No in the referendum, including Istanbul and the capital of Ankara — meaning that Turkey's three largest cities oppose the amendment, with Izmir also voting No.

Although the divide within the MHP likely played a significant role — with Aksener and others campaigning against the amendment, splitting the party's voter base — the difference of about ten percent suggests that a

significant number of AKP voters cast their ballots for No.

With the result's legitimacy questioned, what comes next is uncertain. As Erdoğan has long flouted the existing constitutional rule that ascribes a largely ceremonial role to the president, governing the country instead as a de facto executive president, not much may change in the referendum's immediate aftermath.

But with nearly half the country against the amendments and the opposition contesting the results, voters did not grant Erdoğan the unquestionable stamp of approval he has sought for so long — leaving his position as Turkey's unchallenged leader more vulnerable than he would likely like.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn said they were awaiting an assessment of the vote by international observers.

"In view of the close referendum result and the far-reaching implications of the constitutional amendments," they said, "we also call on the Turkish authorities to seek the broadest possible national consensus in their implementation."



Turkey's democracy died today

Frida Ghitis

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has declared victory in a referendum over a new constitution that will make him far more powerful, potentially for many more years to come. The result, which the opposition is calling fraudulent, promises to make Turkey less democratic, more bitterly divided and more religious than ever.

It comes as no surprise that at the last minute, when the counting showed the "no" vote was threatening the thin lead of the pro-Erdogan "Yes" vote, electoral authorities stepped in to announce they would allow unsealed ballots to be counted, in contravention to the rules.

Already the lead-up to the vote gave enormous advantages to the yes camp, particularly in the form of media coverage. Meanwhile, opponents faced intimidation and the risk of job loss if they publicly voiced their opinions.

Now, with the results showing a narrow 51%-to-49% victory for Erdoğan, the opposition says the

vote counting, too, was marred by fraud and vows to challenge it.

Still, it looks all but certain the President has won a historic victory that will not only transform the country he has led since 2013, but will also create a path for him to remain in office until 2029.

Erdogan, a charismatic, authoritarian populist with an agenda steeped in Islam, has become the focal point of deep divisions in the country, and this referendum will make those divisions only more acrimonious and destabilizing.

With barely half the country supporting his push for more power, and with the three largest cities — Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir — voting no, Erdogan will assume his new powers under a cloud of doubt. That sense of insecurity is likely to make Erdogan more, not less, autocratic.

Erdogan has not been a conciliatory leader. Instead, he has ruled by stoking ideological, social and sectarian divisions. He has responded to challenges, even peaceful and democratic ones, by crushing the opposition. And he has

taken advantage of every opportunity -- and every challenge -- to bolster his power.

No opportunity is greater than the one proffered by Sunday's referendum. The referendum's win approves a new constitution containing 18 amendments that will phase in gradually, turning Turkey's parliamentary system into a presidential one.

Until now, the President was supposed to be a figurehead, unaffiliated with any political party and without great powers. Under Erdoğan, that figurehead role was never real. But the new system will officially transform the ceremonial President into a commanding executive.

Erdogan, who has never lost an election, will resume his role as the leader of the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, which he founded and used as the vehicle for his meteoric rise from soccer player into Turkey's most powerful leader in nearly a century. He will lead the party that holds the majority in parliament, controlling both the legislative and executive branches, and soon strengthening his

dominance over the judiciary. Checks and balances will fade away.

New elections will be held in 2019, at which time the prime minister's position will be abolished. By then, the President will be able to appoint 12 out of the top court's 15 judges, select the members of the National Security Council and play a prominent role in drafting legislation. Critics say Erdoğan will, in effect, become a dictator.

Erdogan never quite left the helm of AKP even as he transitioned into the presidency, and when he faced down an attempted overthrow last July, he used the opportunity to purge the country of anyone who might stand in the way of his political ambitions.

The 2016 coup attempt proved so useful to Erdoğan that many still question if he didn't orchestrate it himself. Within hours of regaining power, he launched a crackdown of stunning magnitude, imprisoning tens of thousands of people, and removing hundreds of thousands from their jobs in the military, universities, courts and elsewhere.

The coup failed, and real democracy died in its wake.

But long before the coup, Erdogan's anti-democratic tendencies were already in stark display. Years before, Turkey had already imprisoned more journalists than any country, as it does today. And that was just one of the signs that liberal, pluralist democracy was not Erdogan's cup of tea.

While much of the country still looked forward to seeing Turkey draw closer to the liberal, modern West and join the European Union, Erdogan fired up the crowds with nationalist, anti-Western rhetoric. The President and his agenda are a

big hit with about half the population, mostly the rural, conservative segments.

But it is anathema to the other half. For urban Turks, and for others who still embrace the secularism of Kemal Ataturk, Erdogan's conservative, religion-driven agenda is hard to stomach.

Worse yet, the President appears determined to challenge Kemalism with a new blend of nationalism and religion that puts him at the top. His new \$600 million, 1,100-room presidential palace has become symbolic evidence for critics' claims that he wants to be the new Sultan, reprising Ottoman glory days, when

one man had full power and Turkey led the Muslim world.

Many worry about how far the President will go in pushing his socially conservative and religious views as he tries to reshape the country. Women were incensed when the President spoke of the "delicate nature" of women and declared that "Our religion [Islam] has defined a position for women: Motherhood."

But perhaps nothing puts the Islamization agenda in sharper focus than the government's education plans for a country in which secularism was a central tenet. Erdogan has said he wants to

raise a "pious generation," and the education ministry has announced a new curriculum that includes massive amounts of religious text, and a heroic depiction of Erdogan's win against the July coup plotters.

What lies ahead for the divided Turkish people is a much more intense Erdogan era. The President will now be empowered to move forward with his plan to erode secularism and consolidate his own power. For those who want Turkey to continue on the path of a democracy, with rule of law, independent judges, free expression and equality for all, the road ahead just became much, much steeper.



RIP Turkey, 1921 – 2017

Emily Tamkin | 3 days ago

Recep Tayyip Erdogan didn't just win his constitutional referendum — he permanently closed a chapter of his country's modern history.

On Jan. 20, 1921, the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed the *Teşkilât-ı Esasîye Kanunu*, or the Law on Fundamental Organization. It would be almost three years until Mustafa Kemal — known more commonly as Ataturk, or "Father Turk" — proclaimed the Republic of Turkey, but the legislation was a critical marker of the new order taking shape in Anatolia.

The new country called Turkey, quite unlike the Ottoman Empire, was structured along modern lines. It was to be administered by executive and legislative branches, as well as a Council of Ministers composed of elected representatives of the parliament. What had once been the authority of the sultan, who ruled alone with political and ecclesiastic legitimacy, was placed in the hands of legislators who represented the sovereignty of the people.

More than any other reform, the Law on Fundamental Organization represented a path from dynastic rule to the modern era. And it was this change that was at stake in Turkey's referendum over the weekend. Much of the attention on Sunday's vote was focused on the fact that it was a referendum on the power of the Turkish presidency and the polarizing politician who occupies that office, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Yet it was actually much more.

Whether they understood it or not, when Turks voted "Yes", they were registering their opposition to the *Teşkilât-ı Esasîye Kanunu* and the version of modernity that Ataturk imagined and represented. Though

the opposition is still disputing the final vote tallies, the Turkish public seems to have given Erdogan and the AKP license to reorganize the Turkish state and in the process raze the values on which it was built. Even if they are demoralized in their defeat, Erdogan's project will arouse significant resistance among the various "No" camps. The predictable result will be the continuation of the purge that has been going on since even before last July's failed coup including more arrests and the additional delegitimization of Erdogan's parliamentary opposition. All of this will further destabilize Turkish politics.

Turkey's Islamists have long venerated the Ottoman period. In doing so, they implicitly expressed thinly veiled contempt for the Turkish Republic. For Necmettin Erbakan, who led the movement from the late 1960s to the emergence of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in August 2001, the republic represented cultural abnegation and repressive secularism in service of what he believed was Ataturk's misbegotten ideas that the country could be made Western and the West would accept it. Rather, he saw Turkey's natural place not at NATO's headquarters in Brussels but as a leader of the Muslim world, whose partners should be Pakistan, Malaysia, Egypt, Iran, and Indonesia.

When Erbakan's protégés — among them Erdogan and former President Abdullah Gul — broke with him and created the AKP, they jettisoned the anti-Western rhetoric of the old guard, committed themselves to advancing Turkey's European Union candidacy, and consciously crafted an image of themselves as the Muslim analogues to Europe's Christian Democrats. Even so, they retained traditional Islamist ideas about the role of Turkey in the

Middle East and the wider Muslim world.

Thinkers within the AKP — notably former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu — harbored reservations about the compatibility of Western political and social institutions with their predominantly Muslim society. But the AKP leadership never acted upon this idea, choosing instead to undermine aspects of Ataturk's legacy within the framework of the republic. That is no longer the case.

The AKP and supporters of the "yes" vote argue that the criticism of the constitutional amendments was unfair. They point out that the changes do not undermine a popularly elected parliament and president as well as an independent (at least formally) judiciary. This is all true, but it is also an exceedingly narrow description of the political system that Erdogan envisions. Rather, the powers that would be afforded to the executive presidency are vast, including the ability to appoint judges without input from parliament, issue decrees with the force of law, and dissolve parliament. The president would also have the sole prerogative over all senior appointments in the bureaucracy and exercise exclusive control of the armed forces. The amendments obviate the need for the post of prime minister, which would be abolished. The Grand National Assembly does retain some oversight and legislative powers, but if the president and the majority are from the same political party, the power of the presidency will be unconstrained. With massive imbalances and virtually no checks on the head of state, who will now also be the head of government, the constitutional amendments render the Law on Fundamental Organization and all subsequent efforts to emulate the organizational principles of a modern state moot. It turns out that Erdogan, who would

wield power not vested in Turkish leaders since the sultans, is actually a neo-Ottoman.

Erdogan's ambition helped propel Turkey to this point. But unlike the caricature of a man who seeks power for the sake of power, the Turkish leader actually has a vision for the transformation of Turkey in which the country is more prosperous, more powerful, and more Muslim, meaning conservative and religious values would shape the behavior and expectations of Turks as they make their way in life. The problem is that Erdogan is convinced that he is the only one with the political skills, moral suasion, and stature to carry it out. Consequently, he needs to command the state and the political arena in ways that Turkish presidents, who are supposed to be above the fray and by tradition are expected to carry out their limited but important powers in statesmanlike fashion, never have.

For all of Erdogan's political successes, forging the "executive presidency" that he seeks has been an exercise in frustration until now.

For all of Erdogan's political successes, forging the "executive presidency" that he seeks has been an exercise in frustration until now. In October 2011, he announced that Turkey would have a new constitution within a year. By 2013, the interparty parliamentary committee charged with writing the new document was deadlocked, so Erdogan set his sights on a constitution written by the AKP. In order to get it passed, however, he needed to reinforce his parliamentary majority. When, in two general elections in 2015, he did not get the 367 seats (out of 550) needed to write and ratify a constitution without the public's input, the Turkish president was forced to settle for constitutional

amendments and Sunday's referendum.

In order to bolster support for the executive presidency, Erdogan has raised the specter of the political and economic instability of the 1990s and early 2000s, when a series of coalition governments proved too incompetent and corrupt to manage Turkey's challenges. Many Turks quite rightly regard that era as one of lost opportunities and would prefer not to repeat it. The wave of terror attacks by Kurdish insurgents that killed scores between the summer of 2015 and late 2016 added urgency to Erdogan's message about the wisdom of a purely presidential system.

Turkey's domineering president has also sought to clear the field of real and perceived opponents, driving and deepening Turkey's authoritarianism. The bureaucracy has been purged, a process that began even before last July's failed coup; the Gulen movement has been dismantled; journalists have been silenced through jail time and other threats to their livelihood; and campaigners for a "no" vote hounded. To build support for a "yes" vote, Erdogan played on nationalist sentiment and manufactured crises with the Dutch and German governments over pro-

AKP rallies planned in their countries.

It should come as no surprise that Erdogan pulled out all the stops in pursuit of the constitutional amendments. After all, they alter the organization of the Turkish state in fundamental ways and in the process do away with the checks and balances in the system. Those constraints on executive power were never strong to begin with, and Erdogan has already upended them in practice. Now, he seeks to legitimize this change in constitutional principles. Why?

Besides the fact that authoritarians like to situate their nondemocratic practices in legal systems so they can claim "rule of law," Erdogan needs the legal cover to pursue his broader transformative agenda. And the only way it seems that he can accomplish that is by making himself something akin to a sultan.

Erdogan is an authoritarian, like those found throughout the world. But he is also inspired by Ottoman history, and there are aspects of his rule that echo that era. As the Turkish president has come to rely on a smaller and smaller group of advisors, including members of his family, his "White Palace" — the presidential palace in Ankara he built on land once owned by Ataturk

— has come to resemble, not merely in grandeur, the palaces of the Ottoman sultans. Yet his effort to secure the executive presidency goes much deeper than that. Erdogan wants to tear down the republic because both he and the people he represents have suffered at the hands of those who have led and defended it. It would be impractical and impossible to re-create the governing structures of the Ottoman state, but in the Turkish-Islamist imagination, the age of the Ottomans was not only the apotheosis of Turkish culture and power, but a tolerant and progressive era. For Erdogan's core constituency, in particular, the AKP era has been a golden era, a modern day analogue to this manufactured past. These predominantly pious and middle class Turks enjoy personal and political freedoms that they were once denied. They have also enjoyed upward economic and social mobility. By granting Erdogan the executive presidency he has so coveted, they are looking forward to even greater achievements. Of course, there are the millions of Turks who voted No and fear the consolidation of authoritarianism and who regard the state and the Kemalist ideas it represents as sacrosanct.

The Turkish Republic has an undeniably complicated history. It is an enormous achievement. In the space of almost a century, a largely agrarian society that had been devastated by war was transformed into a prosperous power that wielded influence in its own region and well beyond. At the same time, modern Turkey's history has also been nondemocratic, repressive, and sometimes violent. It thus makes perfect political sense for Erdogan to seek the transformation of Turkey by empowering the presidency and thereby closing off the possibility once and for all that people like him will be victims of the republic.

At the end of the day, Erdogan is simply replacing one form of authoritarianism with another. The Law on Fundamental Organization and the republic that followed were expressions of modernity. The Turkish Republic has always been flawed, but it always contained the aspiration that — against the backdrop of the principles to which successive constitutions claimed fidelity — it could become a democracy. Erdogan's new Turkey closes off that prospect.

In Sunday's constitutional referendum, the country's civil servants will make their last stand as an independent force.

Bloomberg

Turkey's New Playbook for the Semi-Authoritarian

Noah Feldman

The votes from Turkey's constitutional referendum are in, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has claimed victory for his side, even as the result remains disputed. What's clear is who the winner is not: constitutional democracy. On the surface, the amendments turn Turkey into a presidential system instead of a parliamentary one. Underneath, they strengthen the personal authority of Erdogan, who in the last decade and a half has gone from prime minister to president to quasi-authoritarian leader.

Erdogan has shown once again that he is the vanguard of a new breed of semi-authoritarians that includes Viktor Orban of Hungary and potentially Jaroslaw Kaczynski of Poland. These aren't your grandfather's would-be fascists, who might have come to power by election but then planned to abolish them and assume total dictatorial power.

Instead, the new authoritarians' playbook calls for maintaining regular elections and the outward forms of multiparty democracy, while

in fact consolidating power and cooking the books just enough to keep winning the popular vote. Erdogan, like his emulators and colleagues, has weakened the free press and free speech without completely shutting down all alternative political voices.

After all, Erdogan put his proposed systemic changes up for a referendum, which is not what dictators traditionally did. Yes, he made efforts to silence opposition. And his AK Party may have cheated in other ways in some jurisdictions. Yet the fact remains that the election was clean enough -- and close enough -- that we will probably never know enough to say a majority of the voting public didn't want the result.

All this leads to a genuine puzzle: Why bother? If your plan is to erode constitutional democracy in favor of authoritarianism, why follow most of the rules most of the time?

Part of the answer is that Erdogan, like Orban and the Polish PiS party, is carefully calibrating just how much support he actually has, and how much real opposition exists. Where somewhere close to half the population doesn't like you, the

challenge for the semi-authoritarian is to avoid pushing the opposition into all-out refusal of your legitimacy.

Call it the Hosni Mubarak lesson: If enough people want the president out, the people will go the streets. Then the army will do the rest, undertaking a coup in the name of democracy.

By maintaining at least the basic forms of constitutional democracy, the semi-authoritarian avoids alienating the opposition to the extent that it will try to overthrow him.

