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FRANCE - EUROPE

The Last Days of Charles De Gaulle

Emily Tamkin

The campaign run by France's center-right has cut any last ties between the general and the party that claims to defend his legacy.

When the French Fifth Republic was launched by Charles de Gaulle in 1958, and embraced by a crisis-rocked nation, it was powered by two engines: a constitution to codify de Gaulle's vision and a party to carry out de Gaulle's will.

By then, the general had accepted the need for the latter — but only grudgingly. Modern France's most legendary politician was deeply allergic to political parties. Having lived through the twilight years of both the Third and Fourth Republics, one could hardly blame him. France's surrender to Germany in 1940 and its precarious hold on Algeria in 1958 were, he insisted, the result of the political parties seeking particular and selfish goals.

Parties, de Gaulle believed, led to parliamentary paralysis and national division. "Gaullism" — a term the general himself used sparingly indeed — by contrast, rejected partisanship and particularism. It was a national platform large enough for everyone, regardless of province or profession, race or religion. It was a means to prolong the epiphany of Aug. 26, 1944, when de Gaulle walked down the Champs-Élysées in liberated Paris. In the vast throng of men and women who nearly submerged him "like the sea," de Gaulle later wrote, he witnessed "one of those miracles of national consciousness which, at times, illuminate our history. In the crowd, there was just one thought, one élan, one cry while all differences gave way and individuals disappeared."

Even in France, de Gaulle nevertheless discovered, one still must govern in prose and, thus, through parties. The new president of a new republic required a vehicle to produce the votes that could carry out his popular mandate. And so, de Gaulle oversaw the building of a new political party, L'Union pour la nouvelle république, or Union for the New Republic (UNR). Over the course of the 1960s, the UNR allied with other conservative and centrist parties, creating the ideological stew that, despite the various name changes it underwent, always simmered in the same pot — and always claimed to be the general's heir.

Today, the current iteration has been dubbed Les Républicains. And it, along with the Fifth Republic itself, appears to be crumbling.

But crumbling implies there was once something solid. Some specialists have long wondered if there is such a thing as "Gaullism" — whether it is, as some have put it, an "ism" in search of an ideology, whether there was ever anything to it besides the man himself. Frédéric Grendel, an early Gaullist himself, pronounced: "In Gaullism, there is de Gaulle. The rest is silence." Less portentously, the renowned specialist of French politics Stanley Hoffmann dismissed Gaullism as "ideologically empty." But if Gaullism were simply a silent void, the current collapse of Les Républicains would not be such a noisy and dense affair. Something real, if elusive, is being lost.

At its most basic level, Gaullism entailed a strong and highly centralized state, one prepared to nationalize key industries and intervene in the national economy. Led by a president invested with vast powers — de Gaulle rightly called his republic an "elective monarchy" — under Gaullism, the state's ultimate raison d'être was to yoke the nation to *les grands travaux* ("great projects") that would unify the people and maintain France among the *premier rang*, or first rank of nations.

Since de Gaulle's death in 1970, various politicians in France could reasonably lay some claim to this legacy. During the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, there were larger-than-life political figures like Philippe Séguin and Charles Pasqua, who represented the left and right wings of the movement, respectively. Séguin stressed the social element to Gaullism, the state as guarantor of health and social rights; Pasqua, on the other hand, emphasized the authoritarian facet to Gaullism, the state as the guarantor of social stability (which, in Pasqua's case, was often aimed at keeping immigrants in their place). In 2003, Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin's speech at the United Nations, denouncing the George W. Bush administration's rush to war, also channeled the Gaullist spirit by affirming France's independence and willingness to criticize allies.

With the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, the meaning of Gaullism became even more elusive. Though Sarkozy made a great show of his attachment to the man and movement, his presidency revealed little more than a feverish attachment to power and its perks. The radical Gaullist Jean-Pierre Chevènement observed that whereas de Gaulle was "equal to his statue," Sarkozy is not "for the simple reason that he doesn't have a statue and has difficulty being equal to his duties."

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The process of ideological fission has now reached critical mass with Sarkozy's former prime minister and Les Republicains' current presidential candidate, François Fillon. As the French now know, Fillon is a man incapable of saying "*non*" to family members seeking fat paychecks for sketchy work, as well as to shadowy figures showering him with suits and watches whose price tags dwarf the monthly salary of most French workers. In the best of circumstances, these instances — now being investigated by the French courts — would taint an authentic Gaullist, which Fillon vociferously claims to be.

But Fillon's indifference to certain political principles distances him from Gaullism, as much as his personal sleaziness, and this indifference, in turn, distances Les Republicains yet further from its founding father. Fillon's campaign vows to make France great again would be accomplished on the backs of public and private sector employees. His pledges to cut taxes on the wealthy and unshackle industry from state regulations, as well as pare down the welfare state, run counter to the "social Gaullism" espoused by Séguin. Though a devout Catholic, de Gaulle never posited Catholicism as a defining trait of Frenchmen or women or made his faith a campaign issue; though a French patriot, de Gaulle warned that while patriotism is the love of one's own country, nationalism, of the sort that Fillon has encouraged, is the hatred of others.

Fillon appeared to make one last effort to channel the general when, last month, faced by mounting judicial pressures, moribund polling figures, and metastasizing doubts within the party, he invoked the crisis that confronted de Gaulle in 1968. Fillon trumpeted that he would not resign as the candidate for Les Republicains and called upon the people to help him defend democracy by rallying behind him — a pantomime of the events of 1968 when de Gaulle, faced with rebelling students and striking workers who had paralyzed the nation, vowed to defend democracy against "tyranny" and rallied nearly a million supporters in Paris, who surged down the Champs-Élysées, singing "La Marseillaise" and chanting "De Gaulle is not alone." Miraculously, the political tide turned and swept away the barricades. It was the last time de Gaulle would prove equal to his myth.

Fillon's rallying efforts, too, served their purpose, to a degree: On March 5, about 40,000 supporters gathered under pelting rain at the Place du Trocadéro in Paris to support their beleaguered candidate. Though far fewer than the 200,000 announced by his spokesperson, not to mention the 1 million who backed de Gaulle, there were enough to silence Fillon's critics within the party, who fell back into line. The larger effect, however, drew an even starker contrast between the general and the party that now claims to guard his legacy: As the astute political observer Claude Askolovitch puts it, in 1968 Charles de Gaulle *was* the state and rightly presented himself as its last rampart against chaos. Fillon, however, is a candidate who, caught in a pathetic trap of his own making, has attacked the state itself, casting doubt on the work of the police and courts. Fillon has thus stood Gaullism on its head, Askolovitch says: "A besieged right, instead of defending the republic, now challenges it."

The polling numbers, for a while, at least, suggested that French voters knew a faux Gaullist when they saw one. Last fall, the widespread assumption was that Fillon was France's next president in waiting; polls showed him winning 32 percent of the vote in the first round. Following the series of revelations about his misdeeds, however, Fillon's standing plummeted; an Ifop poll published on April 11 showed that he risked finishing as low as fourth, putting him still behind Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, and even behind Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the candidate of the far-left La France Insoumise.

In the days since, Fillon appears to have recovered some ground, and the first round of voting this Sunday looks poised to be a nail-biter. But even if he successfully salvages this election, the fate of Les Républicains, and the party's relationship with the founder of modern France, will remain unresolved. Torn between those, like Alain Juppé, who defend its inclusionary and universal calling and those, like Fillon, who rally to its exclusionary and sovereignist tendency, the party lacks a figure who, like de Gaulle, projects a clear and powerful dedication to the general interest of the republic. There is no one, at least for now, who seems a likely heir to the Gaullist legacy. (In fact, the one figure who can invoke the general without igniting laughter or yawns is Mélenchon. No other figure speaks as persuasively as does Mélenchon about the republic and its people, and no other figure can electrify as he does the entire gamut of social and professional classes. As more than one observer noted about his remarkable speech at the Bastille on March 18, Mélenchon rose to Gaullist heights in his gestures and language.)

But even the general himself would be hard-pressed to bridge the abyssal divisions in today's France. As president, he always aspired to represent not only a majority of French, much less a political party. At the heart of Gaullism beats the ideal of national unity without exclusion. But with the ephemeral exceptions of 1944 and 1958, this inevitably proved to be an impossible ideal. In 2017, this ideal is even more far-fetched, especially when the Gaullist candidate aspires to unite through exclusion while representing barely a majority within his own party. It may well be, after the first round of the presidential election, that the heartbeat of Gaullism will stop altogether.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

France Heads for a Dreadful Choice

Jeremy Black

Do you fancy retirement at 60, a guaranteed income, a short workweek, and the abolition of fear about the future? Well, move to France and choose among the 11 candidates for the presidency.

Most of the outside world is worried about Marine Le Pen and her National Front, especially in light of her recent demand that France be absolved of responsibility for the deportation of Jews to Nazi death camps because the country was under German occupation. (For the record, the wartime French authorities were complicit.)

But focusing on Ms. Le Pen means playing down the problems posed by the other available choices. She may place ahead of the field in the first round of the election Sunday and is likely, at any rate, to be one of the two candidates that go forward to the second round, on May 7.

But the conventional assumption is that the French vote for their favorite candidate in the first round and, having done so, vote for anyone in the second who will block their least favorite. That process stopped Marine's father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in 2002, when he lost to Jacques Chirac 82% to 18%. Those on the left were willing to vote for the Gaullist in order to defeat Mr. Le Pen.

The expectation has been that this process will deliver victory to Emmanuel Macron, the center-left candidate, a former economics minister in François Hollande's lackluster (to be polite) Socialist government. Mr. Macron is a Tony Blair-like character, strong on talk of renewal and weak on details or policies. In practice, he is part of what ails France—a range of candidates who do not want to explain to the electorate that the world does not owe them a living. François Fillon, the conventional-right candidate, made moves in that direction but has been sunk by scandals about paying his family from public funds.

That leaves Mr. Macron, Ms. Le Pen and the far-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon as the front-runners. None of them have explained how they will get France to work. Ms. Le Pen and Mr. Mélenchon both promise to reduce the retirement age to 60 from 62. In a country that already protects workers' rights, they want to provide more protection and bigger pensions. They promise to tax, spend and oppose multinationals and "globalization."

Polls suggest widespread support for these views, whatever the psephology that delivers the presidential result this year. Just as British politicians cannot touch the sacred cow of the National Health Service, their French counterparts are encouraging a flight from reality that began many years ago.

That poses dangers for France and the European Union. Similarly foolish policies—state control, redistributive taxation and social management—failed under François Mitterrand in 1981-83. That led his minister of economy and finance, Jacques Delors, to become president of the European Commission in 1985 and push through similar policies at the European level. Given the hostility in many EU states to whatever can be decried as "austerity," the renewal of this theme in France bodes ill for fiscal responsibility across the Continent.

France's position within NATO may also come into question. Paris has been stalwart in its opposition to Islamist groups in Northwest Africa, but both Ms. Le Pen and Mr. Mélenchon have tilted toward Vladimir Putin, using their countrymen's disdain for President Trump as an excuse.

More generally, the French election underlines the extent to which the traditional parties of the right are challenged by current developments, a situation seen in 2016 in the American primaries and in former Prime Minister David Cameron's Brexit defeat. At the same time, the left and the far right encourage the electorate not to ask hard questions about economic growth and social welfare. The principal difference between left and far right rests on competing accounts of national identity and interest. In France, as so often elsewhere, the left does not really offer a convincing version of either, while that of the far right is divisive and backward-looking.

For the conventional European right, the French election throws up serious questions of relevance and popularity, and that in a society in which so many wish to retire early and grumble. An inability to face up to their political situation is part of this malaise.

The focus on Brexit has distracted attention from the EU's fundamental crisis, posed by a rejection of economic literacy. There is a strong danger of populist swings around the left or the far right, and a challenge both to business and to international commitments. The pro-business moderate right is too weak, and the rest are too antibusiness.

A defeat for Ms. Le Pen appears likely. That would be welcome, but it should not detract from the broader failures of a corporatist social-welfare model that has already done great harm to France and the EU.

Slate

A Primer on the French Election: Four Candidates, Three Nightmare Scenarios

By Yascha Mounk

"The hero of the game? Bah, that's me," French presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon boasts in a YouTube video about *Fiscal Combat*, a video game played by millions of French voters over the last two weeks. "You confront oligarchs. It's a battle. You capture them. You shake them. And that makes euros fall out of their pockets."

The clip briefly cuts away from Mélenchon to show his campaign manager hunched over a laptop, pulverizing yet another oligarch to the accompaniment of a chiptune soundtrack. "Those Euros?" Mélenchon asks when the camera returns to him. "You can put them toward the common good!"

For many years, Mélenchon has been about as marginal a political figure as his endorsement of *Fiscal Combat* might suggest. After breaking with the center-left Parti Socialiste of President François Hollande, he has called for a 100 percent tax on incomes over 400,000 euros (about $426,000) and endorsed dictators such as Hugo Chavez. And yet, the latest polls see Mélenchon in a dead heat with centrist Emmanuel Macron, conservative François Fillon, and far-right populist Marine Le Pen. Any two out of those four might come out on top in the first rounds of the upcoming presidential elections.

In other words, less than a week before the first round of the election, and less than three weeks before a runoff between the two leading candidates that will determine the next inhabitant of the Élysée Palace, the country's political future is completely up in the air. France might soon be ruled by a self-described communist, by an

untested centrist whose political movement was founded less than a year ago, by a traditional conservative under investigation for blatantly corrupt practices, or by the far-right leader of a party with deep fascist roots.

To explain just how terrifying this situation is, let me give you a quick primer on the four candidates who might soon get to shape the country's future.

Marine Le Pen

Ever since Britain voted to Brexit and the United States elected Donald Trump, commentators have feared that Le Pen would win the French presidential election and complete the populist trifecta. If this outcome does come to pass, the consequences would be disastrous: Le Pen's election would not only threaten the future of the European Union but also call the survival of French democracy into doubt.

Le Pen is the leader of the Front National. Founded by Marine's father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party has long evinced sympathy for the Vichy regime, which collaborated with the Nazis in World War II; trafficked in every form of racism and anti-Semitism; and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the French constitutional order. Since taking over the party, Marine—a plain-spoken woman with a proletarian accent, a lively manner, and considerable wit—has put constant criticisms of France's Muslim minority at the center of her rhetoric. But at the same time, she has tried to "detoxify" the party by styling herself as a defender of the republic and, at times, even a champion of gays or Jews. This strategy paid off: Much more popular than her father ever was, she has long topped first-round polls.

But though Le Pen has tried to soften her party's rough edges, her core beliefs and positions remain extreme. She wants France to leave the European Union, has floated a Trump-style travel ban on Muslims, and recently flew to Moscow to pledge allegiance to Vladimir Putin. Even the varnish she has put on the party seems to be wearing thin: At a recent campaign appearance, for example, Le Pen refused to accept France's responsibility for rounding up more than 13,000 French Jews who were ultimately handed over to the Nazis and transported to Auschwitz.

François Fillon

At the outset of the primaries for the center-right Républicains, there were two big questions: Who would manage to get the second spot in the runoff against Le Pen? And who would have the best chance to beat her? For most observers, that person was likely to be Alain Juppé, a moderate and well-liked former prime minister who could likely attract the support of a lot of centrist and leftist voters in a runoff against Le Pen. But a few weeks before the primary, Juppé faded, only to be beaten handily by Fillon.

Beyond the base of the Républicains, Fillon was never going to be especially popular. Both socially and fiscally conservative, he voted against same-sex marriage, positioned himself as an enemy of the welfare state in the mold of Margaret Thatcher, and maintained extremely friendly relations with Russia. It is little wonder, then, that French observers were very wary of a potential runoff between Fillon and Le Pen: Many left-wing voters, they feared, would refuse to turn out to vote for Fillon in the second round, potentially handing Le Pen the keys to the Élysée.

And that was before the corruption scandal hit. Fillon, the *Canard Enchaîné* revealed, has employed both his own wife and his own children as parliamentary assistants in the past, funneling close to $1 million of taxpayer money to his own family members. To make things worse, none of them seem to have done actual work for him. Under growing pressure to vacate the party's nomination, Fillon promised that he would abandon his campaign if he was put under formal investigation. Soon enough, he was—and yet he didn't.

The prospect that Fillon might face Le Pen in the second round is terrifying for two reasons: First, there is every reason to think that he might lose. And second, even if he did win, he would make a terrible president—close to the Kremlin, regressive on social issues, pursuing an unimaginative course of cuts without investment in economics, and entering office under the stinking cloud of an ongoing investigation for corruption.

Emmanuel Macron

In the wake of Fillon's corruption scandal, the political landscape was looking bleak: Le Pen was riding high, Fillon was laid low by scandal, and President Hollande's Parti Socialiste had nominated Benoît Hamon, an uncharismatic lightweight who was barely capable of holding the allegiance of his own party. In this dark hour, Macron appeared as the would-be savior of the political center—and the French republic.

At 39, Macron is by far the youngest major contender, yet he has already earned one of the most impressive CVs: A graduate of the elite École Nationale d'Administration, he has been an investment banker, a senior civil servant, a presidential aide, and France's minister for the economy. After leaving both the Hollande government and the Parti Socialiste in dramatic fashion, Macron set up his own political movement, En Marche (On the Move).

While Macron has deliberately kept his political positions vague, it is clear that his overall instincts are centrist on economic issues and liberal on social issues. A believer in both the welfare state and free enterprise, Macron has advocated for moderate cuts to the French civil service while promising to modernize French entitlement programs by drawing on the example of Denmark and Sweden. An eloquent defender of a multiethnic society, Macron has also opposed calls for more restrictions on the Muslim veil, advocated the right of same-sex couples to adopt children, and invited American climate scientists whose work is threatened by Trump's policies to move to France.

"To be a patriot," he said at a rally in Marseille, home to hundreds of thousands of immigrants,

that is not the Front National, the hatred that will lead to civil war. To be a patriot is to want a strong France, open to Europe, and faced toward the world. And when I look at Marseille, I see a French city, marked by 2,000 years of history, of immigration, of Europe. … I see Armenians, Italians, Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Malians. … But what do I really see? I see the people of Marseille. I see the people of France.

Macron's mixture of charisma and competence, of youth and ideological flexibility, unexpectedly propelled him to the top of the polls. For the last months, it became the received wisdom that he would qualify for the second round—where he would handily beat Le Pen. It is thanks to Macron that the sense of impending doom about the French elections that had prevailed in the aftermath of Trump's victory gradually dissipated and even gave away to complacency in the first months of the year.

But then, over the course of the last weeks, Macron gradually began to slide in the polls. After middling performances in TV debates, his support—which had always been soft—began to slip away. Today, Macron retains by far the best chances of beating Le Pen if he actually qualifies for the second round, but it is looking less and less certain that he will.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon

Which brings up back to the protagonist of *Fiscal Combat*.

Even his political enemies admit that Mélenchon is a man of real talent. Smart and cultured—an adjective that still counts as a political asset in France—he speaks with great eloquence and refreshing pugnacity. Few French politicians can inveigh against injustice with the pleasing turns of the tongue that seem to come so naturally to him.

