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FRANCE - EUROPE

**The
New York
Times**

After French Vote, a Question: How Were the Polls So Right?

Dan Bilefsky

The need to take the National Front seriously was made clear in 2002, when Ms. Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, shocked the country and confounded pollsters by making his way into a runoff for the presidency at the expense of a sitting prime minister, Lionel Jospin. Socialists held their noses — some literally with clothespins — and supported the center-right candidate, Jacques Chirac, dealing Mr. Le Pen an emphatic defeat.

Polling experts said French pollsters had also benefited from a robust turnout of 78.7 percent in the first round.

"If the voters pollsters talk to turn out in force, there is less risk of getting it wrong," said Prof. Leighton Vaughan Williams, director of the Political Forecasting Unit at Nottingham Business School.

Several French pollsters also credited their success to the widespread use of online polling. While the practice has its critics, some pollsters say people are more likely to acknowledge that they are voting for a far-right party like the National Front if they are doing so by clicking a box on a website rather

than if they are being asked by a stranger over the phone.

"In online polling you guard against the problem of hidden voters, who don't want to admit to a stranger who they are voting for," said Frédéric Dabi, the director general of Ifop, one of the country's leading polling companies.

Getting the polls right initially appeared daunting for many pollsters. In the 16 weeks leading up to the first-round vote, assessing the prospects of a fragmented field of 11 candidates, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a leftist, and François Fillon, a center-right candidate hit by scandals, appeared so fraught that the newspaper *Le Parisien*, which regularly runs polls, decided not to run any.

Adding to the challenges for pollsters, Mr. Macron was running without a political party and some doubted that his new movement could mobilize voters. Mr. Fillon, initially the front-runner, became mired in a corruption scandal. Mr. Mélenchon surged after a televised debate. Then, less than 36 hours before the polls opened, a gunman killed a police officer on the Champs-Élysées, potentially influencing the election.

"We were worried before the election because this was not a traditional election between left and right, and there was a large element of unpredictability," said Bruno Jeanbart, the deputy managing director of OpinionWay, a leading Paris-based polling company.

But the results largely mirrored the polls. On April 21, the last day forecasts were published ahead of the vote, an average of eight major polls assembled by OpinionWay put Mr. Macron at 24 percent, Ms. Le Pen at 22.4 percent, Mr. Fillon at 19.4 percent and Mr. Mélenchon at 18.9 percent. The final results: 24 percent for Mr. Macron; 21.3 percent for Ms. Le Pen; 20 percent for Mr. Fillon; and 19.6 percent for Mr. Mélenchon.

Looking to the second round, the candidates are offering diametrically opposed visions of France. While Mr. Macron, a former banker, favors economic liberalism and more European integration, Ms. Le Pen rails against immigrants, globalization and the European Union.

French pollsters say they are confident they can replicate their success in the first round and are predicting that Mr. Macron will win

by as much as 20 percentage points.

OpinionWay has been predicting that Mr. Macron will get 59 percent of the vote compared with 41 percent for Ms. Le Pen. Mr. Jeanbart said he was confident about that forecast because fewer than a tenth of voters aged 65 or older, who tend to support the European Union, had voted for the Ms. Le Pen in the first round, and they constitute a quarter of registered voters. He also said it was easier to predict the performance of two candidates compared with 11.

But voters around the world are learning to be wary of certainties, and some analysts see a path to victory for Ms. Le Pen if her motivated supporters turn out in force and enough of Mr. Macron's supporters stay home.

Mr. Dabi of Ifop warned against those professing to have political crystal balls. "It is idiotic to say that Macron will win when the campaign is still on," he said, adding, "We are not clairvoyants who can predict the future."

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Another Win for Macron Would Give the EU Breathing Room

Simon Nixon

Emmanuel

Macron's victory in the first round of the French presidential election was greeted with relief rather than triumph in Brussels and other European capitals.

With just 4 percentage points separating the top four candidates, the nightmare scenario of a final round between the anti-EU far left and far right candidates was averted by only the narrowest of margins. And even if the polls are right, and Mr. Macron goes on to win easily in next Sunday's runoff against Marine Le Pen, no one will be under any illusions that this would represent a compelling endorsement of his pro-European, liberal economic agenda.

This isn't just a contest between nationalism and globalism, as Ms. Le Pen has claimed. It is also a contest of values. If Mr. Macron wins, it may be largely because polls

indicate that around 60% of French voters believe that Ms. Le Pen and the National Front party which she led until last week, is a threat to democracy.

This election offers voters the starkest of choices. At its heart lies the issue of security. Ms. Le Pen argues that the only way France can protect its citizens is to quit the EU and the euro; she argues that the answer to the challenges posed by terrorism and illegal migration is to quit the Schengen passport free-travel zone and strengthen national borders; she says that the only way to preserve France's generous social safety net and job protections is to quit the economic straitjacket of single currency membership.

Mr. Macron, in contrast, argues that many of the biggest sources of insecurity are common European challenges best addressed through common European efforts. His response to the risks of terror and

illegal migration is to strengthen the borders of the EU, not close the borders of France. And he argues that the chaos that would follow a decision to quit the euro would bring far greater misery; the path to greater security is in improving France's competitiveness and reforming its social model to focus on better protection of individuals through active employment and training policies rather than trying to preserve every job.

Certainly If Mr. Macron wins, the EU will believe it has earned a reprieve. The risk will have substantially receded of the euro unraveling or the EU being hit by further Brexit-style breakups during this current European electoral cycle. The EU will have most likely bought itself several more years to attempt to win back the trust of voters and show it is still capable of solving common problems.

Whether it succeeds will hinge in large part on Mr. Macron himself. To reform Europe, he first needs to show he can reform France. That means delivering on the economic overhauls economists have long argued are essential to boost France's economic fortunes but which have eluded governments of the past 20 years. These include cutting taxes paid by employers which discourage hiring; easing labor rules that discourage investment; and trimming government spending, which has saddled the government with persistent deficits and high debt.

Mr. Macron has pledged to take action on all three fronts. To succeed, he first will need to build a governing coalition in the National Assembly following parliamentary elections in June, then overcome the inevitable resistance from vested interests among trade unions that have hobbled previous reform

efforts—including his own under the previous government. That will prove a tough test of his political skills.

If reforming France is likely to prove difficult, reforming the EU could prove an even bigger challenge. Mr. Macron has proposed creating a European budget overseen by a European treasury, but similar proposals in the past have run into stiff opposition from Germany which is wary of transfers between member states.