Erdogan has proved twice in recent years that he has achieved this balance, thus avoiding the fare of Mubarak. In the Gezi Park protests of 2013, he faced a huge public demonstration in Istanbul. He eventually shut down the protest by force. But the army didn't take the opportunity to make a power grab.

Then, in 2016, some elements of the army did try a weird, half-hearted coup. It failed, in large part because the public didn't take to the streets in support of the army. Much of the public seems to have felt that the coup was anti-democratic. Erdogan might be semi-authoritarian, but he

had been elected and that was still less authoritarian than a military regime.

The other partial explanation for semi-authoritarianism is that today's rulers don't actually believe in total dictatorship as a desirable method for staying in power. Erdogan had the experience of being banned from politics for Islamic rhetoric. Orban lived through the fall of Communism, as did Kaczynski. That should be enough to teach anyone that rule without meaningful opposition doesn't work very well.

Of course the new semi-authoritarians might fantasize about total power. But their real fantasy seems to be getting re-elected forever by more than 50 percent of an adoring public.

It's not a coincidence that these leaders' parties are all populist. And populism glories in speaking for "the people," defined narrowly enough to exclude the opposition.

The last self-interested twist in the semi-authoritarians' strategy is that they are keeping their options open should they lose popularity someday. Most true dictators are

assassinated or end their lives in prison or exile.

But if the opposition is liberal-democratic and constitutionalist, it seems plausible that if it eventually comes to power, it won't severely punish the semi-authoritarian as it

would be the true dictator. The populist semi-authoritarian will be able to say, when he's out of power, that he followed the constitution, and that his successors should, too. Most liberal-democratic governments will be too rights-oriented -- or wimpy -- to exact punishment.

It emerges that semi-authoritarianism is a terrific way to stay in power so long as you have a populist base and a willingness to erode free speech and free elections.

The world doesn't yet have a good set of tools to respond, as Europe's ineffectual responses to Hungary and Poland show. As for Erdogan, his position is invulnerable relative to regional neighbors and European counterparts. Expect more leaders around the world to follow his lead.



Here's How Turkey Lurched from Democracy Toward Dictatorship

Roy Gutman

ISTANBUL —

Turkey's move to abandon parliamentary democracy and adopt one-man rule fulfills a long-held dream of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who not only expands his powers but also gets a chance to stay in office for another 15 years if, as expected, the current referendum ballot count holds up.

The official Anadolu news agency said the country voted on Sunday 24.3 million to 23.2 million, a margin of 51.1 to 48.8 per cent, in favor of a package of constitutional reforms. But the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) said it will challenge well over 1 million ballots which lacked the seal of the election oversight board.

If Erdogan prevails in the end, as many here expect, the result will be a system under which there's no prime minister, where the parliament will be weakened to the point of being a rubber stamp, and the judiciary will become still more subservient than it is already.

The path to one-man rule—opponents talk of a “dictatorship”—is the story of a politician with a gut instinct for gaining power who's seized on every political setback that's come his way in the past two years and turned it into an opportunity to advance his ambitions.

Using adversity as a stepping stone, he's accreted so much power—far more than is constitutionally accorded to his ceremonial post as president—that the referendum in a sense only formalizes what he's already accomplished.

Dealing with Turkey after the referendum will present big challenges to the U.S. and Turkey's other NATO allies. Ankara and Washington are already in a major dispute over how to defeat the so-called Islamic State in Syria, which President Donald Trump has set as a top priority. Soon the two countries are likely to be bickering over how to retain the semblance of democracy in Turkey and thus prevent the alliance from splitting up.

In some respects, the U.S. has played an unwitting role in Turkey's move toward authoritarian rule. Like Brexit in Britain and the rise of rightwing populism in Europe, which are partly reactions to the flood of refugee from Syria, the internal political shift here is also a byproduct of that war.

Former President Barack Obama decided largely to ignore the Assad regime's war against its own people as well as the consequences—more than half the population displaced internally or abroad, of them more than 3 million Syrians in Turkey alone.

It wasn't until ISIS extremists seized Mosul, Iraq, and named Raqqa, Syria, as their capital that he decided to intervene militarily. That led to a tactical U.S. alliance with People's Protection Units (YPG), the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which the U.S., the EU and Turkey all have designated a terrorist organization. Turkey has been at war with the PKK for some 40 years, with a brief break from 2013-2015.

Less than a year after Obama began providing military support to the YPG in the fight against ISIS, the PKK, no doubt buoyed by its burgeoning relationship with Washington, announced an end to the cease-fire with Turkey and began attacking Turkish security forces in the southeast.

Erdogan, citing the revived war with the PKK, pleaded with the U.S. repeatedly to break off the alliance with the YPG, but to no avail.

Today the U.S. appears as determined to use the PKK's affiliate in Syria to help capture Raqqa as Erdogan is to block it.

A security challenge in its own right, the PKK's return to war with Turkey in July 2015 provided an occasion for Erdogan to rally political support at home.

He was in need of a new political strategy.

Just a month before the PKK had announced the return to violence, Erdogan had endured a major electoral setback, a loss of his majority in national parliamentary

elections. The big winner in those elections was Selahattin Demirtas, the charismatic leader of the pro-Kurdish HDP, whose election campaign had gained support from non-Kurds partly because he was campaigning to block Erdogan from gaining additional powers.

The HDP won 80 seats in the 550-seat parliament, a gain of 51, while Erdogan's party fell to 258, down 69, and lost its parliamentary majority.

Other politicians might have been discouraged by such setbacks, but Erdogan saw opportunity. Rather than form a unity government, he delayed and delayed until he could call new elections. To weaken the HDP, and destroy the chances of its giant-killer Demirtas, he labeled it the political arm of the PKK.

Calling a second round of elections in November, the AKP regained its majority with 317 seats. With that, Erdogan formed a one-party government and began efforts to sideline the HDP, which still had 59 seats in parliament.

In March 2016, parliament voted to lift the immunity of 115 members, including nearly all of the HDP parliamentarians. Demirtas and his co-leader Figen Yuksekdog were arrested last November, and both are now in jail. Yuksekdog was found guilty of supporting terrorism in February and stripped of her parliamentary seat and Demirtas was found guilty of “insulting the Turkish nation and state institutions.” The party of the “giant-killer” was crippled.

Erdogan's third opportunity to turn adversity into political capital occurred July 15 last year, when a group of senior military officers staged an abortive coup. Erdogan, who was vacationing on the Aegean coast, was cut off from his own government, but took to the airwaves over a FaceTime link with CNN Turk, an independent television channel, in which he appealed to the Turkish public to take to the streets in opposition to the coup. His followers confronted tanks in Ankara, Istanbul, and other cities, and 248 lost their lives.

In a daring return to center stage, Erdogan flew in a small plane

through airspace controlled by the coup plotters to Istanbul's Ataturk airport, where loyalists had cleared the runway and facilitated a safe landing.

At a brief appearance the next day, he declared: “This uprising is a gift from God to us, because this will be a reason to cleanse our army.” Five days after the failed coup, he ordered a state of emergency and began ruling by decree.

With his expanded powers, he purged political opponents associated with one-time ally, Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic preacher who lives in U.S. self-exile, who Erdogan charged was behind the coup. But he also purged, fired or arrested Kurds suspected of sympathies with the PKK and many others. Some 150,000 people, many of them public employees, were dismissed from their jobs, 100,000 were put under investigation, and 44,000 were imprisoned pending trial, according to a recent report by the parliamentary committee of the Council of Europe, which sets human rights norms for Europe. Some 177 media outlets were closed, many them Gülenist, but a great many Kurdish, and 2,500 journalists lost their jobs, among them many Kurds but also many affiliated with the opposition CHP.

This set the stage for Erdogan's drive to change the Turkish constitution and give him the powers he had sought for years.

First, he obtained the backing of Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the nationalist MHP, although what the quid pro quo might have been remains unclear. That gave Erdogan the votes in parliament needed to call a referendum. And then, without any public discussion, he submitted the amendments to the parliament itself.

Such debate as there was had to take place under the state of emergency. When ISIS organized a terror attack on an Istanbul nightclub in the dark early hours of New Year's Day, Erdogan launched a major crackdown by the security forces—and extended the state of emergency.

A good part of the debate was not even televised, and individual CHP members posted it on the Internet, using their smartphones. But that was just a preview of the almost surreal campaign for the amendments.

Ever since they won parliamentary approval in mid January and the date for the referendum was set, what's been missing is vigorous public discussion.

The Turkish news media, with some notable but rare exceptions, toe the government line, and those that don't support Erdogan self-censor, particularly at a time some 150 journalists are now reported in jail.

So, there was little debate in the news media. Also missing from the national debate was an actual *debate*, according to Utku Çakırözer, a former editor at the opposition daily *Cumhuriyet*, who's now a CHP deputy from Eskişehir,

an industrial city in central Anatolia. "I don't think there's been a debate between yea-sayers and nay-sayers at the expert level," he said.

Absent such input, the government was able to make claims for the amendments that were completely spurious, such as that the changes would strengthen the separation of powers and that the boost in deputies to 600 from the current 550 would strengthen the parliament.

Erdogan's decision to run an all-out campaign when his current post is supposed to be apolitical and ceremonial rankled his opponents, as did the decision to deploy the ministers in the Turkish government and the aircraft, vehicles, state buildings and other facilities in the campaign.

Erdogan also tapped into an ingrained attitude of defiance to foreign powers last month when he sent government ministers to

western Europe to try to win votes from Turks living abroad.

When the German and Dutch governments made it clear the ministers were not welcome, Erdogan seized the opportunity to accuse both governments of Nazi-style policies. The gambit, which shocked public opinion in west Europe, appears to have won him support among Turks.

But the most critical factor in putting his message across was the way in which Erdogan, who according to the constitution is supposed to be neutral, and his Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim, commandeered the airwaves. What made this possible was a decree issued on the eve of the referendum campaign that lifted the requirement that television channels to give equal time to each side in the debate.

Erdogan made two or three speeches a day, as did Prime

Minister Binali Yildirim, and they invariably got full coverage on national television. A study just cited by the CHP said Erdogan, in his capacity as president, and the AKP as the party advocating the "yes" vote received 10 times as much air time as Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the head of the CHP. The HDP was not even a minor player.

The fact the deck was thus stacked in favor of a "yes" vote may win the losing "no" advocates a vote of sympathy, and that seems to be what Kilicdaroglu now hopes for. "We held a referendum on unequal conditions," he said Sunday night. "We did our best to obey the rules under these conditions."

He promised a fight to the end. But there's almost no place in the Turkish government to appeal to, and international opinion appears to carry less weight with Erdogan with every passing day.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Donald Trump & Syria Airstrike – Moral

President Donald Trump's decision last week to order airstrikes to punish Syria for a chemical-weapons attack that killed and injured scores of civilians has exposed conservatism's intellectual confusion about U.S. foreign policy. Perhaps the most troubling thing about this debate is the deficit of historical perspective – a failure to consider the moral-theological tradition of the West that insists that civilized nations have a responsibility to protect civilian populations in times of war.

Amid the brutally destructive Wars of Religion, Protestant thinker Hugo Grotius wrote *On Laws of War and Peace* (1625). "Though there may be circumstances, in which absolute justice will not condemn the sacrifice of lives in war," he argued, "yet humanity will require that the greatest precaution should be used against involving the innocent in danger, except in cases of extreme urgency and utility."

Here is a political principle, rooted in Judeo-Christian ethics, which has helped to protect countless civilians from the savagery of war. Here is a concept about human dignity that has influenced every international document on the conduct of nations in wartime: from the Geneva Protocol (1925), banning the use of chemical weapons; to the Genocide Convention (1948), adopted in the aftermath of the Holocaust; to the United Nations Responsibility to Protect (2005), a resolution authorizing military force to prevent crimes against humanity.

Yet many of the critics of the U.S. missile strike seem indifferent to this tradition. Conservatives such as Andrew McCarthy argue that Bashar al-Assad's use of a weapon of mass destruction — which targeted innocent men, women, and children — involved "no vital American interests." No vital American interests? When did conservatism decide that the United States has no interest in upholding a universal moral norm that has helped to prevent the West from descending into a permanent state of barbarism? When, exactly, did the humanitarian ideals of the Western tradition become irrelevant to the conduct of U.S. foreign policy?

It was the abject failure of the United Nations to uphold these principles throughout the 1980s and 1990s that produced the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine: the proposition that there is a collective responsibility to protect people from genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity — even if it means military intervention. Overwhelmingly approved by the U.N. General Assembly, R2P insists that nations cannot hide behind the U.N. charter and "national sovereignty" in order to wage war against their civilian populations. The signatories to the doctrine — which include the United States — agree to take "collective action . . . should peaceful means be inadequate" to protect populations at risk of gross human-rights abuses. In this, R2P pays homage to the Christian just-war tradition.

The problem, of course, is that the U.N. Security Council is deemed the only legitimate authority to implement the doctrine. Just-war theorist James Turner Johnson has written of the historic dysfunction of the United Nations in this regard: "The structure of the U.N. is such that clear purpose and effective command and control are virtually unimaginable."

As long as Russia — Syria's chief patron — retains its veto power on the U.N. Security Council, there will be no U.N. resolution to punish Assad or prevent him from committing more war crimes. Russian president Vladimir Putin has even suggested that the United States manufactured the chemical attack as a pretense for an invasion. We thus face the bizarre spectacle of a permanent member of the Security Council either complicit in a chemical-weapons attack or, at the very least, committed to a false and outlandish narrative of U.S. malevolence — all for the purpose of insulating a genocidal regime from censure. The result, if experience is any guide: an even more belligerent Syria, more mass atrocities, more attacks on humanitarian aid workers, and the near collapse of a universal moral principle.

"If we are not able to enforce resolutions preventing the use of chemical weapons, what does that say about our effectiveness in this institution?" asked Nikki Haley, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. "When the United Nations consistently fails in its duty to act collectively, there are times in the

life of states that we are compelled to take our own action."

Ambassador Haley has a good deal of U.S. diplomatic history on her side. The 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo — a bombing campaign that brought an end to the ethnic cleansing of the Balkan wars — lacked U.N. approval. It was, to be sure, a controversial intervention, and Bill Clinton's deep aversion to American casualties contributed to the carnage and chaos during the campaign. But political realists who saw no important U.S. interests at stake — not even naked aggression and a humanitarian disaster within Europe's borders could stir them — looked morally bankrupt once peace and security were restored to the region.

The same can be said about the American and British intervention on behalf of Iraqi Kurds after the first Gulf War. The Kurds of northern Iraq rebelled against Saddam Hussein in 1991, after his army was defeated and kicked out of Kuwait by the U.S.-led coalition. But the Iraqi army cracked down on the rebels, and seemed ready to exterminate the entire population — having used chemical weapons against them with impunity during the Iran-Iraq war. Within weeks, a million Kurds fled the region, with nearly 1,000 people dying each day.

The U.N. Security Council approved humanitarian assistance for the Kurds, but it never authorized the no-fly zones established under President George H. W. Bush. From April to September 1991, Operation Provide Comfort flew over 40,000 sorties, relocated 700,000 refugees,

and restored many Kurdish villages destroyed by the Iraqi military. Over the next decade, U.S. and British pilots took anti-aircraft fire from Iraqi forces, shot down Iraqi planes, and successfully defended the no-fly zones. Today the Iraqi Kurds are among the most pro-Western allies in the Middle East, and arguably the most effective fighting force against the Islamic State. Their survival and contribution to stability in the region was the result of a humanitarian mission that, according to the

realists, *involved no vital American interests.*

The U.S. has sent a message to lawless regimes.

In both instances, the United States drew upon insights embedded in centuries of moral and political philosophy. Conservatives ought to know and care about these ideas, which have done so much to promote international peace and security.

President Trump's decision to put aside his "America First" campaign pledge and to punish the Assad regime will not solve the nearly intractable problem of the Syrian civil war. The airstrike, confined to a single Syrian airfield, has hardly affected Assad's capacity to deploy chemical weapons. But Trump's decision to act, if part of a broader strategy of engagement, has the potential to reverse the diplomatic disaster created by Barack Obama's feckless and disingenuous policies in Syria. It might help secure a

measure of justice where diplomacy, absent the projection of American power, has utterly failed.

The United States has sent a message that lawless regimes cannot always evade the moral laws that govern civilized nations. It is a message that is consistent with America's vital national interests — and with its most cherished political and religious ideals.

**The
Washington
Post**

Opinion | Trump isn't sure what to do next on Syria. Congress has some ideas.

The Trump administration is working hard to come up with a comprehensive strategy for Syria after striking the forces of Bashar al-Assad earlier this month. To that end, congressional leaders are preparing a new push to get their old ideas for pressuring the Syrian president, Russia and Iran to the president's desk.