Never before has the centrist leader of a recently founded political movement come remotely close to conquering the Élysée.

But while Mélenchon loves to intone calls for justice in a booming baritone, the actual policies he favors would likely be a disaster for the French economy and for French democracy. His critics have understandably focused on the unworkable idea of capping salaries at 400,000 euros. But this is merely symptomatic of a much larger failure: Mélenchon does not have the beginning of a vision for how to make France's economy more vibrant or for how to sustain the jobs that finance the country's admirable welfare state. Politics, for Mélenchon, really is like a giant game of *Fiscal Combat*: So long as the people's leader can punch enough rich people, the money for public projects will magically appear.

But it is in the realm of foreign policy that the full extent of Mélenchon's thuggishness becomes apparent. His naked anti-Americanism is only to be expected, I suppose. ("Yankees," he said on one occasion, "represent everything I detest. A pretentious and arrogant empire, composed of uncultured rubes and pitiable cooks.") So is his admiration for far-left dictators from Hugo Chavez to Fidel Castro. But his circle of dictatorial sympathy seems to extend even beyond the usual suspects. And so all he sees in Syria is a rightful ruler, Bashar al-Assad, who is being overthrown in a cynical bid for oil and gas. All he sees in the Ukraine is the imperial ambitions of the West. All he sees in China is the admirable ability of two-dozen members of the Politburo of the Communist Party to hold 1.2 billion people under their control. And all he sees in Tibet is the would-be perpetrators of "Buddhist sharia."

Most French people would find much of Mélenchon's program abhorrent. But because his surge came late in the game, his policies will barely come under scrutiny before the first round—and so he now has a small yet real chance of sneaking into the second round, possibly facing off against Le Pen in a battle of the extremes unprecedented anywhere in Western Europe since World War II.

The election of Emmanuel Macron would be a sensation. For half a

century, the French presidency has alternated between the representative of the main center-left party and the representative of the main center-right party. Never before has the centrist leader of a recently founded political movement come remotely close to conquering the Élysée.

If Macron does win, his presidency would by no means be an easy proposition. Without the support of a major political party, Macron is unlikely to garner significant support in legislative elections this June. And so he will face great difficulty in putting his modernizing agenda into practice even if he does win high office: Radical though his election would be, it would likely open the door to yet more gridlock.

But the alternatives to Macron are far, far worse. The election of Fillon would strengthen Putin's hand, give French voters even better reason to conclude that their country's political class is controlled by the corrupt and the self-serving, and deepen popular disenchantment with democracy. Meanwhile, the election of Le Pen or Mélenchon would wreak instant chaos, call France's membership in the European Union in doubt, and undermine the most basic protections of liberal democracy. Macron is unlikely to fulfill the outsized expectations of his most ardent supporters. But his election is the only realistic way to stave off disaster.

THE DAILY BEAST

The Insane French Elections That Could F*ck Us All

Christopher Dickey and Erin Zaleski

PARIS—The United States appears at last to be waking up, at least a little bit, to the frightening risks that are fast approaching with the French presidential elections. We're seeing some thoughtful editorials, and even comedian John Oliver has chimed in. His message to France, after Brexit and President Trump: "Don't fuck up, too."

Let's be just that blunt. These elections could fuck us all. They have turned into an insane gamble—Russian roulette (and we use the term advisedly) with at least two of the chambers loaded—and the implications for the United States are huge.

The biggest winner in the forthcoming French presidential elections may well be Russian President Vladimir Putin, in fact. And while he might have played a few of his usual dirty tricks—indeed, in 2014 a Russian bank funded the party of Marine Le Pen, the current first-round leader in the polls—Putin can now sit back and watch the French themselves try to destroy the European Union and the NATO alliance he hates so much.

Less than three weeks from now, in the final round of the presidential elections, the only choice left to the voters of France could well be between Le Pen, a crypto-fascist, or Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a charismatic communist, both of whom are strongly anti-EU and anti-NATO.

Victory for either one would mean an end to the political, diplomatic, and economic order that has protected the United States as well as Europe for the last 70 years, preventing the kinds of cataclysms—World Wars I and II—that cost millions of lives in the first half of the 20th century while containing first Soviet and now Russian adventurism.

There are other possibilities, but as the French prepare to go to the polls (or flee them) this Sunday, April 23, the possible outcomes are a total crapshoot. The four top candidates in a field of 11 are in a virtual dead heat; the differences between their scores is within the acknowledged margins of error by the pollsters. The top two finishers will vie against each other in a run-off on May 7. And the reason something like panic has set in among many French, from the heights of the political establishment to conversation over espressos at the counters in working-class cafés, is that the candidate with the most solid base is Le Pen, while the one with the most momentum is the far-left Mélenchon.

Analogies often are misleading, but in the United States, the closest parallel to Le Pen would be Candidate Trump as groomed and coached by Steve Bannon, while the appeal of Mélenchon, especially among young voters, is much like that of Bernie Sanders. Mélenchon has the best presence on the web, which gives him the veneer of modernity, while his program to "share the wealth" of those who've made even small fortunes fits nicely with the traditional French jealousy of financial success and youthful idealism about egalitarianism.

Everyone knows how unreliable polling was in the Brexit vote and before the Trump victory, but here in France, with some 30 percent of the electorate saying they have not yet decided who to vote for less than a week before they go to the polls, and many others saying they might change their mind at the last minute, nobody even pretends to be sure how things will play out. Just to add to the confuson: abstention rates in the first round are expected to be at an all-time high of about 35 percent.

At the beginning of the year, the obvious front-runner was François Fillon, the very conservative former prime minister in the government of President Nicolas Sarkozy from 2007 to 2012. In a primary race last November, Fillon beat his former boss for the nomination of their party, now called *Les Républicains.* His core principles: Thatcherite economics paring back the role of the state, cutting public sector jobs dramatically, and asserting the values of the Catholic Church in family matters, while denouncing Islamism as a totalitarian ideology. He also has famously friendly ties to Putin.

Fillon, 63, has cultivated an image of maturity and experience bolstered at first by probity and morality. But those latter virtues took a hit when he was placed under formal investigation earlier this year for putting his wife on a government payroll, to the tune of almost $1 million, for work she may never have performed. This, as he was calling for the elimination of 500,000 public sector jobs.

So who is left? The wunderkind banker turned presidential adviser turned economy minister and then leader of an independent centrist "movement": Emmanuel Macron. In March, he was the flavor of the month. Polls showed he would make it to the second round of the elections, maybe even edging past Le Pen, then defeat her decisively.

But two televised debates took much of the wind out of Macron's sails. Compared to Le Pen and Mélenchon, he was both wonkish and vague—a deadly combination. That may be because, Obama-like, he really wanted to try to explain the issues. But that's not great TV, and Mélenchon, Le Pen, Fillon, and even fringe party candidates made much more of an impression. Macron started fading from the headlines, and he began to lose his grip on the top position in the polls.

Because Macron's centrist movement, En Marche!, has attracted support from some of the moderate leaders of the Socialist Party, with whom he served as economy minister, he's being branded as a front for the very unpopular outgoing government of President François Hollande.

So now we're in the home stretch of the first heat of this race, with the candidates hoping big rallies will push them across the April 23 threshhold to the final one-on-one showdown May 7.

The most imaginative is Mélenchon, who launched his campaign in February using a hologram projection of himself in Paris while he spoke live to a crowd in Lyon, 500 kilometers away. This week he plans to use the same technique to project a 3-D image of himself to meetings in eight cities at once.

Le Pen's big rally was in Paris on Monday, attended by voters whose fervor, once again, was reminiscent of Trump supporters during the campaign in the United States last year. They are true believers even if they have trouble squaring those beliefs with objective truth. They simply ignore the scandals that have accrued to Le Pen around her alleged misuse of European Parliament funds and, most recently, her attempt to whitewash the role of French officials exterminating Jews during the Holocaust.

At its very core, Le Pen's support is built around hostility toward immigrants, especially if they have dark skin and Muslim-sounding names. And the roots of the party, try as Le Pen might to disavow them, run deep among people with nostalgia for the Nazi collaborators of the Vichy government (as Fillon pointed out), and even the die-hard colonialists who waged a terrorist war against the government of Charles De Gaulle when he decided to withdraw from Algeria in the early 1960s.

"I've been a supporter for 30 years," said a man at the Le Pen rally who would identify himself only as Samuel. "It's a question of national identity. I grew up in the *banlieues*," he said, referring to the suburbs where many housing projects were built in years past to accommodate foreign workers. "I have seen the effects of immigration firsthand."

Others think Le Pen represents law and order in a country that has suffered horrific terror attacks since early 2015. "Marine is the only one who will restore security in France," said Théodora, originally from Romania. "Macron doesn't love his country. I love France more than he does. He is shameful."

Joël, a man in his 60s from the Jura region wearing a Paris-St. Germain soccer club T-shirt and a Le Pen, button said, "I am voting for Marine because I am a patriot, and I appreciate patriotism."

"Macron is like a giant water balloon that will pop. He is a banker and part of the system. He is ephemeral… I hope so, anyway."

That wasn't the sentiment in the market streets of Paris on Easter Sunday, where Macron supporters were out in force.

Ali Chabani, a 53-year-old photographer handing out Macron leaflets, easily rattled off six reasons he'll vote for him: He's "dynamic"; he hasn't been "stealing public funds" (a jibe at Fillon and Le Pen); he is "unbelievably intelligent"; he understands that we are in a global economic war and to win it you need alliances (like the EU); he will create jobs (all the candidates say they will create jobs); and he understands the digital economy. (That's not always a plus with French voters. Mélenchon warns against the "uberization" of the work force.)

Isabelle Nore Vidal, a pharmacist, said she had started by supporting a centrist candidate who lost to Fillon in the primary of *Les Républicains*. Since then, she said, Fillon has proved too divisive for French society. "You have people who suffer enormously," she said. "If Fillon's program is implemented, they will suffer more."

She said she is asked often if Macron isn't too young to be president. "I tell them a society that says a man of 40 is too young is a society that's in trouble." Macron is mature, but with energy and a sense of the future that older candidates don't have, she said.

In fact, Le Pen is only 48. But Nore Vidal just shook her head when she heard the name. Like many other voters, she couldn't even imagine a Le Pen victory, but that doesn't mean it won't happen.

On Monday, Macron drew some 17,000 supporters to a rally in one of the biggest indoor sports arenas of Paris. They filled it to the rafters, waving not only French flags but European Union flags. And Macron himself looked buoyed by the crowd that surrounded him.

"We are going to give back to France its optimism and its faith in the future," he said. He denounced what he called "fraudulent nostalgia." Of 11 candidates, he said, he was the only one who didn't want to drag the country back to the past and close the borders, sealing the country inside itself.

Laughing easily, almost conspiratorially, with his audience, Macron shot little barbs at his opponents, even when he didn't name them. Some, he suggested, would turn France into "Cuba without the sun and Venezuela without oil." (So much for Mélenchon.) Contrasting Fillon and Mélenchon, Macron said the French might be left with a choice between "Thatcher or Trotsky."

As for Le Pen, Macron warned of "a barbarism" in Europe "that is ready to come back."

"We will not let that happen," he said, to rapturous applause.

Perhaps. But at this juncture, if Macron falters or fails next Sunday, the barbarians truly will be at the gates.

The New York Times

UNE - It's France's Turn to Worry About Election Meddling by Russia

Andrew Higgins

The broader question as France charges toward the first round of the presidential election on Sunday, however, is what exactly lies behind what looks to many, particularly supporters of the liberal front-runner, Emmanuel Macron, like a replay of Russia's interference in the presidential election in the United States last year.

Is Moscow meddling covertly, as American intelligence agencies say it did before Donald J. Trump's victory? Or is it just benefiting from a network of politicians, journalists and others in France who share the Kremlin's views on politics there, and much else besides?

Whatever the answer, squalls of fake news reports and a barrage of hacking attacks on the computers of Mr. Macron's campaign have left many in France — and Washington — with an unnerving sense of familiarity.

It all looks so recognizable that Senator Richard M. Burr, Republican of North Carolina and the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, recently said, "I think it's safe by everybody's judgment that the Russians are actively involved in the French elections."

Stung by criticism that its services turbocharged the spread of fake news during the United States election campaign, Facebook announced last week that a drive to purge "inauthentic activity" had led it to "take action against over 30,000 fake accounts" in France.

It is also clear, however, that Russia often does not so much intrude as amplify existing voices with which it agrees, notably on Syria, the perils of American power and the futility of economic sanctions on Moscow.

Nataliya Novikova, who leads Sputnik in Paris, said that its operations there, while eager to present Russia's take on events, did not serve Moscow but rather a French audience eager for a "different angle."

Complaining that Mr. Macron and members of his staff had repeatedly ignored interview requests, she said that Sputnik tried to represent all points of view and had been unfairly branded a Russian bullhorn.

"There are many different truths," Ms. Novikova said. "There has to be a pluralism of truth."

Cécile Vaissié, a professor of Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet studies at the University of Rennes 2, said the Kremlin, building on methods and contacts developed in the Soviet Union, had assembled a "formidable machine of influence" in France that works to promote its interests as well as those of its preferred candidates.

Russia, or at least its state-controlled news media, has been backing two horses in the French race. One is Mr. Fillon, who, while prime minister from 2007 to 2012, struck up a friendship with Vladimir V. Putin, who is said to have sent the French politician a bottle of wine after the death of his mother.

Among the accusations of financial impropriety engulfing Mr. Fillon's campaign is that he received $50,000 from a Lebanese businessman in return for arranging a meeting with Mr. Putin. The Kremlin dismissed the report as "fake news."

Lately, Mr. Fillon has seen a bump in real opinion polls. They still put Mr. Macron in the lead, but the race is tight enough now that the final result, like those of the British referendum on leaving the European Union and the American presidential election, may defy the forecasts of pollsters.

Russia's other preferred candidate is Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front party who traveled to Moscow last month for a meeting with Mr. Putin, whom she openly admires. Her party, traditionally hostile to the United States and the European Union, has received millions of dollars in loans from Russian banks.

Mr. Macron, on the other hand, is the most enthusiastically pro-European Union candidate in the race, and Russia has been seeking to undermine and divide the union.

Unlike in America, where attitudes toward Moscow formed during the Cold War often continue to hobble Russian efforts at public outreach, France has numerous individuals and organizations that speak out for views that mirror Russia's — and its preferences for the French election.

Russia's influence machine, said Ms. Vaissié, the Rennes professor, has been fueled in large part by "the paradox at the heart of our political discourse: a fascination with the United States and a permanent rejection of it that provides absolutely fertile ground for the Russians."

Anti-Americanism in France has seeped deep into the center-right, encouraging an infatuation among some politicians with Russia and Mr. Putin that has provided Russian news outlets in France with some of their most bombastic pro-Russia and anti-Macron voices.

One of those is Nicolas Dhuicq, a member of Parliament, secretary of the legislature's France-Russia Friendship Group and a member of the board of the French-Russian Dialogue Association, an organization stacked with pillars of the French establishment and led by an old political ally of Mr. Putin's.

It was Mr. Dhuicq who told Sputnik in February that Mr. Macron was a closet homosexual supported by a "very rich gay lobby." The claim, which set off a firestorm on social media, put Mr. Macron briefly on the defensive.

The furor quickly fizzled, however, after the allegation was ridiculed by the candidate and the mainstream news media as a transparent exercise in the dark Russian art of "kompromat," or using compromising information to embarrass or hinder.

Mr. Dhuicq also contributed to a Sputnik article that derided Mr. Macron, a former investment banker, as a "U.S. agent lobbying banks' interests."

In an interview, Mr. Dhuicq stood by his claim that Mr. Macron had a secret double life and scoffed at allegations of Russian meddling as fantasy driven by paranoia imported from America.

"I trained as a psychiatrist and know what paranoia looks like," he said.

The Russians "are clever enough to know their influence is close to zero on French voters," he added. "Most people don't even know what Sputnik is."

It is true that very few people read or watch Russian news coverage in French, but what those outlets say gets recycled on social media. Once there, the Russian source often gets stripped away, allowing raw kompromat to churn through blogs, on Twitter and on what Mr. Macron's supporters call the "fascisphere" of anti-establishment and often extreme-right websites.

"The American phenomenon is being repeated here in France," said Pierre Haski, a founder of the liberal news site Rue89. "A large section of the population has broken with the mainstream media and gets its information from parallel sources. This is the world in which RT and Sputnik have found their place."

Sputnik's report about Mr. Fillon's surge in opinion polls, based on research by a company based in Moscow that studies social media, got some traction online but never really took off — in part because of a swift rebuke from a French watchdog that monitors polling claims.

Using information from the same Moscow company, Sputnik again declared "Fillon the favorite in the presidential race" on Friday, but this time it made clear the assertion was not based on polling data.

Mounir Mahjoubi, digital director of the Macron campaign, said the principal goals of the state-funded Russian media outlets were to spread chaos and uncertainty and to undermine Mr. Macron while diverting attention from Mr. Fillon's legal troubles.

In one striking example, Sputnik and RT reported in February — citing what they said was an interview by the WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, with the newspaper Izvestia — that WikiLeaks had "interesting information" about Mr. Macron and was preparing to release it.

"Assange will pour oil on the fire of the French election campaign," RT reported.

But a spokesman for WikiLeaks said that Mr. Assange had never given such an interview and had merely sent a short email responding to a question from an Izvestia reporter.

Murkier still are the thousands of cyberstrikes against the Macron campaign's website and hundreds of attempts to gain access to its email accounts through so-called phishing attacks. The same tactic was used to gain entry to the Democratic National Committee's servers last year.

Yet Damien Bancal, a French journalist who founded and runs the website Zataz, which focuses on digital security, said that attributing such activities to Russia was wild conjecture. The Macron campaign's computer system "is like a Swiss cheese," he said, open to attack not only by Russia but also by "any 15-year-old with a computer."

The government has nonetheless taken the danger seriously, with Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault warning Moscow that "this kind of interference in French political life is unacceptable," and the country's equivalent of the National Security Council in Washington holding a special meeting to discuss cyberthreats.

François Heisbourg of the Foundation for Strategic Research in Paris said he doubted that any Russian efforts, whatever their nature, would have much impact on the election. While at times highly skilled at planting false information and creating confusion, "they often burn themselves while trying to burn down the house," he said.

Bloomberg

How Turkey's Referendum Could Be a Prelude to French Surprise

Mohamed A. El-Erian

Undeterred by warnings, particularly from the Western media -- including The Economist's stark caution that Turkey risked "sliding into dictatorship" -- voters narrowly approved a referendum proposal on Sunday that expands President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's powers under the constitution. Judging from some of the voter interviews, one of the drivers of this outcome was the Turkish electorate's hope that stronger leadership can provide greater stability, security and prosperity.