That said, the German government accepts that reforms of the

eurozone in particular are needed, and indeed Berlin is hopeful that Mr. Macron can provide a useful partner in reforming the eurozone. The European Commission is due soon to publish detailed proposals for new initiatives that could go some way toward providing common shock absorbers for the single currency. But as always, the price of German support for any proposal that deepens economic and financial integration will be that it is accompanied by transfers of real sovereignty, something French governments have found difficult.

Some say these obstacles are insurmountable, dooming a Macron presidency to failure. But that seems premature. Assuming he wins, Mr. Macron would start with important advantages. He will inherit a growing economy and falling unemployment, creating an easier political climate for reform. And he hasn't saddled himself with damaging campaign promises, like the kind that derailed the presidency of his former boss François Hollande whose credibility never recovered from the damage caused by the aggressive tax increases of his first two years.

Mr. Macron also may benefit from a sense of national urgency that has eluded his predecessors, given that the expected strong performance by Ms. Le Pen in Sunday's election will underline only too clearly the likely consequences of failure.

Above all, he has shown himself so far to be a politician with abundant reserves of courage, determination and above all luck. He will need all three, because he may find that winning the presidency proves the easy part.



Marine Le Pen's National Front Might Be Starting to Crack

By Emily Schultheis

MARSEILLE and HÉNIN-BEAUMONT, France — The election is not even over, yet this week, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the notorious former leader of the far-right National Front party, made news in France for appearing to offer an early post-mortem of his daughter's presidential campaign.

"If I'd been in her place, I would have had a Trump-like campaign," he told France Inter radio. "A more open one, very aggressive against those responsible for the decadence of our country, whether left or right."

It was a bold critique from a politician who, despite multiple runs at the presidency, never managed to come as close as his daughter Marine Le Pen: She is potentially expected to receive as much as 40 percent of the vote in the next round of the election, scheduled for May 7. The elder Le Pen's comments may, however, be a preview of what's to come.

For members of the National Front, there is seemingly ample reason to celebrate the results of this campaign, come what may this Sunday, and to applaud the woman who made them possible. Le Pen, who took over leadership of the party in 2011 with an aim to "demonize" what had previously been a fringe party known for its anti-Semitism and xenophobia, has already secured the National Front its biggest vote share ever in a presidential election and, though still widely predicted to lose in the second round, remains likely to make a strong showing.

Yet there are signs that trouble could be on the horizon. Marine Le Pen has spent six years walking a fine line between appealing to a broader swath of the electorate concerned by immigration and the EU and placating her party's far-right, hard-line base, which is above all interested in establishing a

cultural hierarchy that privileges what it views as traditional French ethnic-national identity. Divisions have so far been papered over for the sake of presenting a united election front, but the disparate coalition that currently makes up the National Front may not hold in the wake of electoral defeat. A loss could even force a shift away from the strategy that has made the party what it is today.

"One of the major questions that Marine Le Pen will face in the aftermath of the second round is exactly this: Why didn't the party get what was expected?" said Caterina Froio, an expert on the European far-right at Oxford University. "We will see the splits internal to the party occupying a major, major role in the post-electoral debate."

Were the National Front's divisions to spill out into the public after May 7, it wouldn't be the first time this has happened within a far-right party in Europe. Such groups tend to struggle when attempting transition from protest vehicles to parties seeking a role in government; such transitions require expanding the party's appeal in ways that tend to alienate its base. The leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Frauke Petry, for instance, recently announced that she would not be her party's leading candidate in national elections this fall, following months of party infighting over her proposals for relatively pragmatic policies.

Nor would it even be the first time internal splits have roiled the National Front itself. The party has faced more than one such split in its more than 40-year history, the most famous of which was when Bruno Mégret, Jean-Marie Le Pen's No. 2, left the National Front in 1998 over similar disagreements about the direction of the party. (Mégret found Le Pen's extremist positions too alienating.)

Should she lose, it's unlikely that Le Pen's role as leader of the National Front would be in immediate danger: Unlike the AfD, the National Front has historically been a family dynasty, and there are currently no real challengers who could take her place. "I don't see a leadership contest in the cards," said Dorit Geva, an expert on gender and the National Front at Central European University. "She is firmly in charge of the party, with enormous support and legitimacy." Should she make a strong enough showing, she could emerge from the election more firmly in charge than ever. But should the loss be brutal, it could empower elements within the National Front that had previously been quieted on the promise of electoral victory.

The National Front has existed since the 1970s, when Jean-Marie Le Pen, together with others, brought together supporters from several smaller neo-fascist and anti-Semitic groups. Although it did see some electoral victories over the years — primarily in local or parliamentary races, especially in the more conservative and Catholic south of France — under the elder Le Pen, the National Front was a party that seemed more interested in making noise than getting into government.

Since taking control of the National Front, the younger Le Pen, who unlike her father has been clear that she wants to govern, has gone to great lengths to distance herself from her father and his brand of politics. She has kept her focus on immigration, security, and an exit from the European Union while steering clear of traditional hot-button social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage. This strategy has helped her take the National Front to new heights, drawing in new voters who are disaffected by the current system and no longer consider it taboo to vote for the National Front.

This reimagining of the party's central message — away from conservative, anti-Semitic, hard-line Catholicism and toward security, immigration, and French identity — was spearheaded by Florian Philippot, one of Le Pen's top confidants and a vice president of the party. The rebranding has also entailed reaching out to certain groups that had previously considered the National Front anathema: Le Pen has tried to appeal to Jews as their primary defender against radical Islam, for example, while Philippot, who is gay, has helped steer the party away from emphasizing its opposition to same-sex marriage in an effort to bring in gay voters.

But this transition has at times met with resistance.

The original base of the party has not gone away — nor are these voters necessarily happy with what's being billed as a kinder, gentler National Front.

The original base of the party has not gone away — nor are these voters necessarily happy with what's being billed as a kinder, gentler National Front. One faction prefers the more socially conservative policies of Le Pen's father, particularly in the south of France where the National Front first formed a power base in the 1980s and 1990s. And this faction has a champion in Le Pen's niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who, at 22, was elected as the youngest member of parliament in a generation. Today, at 27, she is a darling of the U.S. far-right news site *Breitbart*, a major force within the party, and the self-proclaimed guardian of Jean-Marie Le Pen's legacy.

"I am the political heir of Jean-Marie Le Pen," Maréchal-Le Pen told the *Washington Post* this month. "At the Front National, we all are his heirs. He was a visionary."