The administration's ongoing policy review on how to defeat the Islamic State hasn't reached a consensus on what to do about the larger Syria conflict. Nobody expected President Trump, who campaigned promising to stay out of Syria, to intervene militarily in his first 100 days in office. Now that Assad's chemical weapons attack has changed Trump's mind, his government is committed to playing a more prominent role in solving the civil war.

The Trump administration needs tools to pressure Assad and his partners to engage in real negotiations on the way forward. Simply asking Moscow to abandon Assad without any real leverage is the same strategy the Obama administration pursued unsuccessfully for years. That's where Congress comes in.

When lawmakers return from their recess next week, they will quickly begin moving several bills designed variously to sanction the Assad, Iranian and Russian governments, several lawmakers and

congressional aides told me. Some of the bills are being reframed as ways to try to stop Assad's atrocities, including one aimed at cutting off support for Iran's ballistic missile program by House Foreign Affairs Committee leaders Edward R. Royce (R-Calif.) and Eliot L. Engel (D-N.Y.).

"This legislation will give the administration much-needed diplomatic and financial leverage to help stop Assad's slaughter of innocent Syrians," Royce told me. "It encourages real negotiations by targeting Assad's backers, Putin and the ayatollah," referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei.

The House and Senate, led by Rep. Peter J. Roskam (R-Ill.) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), also each have bills ready to go that would seek to isolate three Iranian commercial airlines, all of which are suspected to be funneling arms and fighters to Assad.

"As the main benefactor of Bashar al-Assad — whose regime has once again used chemical weapons to kill scores of men, women and children — Iran has consistently used commercial aircraft to transport the weapons and troops that have fueled the conflict in Syria which has claimed the lives of nearly 500,000 people," Rubio and Roskam wrote to Trump on April 10.

Under this legislation, airlines that continue to engage in illicit activities on behalf of terrorist groups or rogue

regimes would be placed back on the sanctions list that the Obama administration removed them from after the Iran nuclear deal was signed.

Republican lawmakers also want the Trump administration to cancel licenses that allow U.S. companies such as Boeing to do business with these Iranian airlines. The chief executive of Iran Aseman Air, Hossein Alaie, is a prominent and longtime member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Rubio and Roskam wrote.

The leaders of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee also have a newly introduced Iran bill that would apply terrorism sanctions to the entire Revolutionary Guard. That legislation was meant to support the Trump administration's previously announced effort to increase pressure on Iran, but now has new relevance.

Trump's reversal on Syria makes it much easier for Congress to pass sanctions that had long been opposed by the Obama administration, said Mark Dubowitz, executive director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

"Given that Syria is a front-burner issue now and given the heavy involvement of Iran in Syria, this provides an easy predicate for Congress to move new legislation and for the administration to crack down on Iranian mischief," he said.

The most directly relevant legislation is the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, a bill that would sanction Assad, Russia and Iran for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The bill is named after the Syrian military photographer who defected with more than 55,000 photos showing the torture and killing of more than 11,000 civilians in custody. The House passed the Caesar bill last year unanimously. Senior congressional aides told me they are prepared to do so again.

There are obstacles to Congress's emerging strategy. Some Democrats are concerned that sanctioning Iran could put the nuclear deal at risk. There's no agreement between the House and Senate yet on the way forward. The Trump administration also does not have the staffing or the policy process needed to incorporate Congress's efforts into a larger diplomatic approach.

"We just don't have a dancing partner on the administration side," one senior congressional aide lamented.

Sanctions are only one part of a real Syria strategy. But if the Trump administration is serious about not repeating President Barack Obama's mistakes in Syria, it will accept the leverage that Congress is offering and use it to compel Syria and its partners to get serious about finding a way to end the slaughter.

Bloomberg

Trump Said No to Troops in Syria. His Aides Aren't So Sure.

Eli Lake

Listening to his campaign rhetoric, the last thing you would expect Donald Trump to do as president would be to escalate a ground war in the Middle East. He won the Republican nomination last year by campaigning against both George

W. Bush's war in Iraq and Barack Obama's war in Libya.

But as Trump's young presidency has shown, many of the candidate's foreign policy positions are not as firmly held as his supporters had hoped. It's not just that Trump struck the Syrian regime after last week's

chemical weapons attack on rebels. It's not just his recent reversals on Chinese currency manipulation and the NATO alliance. The president's biggest foreign policy surprise may be yet to come.

Senior White House and administration officials tell me

Trump's national security adviser, General H.R. McMaster, has been quietly pressing his colleagues to question the underlying assumptions of a draft war plan against the Islamic State that would maintain only a light U.S. ground troop presence in Syria. McMaster's critics

inside the administration say he wants to send tens of thousands of ground troops to the Euphrates River Valley. His supporters insist he is only trying to facilitate a better interagency process to develop Trump's new strategy to defeat the self-described caliphate that controls territory in Iraq and Syria.

U.S. special operations forces and some conventional forces have been in Iraq and Syria since 2014, when Obama reversed course and ordered a new air campaign against the Islamic State. But so far, the U.S. presence on the ground has been much smaller and quieter than more traditional military campaigns, particularly for Syria. It's the difference between boots on the ground and slippers on the ground.

Trump himself has been on different sides of this issue. He promised during his campaign that he would develop a plan to destroy the Islamic State. At times during the campaign he said he favored sending ground troops to Syria to accomplish this task. More recently, Trump told Fox Business this week that that would not be his approach to fighting the Syrian regime: "We're not going into Syria," he said.

McMaster himself has found resistance to a more robust ground troop presence in Syria. In two meetings since the end of February of Trump's national security cabinet, known as the principals' committee, Trump's top advisers have failed to reach consensus on the Islamic State strategy. The White House and administration officials say Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford and General Joseph Votel, who is in charge of U.S. Central Command, oppose sending more conventional forces into Syria. Meanwhile, White House senior strategist Stephen Bannon has derided McMaster to his colleagues as trying to start a new Iraq War, according to these sources.

Because Trump's national security cabinet has not reached consensus, the Islamic State war plan is now being debated at the policy coordinating committee, the interagency group hosted at the State Department of subject matter experts that prepares issues for the principals' committee and deputies' committee, after which a question reaches the president's desk for a decision.

The genesis of this debate starts with one of Trump's first actions as president, when he told the Pentagon to develop a strategy to defeat the Islamic State. Trump's first national security adviser, Michael Flynn, opposed sending conventional forces into a complicated war zone, where they would be targets of al Qaeda, the Islamic State, Iran and Russia. In Flynn's brief tenure, he supported a deal with Russia to work together against the Islamic State and al Qaeda's Syria affiliate, similar to a bargain Obama's secretary of state, John Kerry's tried and failed to seal with Moscow.

Inside the Pentagon, military leaders favor a more robust version of Obama's strategy against the Islamic State. This has been a combination of airstrikes and special operations forces that train and support local forces. Military leaders favor lifting restrictive rules of engagement for U.S. special operations forces and using more close air support, like attack helicopters, in future operations against the Islamic State capital in Raqqa.

McMaster however is skeptical of this approach. To start, it relies primarily on Syrian Kurdish militias to conquer and hold Arab-majority territory. Jack Keane, a retired four-star Army general who is close to McMaster, acknowledged to me this week that the Kurdish forces have been willing to fight the Islamic State, whereas Arab militias have primarily fought against the Assad regime.

"Our special operations guys believe rightfully so that this was a proven force that could fight," Keane said of the Kurdish fighters. "While this makes sense tactically, it doesn't make sense strategically. Those are Arab lands, and the Arabs are not going to put up with Syrian Kurds retaking Arab lands. Whenever you select a military option, you have got to determine what political end state will this support. Regrettably this option puts us back to the drawing board."

There are other reasons that relying too much on the Kurds in Syria presents problems. The U.S. Air Force relies on Turkey's Incirlik Air Base to launch bombing raids over Islamic State positions in Syria. The Turks consider the Syrian Kurdish forces to be allies of Kurdish separatists within Turkey and have

complained that Obama was effectively arming militias with weapons that would be turned on their own government. (Turkey's own president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, cynically declared war on his own Kurdish population in 2016, exacerbating these tensions.)

Keane, who said he was not speaking for McMaster, told me he favored a plan to begin a military operation along the Euphrates River Valley. "A better option is to start the operation in the southeast along the Euphrates River Valley, establish a U.S. base of operations, work with our Sunni Arab coalition partners, who have made repeated offers to help us against the regime and also ISIS. We have turned those down during the Obama administration." Keane added that U.S. conventional forces would be the anchor of that initial push, which he said would most likely require around 10,000 U.S. conventional forces, with an expectation that Arab allies in the region would provide more troops to the U.S.-led effort.

"The president wants to defeat ISIS, he wants to win, what he needs is a U.S.-led conventional coalition ground force that can take Raqqa and clean out the Euphrates River Valley of ISIS all the way to the Iraq border," Keane said. "Handwringing about U.S. ground troops in Syria was a fetish of the Obama administration. Time to look honestly at a winning military strategy."

White House and administration officials familiar with the current debate tell me there is no consensus on how many troops to send to Syria and Iraq. Two sources told me one plan would envision sending up to 50,000 troops. Blogger and conspiracy theorist Mike Cernovich wrote on April 9 that McMaster wanted 150,000 ground troops for Syria, but U.S. officials I spoke with said that number was wildly inflated and no such plan has been under consideration.

In public the tightlipped McMaster has not revealed support for conventional ground forces in Syria. But on Sunday in an interview with Fox News, McMaster gave some insights into his thinking on the broader strategy against the Islamic State. "We are conducting very effective operations alongside our partners in Syria and in Iraq to defeat ISIS, to destroy ISIS and reestablish control of that territory, control of those populations, protect

those populations, allow refugees to come back, begin reconstruction," he said.

That's significant. Obama never said the goal of the U.S. intervention in Iraq and Syria was to defeat the Islamic State, let alone to protect the population from the group and begin reconstruction. Those aims are much closer to the goals of George W. Bush's surge strategy for Iraq at the end of his second term, under which U.S. conventional forces embedded with the Iraqi army would "clear, hold and build" areas that once belonged to al Qaeda's franchise.

McMaster himself is no stranger to the surge. As a young colonel serving in Iraq, he was one of the first military officers to form a successful alliance with local forces, in Tal Afar, to defeat the predecessor to the Islamic State, al Qaeda in Iraq. During the Iraq War, McMaster became one of the closest advisers to David Petraeus, the four-star general who led the counter-insurgency strategy in Iraq that defeated al Qaeda in Iraq -- and brought about a temporary, uneasy peace there.

That peace unraveled after Obama withdrew all U.S. forces from Iraq at the end of 2011. Obama himself never apologized for that decision, even though he had to send special operations forces back to Iraq in the summer of 2014 after the Islamic State captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city. He argued that U.S. forces in Iraq would have been caught up inside a civil war had they stayed.

The cadre of former military advisers to Petraeus took a different view. They argued that America's abandonment of Iraq gave the Shiite majority there a license to pursue a sectarian agenda that provided a political and military opening for the Islamic State. An active U.S. presence in Iraq would have restrained those sectarian forces.

One of those advisers was H.R. McMaster. It's now up to Trump to decide whether to test the Petraeus camp's theory or try to defeat the Islamic State with a light footprint in Syria. Put another way, Trump must decide whether he wants to wage Bush's war or continue Obama's.

functioning democracy. But if the U.S. doesn't want to intervene again, assistance must be linked to maintaining a small military contingent there.

An American-Iraqi decision on keeping U.S. troops in the country must be taken soon, as the rationale for their current presence—to defeat Islamic State—will fade as it is destroyed. The justification for a longer-term presence would be to train and equip Iraqi forces and assist against ISIS remnants. Strategically, it could also help keep Iraq independent of Iran.

The impending destruction of ISIS as a "caliphate" will rank with the 2003 Iraq war, the Arab Spring, the Iran nuclear agreement and Russian intervention in Syria as a regional game-changer. The first four advanced the Iranian and Russian quest to upset the U.S.-led regional security order. But the defeat of ISIS could help the U.S. reverse this trend.

To do so Washington must view the region differently. Since the Cold War the U.S. has treated Middle East challenges—Iran, Saddam Hussein, Syria, Yemen, terrorism, and more—as discrete problems, not part of a larger endeavor. The U.S. assumed that the region's core,

an American-led regional order, would endure.

Threats to that order from Iran, Russia and Sunni Islamists challenge this assumption. In this environment, Cold War principles—alliance solidarity and U.S. credibility—must be reinvigorated. Anything the U.S. does must support the strategy to contain Iran and combat Sunni extremists. The two are linked: Under Iranian influence, Damascus and Baghdad so oppressed their Sunni Arab populations that they turned to ISIS.

Keeping a troop contingent in Iraq would support such a strategy. The Trump administration appears interested, but success is uncertain given that Iraq did not allow the U.S. to extend forces in Iraq in 2011. Prime Minister Abadi appears supportive, but other political leaders, the public and Iran are more or less opposed. To keep a troop presence, the U.S. will have to proceed on three avenues: "sell" the presence, link it to other assistance, and keep it noncontroversial.

Iraqis must be convinced that an American presence would support the fight against terrorism and ensure the Iraqi army does not implode as it did in Mosul in 2014. They must also be convinced that it

would support Iraqi unity, by signaling to skeptical Sunni Arab and Kurdish minorities that the largely Shiite Baghdad government seeks ties to the West. Also important is the perception that the U.S. supports Iraqi sovereignty, by signaling to Iran that Iraq will not become anyone's vassal state.

The U.S. will have to link economic assistance and diplomatic cooperation—in short, "tough love"—to clarify that in exchange for such help, Iraqi politicians have to be flexible on troops. U.S. support for Iraq beyond security has been remarkable: an IMF-led \$15 billion loan, mediation of disputes between Baghdad and Kurdistan, and the facilitation of oil production. The U.S. has a vital interest in preventing Iraq from descending into violence, enabling Iranian regional aggression, or spawning another terrorist movement, and that requires not just political and economic support but continued military ties.

But Iraq must also be reassured that a U.S. military presence would be acceptable to Iraqis. Based on the troop-extension talks with Iraq in 2011, the following would be politically acceptable.

First, the troop contingent should be limited and not permanent. The 5,000 troops contemplated in 2011 are likely the maximum politically sustainable. U.S. troops should also be part of an international contingent and stationed on Iraqi bases. The U.S. should not again ask for Parliament-approved legal immunities for U.S. personnel, but rather extend the administrative status under which they now operate.

Second, the formal troop mission should focus on training and equipping Iraqi forces, and specific intelligence, counterterrorism and perhaps air-support functions. Everyone in the region would understand that such a presence would also help contain Iran and promote stability, but diplomacy requires that this not be explicit.

Third, the U.S. should be careful not to suggest that troops in Iraq are a combat force to project power into Syria or Iran against Baghdad's interests.

None of this guarantees that Iraq will allow such a military presence but it will make the choice easier. Stability in the entire region hangs on Iraq making the right one.



U.S. airstrikes put civilians at risk: Our view

The Editorial Board

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump vowed to "quickly and decisively bomb the hell out of ISIS," and he appears to be following through on that promise. On Thursday, the White House said U.S. forces dropped one of their largest conventional weapons, known as the Mother of all Bombs, on an Islamic State tunnel complex inside Afghanistan.

Stepped-up air pressure is a valuable part of the campaign against ISIS targets in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. But the attacks come with a major risk of civilian casualties. Even accidental bombing of civilians — the military's euphemism is "collateral damage" — is a human tragedy that spawns new enemies, fuels insurgencies and diminishes America's moral high ground for condemning atrocities by the likes of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Already, there are indications of a growing number of civilian deaths resulting from anti-ISIS bombing

campaigns. According to some estimates, up to 200 people died during a March 17 airstrike in Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. It was potentially the largest single loss of innocent lives to U.S.-led coalition strikes since the fight against the Islamic State began in 2014. The U.S. is investigating.

Airwars.org, a non-profit organization, says alleged civilian deaths from coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria rose from 585 in the last quarter of 2016 to 2,580 in the first quarter of 2017. The group acknowledges, however, that many of the reports are unconfirmed.

The Defense Department says the White House has not relaxed rules of engagement in Iraq since Trump took office, although there are conflicting reports from senior Iraqi officials. The Pentagon is adamant that it takes such risks seriously. "There is no military in the world that has proven more sensitive to civilian casualties," Defense Secretary James Mattis told reporters late last month.

One problem, however, is that the U.S. plays only a supporting role in Iraq. The combat air controller who has eyes on the target building is most often an Iraqi, not an American. The ground commander who chooses to call in an airstrike — rather than take the dangerous, if safer-for-civilians, step of clearing the building room by room — is typically an Iraqi officer.