This phenomenon has also played out in other countries, and is likely to continue to have an effect in the months ahead. As a result, neither markets nor political scientists should underestimate what some swing voters are willing to accept, and risk, in their quest for greater national strength, a development that raises interesting domestic and global issues -- including possibly in the upcoming presidential elections in France.

With 51.4 percent of the vote in his favor, and an 85 percent turnout, Erdogan now has wider powers over matters of legislation, finance, appointments and civil society. His win comes at a time of significant regional fluidity, including the conflicts in Syria, together with greater tensions in the country's already delicate relations with Western Europe.

This referendum outcome will embolden the Turkish government: Its first actions postelection included prolonging the state of emergency for three months and signaling the possibility of holding a referendum on reintroducing the death penalty. But it is also generating internal and external push back.

Seizing on reports of irregularities, including by external observers who noted that the referendum fell short of international standards, opposition parties are questioning the legitimacy of the result. The fact that Turkey's three main cities voted "no" is seen by some as a signal of caution for the government. Meanwhile, in an unusual set of comments, high-level European officials, including Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, have warned the government against extrapolating too much from a vote that they regard as illustrating a deep split in Turkey.

But all this is unlikely to deter the Turkish government from drawing the same types of conclusions as President Donald Trump did from his election victory and the U.K. government did from the Brexit referendum: Unsettled and, at times, angry citizens are looking for stronger leadership to regain control of their destiny. And this comes at a time of "unusual uncertainty" both at home and abroad.

How the trade-off turns out well will depend both on how constructively the Turkish government, and Erdogan in particular, uses the new constitutional powers. In the meantime, both markets and political scientists should remember that what occurred in Turkey on Sunday is partly an illustration of a broader global phenomenon of significant numbers of people showing they are willing to take risks in opting for the promise of stronger leadership to secure greater stability and security. And they seem willing to do so even if it entails weakening longstanding checks and balances, potentially fueling political cults of personality and, perhaps even increasing the threat of an eventual slide into greater authoritarianism.

This phenomenon will probably be tested again in the first round of the presidential vote in France on April 23. Already, the three anti-establishment candidates -- Marine Le Pen of the National Front, Jean-Luc Melenchon of the far left, and Emmanuel Macron, who is running as part of a self-declared new movement -- have shaken up the country's politics. In the process, they have out-distanced the insiders Francois Fillon and Benoit Hamon, who have been hampered by liabilities of their own making.

Insights from Turkey's referendum add to the possibility of a victory by one of the unconventional candidates in France. That includes not only the front-runner Macron but there also is a lower extreme tail risk for Le Pen or Melenchon.

Bloomberg

Bond Investors Shouldn't Panic Over French Elections

Komal Sri-Kumar

Investors in European bonds showed increased concern last week about the outcome of France's presidential elections. The spread between French and German 10-year obligations widened as the far-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon rose in the polls before the first round of elections on April 23.

Many investors had expected a mainstream, pro-euro candidate to win the second and final round on May 7.

Yet four major party candidates -- Mélenchon, Marine Le Pen from the far right, and two mainstream politicians, François Fillon and Emmanuel Macron -- are now bunched together in most recent polls. That raises the odds of a showdown between two extreme competitors in the second round. Adding to the uncertainty and investor concerns, about a third of voters have not made up their minds.

Both Mélenchon and Le Pen have promised to take France out of the euro zone. The leftist's threats to impose a 100 percent tax rate on those with monthly incomes above 33,000 euros ($35,154), to lower the retirement age to 60, and to reduce the workweek from 35 hours to 32, have also unnerved investors.

The spread in yield of French 10-year bonds over German bunds (Europe's equivalent of "risk-free" debt) rose from 67 basis points at the beginning of the month to 73

basis points late last week (solid line, right scale on the chart). The spread had been below 50 basis points at the beginning of 2017, when investors felt confident that a mainstream candidate would be the eventual victor. With an anti-Europe candidate leading in the Italian elections expected to be held in February 2018, the Italy/Germany spread widened along with French debt (dotted line, left scale).

What is behind the market concern expressed through wider French and Italian yield spreads? Holders of these obligations fear that if the euro were no longer the medium of exchange in France or Italy, the debt would be restructured and repaid in new French francs or new Italian lire -- or whatever national currency replaces the euro. And since these currencies would likely depreciate against the euro and the dollar, bond-holders would suffer capital losses.

Although there is no telling which way the first round of French elections will go Sunday, a victory by Mélenchon or Le Pen could, counterintuitively, provide a buy signal for investors in various asset classes. This despite what would likely be the immediate reaction of markets to such a result -- a steep fall in French and Italian equity prices, and a further widening of debt spreads with respect to Germany.

Still, there are reasons to believe that the loss of mainstream candidates may yet enable attractive medium-term investment returns. While I focus on France below, many of the implications extend to Italy as well.

First, neither Le Pen nor Mélenchon will be able to unilaterally take France out of the euro zone. Despite the rise of these two candidates, various polls suggest a 70 percent to 80 percent French popular support for continuing to have the euro as the national currency. A determined push by the new president to form a new currency is likely to be defeated in a national referendum.

Second, a proposal to form a new currency will also have to be approved by the French National Assembly. And since a Mélenchon or Le Pen victory will not be accompanied by a parliamentary majority for the new president's party, France may end up with a prime minister of a different party -- a power-sharing arrangement known in France as cohabitation. Historically, these situations have made it extremely difficult for a president to make major structural changes.

Third, let's assume that, despite these stumbling blocks, the new French president manages to take the country out of the euro zone and restructure its debt. He or she would still have to undertake measures to lower the youth unemployment rate, the Achilles' heel of the French and Italian economies (chart below, France on right, Italy on left).

The new leader will have to offer incentives for equity investors, and ease regulations and lower the tax burden, to enable more job creation for workers between 15 and 24 years of age. It is not surprising that the youth vote, disenchanted with years of political sclerosis in France, is going in a big way for Le Pen.

Regarding debt, investment at high yields in French debt redenominated in new francs may prove to be a shrewd move. Steps taken to make it easier to fire unproductive workers, for example, would create jobs for the young and, thereby, reduce the yield on debt as well.

Although investors would breathe a sigh of relief if a mainstream candidate were to win, the medium-term return in markets may be even greater if an extremist candidate becomes the new president.

In sum, by forcing an end to decades-long measures that were hurtful of financial markets, Europe's political risk may spell opportunity for investors -- no matter the outcome.

POLITICO

5 ways the EU could send a message to Viktor Orbán

How to solve a problem like the Hungarian prime minister?

The Hungarian prime minister has been a thorn in Europe's side for years and patience in Brussels is wearing thin. This week the European Commission warned Viktor Orbán that it was considering opening infringement procedures against his government, which could result in heavy fines.

Among the bones of contention are a new education bill that critics say is designed to close down the Central European University backed by U.S. financier George Soros, Orbán's refusal to take part in the legally binding EU refugee relocation scheme, the distribution of a government survey entitled "Let's stop Brussels!" and a campaign against foreign-funded NGOs. It's also just introduced an asylum law that includes automatic detention for all asylum seekers.

They are just the most recent examples of Hungary straying from the EU line: there are 66 pending infringement against Hungary, several of which involve cases of alleged discrimination against non-Hungarians.

So far, Brussels has been unable to lay a glove on Orbán and Frans Timmermans, the Commission's first vice president, was cautious about taking further steps, saying Wednesday that "we have to be on a very firm legal ground before we start infringement procedures." Actions taken so far have been mainly on technical issues: but this time the protection of Article 2 of the EU treaties — on core of EU values — is at stake, Timmermans said.

The moment of truth for Orbán could come as early as April 29 at a meeting of the center-right European People's Party of which Orbán is a member — as are Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Juncker told fellow commissioners on Wednesday that "it's time to speak about the truth."

Here are five things that EU could do to send a message to Orbán.

1. Kick Fidesz out of the EPP

Orbán's strongest link to Brussels is his Fidesz party's membership of the European People's Party. According to the EPP's statutes, suspending or excluding a party would need to be approved by the European Parliament at the request of either the party's president — Frenchman Joseph Daul — or by seven MEPs from five different countries. But it's not in the EPP's interests to kick out the Hungarians. The EPP has 216 seats in the Parliament — making it the biggest group, ahead of the Socialists and Democrats on 189 — and losing the 12 Fidesz MEPs would shrink its lead. Plus, Hungarian MEPs are seen as loyal and hard working.

2. Ramp up the infringements

One obvious target for the EU would be to take action over Hungary's refusal to relocate refugees. That would also mean taking on the other Central European problem child, Poland, which has taken the same hard line. Countries on the frontline of migration such as Italy have pushed for infringement proceedings to be launched and it could help the Commission in its court case against Hungary and Slovakia, which objected to being told they must take in refugees. But it could make harder to reach a deal on reform of EU asylum law.

3. Open a rule-of-law procedure

This was the route taken in the case of Poland and, in the worst case scenario, could lead to the suspension of a country's voting rights. But the Commission seems reluctant to go down this path, mainly because Budapest is prepared to talk to Brussels whereas Warsaw is not. As in Poland's case, securing unanimity among the EU members countries for suspending voting rights would be extremely difficult.

4. Cut off the money

In the 2014-2020 budgetary period, Hungary is slated to receive around €29,6 billion in EU funds to finance motorways, railways, energy projects and other schemes in a country whose GDP is around €126 billion a year. It's an important source of cash for Budapest but the likes of Italy and Sweden are keen to claw back some EU funding if Central European countries are reluctant to host refugees. However, changing the EU's budget rules before 2020 would be impossible.

5. Send in the independent experts

The European Parliament has already approved a new mechanism for monitoring the rule of law which would set up a panel of independent experts to make country-specific recommendations during an annual fitness check of each EU member. The scheme's backers say it would make life easier for the Commission because it would be less political. But there's a problem. "Timmermans knows that he can't propose [a new monitoring process] because he knows he'll lose. He has to make sure there's enough support in Council before he can put a proposal on the table," said Israel Butler, director of advocacy at the Civil Liberties Union for Europe.

INTERNATIONAL

POLITICO

5 takeaways from Turkey's divisive referendum

Zia Weise

ISTANBUL — Referenda are meant to establish certainty: With just two options on the ballot, it ought to be clear whether the majority of voters, however tiny, approves of the proposed changes.

In Turkey's case, Sunday's plebiscite threw up more questions than answers. On the surface, the country made a momentous decision, voting in favor of a constitutional amendment that will expand President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's powers with a narrow 51.3 percent.

The opposition, however, is contesting the result, which is still unofficial. While the electoral board has confirmed a Yes vote, it will not release the official outcome for another 10 days or more. The board itself is under fire for a last-minute decision allowing ballots without an authenticating stamp to count.

An OSCE observer mission criticized that decision Monday, saying that it undermined important safeguards against fraud. The monitoring group also criticized a skewed pre-vote campaign in favor of the Yes vote, intimidation of the No campaign and the fact that the referendum question wasn't listed on the ballot, concluding that the vote "fell short" of international standards.

And thus, doubt and uncertainty reign. Will the opposition take the case to court? Would the courts, whose independence gradually has been eroded, give fair consideration to such a case? What prompted the electoral board to change the rules after the polls had closed? And once the changes become law, how will Erdoğan use his new powers?

These questions will likely be on the mind of many Turks and international observers alike. For now, here are five takeaways from Sunday's referendum:

1. Erdoğan got what he wanted …

Ever since becoming the country's first directly elected president in 2014, after serving as prime minister and leader of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for more than a decade, Erdoğan was dissatisfied with the head of state's largely ceremonial role.

Technically, Erdoğan has always remained the country's ruler, ignoring the constitutional constraints and governing as a de facto executive president. For years, he has advocated a switch to a presidential system that would allow him to occupy this role legally and further expand his executive authority.

On Sunday, he finally got what he wanted: A narrow majority of the country decided that they wanted to extend and expand Erdoğan's rule. There is little doubt that despite questions about the result's legitimacy, Erdoğan will treat the outcome just as he would have treated a landslide win — a sign that his continued rule embodies the people's will.

2. … but he hasn't consolidated his power

The Yes side's majority hinged on just 1.25 million people. Whether that was down to the diaspora or the nationalists who backed Erdoğan is impossible to tell: The margin was so incredibly narrow that any group of voters, non-voters or a mix thereof could have tipped the balance.

Considering that Turkish voters tend to follow party lines, it ought to have been an easy victory for Erdoğan. Together with the ultranationalist opposition party MHP, whose leadership supported a Yes in the referendum, the AKP won more than 60 percent of votes in the last elections.

That's 10 percentage points more than in Sunday's referendum. Given the vehement opposition of other opposition parties, this could mean that the entire MHP voter base split from the party to follow nationalist dissident Meral Aksener, who campaigned for a No — but that's improbable. It's more likely that a significant portion of AKP supporters also voted against Erdoğan.

The implications of the result's narrow margin will not have escaped Erdoğan, who was hoping for an unequivocal mandate: Turkey's political opposition may be weak, but nearly half the country's voters distrust their president.

3. Erdoğan has lost the cities

A significant change occurred among Turkey's urban voters: For the first time, Erdoğan lost the majority in the country's three largest cities: Istanbul, the capital Ankara and the coastal city of Izmir.

While Izmir is well known as a secular stronghold supporting the main opposition party CHP, a majority of voters in both Istanbul and Ankara have backed the AKP in the past. The loss of Istanbul will be especially painful for Erdoğan: He served as the city's major in the 1990s, and his government has pumped vast amounts of money into the megalopolis to pay for numerous ambitious infrastructure projects that doubled as symbols of the AKP's success.

The emergence of an urban-rural divide — along with the coastal provinces voting No — will remind many of the U.S. presidency or Brexit referendum results, but it's not that clear-cut in Turkey: the Kurdish southeast, also largely rural and underdeveloped, also opposed the referendum, as did several previously AKP-supporting provinces on the Black Sea.

4. Turkey remains divided

Turkish society is splintered along multiple fault lines: Secularists versus Islamists, liberals versus conservatives, Turkish nationalists versus Kurdish nationalists — the list goes on. Add to that another one: Yes versus No.

The referendum result saw some groups that usually despise each other on the same side: The pro-Kurdish party HDP and the ultranationalist dissenters led by Meral Aksener, for instance. Despite the high stakes, the referendum campaign inspired little unity.

Both sides, though the government in particular, have occasionally reached for divisive rhetoric in the campaign, with ministers at one point comparing No voters to terrorists. In the immediate aftermath, however, the president struck a conciliatory tone. The result, Erdoğan said, was a victory for all Turkish citizens.

Yet with nearly half the country not only opposed, but also doubting the veracity of the result, the government may struggle to conjure up an atmosphere of unity.

5. For once, the pollsters got it right

2016 was a dismal year for pollsters across the world, ridiculed for their prognosis of a British Remain win and a landslide victory for Hillary Clinton in the United States. Their Turkish colleagues, though, got it right this year.

For much of March, most polling firms predicted a narrow No win, with Erdoğan side trailing a few percentage points behind the opposition. But in April, they forecast the reverse: a tiny majority for the Yes camp.

On Sunday, they were proven right — if the unofficial result is indeed the final one.

The New York Times

Opinion | Democracy Loses in Turkey

The Editorial Board

The best thing that can be said about Turkey's constitutional referendum is that many voters — 48.7 percent of those casting ballots — opposed President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's most outrageous move yet to solidify his autocratic rule. Mr. Erdogan, who had expected to win 60 percent of the vote on Sunday, lost the major cities of Ankara and Istanbul. His legitimacy was further eroded by allegations of voting irregularities from international monitors.

Even so, his victory is expected to prevail in the final count, leaving Turkey in the hands of an erratic and vengeful man and the world wondering whether a nation that for decades has served as a crucial bridge between Europe and the Muslim world can possibly have a stable and prosperous future under someone with so little respect for democratic structures and values.

The referendum culminated Mr. Erdogan's long effort to replace Turkey's parliamentary system with a strong presidency. And while the changes won't formally take effect until the 2019 presidential election,

the outcome tightened his already strong grip and allowed him to boast of "enacting the most important governmental reform of our history."

Important, yes, but not in a good way. By revising or repealing 76 articles in Turkey's Constitution, adopted in 1982, the referendum abolishes the post of prime minister and transfers executive power to the president. It allows the president to issue decrees and declare states of emergency, and to appoint ministers, senior government officials and half the members of Turkey's highest judicial body.

As a practical matter, given his Islamist-based A.K.P. party's majority in Parliament, Mr. Erdogan has been effectively exercising many of these powers. The fact that they have now been formally ratified in the Constitution can only reinforce his dictatorial instincts and further threaten the separation of powers on which liberal democracies have traditionally depended.

When he was first elected prime minister in 2003, Mr. Erdogan seemed committed to making Turkey a model Muslim democracy. In recent years he has aggressively cracked down on dissent and on his critics in politics, the military, academia and the press. An aborted coup last summer provided an excuse to go even further; a state of emergency was declared, and the government has since fired or suspended 130,000 people suspected of having a connection to the coup and has arrested about 45,000, leaving Turkey's people sharply polarized.

The referendum campaign suffered from the same climate of intimidation. Supporters of Mr. Erdogan's proposals dominated the media, and some who opposed him were shot at or beaten. Opposition parties said some ballots lacked an official stamp and at least three instances of voter fraud appeared to be captured on camera. "The referendum took place in a political environment in which fundamental freedoms essential to a genuinely democratic process were curtailed under the state of emergency, and the two sides did not have equal opportunities to make their case to the voters," said Tana de Zulueta, who headed the international election observation mission.

Although Turkey is a vital member of NATO, it is increasingly an outlier in the alliance, which was founded on democratic values. Mr. Erdogan has picked fights with America and Europe, fanned anti-Western animosities among Turks and flirted with Russia. But Turkey remains a major factor in Syria, curbing migration to Europe and defending the alliance's eastern flank. NATO countries should do whatever they can to mitigate Mr. Erdogan's autocratic tendencies while encouraging the proponents of democracy in Turkey. The White House announced that President Trump called on Monday to congratulate Mr. Erdogan on the referendum result — a shockingly wrongheaded response.

Ultimately, if democracy is to revive in Turkey, it will do so because millions of Turks do not want the authoritarian system Mr. Erdogan has imposed and will find ways to reclaim their rights and freedoms.

Bloomberg

Turkey Takes a Stride in the Wrong Direction

The Editors

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's victory in last weekend's constitutional referendum moves his country further away from the Western model of liberal democracy and closer to one-man rule. It was a narrow and disputed victory as well, which heralds continued instability and the measures needed to suppress it. Turkey is still moving in the wrong direction.

The constitution's new provisions will abolish the post of prime minister, subordinate parliament, and let the president in effect control the judiciary. It's true that Erdogan had already expanded and entrenched his powers as president, but the new constitution makes it official: In Turkey, the principle of separated powers is defunct.

The referendum was held during a state of emergency, with the No campaign all but shut down. Yet Erdogan's margin was narrow. Just over 51 percent voted for the changes. The cities of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir were all opposed. Turkey's main opposition party has challenged the result, citing a decision to count millions of ballots that did not bear the official stamp.