Maréchal-Le Pen is a staunch Catholic who vehemently opposes

same-sex marriage and government funding for abortion. She has never explicitly made the kinds of anti-Semitic comments that her grandfather has — but stood up for him when Marine Le Pen threw him out of the party in 2015 for such comments.

Thus far, Maréchal-Le Pen has largely proved a political asset to her aunt: It was Maréchal-Le Pen who warmed up the crowd last week at a rally in Marseille, a city on the Mediterranean coast near Maréchal-Le Pen's parliamentary district and a traditional stronghold for the National Front. She has been a frequent and valuable surrogate in southern France, where National Front voters tend to be more socially conservative, and, as one of just two National Front members of parliament, has real standing within the party.

But there have been disagreements, too — including some very public ones, many of which have provided ample fodder for French media to report on the split between aunt and niece. In December, Maréchal-Le Pen advocated for reducing abortion coverage under the French health care system, a move that forced her aunt to take a position on the issue. Marine Le Pen responded with a flat-out rejection of her niece's

proposal, saying it is “not part of my program.”

At times, Marine Le Pen has publicly criticized her niece. In a late March interview with the women's weekly magazine *Femme Actuelle*, Marine Le Pen said, if elected president, there would be no place in her cabinet for Maréchal-Le Pen: “My niece is an MP. I don't owe her anything. I don't owe anyone anything. I have no favors to return.” She took it even further, criticizing Maréchal-Le Pen as “rather stiff, it's true — a bit like today's youth.”

However Maréchal-Le Pen felt about that comment privately, she shook it off publicly: Days later, she tweeted a photo of her smiling and embracing her aunt, writing, “Onward to victory!”

Online, however, where the National Front has a strong presence, the Philippot-Maréchal-Le Pen divisions have played out among supporters of both factions. After the December spat over abortion funding, supporters of Maréchal-Le Pen began tweeting with the hashtag #MarionEtMoi (“Marion and me”), many of them trashing Philippot. One user described Philippot as “slimy and disloyal”; another said he advocates for a “leftist line.”

Though Maréchal-Le Pen is likely too young to pose a real leadership challenge to her aunt, she could, in the face of a loss, use her clout with the party's conservative wing to put pressure on Marine Le Pen to shift her political and electoral strategy.

With the focus in this final stretch on presenting a united front and winning the presidency, few National Front voters at Le Pen's Marseille rally were interested in discussing the party's various factions — and those who would said they were the same kinds of squabbles any party has from time to time.

“No, no — it's like in a family,” said Daniel Peju-Guillot, a 62-year-old National Front supporter from Pertuis, a small town in the nearby Vaucluse department, adding that “not everyone can be in agreement” all the time.

Jacques Villa, a resident of nearby Montpellier who has supported the National Front for 20 years, said he believes Jean-Marie Le Pen was “too hard” and that Marine Le Pen has made the party “respectable.” But he also noted that he believes both Philippot and Maréchal-Le Pen are important for the party.

“I like Marion, I like Florian — a party needs different currents,” said Villa, 68. “It's normal, and everybody

works for a party in different ways, but that's that.”

It could be that the internal conversations about the future of the party — and whether Le Pen will be at the helm — will be put off until after France's legislative elections, which will be held in early June. Though a presidential victory seems unlikely, the National Front is still expected to make significant gains in the National Assembly, which would introduce a new class of National Front politicians with independent power and influence on the national political stage; how they would fit into what has until now been mostly a family affair remains to be seen.

“This is completely new territory for the National Front, because it has been a party run by a family dynasty,” Geva said. “And even though on one hand it looks like a big success that they have all these new members of parliament, the party's not used to functioning outside of that family dynasty.”

“I don't think it's clear where the National Front is going next,” she added.



Marine Le Pen rarely mentions gender issues, unless she's talking about Muslims

McAuley

By James

PARIS — In a week, Marine Le Pen could become the first woman to win the French presidency. But she sells herself that way only some of the time.

When Le Pen took to the stage to claim her victory in the first round of the vote, there was no talk of the proverbial glass ceiling or any mention of women, girls or gender.

But gender has played a significant, if subtle, role in Marine Le Pen's astonishingly successful 2017 campaign to bring her extremist party from Europe's political fringe into the halls of political power, analysts say. In her writings and speeches this year, it has operated quietly and constantly, and mostly with one particular purpose: stigmatizing Muslims.

“She's used the gender card for her own benefit,” said Cecile Alduy, the author of a well-known book on Le Pen's rhetoric and a professor of French politics at Stanford University. “But always, and only, to denigrate Islam. She hardly ever speaks of the feminine condition

except to target Islam and immigrants.”

In fact, in the public eye, Le Pen, the female leader of a party that has opposed women's rights throughout its 55-year history, has a complicated relationship with gender. On the one hand, she is ultimately the only female candidate seeking power in a political system still dominated by men. On the other, in her capacity as a deputy in the European Parliament, she has repeatedly voted against resolutions that advocates say would have improved women's health and safety.

[Marine Le Pen goes from fringe right-winger to major contender]

On Wednesday, Le Pen's campaign unveiled its new slogan for the final round of the vote: “Choose France,” written across a portrait of the candidate. Given that the French Republic has long represented itself with a female avatar — Marianne, the goddess of liberty, whose face adorns nearly every town hall and administrative building across the country — the choice was not without significance. In a bitterly contested presidential race whose focus is ultimately France's national

identity, the message, for some critics, was clear enough: Marianne is Marine, and Marine is white and blonde.

When she ran — unsuccessfully — for the presidency in 2012, she never emphasized her gender during her campaign and made no attempt to target female voters. This was probably a political calculation, experts say, based on the outcome of the previous French election in 2007, when Ségolène Royal, a Socialist who qualified for the final round of the vote, made appealing to women a major campaign objective. In the end, Royal was unsuccessful: Despite her pitch, most French women backed her opponent, the conservative Nicolas Sarkozy.

But this year, Le Pen, who has often panned identity politics as a “communitarianism” hostile to universal equality, appears to have changed her tactic.

In scenarios once difficult to imagine, she has been citing prominent feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Elisabeth Badinter on the campaign trail. She talks about herself as “a mother, a Frenchwoman.” And she frequently

appeals to “the fights of our grandmothers” when she speaks.

In France, the question of national identity has manifested itself most recently in debates about the female body — specifically whether certain types of face- or body-covering garments that some Muslim women wear violate the creed of a nominally secular society. In 2004, the French government banned the headscarf in public schools, and in 2010, the face-covering burqa. A major controversy of 2016 was over the “burkini,” a bathing suit that allowed certain Muslim women to enjoy the beach while respecting traditional codes of modesty.