The U.S.-led air coalition ultimately decides whether to grant the request for a strike, but under these kinds of arrangements tragedies can and have occurred. When Afghan forces called in an airstrike against Taliban fighters during fighting in the northern city of Kunduz on Oct. 3, 2015, human error, mechanical failure, fatigue and a high operational tempo led a U.S. Air Force gunship to fire for 30 minutes on a Doctors Without Borders hospital, killing 42 people.

Just this week in Syria, bad targeting coordinates led to a misdirected coalition airstrike that killed 18 Syrian fighters allied with the United States.

Mosul, where an estimated 400,000 people are still trapped in western sectors under Islamic State control, is a particularly hellish fighting environment. It's an area of dense housing and narrow streets where the depredations of the militants against civilians — including executions and the use of children as human shields — play out in real time on the video cameras of coalition surveillance aircraft.

Beyond Mosul is the U.S.-supported effort by Kurdish and Syrian rebels to capture Raqqa, a city of 220,000 in Syria that serves as the Islamic State's de facto capital. A U.S. Marine Corps heavy artillery unit has been brought in to hit targets when there's poor weather for airstrikes.

Trump vowed in his inaugural to wipe ISIS "from the face of the earth." While it's impossible to avoid killing civilians in that mission, particularly those placed in harm's way by terrorists, it's worth remembering that every innocent who dies at the hands of U.S. forces leaves survivors who might come to hate America and seek revenge.



Trump bombings: The mother of all distractions?

William D. Hartung

Two high-profile bombings in a week have sparked a debate about the direction of the Trump administration's foreign policy.

Is there a new Trump doctrine in the making, or has the President simply found a formula for distracting the public and the media from his troubles at home: from allegations of collusion with Russia during the 2016 election to his failure at pushing through his most cherished domestic initiatives?

The first strike -- the launching of cruise missiles at a Syrian airbase in retaliation for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's chemical attack on his own civilians -- drew praise from unlikely suspects. These included MSNBC's Brian Williams, who described the attack and the weapons used to carry it out as "beautiful," and CNN's Fareed Zakaria, a longtime Trump critic and foreign policy analyst, who suggested that the strike finally certified Trump's status as a real live president.

The dominant narrative was that a new sheriff was in town who was going to act forcefully when he saw a threat to US interests, in contrast with his predecessor, who was seen as feckless and indecisive. This characterization of President Barack Obama overlooks the fact that his administration dropped 12,000 bombs on Syria in 2016 alone -- hardly the actions of someone who is reluctant to use force.

For those who are impressed by military fireworks, the Trump administration's second strike, which involved hitting ISIS fighters in Afghanistan with the most powerful conventional bomb ever dropped by the United States in combat -- the Massive Ordnance Air Blast Bomb, or MOAB, more popularly referred to as the "mother of all bombs" -- was even more awesome.

And now US ships are moving toward the Korean Peninsula, with a not-so-veiled threat to launch a pre-emptive strike if Pyongyang moves toward yet another nuclear weapons test.

An attack on nuclear-armed North Korea would have far greater

consequences than the first two strikes, threatening to spark devastating conventional attacks on the South Korean capital of Seoul, which sits well within striking distance of the North. One hopes someone in the Trump camp is thinking long and hard before taking such a reckless step.

So, what are we to make of this new aggressiveness, which includes a relaxation of the criteria for US airstrikes, from Iraq to Syria to Yemen, and has caused a surge in civilian casualties, including a mistaken attack on US allies in Syria? Is it a new, get-tough doctrine with the rapid use of force? Or is it a series of erratic, emotionally driven, ill-conceived outbursts that is likely to do more harm than good to US and global security? My vote is for the latter.

The Syrian strike may have actually strengthened the Assad regime, demonstrating that it can absorb a US strike without skipping a beat, as it demonstrated by launching bombing raids from the airfield targeted by cruise missiles the day after that strike.

The use of the MOAB in Afghanistan made a big bang, but it did not appreciably alter the strength of ISIS forces there. And as noted above, saber-rattling or an actual attack on North Korea will put one of our closest allies in Asia at risk without changing the fact that Pyongyang is a nuclear-armed power that could wreak havoc in the region, even if it does not have nuclear weapons that can reach targets in the United States.

The lack of military efficacy of these high-profile bombings suggests they are domestically driven and have nothing to do with any coherent new strategy. The costs of continuing down this road could be high indeed, not just in terms of US standing in the world, but also in terms of the safety and security of the United States and its allies.

Congress and the public deserve to know that this administration has a long-term plan, and that it understands the implications of its actions, before we sign off on further bombings of the sort we have seen in Syria and Afghanistan.



On China, Trump Realizes Trade and Security Mix

Noah Feldman

The news media have been quick to note U.S. President Donald Trump's embrace of bombing in Syria and the need for NATO as reversals of the foreign policy he advocated on the stump. But he's made another flip in the past week that's just as consequential, and possibly more important for his future foreign policy. By asking China to "solve the North Korean problem" in exchange for an improved trade deal, Trump has embraced linkage.

Broadly, linkage is the idea that economic policy and geopolitical strategy can be used in tandem, with trade-offs between the two realms. This idea wasn't on Trump's radar before the election, especially not with respect to China.

Candidate Trump famously took a hard line on China and trade, while simultaneously signaling that he didn't much care about China's geostrategic expansion and conflict with other Pacific powers, including the United States.

Now that he's president, Trump is realizing that he can't soft-pedal global security to the extent his rhetoric suggested he might. That explains his turn toward the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which he trashed on the campaign trail.

Probably the generals around Trump are subtly emphasizing this point. After all, these are men whose whole careers have been devoted to the goal of global security. The concern about North Korea -- and the implicit subordination of economic interest to security -- has the whiff of the generals' preoccupations.

The Syria episode also carried lessons related to North Korea. The first, learned before the U.S. bombing, was that dictators like Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will take advantage of what they perceive as weakness, with little concern for the consequences to Trump. The U.S. president surely understood that the deployment of chemical weapons had something to do with his administration's message that the U.S. no longer sought Assad's ouster.

In that sense, Assad's use of chemical weapons was a slap in Trump's face -- and that is surely part of his rapid swing from indifference to retaliation.

Then, after the bombing, Trump also learned that foreign policy hawks from both the Democratic and Republican parties will support him if he takes bold action against a notorious bad actor.

The generals won't have let it escape Trump's notice that North Korea has been unusually aggressive in testing and firing missiles since his election. Part of this is that Kim Jong Un just wants to be noticed by the new administration. But part is that is he and his advisers are trying to see how much they can get away with during the tenure of a president who ran on a platform of disengaging from the defense of U.S. allies in the Pacific.

Unlike Syria, Trump can't just bomb North Korea -- not without the risk of provoking retaliation on South Korea. Even a conventional North Korean attack on Seoul could kill hundreds of thousands in that densely populated city. A nuclear attack could do much worse.

That has led Trump to look for leverage against North Korea -- and that in turn has led him to China.

Trump can't credibly threaten China militarily. And that's why, presumably, he's trying to bribe China instead.

The only obvious way to bribe China is by offering something China might want and that Trump has threatened not to provide, namely a good trade deal. Voilà, linkage.

This form of linkage is unlikely to work this time, however, for at least two reasons.

One is that China's ability to "solve" North Korea is limited. Yes, China has huge influence through economic ties and subsidies. But China also needs North Korea as a buffer between itself and U.S. ally South Korea -- and North Korea knows that.

The consequence is that there's no easy way to rein in the Kim regime without toppling it. And that's an outcome China really doesn't want. The U.S. similarly has less leverage than one might think over its dependent allies. That's something Trump will discover in the Middle East, assuming he tries to press Israel to make real concessions to the Palestinians.

The other reason linkage likely won't work for North Korea is that Trump hasn't credibly given China enough incentive. A "better" trade deal is only a meaningful prize compared to some baseline.

Yet it's far from clear that there will even be a trade deal with China, and the absence of such a deal doesn't pose a serious problem for China unless the U.S. starts putting tariffs on Chinese products.

Any such tariffs -- for example, an anti-dumping tariff on steel -- are going to be challenged by China before the World Trade Organization. The long delays of such a challenge will be costly to China, to be sure. But China has almost certainly already figured the risks and costs of such a tariff into its pricing strategy.

What's more, Trump's own actions have already removed some of the U.S.'s bargaining power. At one time, the Americans might have tempted China with the offer of membership in a regional trade deal, like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which intentionally excluded the Chinese. But Trump killed the TPP in his first week in office.

But none of this is as important as the fact that, on the job, Trump is thinking in terms of linking economics and geopolitics. That's good news. There's no way to manage the extraordinarily complex U.S.-China relationship without considering both sides of the equation -- and their influences on each other.

Winston Churchill is often credited with the line that the U.S. always does the right thing once it's exhausted all the alternatives. Maybe, very slowly, Trump's foreign policy thinking is starting to develop in the right direction.



Trump Should Make the Case for Trade With China

Emily Tamkin

Transformations sometimes emerge from the most unlikely of sources. The phrase "Nixon goes to China" heralded the surprise outreach by a president who had been China's staunch critic. Hopefully President Donald Trump's recent meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping and his acceptance of Xi's invitation to visit China marks the beginning of a similar metamorphosis. Past administrations have made progress in enforcing trade rules with China, but not in convincing the American public of their effectiveness. Perhaps Trump can convince Americans we are achieving progress, thereby permitting a more constructive path on trade policy.

Getting "tough on China" was not invented by the Trump administration. As President Barack Obama said in September 2016 when filing a World Trade Organization (WTO) complaint, "This is the 14th WTO case we've launched against China since I took office and the 23rd overall, and we've won every case that's been decided." The tough enforcement I witnessed as a member of a presidentially appointed trade advisory panel during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Obama seem to have

escaped public view. Hopefully Trump has better luck.

The Trump administration is correct in concluding that current WTO agreements are insufficient levers for opening up China. But talk of bypassing the WTO would only be of strategic value if it were merely a tactical maneuver to strengthen the global trading system. Arguably nothing has done more to avert not just trade wars, but wars themselves, than the WTO's globally acknowledged dispute resolution mechanism.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would have established a higher benchmark, including on state-owned enterprises, which would have pressured China to accept a higher standard. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross says he will "reexamine" his approach if there is no progress with China in 100 days. Any reexamination should include reconsidering the TPP or advancing a comparable effort. Otherwise, talk of progress with China would be just that — talk.

Yet even talk by Trump could be valuable if it convinces the American people to stop channeling all their economic frustrations against efforts to legitimately address them by enacting trade agreements beneficial to American workers. When I was one of the deciding votes in Congress in support of the Central American Free Trade

Agreement, nearly everyone who expressed opposition began by mentioning China, even though it was not a party to the agreement. What makes this myopia more concerning is that it fails to recognize how such agreements strengthen our North American economic zone in its competition with China.

The talk has indeed begun. Commenting on the summit, Ross claimed that China had expressed for the first time in bilateral talks an interest in reducing its trade surplus with the United States in order to minimize impacts on money supply and inflation, while Trump opined, "lots of very potentially bad problems will be going away."

Yet businesses must not outsource the task of renewing America's faith in markets to any administration. They must not only become adept at engaging the non-market actors that shape individual opportunities and risks (what I call shapeholders), but also social attitudes that shape the environment for all businesses. It is in their best interest for more people to understand that the primary culprits for economic pressures on the middle class are advances in productivity-enhancing technology and the spread of globalization, neither of which are reversible.

Businesses must help the public understand that lower barriers to American products being sold overseas is a solution, not something to be demonized. They must educate not just members of Congress when a trade vote is pending, but their own workers on a continuous basis. Why not disclose how much of each worker's paycheck is a result of trade, as former United States Trade Representative Carla Hills has long advocated? Why not host a picnic for employees at the point in the year marking the proportion of production exported?

If businesses hope to reverse poisonous attitudes towards trade, they must more aggressively push for actions that truly address economic angsts, including tax reform that levels the playing field for job-creating small businesses that can't afford legions of lawyers and accountants to access loopholes, increased investment in lifelong learning to keep workers of all ages prepared for today's economy, and enhanced encouragements to save for retirement.

When Trump goes to China, he could surprisingly catalyze a re-embrace of America's free enterprise heritage. This will only happen if American businesses step up to both more aggressively make the case for markets and to make markets work for all Americans.



Behind North Korea's Fizzled Missile: Has China Lost Control of Kim?

Gordon G. Chang

Kim Jong Un has shown that he doesn't care what Washington and Beijing say, and he may have made himself an even bigger threat to these great powers.

A North Korean missile exploded seconds after blast-off early Sunday morning, and the failed test may make North Korean leader Kim Jong Un even more dangerous than he was before.

The launch of what looks like a short- or intermediate-range missile was meant to be an exclamation

mark for the massive celebrations in Pyongyang Saturday to commemorate the 105th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il Sung, the founder of the North Korean state.

The two-hour-long military parade at the heart of those celebrations featured what appeared to have been three intercontinental ballistic missiles.

One of those ICBMs, as such missiles are called, was previously unknown to analysts. It was hidden from view, carried in a canister on a mobile launcher. If the missile indeed exists—some believe the

canister could have been empty—it clearly has a long range. According to Shin In-kyun of the Korea Defense Network, it could travel at least 3,700 miles.

Others, however, think it can go much further. The canister resembles the one used for China's DF-31 missile, which can travel at least 5,000 miles downrange. If this one has a similar capability, then if launched from North Korea, it could reach some of the lower 48 American states.

Yet Americans might laugh at this latest threat from the Kimster. The

quick end to Sunday's test undercuts the fearsome image of his ballistic missiles. "The timing was a deep embarrassment for the North's leader, Kim Jong Un," the *New York Times* wrote Saturday, referring to the explosion soon after the launch.

That is not, in fact, good news. What does a deeply embarrassed dictator do next? He tests another missile or detonates a nuclear device to end his country's celebrations on what he considers a high note. Kim has plenty of missiles, and his technicians look like they have buried, in preparation for a

detonation, a nuke at the Punggye-ri site in northeastern North Korea.

Or maybe he does something else provocative.

Kim may have to do *something* we consider horrible if he wants to remain in power. His rule looks increasingly unstable—since the end of January there have been various incidents suggesting trouble at the top of the regime—so a humiliating episode like the almost-

immediate failure of the missile Sunday could tip him over the edge.

There's nothing more dangerous than a weak dictator who commands the world's most destructive weapons. Friday, David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security issued a report stating that Kim may have had up to 30 nukes at the end of 2016 and the industrial infrastructure to build more at a fast clip.

And Kim also looks defiant. Washington has been issuing warnings to the North Korean leader in the days leading up to the "Day of the Sun" celebration Saturday, and so has Beijing. The missile test suggests, among other things, that Kim feels he can ignore the stern Chinese lectures delivered through various means, including the *Global Times*. The nationalist tabloid, controlled by *People's Daily*, this week threatened restricting the flow

of oil to Kim, among other measures.

If Kim in fact thinks he can safely defy Beijing, Kim may at this point be, as a practical matter, uncontrollable.

In any event, the next move is up to an insecure, defiant, embarrassed, and uncontrollable Mr. Kim. And he is unlikely to enhance peace and stability in what could be the world's most volatile region.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

McKinnon and Jonathan Cheng

UNE - U.S. Presses China on North Korea After Failed Missile Test

Carol E. Lee and John D.

WASHINGTON—In the wake of North Korea's failed missile test over the weekend, Trump administration officials stepped up pressure on China, saying the threat has reached an inflection point that demands new urgency.

By framing China as the world's best hope for a resolution that doesn't involve military action, the U.S. aimed to raise the stakes for Beijing.

"It's really the consensus with the president, our key allies in the regions—Japan and South Korea in particular, but also the Chinese leadership—that this problem is coming to a head," White House National Security Adviser Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster said on ABC's "This Week."

"And so it's time for us to undertake all actions we can, short of a military option, to try to resolve this peacefully," he said.

Sunday's comments from U.S. officials marked a softening of rhetoric after recent saber rattling from Washington and Pyongyang. Days after vowing the U.S. would go it alone on North Korea if China didn't help, President Donald Trump in a tweet Sunday wrote: "We will see what happens!"

A senior U.S. official said the White House was remaining low-key to give China time to press North Korea to ease tensions before moving to other measures, such as sanctions against North Korea that would hurt Chinese companies.

The U.S. response also was restrained because Pyongyang's test, believed to be of a medium-range missile, was no more provocative than the last two conducted during Mr. Trump's presidency. "We're trying to keep our response muted for a number of reasons, not the least of which is because it failed," the U.S. official said.

Sunday's missile test came the same weekend Vice President Mike Pence arrived in South Korea, part of a planned tour of the region to reassure allies about a continuing U.S. presence. On Monday, Mr. Pence visited the de-militarized zone separating North and South Korea.