Meanwhile Turkey faces pressing economic needs, a resurgent conflict with Kurdish rebels, and instability in neighboring Iraq and Syria. These problems, deeply troubling for Turks, also have implications for the West. The partnership with Turkey has played a critical role in the NATO alliance, the fight against terrorism, and the struggle to manage the influx of refugees from Syria and elsewhere.

Repairing that partnership won't be easy. During the referendum campaign, Erdogan said the governments of Germany and the Netherlands were Nazi-like. He talks of further votes on, among other things, restoring the death penalty -- a proposal that would make Turkey's eventual accession to the European Union even less likely, were that possible. Frustration over the EU's endless equivocating on Turkish-EU relations is understandable, but that hardly justifies moves that widen rather than narrow the differences.

The economy will prove an early test of whether Erdogan, despite everything, might aim to be a unifying rather than divisive force. His early successes in reducing poverty and expanding economic opportunity made him popular. Recently, though, the economy has struggled. The government's meddling in monetary policy has undermined confidence and allowed inflation, now at more than 10 percent, to get out of hand. Cronyism is rampant, and many Turks with money and skills have moved abroad. Growth has slowed, and has come to rely too heavily on consumption and foreign debt.

However much Erdogan talks up Turkey's relationship with Russia and his willingness to turn away from Europe, close economic relations with the EU remain crucial. Europe has played its full part in letting this relationship sour, and both sides should try harder to restore it. Even now Europe could help do that -- for instance, by renegotiating the Turkey-EU customs union to allow free trade in a wider range of Turkish products. Binding Turkey's economy more closely to Europe's serves an immediate mutual interest and in the longer term will incline Turkey toward liberal politics.

But there's no denying that, right now, things look bad. Erdogan's new powers follow years of anti-liberalism, a post-coup crackdown on opponents and journalists, and a one-sided referendum campaign fought in a climate of fear. It seems unlikely that the president will use this win to heal divisions, revive the economy, and mend ties with Turkey's traditional allies. That, nonetheless, is what his country needs him to do.

The Washington Post

Opinion | Turkey slides closer to a dictatorship

By Jennifer Rubin

A vote to grant new powers to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sparked fresh arguments in a divided Turkey on Monday, as opposition parties called for the annulment of the referendum results and Erdogan insisted the debate over the outcome should stop.

And a sharply worded report Monday by an international monitoring group said the referendum "fell short" of full adherence to international standards. It criticized numerous aspects of the vote, including a change to the ballot-counting procedures that "removed an important safeguard."

By a razor-thin margin, voters Sunday approved constitutional changes that will radically transform Turkey's system of government, abolishing the post of prime minister and shifting from a parliamentary system. The new model strengthens the clout of the presidency just eight months after a coup attempt aimed at toppling Erdogan's government.

Former ambassador to Turkey Eric Edelman tells me, "It is hard to know exactly how much fraud took place during Sunday's referendum." He explains, "Well into the count, the Higher Election Commission changed the rules and allowed ballots that lacked the official seal to be counted. This has been grounds for voiding some election results in the past in Turkey." He point out, "The head of the commission initially said some 2.5 million votes were cast that way and subsequently said he had no idea how many such ballots were cast." Can we say Erdogan would have lost had the voting followed international standards? "Given the narrow margin, one cannot exclude that this along with other irregularities may have made the difference in the outcome, but it is premature to reach that judgment now," says Edelman.

The State Department has now issued a statement, which takes an exceptionally lenient tone. It urged "both sides to focus on working together for Turkey's future." As for the international monitors, the State Department notes reports of "irregularities" but indicated it would wait until a final report. The statement ended with a bland appeal for Turkey to "protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens," something it, of course, has not done in the post-coup crackdown. It is hard to discern any interest in halting Erdogan's evolution into a strong man akin to Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi (whom President Trump embraced without reservation recently, and without public mention of human rights abuses).

"Countries like Egypt and Turkey are key partners of the United States — in the case of Turkey, it is a NATO ally, and in the case of Egypt, it is one of the largest recipients of U.S. assistance," acknowledges David Kramer of the pro-human rights McCain Institute. "Both countries face huge security challenges, but the leaderships in Cairo and Ankara are not making matters better by their consolidation of power and crackdown on human rights, civil society, the media and the opposition." He argues, "Respecting human rights and advancing security should be mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive, and that message should be conveyed by Washington at every opportunity."

There are no easy answers here. The Obama administration took virtually no action as Egypt slid into an autocracy and civil liberties were crushed. Regimes like Turkey — such as China, Russia, Iran and others — have seen a green light from the United States to do as they please internally. Erdogan is likely to continue the course he is on. "The notion that a satiated Erdogan would become more reasonable and constructive post-referendum already seems to be discredited," Edelman notes. "You can see this in his post-referendum comments decrying the opposition of other 'crusader' countries and calling for re-imposition of the death penalty."

Truth be told, our tools for affecting Turkey's conduct are limited. We can jawbone privately or publicly, or offer carrots to induce increased respect for civil liberties. That's not a lot — even if Trump were inclined to use such tools. "Turkey remains a pivotal country (a NATO ally that sits astride a crucial and troubled Middle East). Trying to maintain some kind of relationship of influence in Ankara will remain an important interest for the Trump administration but the degree of difficulty just got significantly harder, " Edelman cautions. "The U.S. role should be to try to persuade Erdogan to maintain as many of the institutions of pluralism as possible and to try and induce him to return to the negotiating table with the Kurds. We also need to rebuild military to military ties that have been disrupted by the post-coup purge of the military while at the same time being open and frank about our criticisms of violations of human rights, deviations from rule of law, and support for free media both publicly and privately."

One thing is clear: As bad as Turkey's human rights record has become, it's going to get worse.

FP Foreign Policy

Here's What Erdogan's Referendum Means for Turkey, the EU, and the U.S.

By Amanda Sloat

On Sunday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan achieved a narrow victory in a referendum to amend the Turkish constitution and consolidate power in the presidency. Opposition parties are contesting the results, objecting to a decision by the election board to lift a rule requiring ballots to have official seals and citing discrepancies between vote totals released by the election board and a state-owned news agency. A preliminary report by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observation mission noted an "unlevel playing field" and "restrictive campaign framework." In a country with a history of generally free (if not always fair) elections, allegations of fraud question the legitimacy (if not the practical result) of the vote. It is far too early to assess the aftermath, but here's what to watch for in the weeks ahead.

What is the impact on Turkish domestic politics?

Although polls were forecasting a win, the final results were surprisingly close. For starters, many assumed a wider margin of victory, given the government's near-complete control of media, uncoordinated opposition campaign, and prevailing climate of fear, including a state of emergency. Furthermore, Erdogan notably lost in the country's three largest commercial centers — Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Defeat in Istanbul, where he began his political career as mayor, is a painful blow. This suggests he's vulnerable in a fair race in the 2019 presidential elections and could create political space for a more unified opposition in the near term.

There is a case to be made that a "yes" vote provides short-term political stability (albeit at a high price socially and democratically), given fears a "no" vote would've provoked Erdogan to rerun parliamentary elections or find another way to achieve reform. Results show he lost support within his base and failed to rally nationalists. It remains to be seen whether the narrow margin of victory restrains his ambitions or causes him to double down on perceived threats. In the near term, Erdogan will be warily watching street protests in Istanbul and elsewhere across a deeply divided country. In the medium term, the narrow result raises questions about whether opponents can unify into a meaningful resistance.

The international community has already warned Turkey about the need for fair implementation of the new measures. For example, the Council of Europe cautioned leaders to "consider the next steps carefully" and encouraged respect for judicial independence. Similarly, the European Union noted the reforms would be assessed in light of Turkey's obligations as an EU candidate country and called on leaders to "seek the broadest possible national consensus in their implementation."

Does Turkey give up on the EU?

One of the biggest geopolitical questions emerging from the referendum is how Erdogan will approach the EU. Already tense relations soured during the campaign when Erdogan picked a fight as a means of rallying nationalist voters, accusing the Netherlands and Germany of Nazism after they prevented his officials from holding pro-referendum rallies for Turkish expats. At the same time, Europeans arguably benefitted electorally from anti-Turkism. Austria and Germany blocked campaign rallies, while Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte was buoyed in his re-election bid by standing up to Erdogan's threats. Notably, the diaspora in Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands voted "yes."

Some observers hoped Erdogan's demonization of Europe would end after a successful referendum. However, it may signal the start of a permanent shift in Turkey's perspective. During the campaign, Erdogan said Turkey's EU membership would be "on the table" after the poll. In his victory speech on Sunday, he repeated his campaign pledge to reinstate capital punishment and offered to hold a referendum if parliament didn't support his plans. (Turkey abolished the death penalty in 2004 as part of its EU accession bid.)

Reactions from leaders across Europe were subdued, noting deep divisions within the country. Both Germany and France expressed concern about possible election irregularities and called on Erdogan to engage in dialogue with the opposition. They also warned that reinstating the death penalty would end EU negotiations.

If Turkey surrenders (or forfeits) its bid for EU accession, two orders of business will likely remain on the table. First is the refugee crisis, with EU leaders having a vested interest in maintaining arrangements negotiated last summer to stem flows. If accession talks lapse, Turkey and the EU may conduct transactional negotiations on other shared interests, such as terrorism. The second is economic. The sides may dispense with unpleasant discussions about rule of law and focus instead on strengthening their customs union and potentially negotiating a free trade agreement.

What are the prospects for U.S.-Turkey relations?

The Trump administration has not released a statement on the referendum, nor have any senior American officials commented. The State Department has responded to press queries by providing lines from the acting spokesman, which note the OSCE report and encourage "voters and parties on both sides to focus on working together for Turkey's future and to maintain a meaningful political dialogue." While there may be understandable reluctance to become a pawn in Turkey's domestic politics as has happened before, American silence is striking.

Two thorny issues remain at the center of U.S.-Turkey relations. First

is the extradition of Fethullah Gulen, the Muslim cleric who resides in Pennsylvania and is blamed by Erdogan for last summer's coup attempt. The day before the referendum a Turkish prosecutor launched investigations into 17 individuals accused of fomenting the coup, including former CIA chief John Brennan, Senator Chuck Schumer, and former district attorney Preet Bharara. In the absence of compelling legal evidence (and former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, who was on the Turkish government's payroll and sympathetic to its concerns), Gulen's return to Turkey seems unlikely.

The second matter is disagreement over which forces should lead the charge against the Islamic State in Raqqa, Syria. While the Pentagon wishes to use Syrian Kurdish fighters — the People's Protection Units, or YPG — Ankara views the YPG as synonymous with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK (a designated terrorist organization engaged in a decades-long fight with the Turkish government) and advocates Syrian Arab fighters instead. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made no progress during his oddly timed visit to Ankara two weeks before the referendum, while Turkey's defense minister pressed the case with Defense Secretary James Mattis last week. The Trump administration appeared deferential to Turkish political sensitivities before the referendum, but the Pentagon appears anxious to move and seems unlikely to find alternative troop arrangements sufficient. If the administration proceeds with plans to support a YPG-led assault on Raqqa, it will hope Erdogan's referendum win softens his undoubtedly negative reaction.

The New York Times — UNE - In Supporting Erdogan, Turks Cite Economic and Religious Gains

Patrick Kingsley

The election commission itself denied any irregularities.

Whatever the outcome of the appeals, the referendum reflected a country sharply divided, with voters in the major cities tending to oppose the changes while those in rural areas, who usually are more religious and conservative, voting in favor of them.

Previously a regional economic powerhouse, Turkey has lost momentum recently, as the Syrian civil war across the border and instability within it have discouraged foreign investment and cut into growth.

After a coup attempt against Mr. Erdogan failed in July, he added to the uncertainty, starting a large-scale purge of his perceived enemies, arresting 45,000 people and firing or suspending 130,000. It was not immediately clear whether Mr. Erdogan would reach out to his opponents or use the victory as a mandate for even greater repression.

On Monday, Mr. Erdogan hailed the vote as a major and much-needed step in restoring stability, saying it was the first time that Turkey had changed its political system through "civil politics."

Clearly, roughly half of Turkish voters agreed, happily voting for a man commonly depicted as an autocrat.

Ms. Arslan helps explain why. In her eyes, Mr. Erdogan has expanded certain democratic freedoms in Turkey — in particular, freedom of religion. Ten years ago, Ms. Arslan was unable to attend a Turkish university because women like her who wore head scarves were barred from studying there, a result of rules established by Mr. Erdogan's predecessors, who were seen as enforcing a repressive form of secularism.

Mr. Erdogan has gradually ended those restrictions, allowing women in head scarves to enter campuses from 2008, work in the Civil Service from 2013 and serve in the military from as recently as February. For a large, pious section of the population, Mr. Erdogan therefore represents freedom from a kind of oppression that characterized Turkey throughout most of the 20th century.

"I don't want to go back to that era," Ms. Arslan said as she explained why she voted in support of Mr. Erdogan on Sunday.

Until Turkey's economy began to falter recently, Mr. Erdogan had also brought significant material gain to much of the country. Whether by design or luck, during the early years of his tenure he beefed up the country's infrastructure, building roads and bridges and improving hospitals — which added to his popularity.

A majority of Turkish voters agreed on Sunday to vastly expand the powers of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. But external monitors say the referendum was unfair.

"People's purchasing power has increased. Health care was really bad, but now it has gotten a lot better," said Seckin Ozdemir, a 45-year-old real estate agent who voted in support of the president on Sunday. "Inflation was at 70 to 80 percent before him. It's as low as 9 percent nowadays," Mr. Ozdemir added, citing figures from the start of the year.

For Mr. Ozdemir, the current crises in the Turkish economy validate rather than undermine the decision to grant more power to Mr. Erdogan. In Mr. Ozdemir's view, the president would have been able to turn the economy around by now but had been restricted by the actions of the political opposition.

Mr. Erdogan's nationalism contributes to his popularity, too. Western observers were horrified by his recent spats with Europe, in which Mr. Erdogan accused Dutch and German politicians of Nazism for refusing permission for aides to campaign there for the Turkish referendum. He has also picked fights with Kurdish militants when it suited his purposes.

For the European Union, the results in Turkey may make it even less likely the country will ever be invited to join the bloc. "These constitutional amendments concentrate much power in one person," said Bert Koenders, the Dutch foreign minister. "The European Union will have to critically assess further developments."

But inside Turkey, Mr. Erdogan's tactics play well with a certain nationalist demographic, people who buy into the narrative of a strong president standing up for an embattled Turkey against external aggressors.

"We are voting 'yes' because the European Union is saying 'no,' " said Yusuf Parlayan, 60, a retired factory worker, at a rally last month in the northern city of Kastamonu.

Mr. Erdogan may also have received a small but significant bump in support from Turkey's Kurdish minority. The southeastern provinces, which are mainly populated by Kurds, still voted overwhelmingly against Mr. Erdogan, but they did so to a lesser degree than in recent elections, even though many of these provinces were shaken by last year's Kurdish insurgency, which destroyed the centers of several cities and displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

In Sirnak, for example, 71.7 percent of voters opposed Mr. Erdogan, but that was down from 83.7 percent in the November 2015 general election. In Sirnak, 10,000 fewer voters participated in the referendum than in the previous election, according to official results, but the difference was too small to explain the drop in opposition to Mr. Erdogan.

Some Kurds who sided with Mr. Erdogan on Sunday said they did so precisely because they hoped he might bring the stability needed to sideline the insurgents. "People showed a red card" to the fighters, said Alaattin Parlak, a 43-year-old Diyarbakir businessman, referring to the penalty of expulsion in a soccer match. "They want stability, peace and employment."

But other Kurds rejected this interpretation, and European election observers said the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Kurds in the southeast had left many without a fixed address and therefore without the right to vote.

Ahmet Turk, an opposition politician jailed for parts of last year, said the electoral shifts were only small. Moreover, he told the Dogan News Agency, the shifts were the result of "intense pressure" by the government, which has jailed and fired hundreds of Kurdish politicians in recent months.

In this respect, Kurds showed "a red card" to Mr. Erdogan, rather than to the opposition, Mr. Turk said.

Observers Question Turkish Referendum Result as U.S. Sends Mixed Signals

Margaret Coker, Ned Levin and Yeliz Candemir

ANKARA, Turkey—International observers said a closely contested vote on Turkey's presidential powers contravened Turkish law by changing rules on ballot-counting at the last minute, one of several alleged voting irregularities prompting domestic challenges and foreign criticism.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his supporters hailed the unofficial results announced late Sunday as a win that expressed the will of the people, but the outcome was tight, with his "yes" side getting 51.2% of the vote and "no" 48.8%. In the referendum voters were asked to approve a constitutional amendment to centralize governing powers in the president's office and radically alter Turkey's democracy.

"All debate regarding the constitution is over. It's clear what side the national will—our foundation—is on," Mr. Erdogan said in a speech Monday.

Meanwhile, the U.S. sent mixed signals. President Donald Trump called Mr. Erdogan on Monday and congratulated him on the referendum outcome, U.S. and Turkish officials said.

The White House in a statement confirmed Mr. Trump had spoken with Mr. Erdogan "to congratulate him on his recent referendum victory and to discuss the United States' action in response to the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons on April 4th." The White House also said Mr. Trump had thanked Mr. Erdogan for his support on Syria.

The U.S. State Department earlier noted the concerns voiced by international observers about the vote, including voting-day irregularities and "an uneven playing field during the difficult campaign period."

State Department spokesman Mark Toner said the U.S. urged Turkey "to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all its citizens—regardless of their vote on April 16—as guaranteed by the Turkish constitution and in accordance with Turkey's international commitments."

Turkey's high electoral board validated the vote, despite calls from the opposition that it be annulled due to alleged widespread irregularities. International election observers said the referendum campaign unfolded on "an unlevel playing field," citing the purge since July of some members of the high electoral board and local boards.

Mr. Erdogan's rivals say more than 2.5 million votes could have been compromised and said they were preparing formal objections to the outcome. It wasn't clear how they had arrived at that figure or whether it was accurate. While official vote totals won't be announced for at least 10 days, the unofficial results showed the referendum was rejected by a majority of residents of Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey's largest cities.

Approximately 85% of Turkey's 55 million eligible voters cast ballots in Sunday's referendum, considered one of the most important votes since the republic's founding in 1923.

Amid growing disquiet about the vote's legitimacy, the president on Monday presided over meetings of the cabinet and the National Security Council, where officials recommended an extension of the state of emergency.

International election observers in Ankara issued a preliminary report alleging an array of irregularities, including what they called a contravention of electoral law, during the referendum campaign and the ballot-counting. The group, from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said while the vote was "generally well administered," the referendum fell short of European standards and Turkish laws.

The OSCE's report criticized the unusual decision Sunday evening by the high electoral board to count all ballots despite numerous complaints during polling hours that voters had received ballot forms and envelopes lacking an official seal.

"While the technical aspects of the referendum were well administered and referendum day proceeded in an orderly manner, late changes in counting procedures undermined important safeguards and was in contradiction with the law," the head of the OSCE election observer mission, Tana de Zulueta, said.