Le Pen has been quick to capitalize on these long-brewing culture wars.

In February, for instance, she refused to wear a headscarf to a meeting in Lebanon with a prominent Muslim leader. Then she told reporters that her objection stemmed from her commitment to female emancipation.

[Growing anti-Muslim rhetoric permeates French presidential election campaign]

“They wanted to impose this on me, to present me with a fait accompli,”

she said then. "Well, no one presents me with a *fait accompli*."

In "Notebooks of Hope," the blog she maintains on her campaign website, Le Pen published a post on March 8, International Women's Day, titled "With Me, French Women Will Stay Free." In a significant break with her standard line, she wrote that she was speaking as a woman to the women of her country.

But the major issue she emphasized was not, for instance, the salary discrepancy between women and men, around 17 percent in France. Instead, more than half of the essay focused on what she called "a much more profound threat to the condition of women in our country today," which she identified as "the rise of Islamist fundamentalism in our neighborhoods and in our cities."

French feminist groups — a significant number of which have publicly rejected Le Pen — frequently say that her use of

Muslim immigrants exposes a deep hypocrisy in her beliefs.

After reports from German authorities that "North African or Arabic" migrants assaulted women in Cologne on New Year's Eve in 2015, Le Pen published an op-ed in which she wrote that "the migrant crisis signals the beginning of the end of women's rights."

But Claire Serre-Combe, a spokeswoman and activist for the prominent organization *Osez le féminisme!* (Dare to Be Feminist!), said that Le Pen has remained comparatively silent when reports of domestic violence perpetrated by white men have similarly captivated the public eye.

[Marion Maréchal-Le Pen: 'We've won the battle of ideas']

According to Alduy, Le Pen does not make too much of women's issues.

"She is very smart about not saying too much about women's rights:

**The
New York
Times**

In France's Poor Suburbs, Angry Voters May Skip Big Election (UNE)

Alissa J. Rubin
and Lilia Blaise

In the first round of the presidential election on April 23, voters in many poorer Parisian suburbs did turn out, but for the fiery candidate on the extreme left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who channeled the anger of communities neglected by the political system. And many also chose not to vote. That second option — not voting — is now a real possibility in the final round for those who previously voted for Mr. Mélenchon, even though they arguably have the most at stake.

Just how many voters abstain could determine whether Ms. Le Pen can upend expectations and beat Mr. Macron. The prevailing assumption is that a broad majority of voters — a so-called Republican Front that includes the poorer suburbs — will come together behind Mr. Macron in the name of turning back Ms. Le Pen and the far right. But a low turnout could threaten this belief and help Ms. Le Pen.

In France's poor suburbs, many French are of Arab extraction with parents or grandparents who came from Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia. Many are also from sub-Saharan Africa; the former French colonies of Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal and Togo; and what was once French Indochina, today's Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. For them, neither the right nor the left has delivered when it comes to making jobs more available and reducing discrimination.

Recent terrorist attacks have worsened the stigma attached to immigrants and Muslims. A number of the house searches after the terror attacks in and around Paris on Nov. 13, 2015, were conducted by police in Seine-St.-Denis, the political jurisdiction that includes Stains.

"The second round is a catastrophe," said Cheker Messaoudi, 29, a Frenchman of Tunisian heritage. "I think with Macron we are facing a war on the economy and with Le Pen we are facing a civil war, so it is bad both ways."

With an abstention rate of 38 percent including blank ballots in contrast to 23.5 percent nationwide in the first round of the presidential election, Stains reflects a particularly high degree of disillusionment. A community of about 38,000 inhabitants on the outskirts of Paris, it voted overwhelmingly for Mr. Mélenchon, a former Trotskyite, who finished fourth. With Mr. Mélenchon out, many people see the race, as expressed in an old French saying, as a choice between "la peste et le choléra" (the plague and the cholera).

To many people here, the policy proposals of both candidates are unattractive: Ms. Le Pen proposes a law-and-order program that would place binational Muslims at higher risk of expulsion from the country if they are considered even remotely connected to those suspected of having terrorist links. She also has inveighed against wearing a head scarf in public.

Contrary to her father, she does not propose to abolish abortion rights, but she let her niece, Marion, promise to cut funding to France's version of Planned Parenthood."

In an interview at her Paris office earlier this month, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, now 27 and an elected member of France's National Assembly from Vaucluse, said that she hated the word "gender."

"You mean 'sex'?" she asked. "Because I'm against 'gender theory.'"

Maréchal-Le Pen, like her aunt, a divorced single mother, has been a sharp critic of French abortion rights in recent years. But in the interview she disputed the allegation, saying only that she opposed "the unlimited reimbursement of abortion."

Asked about her experience as a woman in politics, Maréchal-Le Pen said she found it mostly an asset.

"I can catch people's attention and I have a stronger voice to connect with audiences, because of my youth and the way I express myself," she said.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Marine Le Pen, whose aides declined an interview, has carefully honed her own mode of expression.

In the essay she wrote for International Women's Day, she concluded: "With me, in the country of Brigitte Bardot, women will stay free!"

Bardot — a white, blonde French actress from the 1960s and a well-known fan of Le Pen — was prosecuted in 2008 for inciting racial hatred after she wrote that Muslims were "destroying our country by imposing their ways."

Mr. Macron, a former banker, is seen as close to the moneyed elite. He is disparaged for his support for Uber, which employs many people at low wages and often under poor conditions. He worked as a minister to the Socialist president François Hollande, who promised improvements that never arrived.

Sociologists and political scientists who study France's poorer suburbs with substantial minority populations, known here as *banlieues*, said neither candidate had given people much reason to vote for him or her.

"They are really tired of people talking about the *banlieues* but not doing anything," said Julien Talpin, a researcher in political science at the University of Lille. "Macron in the *banlieues* is a kind of big failure. He appears to be an embodiment of the establishment, of the elite, and people can tell he's not one of them."

Mr. Macron received 22 percent of the vote in Stains.

Thomas Kirsbaum, a sociologist, says the demographics and voting patterns of the poorer suburbs are far more complex than is widely understood. Living together are people of immigrant background, who vote on the far left or not at all, and some longtime residents, usually white, but also some immigrants, who vote on the extreme right. In Stains, nearly 15 percent of voters favored Ms. Le Pen.

Then there is a small, new class of young entrepreneurs, both Muslims

and non-Muslims, many of whom support Mr. Macron, who has made outreach to entrepreneurs a priority.