U.S. officials were still assessing the nature of the weaponry that North Korea displayed in a public parade over the weekend. That appeared to include at least one new intercontinental ballistic missile, or ICBM.

Prior to the launch, U.S. intelligence analysts had concluded that North Korea possessed the components necessary to build an ICBM that could reach the U.S. mainland, a U.S. official said.

But it is unclear whether Pyongyang has actually built the missile, the official added. North Korea has never test fired an ICBM, though U.S. officials have braced for such a test for months.

An ICBM would be capable of reaching U.S. cities. While North Korea has on five occasions detonated nuclear devices and showed off what appeared to be an ICBM over the weekend, Pyongyang apparently hasn't been able to master the final piece—designing a nuclear weapon small enough to fit atop an ICBM, officials and experts say.

But the development of a functioning ICBM would mark a significant and alarming advance in the North Korea's weapons capability.

Another senior U.S. official said that had North Korea tested an ICBM—whether successfully or not—or conducted a sixth nuclear test, the Trump administration would have responded with robust diplomatic and economic measures, though not a military strike. The administration still anticipates North Korea could try another launch at any time, the official said.

In recent days, Trump administration officials were preparing for what they expected would be a sixth test

of a nuclear device, timed to the Saturday observance of the birthday of the regime's founder Kim Il Sung.

Gen. McMaster noted Sunday that Mr. Trump had demonstrated in the recent U.S. missile strike on Syria's Assad regime that he is "clearly comfortable making tough decisions."

The U.S. last week dropped the second-largest non-nuclear bomb in its arsenal in Afghanistan, the latest in a series of moves that suggest a more aggressive military posture under Mr. Trump.

North Korea poses a far more complex challenge for Mr. Trump than the conflict in Syria or the war in Afghanistan. It has both nuclear capabilities and an unpredictable leader in Kim Jong Un, and is seeking capabilities to fire a nuclear weapon that reaches the continental U.S.

The U.S. has some 30,000 troops stationed in South Korea and many others around the region.

"This morning's provocation from the north is just the latest reminder of the risks each one of you face every day in the defense of the freedom of the people of South Korea and the defense of America in this part of the world," Mr. Pence told U.S. troops Sunday in South Korea.

North Korea's missile launched Sunday failed about four to five seconds after ignition, in what Deputy National Security Adviser K.T. McFarland described as a "fizzle."

South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff officials said they were working on analyzing the type of missile launched.

Experts said the failed missile launch, while less dramatic than a successful one, suggested that North Korea was testing new capabilities that it hadn't yet fully acquired, and was thus potentially more troubling than a successful test of technologies it has already mastered.

"Even though this was a failed missile, they get better and they learn lessons," Gen. McMaster said.

U.S. officials also expressed some doubt about precisely what materiel North Korea paraded on Saturday.

"There were some canisters, which may or may not have held missiles," Ms. McFarland said.

Still, the lavish parade in central Pyongyang revealed that North Korea may be working on as many as three new intercontinental ballistic missiles — a display of ambition that came as a surprise to weapons experts.

"Usually they show us one or two new things, but this time they were saying, 'We want you to take in this array of new things,'" said Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, Calif. "The scale of their ambition is much bigger than we give them credit for."

The failure of Sunday's missile launch appeared to buy more time for Mr. Trump's efforts to persuade China to ratchet up economic pressure on North Korea.

Mr. Trump said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal last week that he had offered Chinese President Xi Jinping a better trade deal in exchange for new pressure on Pyongyang from Beijing. Yet Mr. Trump also said he doesn't believe China has as much power over North Korea as some experts have thought.

Gen. McMaster said North Korea was "very vulnerable to pressure from the Chinese" because of its reliance on its neighbor for energy and trade.

Mr. Trump signed off on a North Korea strategy before his meeting with Mr. Xi earlier this month.

As part of it, the U.S. is looking for China to take steps that choke off its economic lifeline to North Korea. The U.S. is also looking for China to

apply diplomatic pressure on North Korea.

Mr. Trump on Sunday suggested on Twitter that China was broadly on board with applying pressure on North Korea, defending his decision not to label China a currency manipulator. "Why would I call China a currency manipulator when they are working with us on the North Korean problem?" he tweeted.

Under pressure from Washington, Beijing appears to have taken some limited steps in recent weeks to use its economic leverage to rein in the

North Korean leadership, though China remains wary of using economic clout in a way that might topple the North Korean government.

That could unleash a flood of refugees into northeastern China and bring U.S. troops closer to the Chinese border.

China banned coal imports from North Korea in February and has been sending some ships bearing coal back to North Korea from Chinese ports, according to the Chinese government.

China's coal imports from North Korea were down 51.6% in the first quarter from a year earlier, though overall trade between the two countries rose by 37.4% in the same period, according to China's General Administration of Customs.

China imports iron ore and other mineral resources from North Korea, as well as seafood and garments, while North Korea imports Chinese oil, food, machinery and consumer products.

The Chinese national carrier, Air China, suspended flights between

Beijing and the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, on Friday, according to representatives of the airline. One said tickets on the route weren't available until at least the end of May.

"We've seen the Chinese already take some initial steps towards that," a foreign policy adviser to Mr. Pence said. "Many steps still to take, but I think it's a good first step."



Could loose talk (and tweets) cause a war in Korea?

Michael McGough

intercontinental ballistic missile isn't ready for testing.)

One of the reasons the Los Angeles Times editorial board found the prospect of Donald Trump in the White House so alarming was that he showed himself as a candidate to be impulsive and easily provoked.

This weekend North Korea is likely to test Trump's self-control — and not just when it comes to his Twitter feed.

As Barbara Demick explains in today's Times, Saturday is the 105th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il Sung, the founder of the Communist state and the grandfather of the current leader, Kim Jong Un. It's expected that the North will mark the anniversary with either another nuclear test or another test of a short- or medium-range missile. (Military analysts believe an

Trump has tweeted about North Korea several times this week. On Tuesday he declared ominously that "North Korea is looking for trouble. If China decides to help, that would be great. If not, we will solve the problem without them! U.S.A." On Wednesday he seemed more upbeat, tweeting: "Had a very good call last night with the President of China concerning the menace of North Korea." But on Thursday he was hedging his bets: "I have great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea. If they are unable to do so, the U.S., with its allies, will! U.S.A."

But the loose talk wasn't confined to Trump's Twitter timeline. On Thursday, NBC reported that "multiple senior U.S. intelligence officials" had said that the U.S. was

prepared "to launch a preemptive strike with conventional weapons against North Korea should officials become convinced that North Korea is about to follow through with a nuclear weapons test." (A senior Trump administration official told Reuters that the NBC report was "flat wrong.")

And almost a month ago, on a swing through Asia, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson seemed to suggest that the U.S. was considering a preemptive strike against North Korea. He said that military action was an option not only if North Korea threatened South Korea or U.S. forces but also if "they elevate the threat of their weapons program to a level that we believe requires action."

Trump's tweets this week, and leaks suggesting that a preemptive strike is under consideration, create the expectation that the U.S. must

respond immediately and dramatically to the next North Korean nuclear test or missile launch or else lose credibility. The result, as former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said Friday, is to create a "higher volume in terms of the provocations that are going on."

Trump and Tillerson have every right to be exasperated at North Korea and to try to reshape U.S. policy on the Korean peninsula. But vague threats and loose talk, especially from the president of the United States, aren't the way to make policy or keep the peace. As Panetta said: "We have the potential for a nuclear war that would take millions of lives. So I think we have got to exercise some care here."



Opinion | President Trump's Loose Talk on North Korea

The Editorial Board

Russia have urged both sides to avoid a devastating miscalculation.

As a candidate, Donald Trump seemed to pay no more attention to North Korea's accelerating nuclear weapons program, which his predecessor has warned is America's most urgent threat, than he did to other complex foreign policy issues. Now he is paying attention, but not in a helpful way. His intemperate talk is adding to regional tensions, unnerving allies and likely reinforcing North Korea's longstanding fear that it could one day be attacked by America — the very reason North Korea invested in a nuclear arsenal in the first place.

It would be risky for Mr. Trump to let overconfidence and bombast, expressed in tweets and public statements, box him into some kind of showdown with the North's ruthless leader, Kim Jong-un, who has displayed similarly macho traits. South Korea, Japan and even

That the weekend came and went without North Korea conducting its sixth nuclear test in a decade was a relief. American and South Korean intelligence agencies had detected evidence of preparations for such a test and it was assumed the country would go forward on a politically significant date. Saturday was the 105th anniversary of the birth of Mr. Kim's grandfather, who founded the state in 1949.

Instead, Mr. Kim displayed an array of military hardware, including three types of long-range ballistic missiles, during a parade in Pyongyang and then did a missile test, which fizzled, perhaps because of an American cyberstrike.

The North will almost certainly test another nuclear device in the future. But pressure from China, the North's main ally and trading partner, which itself is under pressure from Mr.

Trump, may have helped persuade Pyongyang to postpone that nuclear test for now.

Political temperatures have been rising. American warships were headed to waters near the Korean Peninsula, a pointed display of military might that was underscored by the Pentagon's use for the first time of a massive conventional MOAB bomb against the Islamic State in Afghanistan.

Then there were the tweets. In one, on April 11, Mr. Trump accused North Korea of "looking for trouble" and warned that "if China decides to help, that would be great. If not, we will solve the problem without them!" That was followed by an NBC News story — hotly denied by the Pentagon — that the administration might strike pre-emptively with conventional weapons. Previous presidents have not taken pre-emptive military action when the North prepared to test because they knew it would not solve the nuclear

threat and would invite retaliation against millions of civilians and 28,000 American troops in South Korea.

North Korea followed with its own threats to "go to war — if they choose" and to "hit the U.S. first" with a nuclear weapon if Washington launched a pre-emptive strike. All this inspired a warning from China about "storm clouds gathering" and a plea that all sides should resist pushing things "to the point where it can't be turned around."

Mr. Trump might be more inclined to listen to China if, as he has asked, Beijing significantly tightened economic sanctions as a means of persuading the North to curb its nuclear and missile programs. China has reportedly stopped buying North Korean coal, and a major government newspaper said that Beijing might curb oil sales, on which the North depends, in the event of another test. Meanwhile,

however, China's overall trade with the North has expanded.

What's missing in the White House is a coherent strategy, something beyond statements and asking

**The
New York
Times**

Broad

While all historical analogies are necessarily imprecise — for starters, President John F. Kennedy dealt with the Soviets and Fidel Castro in a perilous 13 days in 1962, while the roots of the Korean crisis go back a quarter-century — one parallel shines through. When national ambitions, personal ego and deadly weapons are all in the mix, the opportunities for miscalculation are many.

So far, Mr. Trump has played his hand — militarily, at least — as cautiously as his predecessors: A series of Situation Room meetings has come to the predictable conclusion that while the United States can be more aggressive, it should stop just short of confronting the North so frontally that it risks rekindling the Korean War, nearly 64 years after it came to an uneasy armistice.

Still, the current standoff has grown only more volatile. It pits a new president's vow never to allow North Korea to put American cities at risk — "It won't happen!" he said on Twitter on Jan. 2 — against a young, insecure North Korean leader who sees that capability as his only guarantee of survival.

Mr. Trump is clearly new to this kind of dynamic, as he implicitly acknowledged when he volunteered that Xi Jinping, China's president, had given him what amounted to a compressed seminar in Chinese-North Korean relations. He emerged surprised that Beijing did not have the kind of absolute control over its impoverished neighbor that he insisted it did last year.

"After listening for 10 minutes, I realized it's not so easy," he said. "It's not what you would think."

the Atlantic

North Korea and the Risks of Miscalculation

Kathy Gilsinan

Not long after the United States Navy dispatched a carrier strike group in the direction of the Korean peninsula following a North Korean missile test last week, Pyongyang vowed to counter "the reckless act of aggression" and hinted at "catastrophic consequences." The remarks came amid rising tension in the region as satellite images seem

China for help. Mr. Trump needs to be firm, not reckless in his talk, ratchet up sanctions and find a way to engage the North in negotiations. Peace and security in Asia, as well

Mr. Trump's national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, gave voice to the difficult balancing act on North Korea on Sunday. General McMaster, himself a military historian, said on ABC's "This Week" that while the president had not ruled out any option, it was time for the United States "to take action, short of armed conflict, so we can avoid the worst" in dealing with "this unpredictable regime." Translation: Pre-emptive strikes are off the table, at least for now.

The fact that Mr. Kim did not conduct a nuclear test over the weekend, timed to the anniversary of the birth of his grandfather, the founder of the country and its nuclear program, may indicate that Mr. Xi has given him pause. In the White House's telling, Mr. Xi is responding to pressure by Mr. Trump to threaten a cutoff of the North's financial links and energy supplies — its twin lifelines as a state.

"Why would I call China a currency manipulator when they are working with us on the North Korean problem?" Mr. Trump asked in a Twitter post on Sunday morning, making it clear that everything, including the trade issues he vowed to solve as a candidate, could be a bargaining chip when it comes to defanging the North.

The North is trying to create the sense that it is too late for any such defanging — that it has reached a tipping point in its nuclear push. That is why Mr. Kim stood for hours as so many missiles rolled by on Saturday, carried on portable launch vehicles that can be hidden in hundreds of tunnels bored into North Korean mountains.

For all the talk of an eventual intercontinental missile that can reach the United States, one of the stars of the show was a missile of

to indicate that North Korea is preparing for a possible sixth nuclear test, and as U.S. President Donald Trump warns that North Korean President Kim Jong Un is "doing the wrong thing" and that "we have the best military people on earth."

There's nothing particularly unusual about this sort of creative, bellicose rhetoric from the North Korean

as the relationship between Washington and Beijing, depend heavily on whether Mr. Trump and President Xi Jinping of China can

lesser range — the Pukguksong-2, also known as the KN-15. It is a solid-fuel rocket that can be launched in minutes, unlike liquid-fueled missiles, which take hours of preparation. That means they are far less vulnerable to a pre-emptive strike from an American missile launched from a base in Japan or from a carrier strike group like the one Mr. Trump has put off the Korean coast.

The KN-15 was successfully tested in February. On Saturday, it was paraded in public for the first time, like a conquering hero fresh from a moon landing.

"The big takeaway is that they're taking this seriously," said Jeffrey Lewis, a North Korea specialist at the Middlebury Institute for International Studies at Monterey, in California. "They're trying to develop operational systems that might actually survive on the ground," perhaps even enduring blows meant to leave them crippled or destroyed.

But Mr. Kim's otherwise triumphant day took a bad turn when the missile test failed. North Korea used to be pretty successful at launching missiles, so much so that its missiles were sold around the world. Then its launches started failing, suggesting the presence of a hidden Washington hand.

Its big setbacks have revolved around the most threatening missile it has so far flight-tested, known as the Musudan. Last year, it had a failure rate of 88 percent. Mr. Kim was reported to have ordered an investigation into the possibility of foreign sabotage, and the missile has remained unseen since.

Asked on Fox News on Sunday whether the United States had played any role in the latest missile failure, K. T. McFarland, General McMaster's departing deputy, said,

together manage the North Korean threat.

"You know we can't talk about that." Most likely, no one knows for sure, but the ambiguity feeds North Korea's paranoia, intelligence experts say.

But such programs buy time; they are not solutions. Equally worrisome to Washington officials and private analysts is the North's steady progress over a decade in developing nuclear warheads that are small enough to fit atop long-range missiles. By definition, the atomic work appears to be far less open to prying eyes and foreign sabotage. The explosive nuclear tests take place in tunnels dug deep beneath a rugged mountain.

"They've done five tests in 10 years," said Siegfried S. Hecker, a Stanford professor who once directed the Los Alamos weapons laboratory in New Mexico, a birthplace of the atomic bomb. "You can learn a lot in that time."

Tempting as the analogies to Cuba may be, Mr. Kim is probably thinking of another nuclear negotiation — with Libya, in 2003. Its leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, agreed to give up his nascent nuclear program in return for promises from the West of economic integration and acceptance. It never really happened, and as soon as Libya's populace turned against the dictator during the Arab Spring, the United States and its European and Arab allies drove him from power. Ultimately, he was pulled out of a ditch and shot.

Periodically, the North Koreans write about that experience, noting what a sap Colonel Qaddafi was to give up the nuclear program that might have saved him. Mr. Kim, it appears, is not planning to make the same mistake.

discount factor—there's a long track record of unrealized North Korean threats to judge by. In that context, the probability that any given one will be realized is quite small.

The regime has never much liked the annual joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises, and has made its feelings known; the exercises have tended to carry on every year without direct consequences to the

personnel involved. Nor has the regime ever welcomed American aircraft carriers in its nearby waters or been shy about saying so; those, too, have come and gone unmolested.