Mr. Erdogan rejected the observers' conclusions. "Know your place," he said in his speech. "We won't see, hear, or know the politically motivated reports you prepare. We will continue on our path."

Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also criticized the report. "Saying that the referendum fell below international standards is unacceptable," the ministry said, accusing the observers of bias.

Calls to Turkey's high electoral board rang unanswered Monday afternoon. Earlier Monday, the board's chairman said the contested ballots were valid, raising questions about what legal paths exist for the opposition to successfully contest the vote. The board would rule on any formal objections, and its decisions can't be appealed.

The OSCE report also highlighted the organization's concern about the integrity of Turkey's justice system following a failed coup attempt in July 2016.

The electoral boards are administered by judges. Three of the 11 members of the high electoral board and the chairs of 221 lower electoral boards were purged and replaced since July, the OSCE said. Approximately one-third of all judges have been dismissed or detained in the same period.

The observers criticized Turkish electoral boards as lacking transparency, with board sessions closed to the public. Opposition parties weren't adequately represented on local polling station teams, the report said.

The referendum campaign, meanwhile, unfolded on an "unlevel playing field," the observers said. Provincial governors used state-of-emergency laws to restrict freedom of assembly and expression, and restrictions on the media prevented opposition voices from reaching voters, they said.

Before the OSCE report was published, the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, called for the referendum results to be annulled. CHP officials said they planned to issue appeals to municipal, provincial and central electoral boards contesting as much as 60% of the votes.

Turkey will shift to the new presidential system after elections in November 2019, but two changes take effect before then. The referendum's approval would make the president immediately eligible to join a political party, allowing Mr. Erdogan to formally retake the helm of his Justice and Development Party after having resigned in 2014 to take the presidency. And 40 days after the results are officially published, a council that governs Turkey's judiciary will have fewer members, whose appointments will come under the control of the president and parliament.

According to the vote tallies, most voters rejected the referendum in Turkey's three largest cities, including Istanbul, Mr. Erdogan's hometown and Turkey's financial and cultural center, and Ankara, the capital. Mr. Erdogan or his party carried Istanbul, where he was previously mayor, in every election since 2002.

Trump mulls squeezing Iran with tougher sanctions

Dan De Luce

The Trump White House is poised to ratchet up existing sanctions against Iran and is weighing a much stricter interpretation of the nuclear agreement between Tehran and major world powers.

The administration is inclined to adopt a "more rigorous application of the tools at its disposal," a senior White House official told Foreign Policy, referring to sanctions policy. Among the options under consideration: broadening U.S. sanctions to include much larger chunks of the Iranian economy linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

No final decision has been taken by the president or the cabinet. But officials said some decisions will need to be taken soon. On April 25, Iran and the six governments that negotiated the nuclear deal with Tehran, including the United States, are due to meet in Vienna for a quarterly review of the accord.

How President Donald Trump decides to proceed on sanctions and the nuclear deal more broadly carries high stakes for the United States, Iran, and the wider Middle East. A concerted U.S. effort to squeeze Iran would represent a

gamble that Tehran's regional push for power, particularly in Syria and Yemen, could be checked in part by increasing economic pressure.

But the approach could backfire if it causes tensions with the Islamic Republic to spin out of control or prompts Tehran to pull out of the nuclear deal. Tougher U.S. sanctions would make for a tougher re-election fight for President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate who championed the 2015 nuclear deal but is under pressure to show Iranians a notable improvement in the economy. And a harder line on sanctions also could drive a wedge between Washington and its European allies.

Sweeping sanctions that cut across economic sectors could jeopardize the nuclear agreement and prompt Iran to withdraw, said Richard Nephew, who was the leading sanctions expert on the U.S. team that negotiated the accord with Iran.

"It all really comes down to whether the people making decisions agree that the [nuclear deal] is worth keeping," said Nephew, now at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

The 2015 agreement imposed numerous restrictions on Iran's nuclear program in return for easing an array of sanctions — including U.S. measures — that had badly damaged the country's economy. President Trump repeatedly blasted the accord as "the worst deal" and, while on the campaign trail, vowed to "tear it up," but now that he is in office, he has not indicated what he will do.

Trump doesn't have to tear up the deal to tighten the screws on Iran. The agreement, which is not a treaty, provides broad leeway to the governments that signed it in interpreting its terms, and the Trump White House is mulling taking a much more forceful stance on enforcing the deal to the letter.

There are already signs that the Trump administration is using existing legal authorities in a more forceful manner than the Barack Obama administration. Last Thursday, the Treasury Department announced it had sanctioned the brother of the powerful head of the special forces arm of the IRGC, Sohrab Soleimani, for his role in abuses at the country's prisons. And in February, the Treasury Department blacklisted eight organizations linked to the Revolutionary Guards, as well as one of its officials based in Lebanon.

Last week's move was a "further indication that the Trump administration will be taking a much tougher line in applying sanctions than did its predecessor," said Mark Dubowitz, CEO of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies who has urged ramping up economic pressure on Iran.

Dubowitz, an influential voice on sanctions policy particularly among Republican lawmakers in Congress, said he also expects the Trump administration to pursue more prosecutions of illicit financial activities linked to the Iranian regime and of attempts to secure prohibited materials related to weapons or nuclear technology.

The sanctions measures imposed since Trump entered office were based on cases prepared by the Obama Treasury Department that were never enacted, said the White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the administration's policy.

"We are still going off the work they did not execute," the official said.

And Treasury's recent actions reflect a heightened focus by the administration on the Revolutionary Guards, which wield major military and financial clout in Iran and have interests in numerous Iranian companies. The Treasury actions coincide with a debate within the administration about whether to designate the entire IRGC as a terrorist organization. At the moment, only the group's special forces arm, the Quds Force, is blacklisted.

Apart from designating the entire Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization, the administration is also looking at other options. At the moment, any entity that has a 50 percent ownership stake or more held by the IRGC is subject to sanctions, but the administration is mulling a change that would drop the threshold to a lower percentage. Such a move would break with long-standing policy at Treasury, which has traditionally defined ownership as above 50 percent for any category of sanctions. A lower threshold would mean blacklisting hundreds and possibly thousands of additional Iranian companies and organizations with links to the IRGC, experts said. That would almost certainly cause a political backlash in Iran and chill any international interest in investing in Iran. European officials — and former Obama administration officials — are worried that if the White House opts for a blanket blacklisting of the Revolutionary Guards, it could effectively kill the nuclear agreement or trigger retaliation against U.S.-led forces in Iraq.

Appetite for a tougher stance isn't just found in the White House. In the Republican-controlled Congress, there is growing bipartisan support for pushing back against Iran through additional sanctions, though most Democrats want to steer clear of measures that would directly violate the nuclear deal. New bills in the House and Senate call for additional sanctions against Iran over its ballistic missile program and its human rights violations and support for terrorist groups.

The Senate bill, which has backing from some Democrats who endorsed the nuclear deal, would slap sanctions on any individual lending "material support" to Iran's missile program. And it would also apply terrorism-related sanctions to the Revolutionary Guards.

The bill's supporters say the provisions on the IRGC would merely codify existing presidential executive orders. But some former Obama administration officials argue the legislation could open the door to a sweeping designation of the entire IRGC as a terrorist organization.

The former officials say the sanctions legislation poses a possible threat to the nuclear deal as the measures could wreck the consensus among the countries that negotiated the deal.

"Rather than containing Iran, such steps would isolate the United States," several former administration officials wrote in a commentary in FP.

Critics of the deal accused the Obama administration of tolerating Iranian violations of the accord. International inspectors found that Iran last year had twice exceeded limits on stockpiles of heavy water, which is used to cool reactors producing plutonium. Washington chose to resolve the issue discreetly, granting Iran some time to fix the problem. Opponents of the accord are urging the White House to insist on a more assertive interpretation of the deal's provisions — and appear to have found a receptive audience.

Administration officials said they are now looking at holding Iran's feet to the fire over every breach, however small. One option under consideration is an "incredibly strict implementation" of the deal, the senior official said.

But the official added that the administration "was not inconsiderate of the ramifications of the deal" and was carefully weighing the benefits and the risks of a different approach.

The Obama administration, facing complaints from Iran that it was not seeing the promised economic benefits from the accord, had embarked on "road shows" to reassure European governments and foreign companies that non-U.S. investors could return to the Iranian market without necessarily running afoul of U.S. sanctions. Rouhani is facing an electoral challenge from a hard-line favorite of the mullahs and needs to sell the deal as a success to win re-election next month.

But the road shows convinced few: Banks in particular are leery of diving back into the Iranian market when U.S. sanctions could suddenly snap back or be expanded to other parts of the economy.

"It's not surprising to me that financial institutions all over the world are hesitant to re-engage with Iran," said Daniel Glaser, a former senior Treasury official under the Obama administration who crafted hard-hitting sanctions that preceded the nuclear agreement.

Since Trump took office, the outreach effort has been abandoned.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Why Trump Might Win With China

Charles W. Calomiris

In its first months, the Trump administration has pivoted on trade, backing off from threats to overhaul the North American Free Trade Agreement and reversing Mr. Trump's campaign pledge to label China a currency manipulator. Those changes are welcome, but in an interview last week with The Wall Street Journal, the president went further, saying that he might soften his trade stance in exchange for help with "the problem in North Korea."

Mr. Trump may be ceding too much ground. In fact, he may have more leverage over China than he thinks. Claims that Beijing manipulates the value of the yuan never made much sense as an explanation for Chinese growth or for the persistent U.S. trade deficit with China. First, it's impossible for monetary policy (including exchange-rate policy) to

produce long-run growth or trade consequences. This principle of long-run "monetary neutrality" is one of the few tenets of economics that is nearly universally accepted.

Second, the facts show that the Chinese government has not been trying to keep its currency weak. The opposite is true. The yuan appreciated 26% from 1995 to 2014. And China's "real exchange rate" (which captures the relative competitiveness of the prices of goods sold by China and its competitors) increased even more, 53% over the same period.

When a country's real exchange rate appreciates, economists understand it as reflecting high productivity growth. This is called the Harrod-Balassa-Samuelson effect. Circa 1978, China's total factor productivity—a measure of how much value an economy adds to a basket of inputs—stood at roughly 3% of America's. Starting from that very low efficiency, China was able to improve quickly for more than three decades by removing some of the limits that the Communist government had placed on markets. Today China's total factor productivity stands at about 13% of America's.

Lifting restrictions on market transactions has propelled China's growing share of world exports and foreign direct investment in recent decades. China has also kept its tariffs relatively high, and government policies favor domestic producers while limiting the ability of foreigners to compete, factors that boost its trade surplus.

Since 2015 China's currency has depreciated, but Beijing has tried to limit this weakening, partly with an eye toward the possibility of a political backlash in the U.S. Last Thursday, for example, government intervention in the foreign-exchange market raised the value of the yuan 1%.

Despite such interventions, it will be hard for the government to resist yuan depreciation. The weakening reflects a long-term growth slowdown—the natural diminishing returns of economic development. Autocracy contributes to China's financial fragility. As Minxin Pei predicted in his 2006 book, "China's Trapped Transition," the Communist Party ensures its survival by propping up inefficient state-owned enterprises that fund its operations. The financial system cannot truly liberalize because it must remain an instrument for channeling credit subsidies to these firms.

Moreover, as the Chinese economy cooled off over the past decade, the government juiced growth with high spending, especially on buildings and infrastructure. These investments were also mainly funded with debt guaranteed, explicitly or implicitly, by the state. China's combined household, government and nonfinancial corporate debt now stands at roughly 2.5 times gross domestic product. In 1999, China paid off its banks' bad debts, but since then a combination of slow growth and high borrowing imply a nonperforming debt bill of about $3 trillion—10 times the cost of the 1999 bailout. The likely path of least resistance would be for China to let inflation solve some of the problem.

In any case, a combination of slower growth, debt defaults and inflation will continue to weaken the yuan and reduce capital inflows. Foreign reserves, which grew for decades, have declined since 2014. The Chinese elite are cognizant of these problems, hence their increasingly desperate attempts to smuggle wealth out of the country.

In this environment, the Chinese regime could fracture or lose popularity. That is a scary prospect for Beijing, which already faces other major challenges, such as an aging population, a lack of pension funding to support the elderly, and life-threatening levels of pollution. Despite the regime's autocratic nature, protests directed at its shortcomings are becoming common. The government is not immune to public pressures.

Negotiations between China and the U.S., which are now beginning in earnest after the uneventful retreat at Mar-a-Lago, may actually bear fruit. Chinese leaders cannot afford a significant drop in exports to the U.S., which would be interpreted at home and abroad as evidence that the bellicose American president got the better of them.

Mr. Trump has been dealt a stronger hand than he could have asked for on trade with China, which has more incentive to negotiate than ever. He should walk away with a better deal from Beijing than any of his predecessors were able to extract. Mr. Trump may even be able to make progress on geopolitical issues, such as limiting China's military adventures in international waters and securing its help on North Korea.

If he plays his cards right.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Trump Restoring Deterrence: Necessary, Dangerous Corrective of Obama Appeasement

The Tomahawk volley attack, for all its ostentatious symbolism, served larger strategic purposes. It reminded a world without morality that there is still a shred of a rule or two: Do not use nerve gas on the battlefield or against civilians. The past faux redline from Obama, the systematic use of chlorine gas by Syria, and its contextualization by the Obama administration had insidiously eroded that old battlefield prohibition. Trump was right to seek to revive it.

The subsequent MOAB bomb strike in Afghanistan is useful against ISIS's subterranean nests, and in signaling the Taliban and ISIS that the U.S. too can be unpredictable and has not quite written off its 16-year commitment. But as in the case of the Tomahawk strikes against Syria, it also fulfilled the larger purpose of reminding enemies, such as Islamic terrorists, North Korea, and Iran (which all stash weapons of destruction in caves and the like) that the U.S. is capable of anything.

In other words, apparently anywhere Trump thinks that he can make a point about deterrence, with good odds of not getting Americans killed or starting a war (he used Tomahawks not pilots where Russian planes were in the vicinity), he will probably drop a bomb or shoot off a missile or send in an iconic carrier fleet.

The message reminds the world that the Obama administration's "lead from behind," "don't do stupid sh**," plastic red-button reset, Cairo Speech foreign policy followed no historical arc that bent anywhere. And the U.S. was previously on the wrong, not the right, side of both history and the traditions of U.S. bipartisan foreign policy — an aberration from the past, not a blueprint of the future.

Like Ronald Reagan, who, after Jimmy Carter's managed declinism, shelled Lebanon, bombed Gaddafi, and invaded Grenada, Trump is trying to thread the needle between becoming bogged down somewhere and doing nothing.

No president in recent memory also has outsourced such responsibility to his military advisers, whom Trump refers to as "our" or "my" "generals." He can afford to for now, because he has made excellent appointments at Defense, State, National Security, and Homeland Security. These are men who justifiably have won broad bipartisan support and who believe in the ancient ways of military and spiritual deterrence, balance of power, and alliances rather than the U.N., presidential sonorousness, or soft power to keep the peace.

These opportunistic deterrent expressions are likewise intended to remind several parties in particular that the Obama hiatus is over.

Apparently, Trump will not necessarily reset the Obama reset of the Bush reset with Russia. Instead, he probably believes that Putin will soon agree that the 2009–16 era was an abnormal condition in which a far weaker Russia bullied friends and connived against almost everything the U.S. was for. And such asymmetry could not be expected to go on. A return to normal relations is not brinkmanship; it should settle down to tense competition, some cooperation, and grudging respect among two powerful rivals. Who knows, Putin may come to respect (and even prefer) an American leader who is unpredictable and unapologetically tough without being sanctimonious, sermonizing — and weak.

The old canard is largely true: Russia has no natural interests in seeing a radical Islamic and nuclear Iran on its border, other than the fact that this change would irritate and aggravate the U.S., which might satisfy Putin. But if Russia no longer felt a need to automatically oppose everything America sought (or if it feared to do so), then many of its unsavory alliances might no longer may seem all that useful.

Trump is trying to act unpredictably and forcefully against Pyongyang, on the logic that without war, he can prompt greater containment before the unsustainable status quo leads to a conflagration.

Trump's strikes and displays of naval power, and the reactions to them, also remind North Korea that it has no friends and could prove a liability to China (as Syria could to Russia) rather than a useful rabid animal to be occasionally unleashed so that it might bark and nip at

Westernized Asia and the U.S. If North Korea's antics imperil China's commercial buccaneering or lead to a nuclear Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan on China's borders, or to U.S. commercial restrictionism, then China could see North Korea's insanity as not worth the cost. Additionally, if tensions rise, North Korea's own military elite could remove the unhinged Kim Jong-un after concluding that he's expendable. Or regional powers, despite differences, might collectively conclude that they can't live with daily threats of nuclear launchings.

Again, Trump is trying to act unpredictably and forcefully against Pyongyang, the world's most detested government — on the logic that without war, he can prompt greater containment before the unsustainable status quo leads to a conflagration. This is a sort of post–Cold War brinkmanship.

By now, Iran knows that it cannot send another missile toward an American carrier, hijack an American boat, or cheat flagrantly on the Iran Deal without earning some response from a man who dislikes both the revolutionary government and what Iran has done to the U.S. over the past eight years. The general aims of these iconic acts are to remind the world of U.S. strength and that the new president has the willingness to use it to prevent some weaker entity from doing something stupid.

The general aims of these iconic acts are to remind the world of U.S. strength and that the new president has the willingness to use it to prevent some weaker entity from doing something stupid on the misapprehension that the U.S. is in decline rather than reemerging from a temporarily and self-imposed recessional. Once deterrence is reestablished (and only once it is achieved), then the U.S. will be able to appeal to Russia and China to find areas of mutual concern (radical Islam, nuclear proliferation in Asia, rogue nations that threaten the international order, etc.).

Are there risks in seeking to reestablish U.S. deterrence?

Of course.

1) Even dropping a huge bomb or sending in a flock of missiles or deploying the fleet near hostile shores at some point can lose its luster and lead to escalation to ensure that enemies remain impressed. In a cycle of escalation, then, America could leapfrog into an unintended war. It is vital to play out each demonstration of strength to the subsequent third and fourth degree, to guarantee that shows of deterrent force do not lead to unintended involvement or become habitual and thus banal.

2) Trump ran as a Jacksonian — not as a neoconservative or an isolationist. His electoral base must see his use of force as a) long overdue, b) at some point soon, no longer required, c) not leading to but rather preventing a major intervention, and d) undertaken for American not global interests. Otherwise, Trump will stumble into what he ran against.

3) When Trump righteously hits back at nerve-gassing dictators or head-chopping radical Islamists, his polls climb, his press improves, and more Americans think him a sober and judicious centrist — a fine and useful thing. But such political concerns can take on a logic of their own, in that the more Trump is praised by the Council of Foreign Relations or the Brookings Institution, the more likely he might be to fall into a pattern prescribed by an entrenched establishment. For a populist, doing necessary things that political opponents like is a paradox whose political consequences are still not quite fully appreciated.