Mr. Talpin noted a big change from 2012, when the poor suburbs turned out in large numbers to vote for the Socialist Party candidate, Mr. Hollande; he was running against President Nicolas Sarkozy, whom many people opposed.

"They haven't really mobilized so much against Le Pen," he said, despite the xenophobic tone of her campaign. "They are somehow feeling they are experiencing that discrimination on a daily basis."

Sitting in his office not far from the central square in Stains, the mayor, Azzédine Taïbi, who is Muslim, suggested that it would take someone who inspired people, as well as effective government programs, to get people to embrace the political system again.

"This is an electorate that has nothing more to lose," he said. "For this reason, what I see in this election is a sense of abandonment from working-class people: Either we leave them in total hopelessness or we build hope with them through an alternative policy."

Yassine Belattar, a popular stand-up comedian who grew up in the suburbs, said that anti-government feeling was significantly stronger this year because of Mr. Mélenchon, who ratified people's sense of injustice and their fury at the system.

"He manipulates anger for his personal ends," said Mr. Belattar, referring to Mr. Mélenchon, adding

that the candidate's refusal to endorse Mr. Macron helps Ms. Le Pen. Mr. Mélenchon announced on Friday that he would not vote for Ms. Le Pen but refused to endorse Mr. Macron.

Mr. Belattar said he intended to vote for Mr. Macron.

Yet the sense of betrayal is acute among many people, not least toward the Socialists who had promised change but failed to follow through.

"Hollande visited the suburbs but these were visits for the media," said Slimane Abderrahmane, an assistant mayor in Bobigny, a neighboring suburb to Stains, where the abstention rate in the vote last

week was 37 percent (including blank ballots). Mr. Mélenchon took 43 percent of the vote.

"Hollande promised social and economic programs," he added. "He promised to end racial profiling. He was full of promises that people never saw come true."

Mr. Abderrahmane said he was voting for Mr. Macron only because he was afraid that the situation for Muslims would get markedly worse under Ms. Le Pen.

However, his friend Sylvain Legér, a municipal counselor who is white and has spent his whole life in Bobigny, said that after voting for Mr. Mélenchon in the first round, he

could not bring himself to vote for Mr. Macron. He instead will abstain.

"He's for globalization 100 percent," Mr. Legér said. "What does that mean when workers come from their own country, mix with French workers, and on one side you have young people who want to work and on the other you have people who come from elsewhere in Europe or from other countries and who work for less?"

On Friday, Catharine Bonté, 75, a former nurse's aide, recalled writing letters to past presidents seeking help.

"They all helped me a bit with social care," said Ms. Bonté, who is black. "And Giscard d'Estaing's wife even

came to support me once because I was a single mother and I was a victim of injustices and racism."

"But Hollande, he never helped me; he never answered my letters," she added. "So I understand the ones who gave up on voting. There is a lot of suffering here."

Correction: May 1, 2017

An earlier version of this article misspelled in some instances the surname of the far-left presidential candidate. As the article correctly notes elsewhere, he is Jean-Luc Mélenchon, not Mélanchon.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

European Union Doubles Down on Support for Iran Nuclear Accord

Emre Peker

TEHRAN—The European Union rallied behind Iran's nuclear deal during a high-level visit to the country over the weekend, vowing to safeguard the accord despite U.S. threats to scrap it and pledging to support the Islamic Republic's economy.

With less than three weeks before Iran's presidential elections, the EU's push to bring the country into the international fold pits Brussels against Washington, which is ratcheting up pressure on Tehran for "not living up to the spirit" of the 2015 nuclear agreement—even as it fulfills its commitments.

Differences over the Iran deal come as the EU puzzles over the U.S. stance on critical policies, while President Donald Trump seeks to execute a central campaign promise: rolling back his predecessor's landmark initiatives, including efforts to fight climate change and enact global trade agreements. A U.S. shift on the nuclear agreement would pose a particular risk in Iran, where hard-liners are challenging the moderate incumbent whose government clinched the accord, President Hassan Rouhani.

As Mr. Trump weighs his Iran policy, Brussels seeks to convince the White House that the settlement with Iran is important for global security, a cornerstone in efforts to stabilize the war-torn Middle East, and good for business. The president, however, has called it "the worst deal ever negotiated" and his administration has repeatedly cast doubts over its future.

"It is delivering for all sides and the European Union fully stands behind it...we expect all sides to respect the

deal," the EU's energy chief, Miguel Arias Canete, said in Tehran at a joint briefing with Iranian Vice President Ali Akbar Salehi, a chief architect of the agreement who oversees the country's nuclear agency.

The EU has emerged as a prime cheerleader of the Iran accord, providing financial, technical and regulatory support to help Tehran bolster nuclear safety and development capabilities. Brussels is also aiding the Islamic republic's push to join an international nuclear-fusion research project and benefit from the European Atomic Energy Community's capabilities.

Europe's engagement with Iran's civilian nuclear program was prescribed in the agreement to prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons in exchange for lifting economic sanctions. It also serves as a pillar of the EU's multipronged diplomatic and economic strategy.

Mr. Canete led a delegation of EU experts and officials, and dozens of European companies for two days of high-level meetings and business forums. Aside from nuclear issues, the main agenda item was energy—particularly investments in renewable resources—and climate change.

The trip showcased Brussels' push to support European businesses seeking to tap Iran's lucrative market and natural resources. The bloc also wants to bolster its energy security by adding Iran to its gas suppliers. Meanwhile, the EU is looking to enlist Tehran's cooperation in regional matters such as the Syrian war and global issues such as climate change.

Yet progress has been slow, especially in oil and gas investments. Energy giants once eager to enter Iran have been deterred by lengthy contract negotiations, U.S. sanctions targeting Iran's ballistic missile program and support for groups on terror-lists, and uncertainty over whether Mr. Trump will extend expiring waivers on some of the bans.

"There are two obstacles: financing on one the side—the fiscal responsibility—and how you engineer the petroleum contracts," Mr. Canete said in an interview with Western journalists. U.S. sanctions and concerns over due diligence, money laundering and financing of other activities also pose issues, he added.

Massoumeh Ebtekar, the Iranian vice president who was the spokeswoman for the hostage-takers at the U.S. Embassy after the Islamic revolution of 1979 and now oversees environment affairs, acknowledged that banks have been reluctant to resume transactions, citing outside pressures and policies. She expressed hope that as the nuclear deal holds financial relations will normalize, and said some European and Asian banks were already back doing business.