What's different now is Donald Trump. Whereas many of his predecessors steered sedulously clear of escalatory rhetoric, preferring to treat various North Korean leaders as recalcitrant children at worst or distasteful but nevertheless semi-rational negotiating partners at best, Trump has threatened North Korea via Twitter, declaring that the regime is "looking for trouble." As my colleague Uri Friedman pointed out Thursday, three successive presidents prior to Trump, since the Clinton administration considered military action against the North's then-nascent nuclear program, have opted for trying negotiations rather than risk a strike. It's apparent that none succeeded in halting the nuclear program's progress. But it's equally apparent that the kind of massive conflagration on the Korean peninsula that world leaders are now warning against has been avoided since 1953.

For allies, enemies, and observers alike, though, Trump appears to be a wild card, and self-avowedly so. Even foreign-policy positions that are "predictable" for an American president—condemning the use of chemical weapons in war, say, or not deriding NATO as obsolete—were unanticipated reversals from this particular president. Trump himself has said that America needs to be more "unpredictable," as Kevin Sullivan and Karen Tumulty reported in *The Washington Post* this week,

he has made it so, leaving diplomats to ask what exactly the White House intends to do on issues ranging from border-adjustment taxes to Russia. (Russians are themselves confused: A foreign ministry spokeswoman told my colleague Julia Ioffe and other journalists this week: "We don't understand what they're going to do in Syria, and not only there. ... No one understands what they're going to do with Iran, no one understands what they're going to do with Afghanistan. Excuse me, and I still haven't said anything about Iraq.")

On the other hand, where coercive diplomacy is concerned, there are clear advantages to a posture of: "Don't try it. You have no idea what I'm capable of." From Cold War deterrence resting on the guarantee of "mutual assured destruction"—you hit me with nukes, I will strike back, even if we incinerate the world—to Barack Obama's vow to take unspecified measures against Russian hacking "at a time and place of our own choosing," presidents routinely court risks and instrumentalize uncertainty as a negotiating tactic. If you extract a concession because an enemy fears an attack you had no real intention of carrying out anyway, so much the better. At the very least, there's the practical advantage that comes with not telegraphing your intentions to an enemy trying to prepare for your next move.

Yet it's also the case that uncertainty raises the risks of miscalculation on either side—and, in a tense confrontation between two nuclear powers, the potential costs. Threats of preventive strikes, or even leaks that such strikes could

be under consideration, can prompt the other side to want to strike first. There's a reason that, when NBC reported Thursday based on intelligence sources that the U.S. was prepared to implement exactly such an option, senior officials from the Pentagon quickly disavowed the story and declared it "extremely dangerous." There's a reason that the Chinese foreign minister is urging "all sides to no longer engage in mutual provocation and threats, whether through words or deeds, and [not to] push the situation to the point where it can't be turned around and gets out of hand." Even the most predictable of leaders must make decisions about each other's likely actions, and have imperfect information even with the best intelligence, and act on those educated guesses. When two leaders each habitually bluster and exaggerate, there's a higher likelihood of making a catastrophic mistake based on a bad guess.

This is the case even though the underlying circumstances that could prompt escalation are not terribly dangerous in and of themselves. If North Korea conducts a nuclear test this weekend, it would be its sixth, meaning that its program is advancing but is not necessarily much more dangerous than it was a week ago. There may not even be a test: reporters told to plan for a "big" event in the country on Friday were ushered to the unveiling of a new road and apartment complex. As Anna Fifield writes in *The Washington Post*, "Expectations for a nuclear test or missile launch in the lead-up to Saturday's celebrations in Pyongyang have not come to pass. Instead, there are signs that the regime is getting

ready to hold a huge parade this weekend, perhaps showing off new missiles—something that would qualify as the 'big' event it had heralded." Even if a nuclear test does materialize, the likelihood of U.S. retaliation is low. The Associated Press reported Friday afternoon that, following a two-month review of its North Korea strategy, the Trump administration had chosen a strategy of "maximum pressure and engagement," involving "increasing pressure on Pyongyang with the help of China, North Korea's dominant trade and military partner." (The shape of the "engagement" part is so far unclear; Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has rejected the negotiation option, though this administration is nothing if not flexible.)

In the end, the risks may prove self-mitigating by virtue of their enormity. The Korea expert Victor Cha recently warned Friedman about the possibility of "millions of casualties" resulting from war in the Korean peninsula, if North Korea launched nuclear or conventional strikes against South Korea and Japan. The international-relations scholar Robert Jervis, who has written extensively on deterrence and the Cold War, recently told me that "there were a number of times the Cold War looked desperate and the worst never occurred" and that "deterrence, as a basic feeling, is a powerful inhibitor." Assuming that logic holds, North Korea will at the very least reap a propaganda payoff just from demonstrating its ability to stoke anxieties around the world with a few coy comments about something "big" in the days before a national holiday. Maybe that's all they're after.

ETATS-UNIS



Trump's flip-flops don't make him a statesman: Gabriel Schoenfeld

Gabriel Schoenfeld

The most striking aspect of this initial chapter of Donald Trump's presidency is how thoroughly it has exposed his protean political character. This should not come entirely as a surprise. In his prior lives and careers as a real estate developer, a playboy, a reality TV star, Trump transmogrified himself on multiple occasions. And over the past several decades in the political realm, he switched parties more

often than he switched mistresses and wives. But as we approach the 100-day mark of his presidency, Trump has begun to jettison campaign stances and promises at a pace that, even by the standards of his own past, is frantic.

To Trump the candidate, China was "raping" the United States. Now, after a dessert of exquisite chocolate cake at Mar-a-Lago with President Xi Jinping, the Chinese are no longer even "currency manipulators," not to mention

rapists. On NATO: "I said it was obsolete. It's no longer obsolete." The Export-Import Bank, yesterday slated for elimination by conservatives as a piggy bank for Wall Street elites, is today totally amazing. Federal Reserve Board head Janet Yellen, whom candidate Trump wanted to can, is now a great gal. President Vladimir Putin's Russia has abruptly gone from good to bad. The candidate who opposed a humanitarian intervention in Syria is now engaged in one. The list of

Trump's abrupt and unexpected reversals grows longer by the hour.

The *Bloomberg* columnist Ramesh Ponnuru is plainly correct when he points to the absence of ideology as an explanation for all the shifts: "Trumpism doesn't exist." The president has tendencies and impulses, some of which conflict with one another, rather than a political philosophy." Without intellectual buoys, pulled by currents and buffeted by winds,

Trump will always be searching somewhat randomly for direction.

But, of course, the direction of Trump's shifts has not been exactly random. The hard-edged populism of the campaign is waning. Its chief theoretician, former *Breitbart* executive chairman Steve Bannon, is on a train to exile in Siberia and has reportedly expressed fear about having a "shiv" thrust into his back. At the same time, the so-called "Democrats," a cabal of not-so-crypto liberals led by daughter Ivanka and son-in-law Jared Kushner, appear to be ascendant.

Whether this represents progress or regression depends, of course, on one's political point of view. But it raises a fascinating question about the quality and character of the mind of the man at our nation's helm. With his administration suffering one humiliating defeat after another in Congress and the

courts, is the 70-year-old Trump showing that, contrary to expectations, he is capable of learning?

If by learning, we mean that Trump has thrown himself into the hard work of understanding the intricacies and nuances of managing our sprawling federal government, the answer must be decidedly no. Trump remains as incurious and ignorant as ever. "Nobody knew that health care could be so complicated," he pronounced as his health care bill went down the drain. Even with the immense resources of the CIA and the National Security Agency at his disposal, the "shows" — preeminently Fox News — appear to remain his principal source of intelligence.

But there are modes of learning quite different from the arduous labor of investigating a subject, examining it from all angles, and

thinking it through. Trump may be unusually adept at one of those alternative modes. Given the right kind of punishments and rewards, rodents can learn to navigate a maze flawlessly. They may wholly lack an understanding of the layout of the system in which they are entrapped, but responding on a primitive neural level to stimuli, they figure it out.

"I'm an intuitive person. I didn't read books," Trump told *Time* last year in a discussion of how he had answered a question about NATO and how he makes policy decisions ("off the cuff"). Over the course of his entire life, the man who is now our president has been a single-minded (and uniquely successful) seeker of publicity and an equally single-minded (if not always so successful) seeker of adulation. With his approval numbers at historic lows, in changing direction Trump is doing

what he has always done and what he does best.

Here is how to understand the turnabouts and tergiversation ("to continue ambiguously arguing your point even though you know you are incorrect") of his first 100 days in office. They all lead away from the limited confines of his populist base and toward approval from the broad American center, and they stem not from any rethinking of means and ends, of principles and objectives. The Trump who is heaving his campaign promises overboard one by one is not a statesman toiling to perfect our union. He is, rather, an intuitive creature, avoiding shocks and seeking rewards, turning this way and that as he attempts to master the routes of a labyrinth he strove mightily to enter but still comprehends only dimly.

NATIONAL
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Donald Trump's 'Pragmatism': Government-by-Approval | National Review

The president who proclaimed that he was a rock, he was an island, sure seems to be shifting a lot.

Donald Trump has now flip-flopped on Chinese currency manipulation (he no longer believes it's happening); North Korea (he now says the Chinese don't have the power to oust Kim Jong Un); Syria (Bashar al-Assad must now go); chemical-weapons use (Assad is now a "butcher"); the Export-Import Bank (he suddenly favors it, after a campaign spent opposing it); NATO (it's no longer "obsolete"); and Fed chair Janet Yellen (he once thought her a nefarious operator; now he thinks she's great).

White House press secretary Sean Spicer, when asked recently to explain all these dizzying about-faces, said, "If you look at what's happened, it's those entities or individuals in some cases — or issues — evolving toward the president's position." In other words, reality changed to reflect Trump, as the planets circle the sun.

Okay, then. But what's *really* going on? There are two theories.

The first theory: Reality hit Trump like a freight train. His campaign rhetoric simply couldn't stand up to the light of day. It was one thing to jocularly dismiss human-rights atrocities as none of America's business while speaking to crowds in rural Ohio, but the leader of the free world typically feels the weight of responsibility when pictures of dead children crop up on the television.

The second theory: Trump has fallen prey to nefarious actors bent on hijacking his presidency. Those who brought him to the White House are being systematically sidelined by these clever operators. After President Trump decided to bomb Syria in response to Assad's use of chemical weapons on his own people, many of his most ardent supporters leaned heavily on this theory. "Trump's Syrian misadventure is immoral, violates every promise he ran on and could sink his presidency," Ann Coulter wrote. She also blamed those surrounding the president — rather than the president himself — for the decision: "Left to his own devices, uncontaminated by Washington group-think, Trump gets it right."

The most plausible scenario? Both theories are correct.

Unfortunately, even those who lack an ideology have a worldview, and Trump's is essentially self-centered.

Trump doesn't have a fully formed ideology. This was seen by his supporters as a plus: Because he wasn't in thrall to any one notion of the world, their thinking went, he would approach each issue with an open mind, never bound by ideological rigor. He could be a freewheeling pragmatist.

Unfortunately, even those who lack an ideology have a worldview, and Trump's is essentially self-centered: What is good for his popularity is good for the world. This, it should go without saying, leaves him subject to co-option by those with a

more ideological bent. When reality hits him in the face, he reacts spontaneously — and in doing so, he aligns with movements that have long pre-existed him, and that cheer him along. Spurred by that applause, he is drawn into the orbit of those ideologues who supply it.

That's precisely how Trump ended up in the camp of the nationalist-populists during the election cycle. He articulated a knee-jerk sentiment about illegal immigration, Steve Bannon and the *Breitbart* crowd cheered, and so he doubled down on that sentiment. (He admitted as much himself during the campaign, stating that he simply invoked the border wall every time crowds began to get bored.) It's the likely reason for his the warmth he showed toward Vladimir Putin before the Syria strike once again soured U.S.-Kremlin relations: Putin had been quite warm toward him and his allies, and Trump enjoyed the approval.

This is the Trump pattern: react, wait for applause, and then cater to those clapping.

That's apparently how he came to his decision about striking Syria. Just days before the sarin-gas attack, the official Trump-administration position was that Assad did not need to go. Then, according to Eric Trump, his sister Ivanka influenced their father into action: "Ivanka is a mother of three kids and she has influence. I'm sure she said: 'Listen, this is horrible stuff.' My father will act in times like

that." The resulting decision received widespread applause, which obviously thrilled Trump, as his description of President Xi Jinping's reaction to the news made clear:

"I was sitting at the table. We had finished dinner. We are now having dessert. And we had the most beautiful piece of chocolate cake that you have ever seen. And President Xi was enjoying it," Trump said.

"And I was given the message from the generals that the ships are locked and loaded. What do you do? And we made a determination to do it. So the missiles were on the way."

"And I said: 'Mr President, let me explain something to you . . . we've just launched 59 missiles, heading to Iraq [sic] . . . heading toward Syria and I want you to know that.'"

"I didn't want him to go home . . . and then they say: 'You know the guy you just had dinner with just attacked [Syria].'"

Asked how the leader of China, which alongside Russia has repeatedly blocked UN resolutions targeting the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, had reacted, Trump said: "He paused for 10 seconds and then he asked the interpreter to please say it again — I didn't think that was a good sign."

"And he said to me, anybody that uses gases — you could almost say, or anything else — but

anybody that was so brutal and uses gases to do that to young children and babies, it's OK. He was OK with it. He was OK."

To recap: Trump was awakened to reality by Ivanka, he was reassured by those who cheered the resulting decision, and he sees himself as more powerful and successful because that applause crossed international lines.

What does that mean? It means that it would be

deeply naïve to suspect that Trump has turned permanently to the right. He has instead turned to Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump, both of whom have strong opinions about politics, and both of whom have generally lived their political lives on the mainstream left. Trump spent the campaign telling crowds of big-government nationalist-populists what they wanted to hear; now, his only feedback loop consists of his family and the media. His nationalist-populist base is outraged

that he has supposedly abandoned his principles, when in reality he's only reacted to events, and, in doing so, abandoned *their* principles.

Practically speaking, this means that Bannon is out while Jared and Ivanka are in. It means that nationalist populism is out while human-rights policing is in. It means that Trump will rush from issue to issue, reacting without a plan, and then looking for those who cheer him to provide an ideological framework that fills in the gaps. It

means that anything can happen, from single-payer health care to a preemptive strike on North Korea.

Pragmatism is merely code for "doing whatever I want." And what Trump wants may not be what his supporters thought they were getting.



Democratic hypocrisy on Trump's war power

Julian Zelizer

Democrats don't really have much ground to stand on when they criticize President Trump for flexing too much muscle on national security. The Democrats, along with their opponents, have been part of the bipartisan push for expanding executive power since World War II.

But now some are up in arms about the Trump administration's recent missile strikes against Syria. Given that there is no clear threat to the national interest, they argue that Trump needs to request authority from Congress to undertake this mission. Several Democrats have insisted that if the president doesn't seek permission, then he is exceeding his constitutional power.

Rep. Eliot Engel of New York, the highest-ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, praised the missile strikes in Syria as an appropriate response to the regime's use of chemical weapons. But he also said that "military force against Assad can only continue in the long term with congressional approval." Virginia Democrat and former vice presidential candidate Sen.

Tim Kaine called the strike in Syria "unlawful" since Trump had not obtained approval from Congress.

But presidents from both parties have made a series of decisions that gradually weakened the role of Congress in shaping national security decisions while granting the White House much greater leeway to decide when and how to use America's military power.

The first thing to go was the declaration of war. Starting with

President Harry Truman's actions in Korea, commanders in chief have deployed troops overseas without requesting a formal declaration of war from Congress, as FDR had done in 1941. Presidents have requested ceremonial resolutions of support for using military force from Congress, as President Lyndon Johnson did in August 1964 with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, but then proceeded to shape and expand military operations without really involving the legislative branch.

Even after the passage of the War Powers Resolution in 1973, which was meant to reassert congressional war-making power, presidents have continued to act with a relatively free hand. Although President Obama was more sensitive than most to the impact of this approach, he didn't do much to move away from the wartime framework used to fight terrorism.

Obama followed the plan adopted by President George W. Bush after 9/11 when Congress granted the president to "use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001." That authorization has been used to justify drone strikes.

The executive branch itself has become massive since the Cold War, with institutions such as the CIA and the National Security Agency having tremendous authority to conduct secret operations and surveillance against foes overseas as well as potential threats at home. There have been moments, such as the mid-1970s with the Sen. Frank Church

hearings into wrongdoing by the CIA, when Congress pushed back by implementing reforms that curbed the power of these organizations. But such moves have been limited.

As the nation discovered with the Edward Snowden leaks about surveillance, Congress has generally allowed the national security state to operate with a relatively free hand in the name of protecting the homeland.