4) Soon the low-hanging fruit of sending carriers around the globe and bombing Assad or ISIS will be picked, and Trump may find himself in an "incident" with a nuclear-armed Russia or China. Both adversaries have their own deterrent considerations and will bristle that they really do have to back down from what has been (since 2009) a rare period of opportunism at U.S. expense. The best solution, obviously, is to persuade Russia and China to curb their clients so that they will receive credit for their belated maturity.

Losing deterrence and seeking to recapture it are among the most dangerous moments for a great power, and we will be reminded of just that peril over the next year. There's only one thing more dangerous in the short term than allowing North Korea to advance to launching intercontinental nuclear missiles, or letting China build an artificial island base in international waters of the South China Sea, or permitting the Iranians to haze U.S. ships in the Gulf of Hormuz, or backing down from Assad as he gasses civilians: trying to put an end to such things, and reminding the world that what was once normal was always in the long term a sure way to war.

The Washington Post

Opinion | The North Korean threat is literally on parade. Can Trump get China to act?

STRIP AWAY the bravado and hype, and two important developments emerged from the news of recent days with regard to North Korea. The first is that in a show of missiles over the weekend, the regime in Pyongyang revealed some new strengths and some uncertainties in its quest to be a global nuclear and missile threat. The second is that the Trump administration has begun to implement a strategy to ramp up pressure on Pyongyang, but along well-known paths.

Assumptions about technological progress based on a military parade can be guesswork, but the weekend's extravaganza in Pyongyang offered important clues, according to experts at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. North Korea is moving toward solid-fuel ballistic missiles — displaying both sea- and land-based variants that have been previously tested. Solid-fuel missiles can be quicker to launch than liquid-fueled and, on land, easier to transport and conceal. A second surprise was a nose cone with fins that might indicate progress toward a targeted or steerable warhead reentry vehicle. North Korea also showed off some very long canisters, suggesting a large, long-range missile under development, but the missile itself was not on display. No conclusions can be drawn about a weekend missile test that failed except that North Korea, like all missile and nuclear powers, is testing and presumably learning from success as well as failure. The regime's intentions are clear, and its capabilities seem to be improving, if uneven.

Now President Trump is throwing his own strategy into gear. Vice President Pence repeated sternly at the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas on Monday that the era of President Barack Obama's "strategic patience" is over and warned North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un not to test U.S. resolve. The United States also sent a Navy carrier battle group to the region. Beyond the public psy-ops, which hopefully will not spin out of control into a military miscalculation, it appears the central thrust of the administration's strategy is to induce China to rein in its client. Mr. Trump has explicitly hinted that he will not punish China as a currency manipulator — as he had often threatened — if it helps on North Korea. Certainly, China can do more than it has in recent years, including squeeze North Korea's energy lifeline. But Mr. Trump's approach has been tried repeatedly, without much success, because China's leaders, while irked by Pyongyang, do not want to destroy the regime and risk a hostile state on their border. Is Mr. Trump driving toward a new outcome with China or the same old dead end?

Mr. Trump's strategy is to crank up pressure, then push for a negotiation leading to denuclearization, stopping short of regime change. This approach makes sense in the short term. The Trump administration is right both to declare a limit to Western patience and to look for a non-military solution. But the horror of Mr. Kim's rule also cannot be overstated, from the reported assassination of his own half brother in Malaysia to systematic and grave human rights violations. As long as North Korea remains a giant prison camp, the long-term problem will not have been solved.

UNE - Pence Talks Tough on North Korea, but U.S. Stops Short of Drawing Red Line

The New York Times

Mark Landler and Jane Perlez

Mr. Spicer pointed to China's cutback of coal imports from North Korea as evidence of its new resolve to curb the provocative behavior of its neighbor. But the Chinese government made the decision to stop purchasing North Korean coal before President Xi Jinping of China met with Mr. Trump this month at Mar-a-Lago, his private club in Florida.

The administration has teed up additional sanctions on North Korea — from grounding its state airline to banning exports of its seafood — depending on its behavior, according to officials briefed on the policy. The White House is also considering targeting Chinese banks that do business with North Korea, these people said. But it is holding off on that step, which would antagonize Beijing, until it sees what China does.

Few of the unilateral sanctions are likely to change North Korea's behavior, and most would simply be recycled proposals from the Obama administration. So despite insisting it has mothballed the previous administration's policy of "strategic patience" on North Korea, the Trump administration finds itself in the familiar position of waiting.

Mr. Pence even held out the possibility of opening talks with the North Korean regime, noting that Washington was seeking security "through peaceable means, through negotiations."

The Trump administration's mixture of resolve and ambiguity attested to its quandary with North Korea. Though the North Korean dictator, Kim Jong-un, refrained from detonating a nuclear device and suffered another failed missile test this weekend, the United States has not yet found a way around the limited options against the North that constrained his predecessors and put it on the path to becoming a nuclear power.

Mr. Trump essentially has three choices: a military strike that could ignite a full-blown war; pressure on China to impose tougher sanctions to persuade the North to change course, an approach that failed for Barack Obama as president; or a deal that could require significant concessions, with no guarantee that North Korea would fulfill its promises.

The question is whether his apparent willingness to consider both war and a deal may be enough carrot and stick to persuade China to change its approach and apply enough pressure to bring the North to the table.

Examining North Korea's Missiles

At a recent military parade, North Korea displayed several missiles at a time of heightened tensions with the United States. Here's a closer look at what some of them are designed to do.

Talks have long been China's preference, and now that Mr. Trump seems to be relying on Beijing to an extraordinary degree, Mr. Pence may have been signaling that the United States is open to them. China's chief objective is to get talks — of any kind — started to avoid conflict so close to home.

War on the peninsula is a nightmare for China that could lead to at least one million casualties, according to some estimates, ravage the Koreas and set back Beijing's climb to global pre-eminence.

In his most flexible language yet, China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, on Friday appealed again for negotiations. "As long as it is a talk, China is willing to support it: either it is formal or informal, one-track or dual-track, bilateral, trilateral or quadrilateral," Mr. Wang said in Beijing.

On Monday, the State Department's acting assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs, Susan Thornton, said that North Korea would need to make a definitive change in its nuclear or missile programs before the United States would consider renewed talks.

The administration wants "a signal that they realize the current status quo is not sustainable," Ms. Thornton said, although she refused to specify what signal would be acceptable. "Without a signal like that, I think the international community is going to resolve to just ratchet up the pressure."

The United States has a long history of failed attempts at negotiations with North Korea, reaching back to the Clinton administration and extending through the George W. Bush and Obama administrations. But Mr. Trump has made it clear that this problem can no longer be postponed.

Mr. Kim already has enough fissile material for 20 to 25 nuclear weapons, and he may be able to produce sufficient fissile materials — plutonium and highly enriched uranium — for six to seven new weapons a year, according to Siegfried S. Hecker, a former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Should the North conduct its sixth nuclear test, it would move closer to having a hydrogen bomb, or a two-stage thermonuclear weapon, Mr. Hecker said, with up to a thousand times more power than the Hiroshima-style weapons Mr. Kim has detonated so far.

With that level of firepower, Mr. Hecker said he worried about a "nuclear catastrophe" on the peninsula resulting from either "escalation of military activities" or poor security around the North's nuclear arsenal. Talks are needed immediately, he said, just to deal with the threat to Japan and South Korea, both American allies.

The logic for diplomacy should be compelling to the Trump administration, Chinese experts say, even as Washington stakes out a policy of "maximum pressure" and has deployed a naval flotilla led by the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson to the coast of the Korean Peninsula, though it is still thousands of miles away.

On Monday, North Korea reacted to the latest warnings from the White House by accusing the Trump administration of applying "gangster-like logic" and promising "tough counteraction" to any military threats.

Pyongyang's deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Kim In-ryong, spoke from prepared remarks, four pages long and peppered with familiar statements condemning American "imperialism" and defending "sovereignty." He referred to his remarks even when trying to answer half a dozen questions posed by reporters.

The closest he came to answering a question was to say that another nuclear test would be carried out "at the time, at the place where our headquarters deemed necessary."

America Can't Do Much About North Korea

the Atlantic

Ian Buruma

When asked by the *Financial Times* on April 2 about working with China to reduce the nuclear threat from North Korea, President Donald Trump replied: "Well, if China is not going to solve North Korea, we will. That is all I am telling you." Quite how this would be done, the president declined to divulge.

In the weeks that followed, the hostile standoff in Northeast Asia heated up. As a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier sped towards the Korean peninsula, the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un celebrated the "Day of the Sun" (the day before Easter Sunday) by standing on a platform for hours reviewing a parade of long-range missiles, scuds, and other hardware. The launch of a ballistic missile on that same morning, however, ended in failure, as the weapon blew up as soon as it took off.

The world is slowly adjusting to Trump's bluster. Often, he appears not to know what he is talking about. It may well be that a word in his ear from a U.S. admiral, or Chinese President Xi Jinping, or his son-in-law Jared Kushner, the real-estate heir put in charge of world affairs, could soften his bellicose tone. But words or tweets, however hasty or ill-conceived, coming from the White House, do matter. The last thing needed in the fraught situation in Northeast Asia, where military action could spiral into catastrophe, is more macho posturing. (Enough such bluster is already blowing in from Pyongyang: In a recent set of photographs, Kim Jong Un, dressed to resemble his grandfather Kim Il Sung, stands in front of nuclear warheads and threatens to unleash "pre-emptive nuclear strikes" against Japan or even the United States.)

America doesn't know exactly what North Korea's nuclear capability is, but it is likely sufficient to kill millions of South Koreans or Japanese. That North Korea would be smashed in retaliation is no consolation. The fact is that there is nothing much America can do about Kim's attempts to develop nuclear-tipped missiles, especially without China's support. Even Trump, his brilliance notwithstanding, must realize that some problems just cannot be "solved."

The litany of futile diplomatic overtures to curb North Korea's nuclear ambitions reads like a history of failure. In 1994, President Bill Clinton promised aid to North

Korea in exchange for a promise to freeze its nuclear program. In 2002, it became clear that the North Koreans had reneged on the deal. The thing is that Kim will not give up his nuclear arsenal, for it is all he has got. Without the bomb, North Korea would be no more than a small, impoverished dictatorship. With nuclear missiles, it can behave as a major power, or more importantly, hold other major powers at bay.

Clinton also once considered bombing North Korean nuclear installations, but, in the end, considered the risk too high. It would be even higher now. Not only are such installations now more dispersed throughout the country, making a clean hit very difficult, but the "collateral damage" inflicted by a cornered Northern regime would be horrendous: Seoul is a mere 35 miles from the North Korean border.

Empty threats from Washington are not just ineffectual; they play into the Korean dictator's hands. Whether most North Koreans really worship the Kim dynasty as much as they seem to is hard to know, since most of "these gestures of idolatry" are coerced. But Korean nationalism can be very easily stirred up. One thing that holds North Koreans together is the fear, constantly stoked by the regime, of a wicked foreign attack.

China is the only power with any influence in North Korea, but the last thing Beijing wants is for its communist neighbor to collapse. The Kim regime may be annoying, but a united Korea filled with U.S. military bases would be worse, not to mention the potential refugee crisis on China's borders.

Empty threats from Washington are not just ineffectual; they play into the Korean dictator's hands.

Perhaps a cyber attack could disrupt the North Korean nuclear program, but it would not be enough to rid of the threat altogether. So there appears to be little choice but to live with North Korea as a nuclear power. Pressing the Chinese to force their ally to give up its nuclear arms is useless. The best that can be hoped for is that China makes sure the North Koreans don't actually use them.

Cooperating with China in this matter should not be so difficult, for the dirty secret in Northeast Asia is that everyone would really prefer to maintain the status quo. South Koreans tell themselves that unification of the motherland is their highest goal, but not at any price. It would be wonderful, of course, if a bloodless revolution could unite the two Koreas in a peaceful liberal democracy, as happened in Germany.

But it is impossible to see how this could happen—North Korea is no East Germany. There is no Gorbachev to keep violence in check. And it was hard enough for the West Germans to absorb their former Communist compatriots. The South Koreans could certainly not afford to do so. In the unlikely event of a peaceful unification, the Americans and Japanese would probably be stuck footing much of the bill.

Since even President Trump, once the situation has been explained to him, would probably be unwilling to risk a devastating war to force a change in the status quo, a nuclear-armed North Korea is here to stay. This is dangerous. Everything must be done to stop the North Koreans from selling their weapons abroad. For this reason alone, Chinese cooperation is essential.

So the situation is bad. But the world will have to live with it. Unfortunately, so do the people unlucky enough to have been born in North Korea. Living under a brutal dictatorship is a terrible fate. But even that is better than dying in a nuclear war.

Los Angeles Times

Campaign bluster won't work with North Korea. Can Trump learn in time to avert disaster?

The Times Editorial Board

The world is on the brink of danger once again, with North Korea threatening further nuclear tests and new missile launches, and the United States drawing red lines and issuing warnings. In recent days, both Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have said that American "strategic patience" had come to an end. On Monday President Trump told reporters that North Korea "has gotta behave," and Pence later cautioned the country not to "test" Trump's "resolve." China last week warned of "storm clouds gathering" and described the U.S., North Korea and South Korea as having their "swords drawn and bows bent." A fleet of American warships was sent to the Korean coast.

These are the moments when steady leadership, careful analysis, wisdom and experience are of paramount importance. But instead we have in the White House a president with no experience and a short attention span, who thus far has shown a tendency toward glib solutions and demagogic bluster. An impulsive man who, if the stories after the recent strike on Syria are to be believed, will make decisions based on emotion and sad photos rather than a careful assessment of risks and rewards.

Luckily for him and for the rest of us, an immediate crisis was averted over the weekend when North Korea's reckless effort to test launch a ballistic missile from a submarine base on its coast failed. But Kim Jong Un is certainly not going away, and a new nuclear test may come any day. In the weeks ahead, Trump's aides and confidantes must not take their lead from the president's bombast, but must lead him toward rational decision-making. They must impress upon him the importance of taking action — or even threatening action — only when he has a sophisticated understanding of the potential costs and benefits, of the likely responses to American behavior and of the preferred endgame. He must also be reminded of the importance of consultation — with advisers, with allies, and with regional powers like China.

Call it the education of Donald Trump. It's worth a try. Last week, for instance, he described a minor epiphany, telling the Wall Street Journal about a discussion he had recently with Chinese President Xi Jinping about North Korea. "After listening for 10 minutes, I realized it's not so easy," he said. "It's not what you would think."

While it's certainly both bizarre and troubling that he thought such issues would be "easy," it's mildly encouraging that he is acknowledging his mistake.

Because foreign policy is indeed complicated. It's one thing to sound decisive and resolute on the campaign trail, but in real-world crises, the stakes are usually extremely high and the options unsatisfying. Consider Syria, for instance, where the Obama administration was unwilling to leave the region alone to work out its problems — or to become much more deeply involved in what could turn into another quagmire like the ones in Iraq, Libya or Afghanistan. Instead, American has remained half in, half out while 400,000 Syrians have died.

In the case of North Korea, the options are also limited and imperfect. There is a good argument that only diplomacy — bolstered by good-faith assistance from China, which has significant influence with North Korea — can pull that reclusive and impoverished country back from the nuclear brink without risking dangerous escalation, including potential attacks on South Korea or even, in the future, the United States. But there is also a case to be made that the endless search for a diplomatic solution has allowed North Korea to march steadily closer to the day when it can perfect and weaponize its long-range missiles, and that a tougher approach is necessary.

The Times generally leans more toward the former approach than the latter. But whichever way the new administration goes, it must do so cautiously and thoughtfully.

So far, the Trump administration has made no serious mistakes with regard to North Korea. Though its rhetoric is growing more belligerent, teetering on the edge of intemperance, no damage has been done.

In the years ahead, North Korea will continue to challenge American policymakers. As will Syria, Russia, China, Ukraine, Israel, Pakistan, Turkey and other countries. We hope our president can learn, and do so in a hurry.

ETATS-UNIS

Opinion | How America Is Losing the Credibility War

Antony J. Blinken

Equally problematic is Mr. Trump's challenged relationship with veracity, documented almost daily by independent fact-checking organizations. The greatest hits include his repeatedly debunked claim that former President Obama tapped his phones, that a nonexistent terrorist attack occurred in Sweden, that Germany owes NATO vast sums of money, that Mr. Obama released more than 100 detainees from Guantánamo who returned to the battlefield and that Democrats made up allegations about Russian efforts to influence our election. Mr. Trump's canards risk undermining his ability to counter propaganda from our adversaries.

The president was rightly applauded for striking back smartly against the Assad regime in Syria for its use of chemical weapons. But his response incited an information war in which President Bashar al-Assad and his Russian enablers have sought to escape blame for the atrocity.

Their tactics have ranged from advancing alternative scenarios — for example, alleging it was American warplanes that bombed a terrorist warehouse full of sarin gas — to asserting that the evidence proffered by the United States was fabricated. We don't know where "those dead children were killed," Mr. Assad asserted, adding, "Were they dead at all?"

Mr. Putin is a master at this game, throwing out falsehoods to confuse casual consumers of the news while creating a phony equivalence between Western governments and media, and his own. An army of bots and trolls and RT, the Kremlin's international propaganda network, carry his false flags around the world. In this way, every source of information is suspect, and there is no objective truth.

During the crisis caused by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, I worked with colleagues in the Obama administration to convince people in other countries that Russian troops were indeed in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbass, that Moscow was arming and directing the separatists, and that it was the separatists, using a missile launcher driven in from Russia, that shot down a Malaysian passenger airliner, killing all onboard.

We spent hours negotiating with the intelligence community about what information we could declassify, marshaling open-source evidence and working on fact-based presentations for our allies and the media.

Mr. Putin's propaganda campaigns made our job tougher than expected. But we had one trump card that usually carried the day: President Obama's credibility. Foreign leaders trusted his word, even when they disagreed with his policies.

President John F. Kennedy demonstrated the value of presidential credibility at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, when he sent emissaries to America's allies in October 1962 to secure support for the quarantine of Cuba. He designated Dean Acheson, the former secretary of state, to deal with Washington's prickliest partner — President Charles de Gaulle of France.

When Acheson offered to show de Gaulle spy plane imagery to back up the claim that the Soviet Union had deployed nuclear missiles 90 miles from American shores, de Gaulle threw up his hands and said he needed no such evidence. "The word of the president of the United States is good enough for me."

If Mr. Trump continues to spread his own misinformation on matters large and small, he will cede that advantage and America will be seen like any other country — which is just what our adversaries want. This will complicate his administration's ability to rally others against threats to our national security.

Every country has a founding mythology. For Americans, it starts with our first president's youthful encounter with a cherry tree and refusal to tell a lie.

Mr. Trump would do well to find inspiration in that story, which goes to the heart of what makes America different — and our foreign policy effective — around the world.

Trump's ad hoc foreign policy is the right one: Robert Robb

Robert Robb, The Arizona Republic

Any semblance of a Donald Trump foreign policy construct coming out of the presidential campaign evaporated with the retaliatory cruise missile attack on a Syrian airbase.