Iran's agreement with the world powers, coupled with a boost in oil production, helped propel its economy, which reversed a recession in 2015-2016 to expand by 7.4% in the first half of 2016-2017, according to the International Monetary Fund. Trade with the EU has jumped 79%, Mr. Canete said. The deal and its reverberations have been hotly debated ahead of the elections, Ms. Ebtekar said.

"The expectations for the nuclear deal are still very high and people hope to see it properly implemented," she said. Younger voters have especially pinned their hopes on Mr. Rouhani and the continuation of moderating trends, the vice president added.

Yet Iran hasn't stopped stoking tensions in the Middle East, U.S. officials say, pointing to Tehran's recent missile test and role in supporting embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Unlike its international partners, the U.S. didn't quickly move to sponsor investment and establish economic links with Iran. Now, the Trump administration is signaling a desire to at least renegotiate the nuclear deal despite international monitors confirming Tehran's compliance with the terms.

"There's no renegotiation, we don't see any benefit," Mr. Salehi said, adding that if the U.S. doesn't meet its commitments, Iran would take reciprocal action. Regardless of the election outcome, Iran would remain committed to the deal, he added.

Even though Mr. Trump has proved in Syria that he can pivot in days to military strikes from a noninterventionist stance, Iran's nuclear chief dismissed repeated threats from the White House. Tehran's attitude underscores questions over Mr. Trump's credibility as U.S. officials struggle to strike a common tune on major policies.

"We do not give much attention to the words," Mr. Salehi said. "So we wait and see what actual action will be taken, and then we will respond accordingly."

Editorial : The Kremlin turns its electoral meddling to Western Europe

BY NOW it should be clear that the new normal of Russian conduct on the international stage includes tampering with elections in Western democracies to boost candidates the Kremlin believes likely to do its bidding and to harass those who won't. Having done exactly that in the 2016 U.S. elections, President Vladimir Putin's intelligence agencies are now directing their subterfuge at Europe, including the continent's foremost economic powers: Germany and France.

The immediate targets of Russian cyber-meddling are Emmanuel Macron, the front-runner in the second and final round of France's presidential election, set for May 7, and think tanks associated with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose governing coalition faces elections this fall. Like Hillary

Clinton, whose campaign was similarly in the Kremlin's crosshairs, neither Mr. Macron nor Ms. Merkel has been shy about condemning Moscow's aggression in Ukraine. They have backed economic sanctions against Russia that have infuriated Mr. Putin.

The result has been a relentless series of cyberattacks originating in Moscow, in all probability directed by Russian military intelligence. In addition to Mr. Macron and Ms. Merkel, hacking targets have included the Foreign and Defense ministries of Denmark, a stalwart of the European Union and NATO. "This is part of a continuing war from the Russian side in this field," said Danish Defense Minister Claus Hjort Frederiksen, "and it's an eternal struggle to keep them away."

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Amid the flurry of reports about Russian-directed fake news, phishing, phony websites and other stratagems deployed by Mr. Putin's cyberwarriors, it's important to stay focused on the central outrage — namely, that the Kremlin, having succeeded in corrupting America's politics last year, is now intent on hijacking elections, democracy's most basic feature, in other key Western nations. That's why congressional Republicans leading investigations into the 2016 elections must do their jobs; Russian interference is an attack on core American values, not a partisan issue.

In February, the Macron campaign said it had detected more than 2,000 attempts to hack its campaign — most thought to have originated in

Russia — including cyber-assaults that crashed its website and a barrage of efforts to gain access to the email accounts of campaign officials, perhaps in an attempt to collect compromising information that could then be used as leverage, a favorite Kremlin tactic, or for embarrassment.

Moscow's tactics are designed to favor its preferred candidate in the May 7 runoff: Marine Le Pen, a right-wing nationalist who has taken loans from Russian banks, opposed sanctions against Moscow and heaped scorn on the E.U. Her policies would weaken Europe and drive a wedge among Western democracies — precisely the return on investment Mr. Putin is hoping for from his meddling.

Estonia Leads the Way in NATO's Cyberdefense

Thomas Grove

TALLINN,

Estonia—A hotel conference room in the Baltic republic of Estonia recently became the front line in a rehearsal for cyberwarfare, in an exercise that tested the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's readiness to repel hackers.

Last week, nearly 900 cybersecurity experts from across Europe and the U.S. participated in an event hosted in Tallinn to focus on defending a fictional country against a simulated cyberattack. The defenders faced real-world scenarios: a knocked-out email server, fake news accusing a NATO country of developing drones with chemical weapons, and hackers compromising an air base's fueling system.

The exercise—dubbed Locked Shields 2017—was unprecedented in complexity, organizers say. And for the Estonian cybersecurity team hosting the event, it marked the 10-year anniversary of cyberattacks that crippled the Baltic nation's nascent digital infrastructure. The attacks, blamed on Russia, swamped Estonian banking and government websites and threatened to take the country offline.

Since the 2007 cyberattacks, the former Soviet republic of 1.3 million has transformed into one of Europe's most tech-savvy countries. Its importance to NATO is vast: As well as playing a central role in hosting the alliance's deterrent force

in the Baltic region, Estonia is at the forefront of the alliance's defenses against hacking.

Following Russia's alleged hacking of the Democratic National Committee ahead of last year's U.S. presidential election, the urgency has never been greater.

To establish a stronger line of cyberdefense, Estonia established a volunteer body that can be called on to protect the country's digital infrastructure. The unit's volunteers donate their free time to regular training, much like a national guard. And they are responsible for defending everything from online banking to the country's electronic voting system if an attack occurred.

"We have lots of talented people who work in the private sector and we offered them the possibility of working once a week for a more patriotic cause," said Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the former Estonian president who oversaw the creation of the unit. "You basically think of the most dystopian future imaginable and try to defend against that."

The Russian government consistently maintains that it doesn't interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and denies orchestrating cyberattacks. But NATO officials say they have seen an increase in cyberattacks on their networks.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said earlier this year there were an average of 400

attacks a month on alliance networks, up 60% from the previous year. He didn't indicate who may have been behind them.

"Our aim is to give [people] the proper mind-set and capabilities to defend against attacks and to protect the lifestyle we are used to," said Aare Reintam, one of the organizers of the event.

During the exercise—the eighth in an annual series—teams faced not only simulated attacks on computer software, but also on critical infrastructure. Planners introduced another challenge: fake news. Participants in this year's exercise had to confront questions from a hostile press.