When presidents have used air power and special operations forces in response to perceived specific threats abroad, congressional pushback has been rare.

There have only been a few exceptions, such in 2013 when Republicans in Congress would not support President Obama when he wanted to attack Syria in response for its regime using chemical weapons. By contrast, neither party complained much when Obama conducted an aggressive drone campaign against terrorists.

Some members of Congress have publicly criticized the White House or threatened to use the power of the purse to limit use of the military. But rarely have they done much to actually prevent presidents from taking those kinds of steps.

The fact that Democrats in Congress have joined Republicans in this embrace of executive power does not mean the legislative branch does not have immense authority.

Congress retains power over military spending, Congress has the ability to investigate presidential misconduct and Congress has the

ability to conduct aggressive oversight on executive agencies. In addition, members of Congress have the power to command media attention and cause problems for presidents as they undertake these missions.

When enough legislators opposed the war in Vietnam, they were able to bring massive pressure against President Nixon to finally draw down the war. But too often both parties have failed to use those powers.

When Democrats blast Trump, it's hard for many Americans -- including liberals who have a genuine problem with what the President is doing -- to take them seriously. Both parties have been participants in vastly expanding executive power on national security and complicit in standing by as this occurred.

To be sure, there have been some critics. A small group of Democrats unsuccessfully sued President George H.W. Bush when he sent troops to oust the Iraqis after the invasion of Kuwait.

Politicians in both parties have created a presidency with immense authority to use military force without any substantive checks on power. So if Democrats feel that President Trump has too much freedom to use force as he sees fit, they might want to take a look in the mirror and evaluate some of the historical decisions they themselves have made.



Trump, Populists & Conservatives: Triangulation Domestically Can Bring Wins

Washington is a world distorted by a magnifying glass, where minor slips morph into catastrophic falls, and a winning news cycle swells into a victory for all the ages. When

overstimulation causes the jaded to speak in ever more extravagant terms, we should be careful about making mountains of molehills.

That said, the Trump administration has hit some obstacles in its early weeks. It deferred many of the president's signature policy items (on immigration and trade, for

instance) in order to focus on health-care and tax reform. Some on Capitol Hill might like this outcome, as it minimizes the more disruptive domestic-policy

tendencies of the Trump White House. But there is some evidence that a prolonged legislative deadlock on Capitol Hill could harm the approval rating of both the president and the Republican Congress, and low approval ratings could in turn endanger Republicans in the 2018 midterms.

The unpopularity of the American Health Care Act and the failure of this bill (which gave the nation the spectacle of a divided GOP) has pulled down Republican poll numbers. The recent action in Syria may have led to a spike in the president's approval rating, but it's unclear how enduring this increase will be. And, as the experience of George H. W. Bush shows, a troubled domestic record can blot out a president's efforts in international affairs. The Kansas special election shows that the Democratic party is energized and well funded. That energy combined with an alienation of the core Trump electorate and the tendency of the opposition to win seats in the midterm election suggests that Republicans could be facing some political headwinds.

The Trump White House could confront these political difficulties if, with the help of leaders in Congress, it passed more-focused pieces of legislation that aligned both populist and conservative interests. The passage of broadly popular, non-polarizing measures could help build the goodwill that will be required to pass more-sweeping reforms. An effort of populist triangulation could lessen the risks of a political backlash in 2018 while also taking steps toward broader policy goals. Three areas immediately present themselves as ripe for this effort: infrastructure, immigration, and health care.

Rebuild America. An infrastructure package with bipartisan support would provide both political and policy benefits. A Quinnipiac poll in March found that 90 percent of Americans support increased federal spending for "roads, bridges, mass transit, and other infrastructure." The Quinnipiac poll also showed no real partisan differences on infrastructure — 90 percent of both Democrats and Republicans want increased infrastructure spending (and 91 percent of independents do). Tax policy and health care expose large divides between the two parties and also at times within the GOP. By contrast, infrastructure spending does not highlight these ideological divisions with the same bright glare.

As a political matter, a deal on infrastructure could corral some Democrats into bipartisan cooperation. It's easy for Democrats

to stand united against cuts to Medicaid or cuts to capital-gains taxes.

Many Democrats, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, have expressed a desire to support an infrastructure package.

It's much harder for them to resist calls for investments in highways, bridges, and tunnels. Moreover, many Democrats, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, have expressed a desire to support an infrastructure package. The Democratic proposal on infrastructure differs somewhat from that initially favored by President Trump, but it seems that the parties can find some middle ground. Passing a significant infrastructure bill would be a sign that the Trump administration could take the lead on negotiating bipartisan legislation. A picture of Donald Trump at a signing ceremony with Schumer and Paul Ryan both grinning over his shoulder could go a long way toward establishing the image of the president as an executive deal-maker

There would be further political benefits to an infrastructure package. If properly designed, it would provide blue-collar jobs in the short term and a foundation for economic growth in the years to come. The president's electoral prospects depend on his delivering for working-class voters, and an infrastructure bill would help him keep his campaign promises. Moreover, infrastructure seems to be an area where the president has great personal interest and, from his decades as a real-estate developer, no small experience. Action on infrastructure could also help solidify a governing vision. If the Trump White House is serious about running on a banner of Henry Clay's "American System" 2.0, infrastructure would seem to be a key element.

Slash guest-worker programs. While the Trump administration is making significant steps to improve the enforcement of immigration laws, the legal-immigration system needs work, too. Reforming the immigration system so that it better advances opportunity and a sense of civic belonging would be a transformative achievement. But there's no reason that major reform has to be the only legislative option.

An effort to sunset or radically reduce most guest-worker programs would be a modest policy proposal that could pave the way for further reforms. Outside corporate lobbyists and tech CEOs, guest-worker programs have little political constituency. The H-2B visa undercuts workers without college

degrees, who have already seen their wages pummeled by trends in trade and automation. Meanwhile, the H-1B visa discourages corporate investment in the domestic workforce. It undermines white-collar professionals and, in distorting the market, also hinders the employment prospects of college graduates.

Rolling back guest-worker programs could unite conservatives, populists, and even some progressives. From a free-market perspective, guest-worker programs are almost impossible to justify: By importing a class of workers who do not have the full freedom to bargain for their labor, guest-worker programs subvert the free market. Moreover, they subvert it in a way that injures the economic prospects of the average worker, a fact that can push populists and the remaining pro-worker progressives to oppose those programs, too. In fragmenting the body politic into citizens and helots, guest-worker programs corrode the politics of a republic even more than they do its economics.

A targeted measure to limit guest-worker programs could win support from both sides of the aisle.

Many Democrats, especially on the leftmost edge of the political coalition, have been critical of guest-worker programs. Bernie Sanders has raged against them. Representative Zoe Lofgren (D., Calif.) has introduced the High-Skilled Integrity and Fairness Act of 2017, which would increase the minimum pay for holders of the H-1B visa in order to discourage efforts to replace Americans with guest workers. So it seems that a targeted measure to limit guest-worker programs could win support from both sides of the aisle — the same way an infrastructure bill could. Guest-worker reform could highlight tensions in the Democratic party between transnationalists, for whom increased migration should occur no matter its effects, and those who still subscribe to the pro-worker ethos of the New Deal. This kind of reform might draw attention to some tension between corporatists and populists in the Republican coalition, too, but the populists could have a far stronger political hand on this issue.

Putting new limits on guest-worker programs might add urgency to the effort to reform the legal-immigration system. Denied access to guest workers, America's corporations might lobby with more intensity for reforms that would transfer some bloodline-based visas into skill-based ones. It might even be possible to make the curtailing of guest-worker programs a first step

in the process of legal-immigration reform: For example, a legislative package could eliminate 65,000 H-1B visas and create 65,000 new skills-based visas that would be "paid for" by eliminating 65,000 chain-migration visas. (Admittedly, the increased complexity of such a package could add to its political obstacles.)

Expand health care. While Congress negotiates on broader efforts to reform the health-care system, it could also pass a smaller version of market-oriented reforms. In exchange for liberalizing health-insurance markets, Congress could continue to fund health care for low-income Americans. It could use subsidies as an incentive for reform. For instance, if Congress modified the ACA's preexisting-conditions requirement, it could also increase subsidies to help those with preexisting conditions purchase coverage. The goal of these reforms would be to expand consumer choice and health-care coverage.

Part of the legislative effort could include funding new medical residencies to encourage U.S. medical schools to admit more doctors; limits on subsidized medical residencies act as a kind of indirect cap on the number of students who graduate from American medical schools each year. Increased funding for residencies could target poor and rural areas, which often have medical shortages. If Republicans continue to support funding so that lower-income voters can get health-care coverage, they may have enough room to cut a deal with Democrats on reforms that would expand and diversify the health-care marketplace. Market-oriented reform could eventually decrease the costs of health care (or at least slow down the growth in costs), which could in turn reduce the demand for increased government spending on health care.

Those are not the only areas where policymakers might engage in populist triangulation. A targeted tax bill is another reform that might deliver benefits to working families. But whatever route they take, Republicans should think of ways to advance, even in a modest and piecemeal fashion, policies that would deliver for the working class. That task might entail sacrificing ideological nostalgia on one hand and a burn-the-house-down adversarial approach on the other. But successful triangulation could help Republicans avoid the traps that have destroyed more than one congressional majority and injured more than one presidential legacy.

The Fight Over Trump's Tax Returns Isn't Over

Bourree Lam

On Saturday, thousands are once again expected to march in cities across the U.S. But this time it's not because of immigration policy or issues that affect women—it's to demand the release of President Donald Trump's tax returns.

The main marches—organized by a group of nonprofit leaders and members of the Working Families Party—will take place in Washington, D.C., and New York, with simultaneous demonstrations planned in cities such as San Francisco and Chicago, Des Moines, and Nashville. According to the Tax March's website, there are nearly 200 planned marches in 45 states along with international marches in Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the U.K.

Trump has changed his stances on a variety of issues since the days of his 2016 campaign, from deeming China a currency manipulator to saying the Labor Department's statistics are accurate. But one issue he hasn't changed his position on is releasing his returns.

On the campaign trail, Trump said he'd make the documents available after an IRS audit has been completed. Many have criticized that response, noting that an audit does not prohibit him from releasing the returns. Kellyanne Conway, one of Trump's top advisors, has vacillated in her response to the question, at times saying that he won't make the records public, but then also echoing her bosses' claims that the returns will be available after the audit is complete.

The release of Trump's tax returns is an issue Americans of both parties seem keen to hang on to. In January, a poll by ABC News and *The Washington Post* found that 74 percent of Americans believed that Trump should release his returns. Another poll found that 64 percent of Republicans want to see Trump's tax returns too.

Though the turnout of Saturday's March isn't expected to be as large as the Women's March on Washington, Trump's unwillingness to show the public his tax records has evoked plenty of frustration. He is the first president to break with

the 40-year tradition of presidential candidates releasing tax returns before a general election. Americans generally support the idea, largely because tax returns reveal a great deal more about an individual's finances than the voluntary financial disclosures Trump provided as an alternative during the campaign.

With that level of interest, it's no wonder that Rachel Maddow's tax scoop in March, a few pages from the president's 2005 tax returns, was a nonevent that still received immense media and public attention. Anna Chu, one of the organizers of the Tax March who works at the National Women's Law Center, told *DCist* that the leak didn't show what the public needs to see. And a one-page leak of Trump's record to *The New York Times* only whet the public's appetite. The speculation that his returns might turn up concerning revelations is amplified by ongoing worries that Trump hasn't taken adequate measures to distance himself from his businesses while in

office, resulting in myriad conflicts of interests.

As president, Trump's returns will be automatically selected for auditing every year in accordance with an IRS rule. But that mandatory audit won't reveal his finances to the public, nor will it scrutinize the president's financial situation prior to taking office.

After Trump's inauguration, the first petition to appear on the White House's citizen-petitions website *We the People* called for the immediate release of the president's tax returns. That petition has since garnered over a million signatures, the most signatures a *We the People* petition has ever gotten, though there's been no official response from the White House. The idea for the march started as a tweet from a professor and a comedian; the fact that it's turned into a national event is indication enough that Americans have no intention of letting the matter go easily.



Trump's taxes must be released before tax reform: Painter and Eisen

Richard Painter and Norman

Eisen

Many of us will fork over up to a third of our income to pay federal taxes this year and as much as half of our income in federal, state and local taxes combined.

We only ask a few things in return.

First, a government that spends our money wisely and does not succumb to government contractors and others who use campaign contributions and lobbyists to get a portion of our money that they should not have. Second, a government that is responsive to the interests of the American people rather than to the special interests, including companies in which public officials have investments or other relationships. Third, a government that is transparent and open so we know what the government is doing and what financial and other

conflicts of interests government officials might have.

The Trump administration and Congress are falling short in all three areas.

First, wasteful spending by big government continues, with enormous proposed increases in defense spending sure to benefit defense contractors whether or not the spending improves our national security. The military industrial complex that President Eisenhower warned against in 1961 now has more influence than ever before, thanks to campaign money. Then there is the "big beautiful wall" that will cost billions of dollars, that we are told Mexico will pay for, but that we know full well will be our financial responsibility.

Second, conflicts of interest are worse than ever under Trump. The president continues to receive payments and benefits from foreign governments (emoluments) in

violation of the Constitution, and Congress has thus far done nothing to stop him. Trump also says that, "the president cannot have a conflict of interest" a statement which simply is not true. And meanwhile the cesspool of campaign finance bubbles unabated with the long-time general in the war against campaign finance reform, Don McGahn, having been installed as White House counsel.

Third, there is no transparency, starting at the top. For the first time in recent memory, the president has refused to release his tax returns. We know from a document sent to *The New York Times* that in 1995 he had a \$916 million tax loss carry forward from real estate that would have allowed him to avoid paying any tax for years. We know from a leaked 2015 return that he would have paid very little of his income in tax that year but for the alternative minimum tax (AMT) that he wants to abolish. And that's it.

At a minimum, before this administration even thinks of proposing any changes to the tax code, we should see what tax code provisions the president himself has been and is taking advantage of, and how much tax he has paid in the past few years. Otherwise we are bound to end up with a deal where the rest of us pay yet more tax while he, and probably his business partners and political allies, pay less.

The "art of the deal" for him, perhaps, but for the rest of us it's the "art of the steal."

We should not have to pay taxes for a government that ignores our interests and prioritizes instead the interests of our political leaders and the elites who support them. Unless things change soon, the American people may confront Trump with another tea party where they toss his ideas about "tax reform" and the rest of his agenda right into the harbor.



Opinion | Taxes — the great uniter?

By Robert J. Samuelson

As Tax Day — April 18 this year — approaches, we are confronted

once again with the apparently enduring reality that Americans hate to pay taxes. Few political generalizations seem so indestructible. Gallup has long

asked Americans whether their federal income taxes are too high. About 50 to 60 percent regularly say "yes." The federal income tax is

deeply unpopular. So goes the conventional wisdom.

Except that it's not true or, at any rate, is too simple and incomplete.

The tax system is not just a divider; it's a uniter, too.

"Americans almost universally agree that taxpaying is a civic duty," writes political scientist Vanessa Williamson in her new book, "Read My Lips: Why Americans Are Proud to Pay Taxes." To be a taxpayer is "a source of pride because it is evidence that one is an upstanding, contributing member of the community."

Williamson studied existing surveys, conducted one of her own and interviewed 49 taxpayers in depth. What she concluded suggests a sizable revision of popular thinking, which emphasizes a profound dislike of taxes.

"Around four in five Americans ... see taxpaying as a moral responsibility and tax evasion as morally wrong," she writes of the various surveys. "This is a belief that is particularly strong in the United States" compared with many European countries, she finds. Americans have one of the world's highest rates of tax compliance — an achievement aided by tax withholding.

In one of the interviews, Roy — a 61-year-old retired Republican postal worker from Ohio — puts it this way: "I feel like I am doing my part in supplying the needs and to help pay for things in this country that are needed. So, in a small way, I do feel like it's my civic duty and that I'm responsible for paying taxes."

Taxes are a bond as well as a burden. They're a modern embrace of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.'s famous dictum: "Taxes are what we pay for civilized society." Interestingly, Republicans more than Democrats feel that tax evasion is morally wrong. "Republicans believe strongly in paying taxes," Williamson writes.

One reason popular opinion misses the unifying aspects of taxes is that public surveys are skewed, she argues. "Public opinion polls commonly assume that the only attitude Americans hold about taxes is one of enraged opposition," Williamson writes. "Negative questions carry a value judgment and predispose certain answers."

Still, it's possible to take tax revisionism too far, as Williamson herself notes. Taxes — and the government programs they support — remain highly contentious issues at both the state and national levels. Somebody has got to pay; conflict is unavoidable.