Trump is going to conduct an ad hoc foreign policy, unrooted in any overarching strategic vision of America's place and role in the world. That may be OK.

During the campaign, Trump displayed instincts about foreign policy that could be cobbled together into a construct.

Trump made it clear he thought the United States was overextended globally and too quick to get into fights in which there wasn't truly an actionable national security interest at stake. And that the United States did too much and our allies did too little in maintaining international order.

That suggested that Trump would conduct a hard-headed national-interest foreign policy. The Trump administration would advance American interests, narrowly defined. It would seek and work with allies to that end. But otherwise, other countries needed to step up to the plate.

Trump claimed that there was an actionable national security interest in retaliating against Bashar Assad's use of chemical weapons. But that was just gloss.

The attack on the Syrian airbase didn't make the United States any less likely to be the target of a chemical attack.

There can be no doubt that the United States would retaliate massively against any use of chemical weapons against us. A retaliatory gesture against Assad wasn't necessary to reinforce that point.

Instead, this was a military intervention purely on humanitarian grounds. It is intended to deter Assad from using chemical weapons against Syrians, even though that doesn't advance a hard-headed, narrowly-defined American interest.

Nor is the attack part of a larger strategy for Syria, the Middle East, or American relations with Assad's enablers, Russia and Iran.

It arguably had the ancillary benefit of causing other countries to recalculate the willingness of the United States to use force under Trump compared to Barack Obama. But that didn't drive the decision. The decision was driven by the desire to deter Assad from using chemical weapons, period.

It was a completely ad hoc decision. It felt like the right thing to do. So Trump did it. And most Americans seem to agree that it was the right thing to do.

My guess is that's the way foreign policy is going to be conducted under Trump, a series of ad hoc decisions based on what seems right or doable at the time. At the end of the day, to borrow from Winston Churchill, there will be no theme to the pudding.

Trump follows two big construct presidents when it comes to foreign policy.

After 9/11, George W. Bush saw the United States as a catalyst for transforming authoritarian states in the Middle East into market-oriented democracies.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq weren't just to chase out perceived threats. Both countries were to become exemplars for the region and a contagion for change within it.

Obama's big construct wasn't, as neoconservatives would have it, just to retreat from global leadership and responsibility. Obama's construct was considerably more subtle than that.

Obama wanted to reset America's relationship with the world to be more cooperative and respectful. The United States would continue to provide leadership. But it would operate in coordination with others, through multilateral organizations. That would result, according to Obama, in a more secure international order and greater burden sharing by other countries.

It's fair to describe both of these big foreign policy constructs as failures.

The democratic tide in the world is receding, not advancing. Afghanistan and Iraq are messes, examples of American overreach, not exemplars of good governance or the virtues of democratic capitalism. The threat of terrorism can't be quantified, but it doesn't seem to be abating.

Things fell apart everywhere under Obama. Cooperative multilateralism is no match for national interest realpolitik, which still governs the affairs of nation-states.

The world is a messy place. There is no clear path to navigating the Sunni-Shiite competition for regional influence in the Middle East, containing Russian revanchism, coping with the rise of China, eliminating North Korea's nuclear threat, or controlling Islamic terrorism. There's no big construct that envelops all of this, and more.

Picking our way through it ad hoc may be the way to go.

UNE - Trump's Unreleased Taxes Threaten Yet Another Campaign Promise

Alan Rappeport

With Republicans sharply divided on a path forward and the administration unable to come up with a plan of its own, the Democratic resistance is only the newest impediment.

As a candidate, Mr. Trump declared that he understood America's complex tax laws "better than anyone who has ever run for president" and that he alone could fix them. But it is becoming increasingly unlikely that there will be a simpler system, or even lower tax rates, this time next year. The Trump administration's tax plan, promised in February, has yet to materialize; a House Republican plan has bogged down, taking as much fire from conservatives as liberals; and on Monday, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told The Financial Times that the administration's goal of getting a tax plan signed by August was "not realistic at this point."

A tax overhaul could be the next expansive Trump campaign promise that falters before it even gathered much steam.

"If they have no plan, they can't negotiate," said Larry Kudlow, the economist who helped Mr. Trump devise his campaign tax plan. "In that case, tax reform is dead."

The first pitfall for Mr. Trump was the debacle of his health care plan, which burned political capital and precious days off the legislative calendar. But his administration saw repealing the taxes imposed by the Affordable Care Act as an important step that would allow for deeper tax cuts later. Mr. Trump even suggested last week that he might return to health care before tax cuts.

Republican leaders in Congress also failed to create momentum. Speaker Paul D. Ryan built a tax blueprint around a "border adjustment" tax that would have imposed a steep levy on imports, hoping to encourage domestic manufacturing while raising revenue that could be used to lower overall tax rates. But it has been assailed by retailers, oil companies and the billionaire Koch brothers. With no palpable support in the Senate, its prospects appear to be nearly dead. Heading into a congressional recess, Mr. Ryan admitted that Republicans in the House, Senate and White House were not on the same page.

The president's own vision for a new tax system is muddled at best. In the past few months, he has called for taxing companies that move operations abroad, waffled on the border tax and, last week, called for a "reciprocal" tax that would match the import taxes other countries impose on the United States.

But it is Mr. Trump's own taxes that have provided the crucial leverage for his opponents. More than 100,000 of his critics took to the streets over the weekend in marches around the country, demanding that the president release his returns. Tax legislation, they say, could be a plot by Mr. Trump to get even richer.

"When they talk about tax reform, are they talking about cutting Donald Trump's taxes by millions of dollars a year?" asked Ezra Levin, a member of the Tax March executive committee. "We don't know."

Beyond the politics of Mr. Trump's returns, lawmakers do not want to pass an overhaul of the tax code that unwittingly enriches the commander in chief and his progeny. Those who are worried about conflicts of interest point to the potential repeal of the estate tax or elimination of the alternative minimum tax as provisions that would enrich Mr. Trump.

Perhaps the most consequential concern relates to a House Republican proposal to get rid of a rule that lets companies write off the interest they pay on loans — a move real estate developers and Mr. Trump vehemently oppose. Doing so would raise $1 trillion in revenue and reduce the appeal of one of Mr. Trump's favorite business tools: debt.

In the halls of Congress, Democrats are employing procedural maneuvers to drive home their point on the tax returns and possibly compel Republican lawmakers to join their effort to force Mr. Trump to release them. And Democratic aides say more tricks are coming.

More than a dozen Republicans — from recognizable names like Senator Joni Ernst of Iowa and Representative Mark Sanford of South Carolina to backbenchers like Representatives David Young of Iowa, Matt Gaetz of Florida, Walter B. Jones of North Carolina, Ted Yoho of Florida, Rodney Frelinghuysen of New Jersey and Justin Amash of Michigan — have agreed that Mr. Trump should release his returns.

That list grows almost daily. On Monday, former Representative Joe Walsh of Illinois, a conservative firebrand and Trump loyalist, said the president should release his tax returns. "I do think this issue will come back and bite him on the butt," he said on MSNBC.

Republicans argue that Democrats are putting politics ahead of an opportunity to fix a broken tax system. Mr. Trump shot back at his critics on Twitter on Sunday, suggesting that the protesters had been paid and that they were sore losers. On Monday, Mr. Spicer said that Mr. Trump remained under audit and that, breaking with 40 years of presidential tradition, his tax returns would not be made public.

"I think the president's view on this has been very clear from the campaign, and the American people understood it when they elected him in November," Mr. Spicer said.

Polls show that a majority of Americans, including most Republicans, would like Mr. Trump to release his tax returns, according to the Republican pollster Frank Luntz. However, the issue is a low priority for voters.

"You're not going to change someone's opinion of Trump merely by what's in his tax returns," Mr. Luntz said.

It remains unclear what impact the emphasis on Mr. Trump's taxes will have on his aspirations of tackling the tax code.

Mr. Schumer said he had had no communication with the president about tax legislation and only minimal outreach from his economic advisers. While Mr. Trump signaled that he would like to reach a bipartisan tax deal, potentially including an infrastructure plan, the focus on his tax returns suggests that any legislation will happen along party lines. That would mean that a more limited bill, requiring a simple majority, would need to pass the Senate through complicated budget rules that create a new set of problems.

With little appetite for bipartisanship, many veterans of tax fights and lobbyists in Washington expect that Mr. Trump will ultimately embrace straight tax cuts, with some cleaning up of deductions, and call it a victory. Even that would be difficult, with a narrow Republican majority in the Senate and a widening budget deficit.

Former Representative Dave Camp of Michigan — a Republican who, as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, released a tax plan in 2014 — said that if they wanted to get something done, lawmakers needed to brace for a more intense series of battles over the details of tax legislation than they faced during the failed health care effort.

"Obviously, there is a lot at stake here," Mr. Camp said. "Health care is 20 percent of the economy, but tax reform is 100 percent of the economy."

Enough excuses. Release your taxes, Mr. President

The Times Editorial Board

Tuesday is Tax Day, and millions of Americans are expected to file their 1040s as part of the complicated business of paying for government. Now is the time for President Trump to stop making excuses and release his own tax records to the public, as he should have done many months ago.

His current and complete tax returns, that is. And back taxes too, while he's at it. Two pages of Trump's 2005 forms that were leaked to the media last month showed he paid $38 million in taxes that year on more than $150 million in income. Because the documents were stamped "client copy," it raised speculation that Trump or his emissaries had leaked the document to show that, at least for one year, he did pay federal taxes. Another leak, reported in the New York Times last year, suggested that Trump had taken a huge $916-million loss in the 1990s that enabled him to pay no federal taxes at all for an undetermined number of years.

Neither of those leaks is sufficient. Neither answers the most basic questions that Americans have about their new president. For instance: Does he have business entanglements overseas that might affect his foreign policy decisions? Does he owe money to Russian lenders? How much does he give to charity? Does the nation's convoluted tax system mean Trump pays taxes at a lower rate than middle-class Americans? In what years did he pay no taxes at all, and why? What other conflicts of interest exist that we can't even guess at?

Trump would like us to believe that his election victory means people don't care about his tax returns. But they do. A poll conducted in January found that nearly three-quarters of Americans want him to release his returns. On Saturday, tens of thousands of people marched in Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and dozens of other U.S. cities demanding that the president release his taxes.

Of course, he doesn't have to. Although it has become a tradition over the last four decades, there's no law requiring that presidents make public their tax forms. But Trump, whose finances are particularly complicated and whose potential conflicts of interests are far greater than most presidents — and who promised during the campaign that he would release his returns eventually — should do as other candidates and presidents have done. Especially with a major tax reform proposal on the way. How can the public trust the president's motives on a tax overhaul without knowing whether he will profit from it?

UNE - Trump Voters in a Swing District Wonder When the 'Winning' Will Start

Matt Flegenheimer

Such is a view from this swing county of a swing region of a swing state that powered Mr. Trump's improbable victory, an electoral thermometer for a president slogging toward the end of his first 100 days. Across the country, Republican officials have grown anxious at their standing on even ruby-red turf, sweating out a closer-than-expected victory last week in a House race in a Kansas congressional district that Mr. Trump had carried by 27 points. Another stress test arrives Tuesday, with a special election for a House seat in Georgia.

But it is here, among voters in one of the nation's few true tossup districts, where any lasting strain may be felt most acutely.

In consecutive presidential elections, Pennsylvania's Eighth District, which includes Bucks County and pockets of Montgomery County, has delivered Republican nominees their narrowest margins of victory in a congressional district. Mitt Romney won it by one-tenth of a point in 2012. Mr. Trump prevailed by two-tenths, attracting many of the relatively affluent and educated white suburban voters who were expected to lift Hillary Clinton, last year's Democratic candidate.

The result is a patch of purple political terrain — specked with tree-lined blocks, sprawling estates and multiplying recovery houses — that looks much like the rest of a bitterly divided country, sorting itself generally into three camps: those with regrets about supporting Mr. Trump, those without them and those who cannot believe anyone supported him in the first place.

"No one wants to be wrong," said Brian Mock, 33, a tattoo artist in Levittown, Pa., and a Trump skeptic. "It's seeing a house on fire and saying, 'That house isn't on fire.' It is very clearly on fire."

Yet interviews with voters across the district suggest a nuanced view of a president getting his sea legs. Many still trust him, but wonder why his deal-making instincts do not seem to be translating. They admire his zeal, but are occasionally baffled by his tweets. They insist he will be fine, but suggest gently that maybe Vice President Mike Pence should assume a more expansive role.

Perhaps most forcefully, they question when they will begin to see more of that word they were promised, the outcome that voters were supposed to be "sick and tired of" by now, in Mr. Trump's campaign estimation.

"It's not what he's done, it's what he's trying to do," said Bill Yokobosky IV, 33, a train engineer from Langhorne, Pa., who was waiting for a haircut at a strip mall. "He hasn't succeeded, really."

Like many colleagues from his rail union, Mr. Yokobosky defied leadership wishes in voting for Mr. Trump. He does not regret it, and he is eager to defend the president against the "nit-picking" of opponents, particularly over any links to Russia. But he has come to consider the perils of a commander in chief plainly "trying to learn on the fly."

"He's fighting himself and he's fighting Washington," Mr. Yokobosky said. "They're just trying to get settled in there."

Mr. Trump is not the only newcomer getting acclimated. The district's congressman is Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, a former F.B.I. agent whose brother Mike won, lost and reclaimed the seat over the past dozen years before stepping aside in January.

At times, Mr. Fitzpatrick, a Republican, has created conspicuous distance from Mr. Trump, criticizing his attempts to ban travel from several predominantly Muslim countries and opposing the Trump-backed health care bill that failed in the House.

But Mr. Fitzpatrick has gained little traction, at least so far, on a pet issue: redistricting reform. "We need more districts like this," he said. "It's a bellwether."

Some critics of the president seem to hope so, describing a change in at least a handful of Trump-supporting neighbors recently: a humbling in the face of his stumbles, among voters who used to gloat.

"They've quieted down," said Doug Meginley, the manager at Positively Records in Levittown, perched beside an Elvis mask, a Vanilla Fudge drumhead and a Monkees-themed tambourine. "The Trump supporters know."

At the same time, many in the area have made a point of reinforcing their loyalty, letting bumper stickers linger and Facebook posts bloom.

In December, some traveled west to Hershey, Pa., for a stop on Mr. Trump's "thank you" tour.

Patricia Poprik, the chairwoman of the Bucks County Republican Committee, brought her two granddaughters, one of whom had requested a meeting with Mr. Trump as a Christmas gift.

"He goes, 'Girls, you gotta do better than that,'" Ms. Poprik recalled of the presidential greeting backstage.

Holding forth last week at the committee's stately headquarters in Doylestown, Ms. Poprik said many residents who initially feared publicly identifying as Trump voters had unmasked themselves since the election.

She acknowledged some "glitches" early on, including Mr. Trump's halting progress on key campaign promises. But she remained broadly supportive.

"He thought he could go faster. I knew he couldn't," Ms. Poprik said from her office, which includes a talking George W. Bush doll; two Trump-branded water bottles; and several hundred elephant-themed trinkets. "You've got to get your rhythm."

Many seem inclined to give him the space. Last month, hundreds gathered in frigid temperatures at a park in Bensalem for an event without the president, or any marquee speakers, simply to say they had his back.

"It's really disheartening what they're putting him through," said Jeanne Maher, 66, from Langhorne,

whose husband, a bonsai artist, affixed a "Hillary for Prison" sticker to his motorcycle during the campaign.

That message is gone now, but they have not removed a campaign lawn sign. "We're proud of it," she said. "We don't want to take it down."

Other local displays have been maintained less happily.

Mike Mallon, 42, who owns a custom printing company in Bensalem, has kept a sign in front of his home since shortly before the election, positioning it now beside two small American flags and beneath a porch that includes two headless mannequins.

"WORRY," the poster reads simply. He had hoped to take it down in November.

Then there is the rendering Mr. Mallon created himself, a canvas depicting the outlines of Mr. Trump's face, barbed wire, a border wall and a pile of ironic trophies. The piece's title is familiar, he said.

"¿Winning?"

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Democrats Try for an Upset in Georgia Sixth

Alpharetta, Ga. – As we enter the final day of the special election to replace Representative Tom Price, the nation's attention is fixed on Georgia's sixth congressional district. Even at this late stage, the outcome of this race remains highly uncertain. But one thing is certain: The Democrat in the race has convinced much of the country that he will pull off the first big win for his party since the Republicans swept last November's elections. That candidate, 30-year-old Jon Ossoff, is a former Democratic staffer who has managed to rake in over $8 million in donations over the course of the race. Heading into Election Day, Ossoff appears to be playing with the house's money. He has come out on top of his Republican rivals in every poll for the past two months, and surveys indicate that he led the two weeks of early voting by a wide margin. Here, one hears a common refrain: "Could he really do it?"

Perhaps. Nevertheless, the format of this race will make it difficult for Ossoff to manage an outright victory tonight. Because neither party held a primary, the race features a total of 18 candidates. If no candidate reaches 50 percent of the vote, the top two candidates will face each other in a runoff in June.

Though Democratic support quickly coalesced around the dynamic young Ossoff, GOP voters have yet to settle on one frontrunner, which helps to explain how the Democrat has easily outperformed his competition in every poll. Several Republican candidates have spent the past few months battling for top billing, but the latest numbers suggest that former Georgia secretary of state Karen Handel and local businessman and former Johns Creek city councilman Bob Gray are battling over the second slot in the June 20 runoff.

The district's long history as a Republican stronghold also seems to suggest that Ossoff will have a tough time snatching this seat from the GOP. Georgia's sixth congressional district — which is made up of the eastern part of Cobb County, as well as the northern parts of Fulton and DeKalb counties — has been represented by a Republican for nearly four decades straight, since 1979. For about two of those decades, the district's congressman was Newt Gingrich; he was followed by Johnny Isakson (who is now one of Georgia's two senators), and then Price. None of these candidates ever had any difficulty holding on to the seat.

John McCain and Mitt Romney won GA-06 by 20-point margins in 2008 and 2012 respectively. But, despite the fact that Trump was able to take the district from Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton last November, he did so by an unusually slim margin, which is a large part of why Democrats believe Ossoff has a good chance of pulling off a victory tonight.

Though the GOP has been bitterly divided by this race, they all seem to agree on one thing: None of them likes the way the national Democratic party has pushed Ossoff on the district.

Has he? Again: Maybe. But many who know the district well — much better than the outside Democrats who have swooped in to peddle Ossoff as the antidote to Trump — are quick to point out that, while GA-06 has long been Republican, it has never been *Trump* Republican. In the GOP presidential primary last year, Florida senator Marco Rubio won the district with nearly 40 percent of the vote. Trump came in a distant second with 28 percent, topped by a margin of about 14,000 votes. This may explain why voter enthusiasm in GA-06 paled come November.