Organizers hope the experience gives other countries a chance to bolster their own defenses against cyberattacks. The Maryland National Guard has consulted with Estonia over its use of a cyber variant of a national guard. Neighboring Latvia, also a NATO member, implemented the cyber national guard model in 2014.

"We're not gearing up to go and invade anyone, we're worried about building up our defensive skill set," said Rain Ottis, a 36-year-old university professor who is a longtime organizer in Locked Shields. "We have much to protect and much to lose in terms of cyberspace and way of life."

While the event wasn't an official NATO training exercise, the alliance had an official presence, and its

NATO-accredited hosting center has been praised by Mr. Stoltenberg.

For Estonians, the Russian hacking threat is viewed as real and urgent. Earlier this year, Estonian parliamentarian Marko Mihkelson received an email that appeared to be from NATO, offering a link to what claimed to be an official analysis of a North Korean missile launch.

Mr. Mihkelson, who is chairman of the parliamentary foreign-affairs committee, didn't click the link. Instead, he flagged the email to cyber experts who said it employed the same malware used last year against the DNC by an alleged group of Russian hackers known as Fancy Bear.

"Their activity in cyberspace is more aggressive, and they're not even hiding it any more," the lawmaker said, blaming Russia for stepping up hacking attacks.

Some analysts say Fancy Bear's use of less-sophisticated phishing attacks that use fake links to compromise system networks is meant not to steal data as much as to announce Russia's growing cyber presence to Western countries.

"Since 2014 we've seen a real shift in Russian operations in which they didn't really care if they got caught," said Robert M. Lee, founder and chief executive of cybersecurity company Dragos.

Mcdonald-Gibson : Populism Has Not ‘Peaked’ in Europe. The Fight Continues.

Charlotte Mcdonald-Gibson

BRUSSELS — Dark clouds have been hovering over Europeans who believe in an integrated, tolerant and open Continent. First came Britain's vote to leave the European Union in June, followed by Donald J. Trump's election. Nationalists and right-wing populists seemed to be on the march. And Europhiles looked nervously ahead to a string of elections in 2017, any one of which could herald the moment when the European project began to unravel for good.

These people might be forgiven for savoring the feeling of respite recently.

The first round of France's presidential election, on April 23, put the passionately pro-European Union independent candidate, Emmanuel Macron, ahead of Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front. Polls now heavily favor Mr. Macron to beat Ms. Le Pen in the second round on Sunday. That election followed one in the Netherlands in March in which the openly Islamophobic and fervently Euroskeptic candidate, Geert Wilders, did worse than expected. And in Austria in December, the far right's Norbert Hofer narrowly lost the presidential election to Alexander van der Bellen, a former Green Party leader.

In light of all this, many now claim that right-wing populism has peaked, and the European Union has walked back from the brink of self-destruction. But while there are many positive

lessons to be drawn from the recent elections, triumphalism, which leads to complacency, would be dangerous and misplaced.

Something hasn't peaked until it has started to decline — and to date the far right has only been ascendant. Ms. Le Pen's National Front added around 1.2 million votes to its first-round result in 2012. Mr. Wilders's Freedom Party now has 20 seats in the Dutch Parliament, a gain of five from 2012. The previous candidate from Mr. Hofer's party received about 15 percent in the last presidential poll in 2010, while Mr. Hofer topped the vote in the first round and got 46 percent in the run off.

And the far right's influence isn't felt only at the voting booth. Derogatory language once unthinkable in a union shaped by its experiences during World War II are now commonplace. The second biggest party in the Netherlands is led by a man who has called people of Moroccan origin “scum.” Violent attacks by far-right extremists are on the rise. Germany reported nearly 10 hate crimes a day against migrants and refugees in 2016. Mayors across the Continent are under police protection because of threats from the extreme right. (And anyone under the illusion that the values of human rights, tolerance and dignity for all — enshrined in European Union treaties — can be taken for granted should visit the camps in Greece where around 62,000 refugees are trapped, many of them in dire conditions.)

But there is also plenty to celebrate for people who believe that Europe will be safer and more prosperous if countries work together and keep their doors open to the world, rather than retreat into nationalism and isolationism. And there are lessons to be learned. The biggest winners have been those leaders who embraced liberal, pro-European Union values with the same passion and emotion as the populists. Meanwhile, the traditional mainstream parties that have responded by shifting their own rhetoric toward the right have fared less well.

In the Netherlands, the Green Left party, led by the charismatic Jesse Klaver, openly embraced the Dutch tradition of tolerance and diversity with the same fervor that Mr. Wilders applied to his hatred of Muslims. Consequently, the party soared from four seats to 14. The party of the incumbent prime minister, Mark Rutte, on the other hand, lost eight seats after he made last-minute attempts to woo Wilders voters with an open letter saying that migrants who don't integrate should leave the country.

In France, Mr. Macron matched Ms. Le Pen's strident Euroskepticism and anti-refugee language with an unashamed passion for continental unity and multiculturalism. He praised Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, who he said “saved” Europeans' “collective dignity” when she opened her country's doors to those fleeing persecution. Speaking of the European Union, he declared that “we are Europe; we are

Brussels.” It looks set to pay off when French voters return to the polls on Sunday.

But this kind of language was utterly absent from the Remain campaign before the Brexit referendum, where leaders were too embarrassed or fearful to show such emotional support for the European Union and instead tried to make their case using facts and figures.

Europe's next crucial election will be held in Germany in September. The far-right Alternative for Germany is forecast to get its first seats in Parliament, riding on a wave of hostility to migrants. Ms. Merkel has responded by watering down some of her open-door policies, and has backed a partial ban on the facial veil. The good news is that Ms. Merkel's biggest challenger is not from the right, but a Social Democrat: Martin Schulz, a former president of the European Parliament who is even more pro-European Union and pro-refugee than she is.

In all these elections, there are many domestic concerns affecting the outcome and they cannot be seen solely through the lens of support for the European Union or immigration policy. But there is one overarching message: You win by matching the emotions of the nationalists, not by pandering to them.

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Europe Investors Bid Adieu to Political Jitters and Begin Buying

Riva Gold and Georgi Kantchev

Investors aren't waiting for the conclusion of the French election to put money back into Europe.

They are already flocking back, betting that the region has finally unshackled itself from fears of political turmoil.

Local stock markets just had their best week this year following the first round of the French presidential vote, and investors have poured money into the region's equity funds at the fastest pace since 2015. The euro climbed 1.6% against the dollar in its best week since July.

All this comes as investors start to look beyond political risks and focus on the continent's strong economic recovery.