In her interviews, Williamson found widespread resentment that both the very rich and the very poor (particularly immigrants) don't pay their "fair share" of taxes. The animus against the poor affects both Republicans and Democrats, though Republicans more so.

(It's also a bum rap, Williamson argues. Thanks to the payroll and sales taxes, almost everyone is a taxpayer in some form. She estimates that the poorest fifth of earners make 3 percent of the income and account for 2 percent of all taxes. It's also true that high taxable thresholds mean that 44 percent of tax filers in 2016 didn't owe federal income taxes, reports the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center.)

Even if all Americans were satisfied with their present tax situation — clearly not the case — it does not

follow that everyone would be happy if their taxes were raised. President Trump has promised tax reform but has yet to present a concrete proposal. When he does, it is almost certain to trigger a congressional donnybrook, because some taxpayers will be hit with increases to finance tax cuts for other taxpayers.

Bigger problems loom in the future. Sooner or later, we will have to raise taxes, because there is a huge and growing gap between the government's spending commitments and its tax revenues. Although we are now near full employment, meaning the economy is near its physical capacity, the deficit is roughly \$500 billion. Under present policies and assuming unrealistically no future recession, it will continue to rise.

How long this can continue is anyone's guess, although the answer is probably not forever. By all means, let's acknowledge the benefits of taxes. But let's not assume that higher taxes will make government more popular. This seems dubious.

Los Angeles Times

Editorial Board

The Trump administration has embarked on a stepped-up campaign to capture and deport immigrants living in the United States illegally, even if they've been here for a long time, have deep roots in the community and have been law-abiding and productive members of American society.

It's a mean-spirited, costly and unnecessary approach to illegal immigration that will divide families and destabilize communities at enormous cost to taxpayers, while providing little or no public benefit. California legislators are right to object, and to insist that state and local resources not be spent on helping the federal government in this misguided policy.

On the other hand, it is entirely reasonable — and in the public interest — for the federal government to deport immigrants living in the U.S. illegally who have committed serious or violent crimes. While state and local governments also should not be involved in enforcing that — it's not their job — they shouldn't obstruct it either.

Those are the sticky issues that have surrounded the drafting of SB 54, which some people call the "sanctuary state" bill. When first

California's so-called 'sanctuary bill' will help protect non-violent immigrants from Trump's overreaches

The Times

offered by Senate Pro-Tem Kevin de León, the bill put too many obstacles in the way of the federal government's ability to do its job properly. With a series of recent amendments, however, the bill has been improved and, with a couple more small changes, should be supported.

One of the big questions as the bill moved through the Senate (it's been approved there and is now before the Assembly) has been whether local jails and state prisons should have to honor administrative "detainer requests" from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. These detainers ask jails and prisons to hold immigrants suspected of being in the country illegally beyond the end of their sentences, until ICE agents arrive to pick them up. But a detainer request does not have the force of law behind it, and to continue to hold inmates without a court order, even though they are eligible for release, likely would violate their 4th Amendment rights, leaving local governments on the hook for civil damages. Federal authorities know this well — a federal magistrate in Oregon told them so in a 2014 decision.

Yet, in their sweaty fervor to oust those here illegally, Trump and Homeland Security Secretary John

Kelly seem perfectly happy to ignore the Constitution. SB 54 orders local jurisdictions not to comply with these detainer requests.

But would resistance to the president's agenda come at too high a cost? Trump already has threatened to withhold federal funds from jurisdictions that do not cooperate with his roundups. Luckily for California, there are court decisions that limit such coercive punitive steps, and any such move by Trump undoubtedly would land the policy in court. The state already is prepared for such fights — it pays the law firm of former U.S. Atty. Gen. Eric H. Holder \$25,000 a month just for such contingencies.

The amended SB 54 hews a pragmatic line by precluding local agencies — from schools to health agencies — from volunteering information to ICE about clients, students and others with whom they interact.

It also would keep school and other local government databases, including health services agencies, out of reach of immigration agents. Children, regardless of status, have a right to attend school, and the ill and injured should feel safe seeking medical treatment without having to calculate the odds of deportation.

But the law does allow criminal justice agencies to continue to submit names of people arrested to federal databases and to notify ICE of the pending release of people who previously have been deported for a violent felony. It also requires the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to inform ICE of the release times of all prisoners convicted of violent or serious felonies.

That provision should be broadened; the bill should be amended to allow prisons, jails and other criminal justice agencies to release reasonable amounts of information to ICE about all inmates. As currently drafted, state or local officials would, in essence, be determining what is a deportable offense, something that is outside their responsibility.

This bill is a stopgap measure. In the longer term, Congress needs to come up with a comprehensive reform plan that allows the federal government to enforce immigration laws at the borders while offering a path to legal status for immigrants who have been living responsibly, but illegally, in the U.S. for years. Otherwise, we are heading pell-mell toward disrupted and fearful communities, further erosion of faith in public institutions such as the police and courts, and destabilized

labor markets in immigrant-heavy construction and food services. industries such as agriculture,

Los Angeles Times

Yes, Trump's hard-line immigration stance helped him win the election — but it could be his undoing

Philip Klunkner

Ever since he announced his presidential campaign in July 2015, Donald Trump has made opposition to immigration central to his political strategy — and pundits have debated whether this strategy was effective. He won, of course, but did he win despite his aggressive rhetoric, or because of it?

Data from the recently released American National Election Study has finally provided an answer: Immigration was central to the election, and hostility toward immigrants animated Trump voters.

Comparing the results of the 2012 and 2016 ANES surveys shows that Trump increased his vote over Mitt Romney's on a number of immigration-related issues. In 2012 and 2016, the ANES asked respondents their feelings toward immigrants in the country illegally. Respondents could rate them anywhere between 100 (most positive) or 0 (most negative). Among those with positive views (above 50), there was no change between 2012 and 2016, with Romney and Trump each receiving 22% of the vote. Among those who had negative views, however, Trump did better than Romney, capturing 60% of the vote compared with only 55% for Romney.

Attitudes toward immigrants in the country illegally speak to why some

voters switched parties between 2012 and 2016. Among those who voted in both elections but didn't switch their vote, the average rating of immigrants in the country illegally was 42. Among those who switched from Romney to Hillary Clinton, it was 41. But those who switched their vote from President Obama to Trump were much more negative, with an average rating of only 32.

However, Trump's support wasn't limited to just those who oppose immigrants residing in the country illegally — he also picked up votes among those who want to limit all immigration to the United States. In 2012, Romney received 58% of the vote among those who said they think that "the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States" should be decreased. In 2016, Trump got 74% of the vote among those who held this view.

Overall, immigration represented one of the biggest divides between Trump and Clinton voters. Among Trump voters, 67% endorsed building a southern border wall and 47% of them favored it a great deal. In contrast, 77% of Clinton voters opposed building a wall and 67% strongly opposed it.

Trump and Clinton voters were also deeply divided on the importance of speaking English. Eighty percent of Trump voters said that speaking English is very important for being

"truly American," but only 43% of Clinton voters took the same view.

Nearly half of Trump voters (49%) favored changing the Constitution so that children born to undocumented immigrants would no longer automatically receive U.S. citizenship. Only 18% of Clinton voters took this view.

Trump voters, finally, said they don't want to let Syrian refugees into the U.S., with 80% opposed to such a policy, compared with only 23% of Clinton voters. This result reflected Trump voters' overall negative views of Muslims. On the 100-point scale mentioned above, 71% of Trump voters had a negative view of Muslims (50 or below). In contrast, only 31% of Clinton voters rated Muslims negatively. Trump's hard-line stance on immigration, then, likely helped him win in 2016. But a word of caution: Many of his positions actually fall on the wrong side of public opinion.

In the ANES survey, a large majority of Trump voters (68%) said that "immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children and have lived here for at least 10 years and graduated high school" should be allowed to stay in the U.S. They want a border wall; they're divided on the 14th Amendment — and yet, when push comes to shove, they don't want to deport kids who have done nothing wrong.

Broadening out from Trump voters to the population at large, public opinion is even more dovish. Only 32% said they want to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. Most (56%) oppose decreasing immigration levels. Only 21% said they think that immigration is bad for the economy.

Trump won in 2016 by mobilizing the minority of Americans with anti-immigration views — but only because he avoided an offsetting counter-mobilization by the majority of Americans with pro-immigration views. Now that he is president and his immigration views can't be dismissed as mere campaign rhetoric, that counter-mobilization may finally be manifesting itself.

Widespread protests against Trump's executive order barring individuals from several Muslim countries, congressional skepticism about the effectiveness and cost of Trump's proposed wall, and increased awareness of the negative effect that his policies are having on U.S. businesses, schools and families suggest a growing backlash. Should that backlash develop and sustain itself, the immigration views that helped Trump in 2016 might prove to be his undoing.

The New York Times

Opinion | 100 Days of Horror

Charles M. Blow

With Donald Trump's 100th day in office fast approaching, White House staffers are reportedly trying desperately to "rebrand" the colossal failure of the first 100 days as some kind of success.

Trump's legislative agenda has been stymied. The drip, drip, drip of negative news about connections between campaign associates and Russia — and Russia's efforts to impact our election — continues unabated. He seems to have no real strategy for governance other than pouting and gloating. His advisers are at each other's throats. And the public has soured on him to a historic degree.

His failures so far, I suppose, should bring resisters like me some modicum of joy, but I must confess

that they don't. Or, more precisely, if they do, that joy is outweighed by the rolling litany of daily horrors that Trump has inflicted.

The horrors are both consuming and exhausting. For me at this point they center on an erosion of equality. This by no means downplays Trump's incessant lying, the outrage of him draining the Treasury for his personal junkets, or his disturbing turn toward war. But somewhat below the radar, or at least with less fanfare, our access, inclusion and justice are being assailed by a man who lied on the campaign trail promising to promote them.

As a candidate, Trump blasted Jeb Bush, who while answering a question about defunding Planned Parenthood suggested that the federal government had overfunded women's health care.

On MSNBC's "Morning Joe," Trump prattled to Mika Brzezinski: "The women's health issue, which Jeb Bush so amazingly blew about four or five days ago when he said 'no money going to women's health issues' or essentially that. With me, Mika, I would be the best for women, the best for women's health issues."

Well, last week that very same man quietly signed legislation "aimed at cutting off federal funding to Planned Parenthood and other groups that perform abortions," according to The New York Times. As The Times explained, the bill would allow state and local governments to withhold "federal funding for family planning services related to contraception, sexually transmitted infections, fertility, pregnancy care, and breast and cervical cancer screening from

qualified health providers — regardless of whether they also performed abortions."

As a candidate, Trump claimed to be a better friend to the L.G.B.T. community than Hillary Clinton, tweeting of that community "I will fight for you," and saying during an interview on NBC's "Today" show that transgender people should "use the bathroom that they feel is appropriate."

As president, his administration rescinded Obama-era protections for transgender students in public schools that allowed them to use bathrooms that correspond with their gender identity.

As a candidate, Trump disparagingly chided black voters with the question, "What the hell do you have to lose?" and issued a "New Deal for Black America" in

which he promised: "We will apply the law fairly, equally and without prejudice. There will be only one set of rules — not a two-tiered system of justice."

As president, his Justice Department has dropped its objection to a racially discriminatory Texas voter ID law. Just last week Time reported: "A judge ruled for a second time Monday that Texas' strict voter ID law was intentionally crafted to discriminate against minorities, which follows another court finding evidence of racial gerrymandering in how Republican

lawmakers drew the state's election maps."

This Justice Department has also "rescinded a six-month-old Obama administration directive that sought to curtail the government's use of private prisons," as reported by NBC News, and "ordered a sweeping review of federal agreements with dozens of law enforcement agencies, an examination that reflects President Trump's emphasis on law and order and could lead to a retreat on consent decrees with troubled police departments nationwide," as The Times reported.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said on Thursday that consent decrees "can reduce morale of the police officers."

Furthermore, The Washington Post reported last week that Sessions had appointed Steven H. Cook to be one of his top lieutenants, noting: "Law enforcement officials say that Sessions and Cook are preparing a plan to prosecute more drug and gun cases and pursue mandatory minimum sentences. The two men are eager to bring back the national crime strategy of the 1980s and '90s from the peak of the drug war, an approach that had fallen out of

favor in recent years as minority communities grappled with the effects of mass incarceration."

The clock is being turned back. Vulnerable populations are under relentless attack by this administration. This is a war, and that is not hyperbole or exaggeration. While folks are hoping that some Russia-related revelation will emerge from the darkness to bring this administration to a calamitous conclusion, the administration is busy rebuilding and reinforcing the architecture of oppression in plain sight.



Trump's populist revolution is already over — for now

Doyle McManus

Not yet 100 days into Donald

Trump's presidency, the populist revolution he seemed to promise is already over — at least for now. Two weeks of head-spinning policy reversals have put Trump squarely inside the chalk lines of conventional Republican conservatism on both economics and foreign affairs.

His impulsive management style and his fact-challenged rhetoric are still intact. But most of his policy positions are now remarkably similar to those espoused by the GOP's last establishment nominee, Mitt Romney, in 2012.

Consider:

In foreign policy, Trump once derided traditional alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, said he'd seek an alliance with Russia's Vladimir Putin, and promised to avoid entanglement in Syria's civil war. In the last 10 days, Trump praised NATO, confronted Russia and ordered a missile strike against Syria in retaliation for a chemical weapons attack.

On trade, Trump promised to declare China a currency manipulator, threatened to scrap the North American Free Trade Agreement and suggested he'd abolish the Export-Import Bank; he's walked away from all three positions.

On economics, Trump promised to cut middle-class taxes and protect Social Security and Medicare. But the first drafts of his tax plan awarded the biggest cuts to top-end

earners — and last week, Trump's budget director said he hopes to persuade the president to back changes to Social Security and Medicare too.

Trump is still pursuing at least one populist priority, his crackdown on immigrants who are in the country illegally — but even there, his policy isn't much harsher than the "self-deportation" plan Romney proposed.

"Trump has adopted ... the very policy positions that he railed against during the 2016 campaign," Lanhee Chen, Romney's policy director in 2012, told me. Trump's new stances, he said are "in line with those put forth by Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio and Chris Christie, generally speaking, in 2016."

Some of Trump's supporters aren't happy with the change. "No one elected the president so Gary Cohn could go to Washington," Trump campaign strategist Sam Nunberg complained to the New York Times, referring to the Goldman Sachs banker who now heads the National Economic Council.

What happened? One answer is that Trump has been mugged by reality. He's abruptly discovered that being a successful president is more complicated than winning an election.

It was clear during the campaign that Trump was never strongly tethered to most of his positions, which he revised or abandoned depending on the needs of the moment. It has become clear that he had only a tenuous grasp of the

complexity of many of the policies he proposed to change.

"Nobody knew healthcare could be so complicated," he said after his first brush with actual policy choices.

In foreign policy, after a campaign filled with breezy assertions of "America First," Trump was confronted by real world dilemmas with real world consequences. He wisely took the advice of the advisors he calls "my generals," Defense Secretary James N. Mattis and National Security advisor H.R. McMaster.

In economic policy, he has surrounded himself with business moguls, mostly from New York — several, like Cohn, from Goldman Sachs. They brought corporate leaders into the White House to plead the case for keeping the Ex-Im Bank, which finances export sales mostly for big corporations, and another populist promise quickly disappeared.

A more basic explanation for his flip-flops is his ego: Trump wants to win. He has been furious, aides say, that the chaos of his first weeks in office — especially the botched roll-out of his immigration ban and the failure of the House healthcare bill — made his poll numbers tank.

Stephen K. Bannon, the most populist of Trump's top advisors, was tagged as an author of both of those fiascos. Bannon insisted on rushing the immigrant ban into place, and on healthcare, he alienated members of Congress whose support Trump needed.

It didn't help Bannon's cause when he argued against the airstrike in Syria, which rewarded Trump with a few days of bipartisan praise. It helped even less that Bannon tangled openly with Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law.

The result: Bannon's revolutionary populism is out. Conventional conservatism is in.

So does this mean Trump is now a predictable, conventional conservative president and that the rest of his tenure will be the equivalent of a Romney administration?

Hardly. Trump is still an experimental politician. His positions will depend on the needs of the moment.

His immediate need is for success in Congress, where he's trying to revive the healthcare bill as a prelude to the centerpiece of his economic strategy, a tax reform plan.

This month, those priorities are pulling him toward the demands of the House Freedom Caucus, the hard-line conservatives who blocked the first attempt to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. Next month, if a Freedom Caucus Trumpcare bill gets through the House and lands in the less conservative Senate, the same need for success may pull him back toward the center.

This week, he sounds like President Mitt Romney. Next week: Who knows?