It is worth noting, too, that, skeptical though they are of his strand of conservatism, Trump is faring better with voters in GA-06 than he is with the median voter. While his current national approval rating is at 42 percent, in March he had an approval rating of 51 percent in the sixth district.

Bob Gray is quick to note that he is the only GA-06 candidate who actively campaigned for President Trump during the general election. "If you weren't supporting the president, you were necessarily supporting Hillary Clinton," he says. "There were only two people running. You're either for Hillary Clinton or against her."

For her part, Handel doesn't think Trump has affected this race much at all: "I know some would like to make that the narrative of the race, for their own particular purposes, but I'm not seeing it or hearing it for myself out there."

The apparently friendly terrain has helped to foster a competitive primary. Throughout the race, Handel has consistently touted her record as a local and state politician, arguing that her proven track record makes her the best GOP option. "The people of this district know me," she tells me at a pizza joint in Alpharetta, Ga. "They trust me, and they've seen the kind of job I can do at delivering results for them."

Gray rejects Handel's narrative emphatically. "Karen is your consummate career politician," he insists. "She has run nine times for six races, won only twice, and never finished a term."

Local city councilman Joe Gebbia would likely disagree with Gray's portrayal of Handel's record. "I think she brings with her a good balance of expertise and understanding of the issues," he explains to me at Handel's event. "Her experience can't be discounted, especially her commission positions and as secretary of state."

Hostile as they might be toward each other, however, neither Handel nor Gray can name a specific policy question on which they disagree with the president. Gray says that he is completely onboard with all 22 promises Trump made in his joint address to Congress in late February.

Although she mentions no specific disagreement with the Trump administration, Handel says she has a reputation for being an independent thinker. "I'm not a yes gal by any stretch of the imagination. That's not going to change. Being a member of Congress and representing the sixth district is not being an extension of the White House."

Though the GOP has been bitterly divided by this race, they all seem to agree on one thing: None of them likes the way the national Democratic party has pushed Ossoff on the district.

"To be honest with you, I'm not particularly happy about the outside influence coming in and trying to sway this," Gebbia says, shaking his head. "I interpret that as the outside Democratic party trying to buy a seat here."

Gebbia also notes that Ossoff doesn't actually live in the district; he lives in the Emory area with his girlfriend and will move to GA-06 if he wins the election. While it is permissible for candidates to run for representative in a district where they don't reside, it reinforces Ossoff's appearance as an outsider in this race.

Gray contends that Democrats are wrong about Ossoff's support on the ground, adding that the influx of outside money and people has given the Democratic party the appearance of a groundswell against Trump. "As we've spent time across the district, I don't think they're correct that Trump and GOP are causing more Democrats to turn out," he says.

It is proving difficult to predict who is correct. Given the many fluctuations in the available polling and the notoriously unreliable turnout that marks special elections, this one really could go either way. The Democrats shouldn't proclaim victory just yet.

It's Trump vs. the Resistance in Georgia Race

Patricia Murphy

ATLANTA—The upcoming Georgia special election to fill the seat of Health and Human Services Sec. Tom Price is putting the "jungle" in jungle primary. With 18 candidates, a $14 million tsunami of TV ads, a Republican field attacking each other like a pack of dingoes, and an unknown Democrat raising cash like a presidential contender, the usually ho-hum race for the suburban-Atlanta House seat has become an all-out war. If no candidate clears 50 percent in Tuesday's primary, the top two will go on to a June 20 runoff and the war will continue for another eight weeks.

At the heart of the chaos is President Donald Trump, whose election in November solidified his base among the Tea Party faithful here, but also lit a fire of national resistance whose singular goal recently has become flipping Georgia's 6th congressional district to Democratic hands. Trump won the solidly Republican district by just 1.5 percent. over Hillary Clinton.

In an ordinary election year, in an ordinary time, an open seat in or around Atlanta's wealthy northern suburbs would be a mostly friendly contest between whichever two Republicans said they wanted the job. But the race has drawn a melee of 11 GOP hopefuls, a scramble of activists, gray-haired state-senators, Trump enthusiasts and businessmen.

Instead of getting behind one or two of the strongest candidates, local Republican leaders have similarly scattered their support among the field. Former U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss is backing Karen Handel, a former secretary of state, while current U.S. Sen. David Perdue has gotten behind former state Sen. Dan Moody. Sean Hannity endorsed Tea Party founder Amy Kremer, while Sen. Marco Rubio, who won the district in the GOP presidential primary, is supporting state Sen. Judson Hill.

The Club for Growth has pumped $600,000 into the race to help businessman Bob Gray, but is also running a blistering attack ad against Handel, who is also getting attacked by Gray and Moody. Gray claims he was the only candidate to back Trump early on, but it was Bruce LeVell, not Gray, who arrived at an event in a "Trump 2020" campaign bus and had former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski stumping for him. Confused yet? That's the problem for Republicans.

"It's crazy, it's a true jungle primary," said Kerwin Swint, the chair of the political science department at Kennesaw State University, which sits just beyond the district's current lines. "This is one of the headaches behind the way that Georgia does special elections, but it's usually not this complex and it's presenting some difficulties Republicans clearly didn't anticipate."

Among those difficulties, along with the fact that the monster field has split money, air time, and enthusiasm between the Republicans, is that it has also opened the door to Jon Ossoff, the 30 year-old former congressional staffer whom national Democrats got behind early and rocketed to an unprecedented fundraising haul. Ossoff's campaign reported $8.3 million raised since January, with much of that coming from small-dollar donations around the country through DailyKos, an early endorser, and ActBlue, the liberal activist fundraising portal.

Chip Lake, a longtime Republican consultant in Georgia, described Ossoff's fundraising as an alarming possible glimpse into the future for Republican candidates in a Trump era.

"I've been in this business for over 25 years and I have never seen anything like what Job Ossoff has been able to do," Lake said. "That doesn't mean he can win, but he is a shoe-in to make the runoff and two or three weeks ago we were worried he could get to 50 percent. They say money can't buy you love, but it can buy a lot of votes."

Giving money to Ossoff seems to be downright therapeutic for Democrats across the country looking for a way to stick it to Trump. Locally, volunteering for Ossoff seems to have the same result.

Turin Mamoun, a stay-at-home mom from East Cobb County, Ga. went to her first-ever political meeting in January after Trump was elected president. "I'm worried, very worried," she said before heading out to canvass for Ossoff Saturday afternoon. "I've been a Democrat my whole life, but I'm scared now and I didn't even know where to begin."

Mamoun and her friend, Sara Mhazel, met Ossoff at the Cobb County Democrats' meeting just after he got into the race. Mhazel had never volunteered for a campaign. Mamoun had never even had a sign in her yard. They were both soon canvassing for Ossoff and his campaign in the sixth district, where they both live.

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"I've spent my entire professional life promoting democracy overseas, when all of the sudden I woke up in November and realized we were neglecting our own backyard," said Mhazel, a lawyer at Atlanta's Carter Center. How much of the race is about sending a message to Donald Trump? "A lot," they both said.

If the race does go to a runoff, conventional wisdom says the top Republican should easily win in June, as conservatives coalesce behind a single candidate. Democrats may have the energy in the district right now, but for decades Republicans have had the infrastructure that candidates typically need to win, especially in a special election in June.

"Democrats see an opportunity. They've galvanized, they've organized, they've raised a ton of money, they're going all out," Kennesaw State's Kerwin Swint said. "But just looking at the numbers, if Ossoff doesn't win Tuesday, I just don't see how he can win. What are you going to do, bus a lot of people in from California?"

But if there's one thing that has failed completely in the last year, it's using past political performance to predict the future. With Trump's approval ratings underwater, his policy positions shifting every day, and Democrats like Ossoff able to nationalize local races and raise millions from small dollar donors in a week, Republican operatives say their party may be facing an entirely new paradigm. It's a dynamic that Lake says should worry Republicans greatly, even in a district like the Sixth that Lake sees as solidly Republican.

"We really are in no-man's land when it comes to campaigns and elections at the federal level," Lake said. "Any Republican would be lying to you if they told you they weren't deeply concerned about the damage Donald Trump could cause our party over the four years he's in office."

Trump is tarnishing Republicans: Jesse Ferguson

Jesse Ferguson

For a political party that often seems to be *Lost in Space*, Republicans should be hearing "Danger, Will Robinson!" alarms.

We need look no further than the special election in Kansas's Fourth Congressional District to see the warning signs: a Republican won by 7 points in a seat that Trump won by *27 points* only six months ago. That's a 20-point swing. By my count, there are 120 Republican-held congressional districts where Trump won by 20 or fewer points. Obviously, that doesn't mean that Democrats are going to win all 120 of those seats in 2018 — but 120 Republican members of Congress probably didn't sleep well last Tuesday night.

The problem is the party's legislative and political stumbles are piling up. For instance, they won the battle to get Justice Neil Gorsuch on to the Supreme Court, but the way they did it — by depriving former President Barack Obama of an appointment and then overturning the Senate rules — is the latest data point that leads them to lose the war. Gorsuch's confirmation will be a distant memory by the 2018 midterm election campaign. What will last is the impression that Republicans in Congress will do anything it takes to get their way.

Part of that includes sticking with and protecting a compromised and unpopular president. Trump pushes Republicans to walk the plank for him on issue after issue, from health care repeal to budget cuts and much more, even if it hurts his own voters. And he expects them to defend him in self-inflicted scandal after scandal — so much that they are coming dangerously close to being seen as accomplices in Trump's sustained effort to hide his tax returns and ties to Russia. If that happens, they can wave goodbye to their control of Congress.

A Quinnipiac University survey this month shows the peril for Republicans in standing behind Trump. His job approval rating was negative by a staggering 22 points (35% approval compared to 57% disapproval). More alarmingly, 49% of the 57% who disapprove are people who "strongly" disapprove, while a meager 25% strongly

approve. That 2-to-1 intensity ratio should jar anyone looking at the 2018 electorate.

Trump's approval rating is tanking for the same reason that association with him is so dangerous for the GOP: He is losing on the key traits and qualities that matter most to ordinary people. He's considered not honest by 27 points (61% to 34%), thought not to care about average Americans by 18 points (57% to 39%), found to be not level-headed by 37 points (66% to 29%), and believed not to share their values by 27 points (61% to 34%).

Voters certainly don't believe that every Republican in Congress is a carbon copy of Trump. But a Congress filled with Trump apologists and rubber stamps, even if they're not replicas, would be held just as responsible for the untold damage that he and his agenda would do to the country.

Two GOP congressmen are a cautionary tale. House Intelligence chairman Devin Nunes tried so hard to protect Trump that's he's no longer in charge of his own committee's Russia probe. And Rep. Ted Yoho defended Nunes by arguing: "You've got to keep in mind who he works for. He works for the president, and he answers to the president."

Not quite, as Yoho belatedly admitted. All members of Congress answer to their constituents. They want to know that their elected officials will represent their interests. What they're seeing in Washington is a Republican Party that represents Trump's interests instead.

When it came to health care, only 17% of the country supported the GOP's repeal bill. Three-quarters want Trump to release his tax returns, so we can uncover what is or isn't driving his financial interests. And most people now support an independent investigation into the Trump team's Russia ties.

Any direction you look, you can see the damage Trump is doing to his party. Republicans in Congress are at 70% disapproval. House Speaker Paul Ryan is increasingly disliked. "As President Trump's approval tanks, Congress, especially Republicans, follow right behind him," Tim Malloy, assistant director of the Quinnipiac poll, said recently.

Voters back home are showing Republicans during the congressional recess how they feel about unwavering support for Trump. A town hall meeting last week in a swing district in Colorado prompted CNN to report, "Angry constituents ask GOP Rep. Mike Coffman to choose between them or Trump." We should expect to see more of this unless and until Republicans in Congress step up and show they're not Trump rubber-stamps or accomplices.

Issues like hiding tax returns are no longer insider baseball in Washington — they are proof points in a narrative. It's a time for choosing for Republicans. Will they put country over party? If they give the wrong answer, they'll be answering for it all election season.

Los Angeles Times

Trump's acting like a lame duck president

Jonah Goldberg

One of the (many) things that makes the Trump presidency so hard to read is that the chapters are all out of order.

Traditionally, during the transition period, presidents-elect are out of the limelight. But while Barack Obama was still in the White House, Donald Trump announced "deals" and appointments that made it seem like he was already in office, hitting the ground running to Make America Great Again. On the entirely subjective calculus of wins, he probably had more before his inauguration than any president.

Conversely, the first 100 days are supposed to be a time of big domestic legislative achievements. Instead, they've looked more like the lame-duck period of a president's second term.

Once sworn in, rather than get a political honeymoon with the news media, Trump had an angry divorce. And instead of giving Trump a big gift-wrapped box of legislation, Congress has mostly given him the sorts of headaches presidents have to deal with when they've lost their clout.

The White House is touting its raft of executive orders as proof that things are getting done and promises are being kept. That's a fair spin. Trump campaigned on repealing a slew of Obama's executive orders and other "job-killing" regulations.

But that doesn't change the fact that presidents usually turn to executive orders when getting big stuff through Congress is impossible and to prove they still have their mojo. Hence Obama's famous quip in 2014 that he still had "a pen and a phone."

There's another thing presidents famously do in their second terms, when Congress isn't interested in the president's agenda: retreat to foreign policy. Ronald Reagan concentrated on dealing with the Soviets. Bill Clinton focused on peace negotiations in Northern Ireland and the Middle East and his air war in the former Yugoslavia. George W. Bush launched the surge in Iraq, gave a shot at Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and initiated a massive humanitarian effort to fight AIDS in Africa. Obama's second term was dominated by his obsession with getting a nuclear deal with Iran.

And now President Trump, early in his first term, is trying the same trick. That's because, according to numerous reports from inside the shockingly leaky White House (another feature of lame duck presidencies, when staffers look to their own political future) Trump is eager for "wins." As Trump advisor Larry Kudlow told the Washington Post, "The president wants Ws — he wants wins."

His biggest "W" to date was the appointment of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court, which came when he turned to seasoned pros who know how to get things done in Washington, namely Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Leonard Leo of the Federalist Society. His other big "W" was his missile strike on Syria, for which he also had seasoned pros to thank: Defense Secretary James N. Mattis and national security advisor Gen. H.R. McMaster.

It's early yet, but that strike, combined with his authorization of a massive bomb drop on an alleged Islamic State compound in Afghanistan, has yielded other apparent foreign policy Ws. China seems to be cooperating in the administration's effort to squeeze the North Korean regime. Domestically, these moves succeeded in sucking some of the oxygen out of the media's feeding frenzy over allegations that Trump's campaign colluded with Russia and claims that he is a "puppet" of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

It seems a fair guess that Trump's response will be, "more please." As Fox News anchor Bret Baier recently put it, Trump is "not that ideological. He is more practical and he is looking for Ws, wins. If you turn to the Pentagon and say, 'give me some wins,' they have got a long list of things that can produce Ws."

Trump's sudden transformation into a foreign policy president isn't necessarily sinister. Obama's policy of "strategic patience" and "leading from behind" left a lot of low-hanging fruit for Trump to pluck.

The question is, what happens when the list of easy Ws runs out? There's little evidence that Trump is operating with a coherent strategic vision, which means that he won't have a thought-out criteria for knowing when to say no to the generals he clearly admires. For a true lame duck president, that may not matter — when the Ws run out, he's out of office. For a first-term president who just acts like a lame duck president, it's another story.

USA TODAY

Why Trump is vulnerable to impeachment: Allan Lichtman

Allan J. Lichtman

To impeach or not to impeach, that is the question: if the president's misdeeds are serious, not minor or technical, then the answer is yes. As students of history, the framers knew that power corrupts and they established impeachment as a legal and peaceful means for escaping tyranny without having to resort to revolution or assassination.

Recognizing that presidential misdeeds can take many forms, the delegates set the criteria for impeachment and removal broadly, trusting in the judgment of America's elected representatives. The resignation of Richard Nixon, who was faced with the prospects of impeachment and conviction, removed from office a president who threatened America's constitutional order and likely had committed treason and crimes against humanity in Southeast Asia.

President Trump need not match the level of misdeeds of Richard Nixon to warrant his impeachment. But Americans should be mindful of the distinction between that which merits punishment and that which is merely a matter of preference. For example, the president's unconventional style or his lack of "presidential" stature and demeanor might offend, but those are not offenses worthy of impeachment. Differences of policy and values do not make a case for impeachment, either. If he listens, Trump can yet change his ways.

Still, Trump's history and the path he's followed — as candidate, president-elect and president — show that he is uniquely vulnerable to impeachment. It took three years for the House to impeach Andrew Johnson and more than five years for the impeachment of Bill Clinton and the near impeachment of Richard Nixon. Yet in the early stages of his presidency, Trump has already begun matching the abuses of Nixon.

Is it shouting into the wind to make the case to a Republican Congress for impeaching a president of their own party? The answer is no. Once Trump becomes more of a liability than an asset to the GOP, the party may be willing to turn on him through impeachment.

Circumstances for Republicans today are far from those of 1868, when the controversial and polarizing Benjamin Wade would have become president in the event of Andrew Johnson's removal. If the Senate removes Trump from office, then Vice President Mike Pence, a Republican dream president with experience in Congress, rises to the White House.

As always in politics, complications lurk within every scenario. By supporting the impeachment of their president, Republicans will turn the very dangerous Trump into their enemy, which could have nightmarish consequences if he survives conviction in the Senate. They would risk the alienation of his loyal followers and the potential loss of dozens of House and Senate seats in the midterm elections of 2018.

Still, if Democrats solidly back impeachment, only some two dozen House Republicans would have to join the Democrats for a voting majority. When the House Judiciary Committee took a vote on articles of impeachment against Richard Nixon, it revealed that egregious transgressions can crack party loyalty; 6 of the committee's 17 Republicans joined all 21 Democrats in backing two of the three articles that the committee endorsed.

Democrats would also be wise to think now about what they wish for when faced with the prospect of a Pence administration in the event of Trump's impeachment and removal. Yet despite sharp policy differences, Democrats could likely trust Pence as president to respect the Constitution and the law, stand firm against Russian aggression and not risk a nuclear war.

Former lawyers in the Obama administration have formed a working group to monitor violations of the law and the Constitution by Trump. But the fate of Trump will ultimately rest with the democratic activism of the American people. Americans rightly celebrate their nation's founders: Thomas Jefferson for justifying independence; Washington for leading the Continental army to victory in the American Revolution. But it was the protests of ordinary colonials, men and women, whites and blacks, that turned public sentiment against King George III and ignited the revolution. "The Revolution was," as John Adams wrote, "in the minds and hearts of the people."

The many robust demonstrations against Trump will be like smoke through a chimney unless, like the revolutionary protests, they are put to a purposeful end. If investigations uncover traitorous collusion with the Russians or Trump continues to clash with the law, the Constitution, the environment, and the nation's traditions and its security, the American people must demand his impeachment. If Republicans in Congress remain recalcitrant, voters should be swift to dismiss them from office in 2018. Justice will be realized in today's America not through revolution, but by the Constitution's peaceful remedy of impeachment — but only if the people demand it.