“People are beginning to let go of European political risks as a theme,” said George Maris, portfolio manager at Janus Capital. JNS - 0.87% The underlying economy and earnings picture are becoming more evident now in Europe, Mr. Maris said.

Europe's buoyant equity markets are already reflecting much of that optimism, despite coming political events that had once concerned investors—chiefly the final round of voting in France's presidential elections and votes in Italy and Germany.

Germany's benchmark DAX index reached a record in the week following the French vote, while the Euro Stoxx 50 index of blue-chip eurozone stocks climbed 3.5%, with advances in Europe led by the banking sector. In dollar terms, the

Euro Stoxx 50 index is up almost 12% this year, nearly double the S&P 500's gains.

European equity funds recorded their strongest inflows since December 2015, with inflows of \$2.4 billion in the week to April 26, according to EPFR Global data.

Eurozone markets have rallied since the first round of French presidential elections on April 23, when pro-European centrist Emmanuel Macron won more votes than both Marine Le Pen, who pledged to take France out of the euro, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a far-left antiglobalist candidate. Mr. Macron is now seen as a heavy favorite in the second round on May 7, when he will face Ms. Le Pen.

A solid election victory for the Dutch political establishment in March has

also soothed fears of a continentwide lurch toward nationalism that had weighed on asset prices through this year.

Instead of politics, investors are focusing on economics and earnings.

Unlike previous years, analysts have continued to raise their projections for annual growth in earnings per share in the eurozone, according to J.P. Morgan.

First-quarter earnings in the Stoxx Europe 600 are expected to increase 5.5% from the first quarter of 2016, according to Thomson Reuters data.

Investors point to good signals from the economy. Business confidence and gauges of activity in the eurozone's manufacturing and

services sectors rose to six-year highs in April, despite uncertainty ahead of the French vote.

"European growth is the best it's been since the global financial crisis," said Robert Waldner, chief strategist at Invesco Fixed income. "The combination of supportive financial conditions and a solid economy should boost equities and credit markets in the region."

All this has ramifications for the European Central Bank as it contemplates an exit from a €2.3 trillion (\$2.5 trillion) bond-purchase program. On Friday, eurozone inflation data for April came in higher

than expected, reaching 1.9%. The ECB targets inflation close to 2%. The region has been battling low and at times negative inflation for much of the past three years.

The euro jumped after Friday's inflation figures to settle at \$1.0897. "The market is pricing out political risks and is pricing in a less cautious [European Central Bank]," said Vasileios Gkionakis, head of foreign-exchange strategy at UniCredit Research.

Mr. Gkionakis expects that if Mr. Macron becomes French president, the euro would go past \$1.10.

The ECB's signals in the months ahead are expected to be critical for the euro's performance toward the end of the year.

Risks remain. There is still a chance that Ms. Le Pen could win the French presidency, renewing questions about the future of the eurozone. Euroskeptical parties have a shot at winning Italian elections that will come by next year, at the latest, and Italy continues to struggle with weak banks and bleak economic prospects.

French economic growth slowed at the start of the year, while ECB President Mario Draghi highlighted

Thursday that consumer prices remain subdued across the euro area.

For now, the European party continues.

Assuming French elections go as expected, "it at the very least removes the immediate existential concerns about the eurozone and euro currency itself," said Abi Oladimeji, chief investment officer at Thomas Miller Investment.

The New York Times Tony Blair Urges U.K. to Stay Centered, and Close to Europe

Stephen Castle

"I personally think that when people see the details, they will hesitate," he said, referring to the complexity of any deal Mrs. May can negotiate.

Many would dispute that assertion. And thanks in part to his active role in pursuing the Iraq war, Mr. Blair is a diminished figure in Britain these days, particularly within his Labour Party, which has swung to the left.

But his skill in winning elections is undisputed. Capturing the political center ground, Mr. Blair was elected prime minister in May 1997, becoming, at 43, the youngest premier since Lord Liverpool in 1812, ending 18 years of Conservative government and prompting the optimistic "Cool Britannia" era.

Mr. Blair also later secured two more victories. Yet the Conservatives are now firmly back in power, and the Labour Party is led by Jeremy Corbyn, its most left-wing leader in decades, who trails Mrs. May badly in opinion polls.

Citing polls in Britain suggesting that Mrs. May will win in June, Mr. Blair urged Britons to vote for candidates who want to keep options open on Brexit, provide an opposition and

deny Mrs. May a "blank check."

Despite the aftershocks of the financial crisis, Mr. Blair believes that centrists can find answers to globalization. He described Emmanuel Macron, a contender for the presidency of France, as a force for change in Europe.

The key, Mr. Blair said, is "accepting globalization as a fact, accepting its benefits but preparing people for its consequences," rather than embracing protectionism or isolationism.

Speaking in his London office on Friday, Mr. Blair said he would "never give up" on the idea of remaining in the European Union, though he conceded that others think this is now impossible.

One theory about the coming elections is that if Mrs. May wins a significant parliamentary majority, she will gain the political space to compromise, and retain close ties to the European Union.

But Mr. Blair thinks she is headed in the opposite direction, appealing to supporters of the U.K. Independence Party, or UKIP, a right-wing, anti-European Union party, and to Labour voters who opted to leave the union.

"They're collapsing the UKIP vote into them, and they're going after the 'leave' vote from Labour," he said, sipping coffee (which he gave up as prime minister). "Now that doesn't strike me as a strategy designed to give you an easier ride on Brexit."

As for the timing of the election, he said it was "the optimal moment for Theresa May to say, 'Give me the strong mandate' before people actually know what this negotiation means."

When they realize the implications, Mr. Blair said, attitudes may shift. "All I say to you is it was 52 percent to 48 percent," he said, referring to the referendum vote to leave the European Union, "and you only need one in 15 of those who voted 'leave' to change their minds."

Though he plans to vote for Labour, Mr. Blair has pointedly declined to endorse Mr. Corbyn for prime minister, and Mr. Blair's prescription for progressive politics sounds like a veiled criticism of the current Labour leader's brand of socialism.

"Anything that looks like a form of conservatism of the left is never going to work, because the progressive forces only win when they understand the future and show

how they can make it work for people," Mr. Blair said.

"The chief characteristic of the world is accelerating change, and for the left it has got to be constantly modernizing," he argued when asked about the failures of center-left parties in continental Europe.

As for the United States, Mr. Blair said he was somewhat reassured by President Trump's first 100 days in office. "It is in everyone's interest that this is a presidency that is a force for stability and not instability," he said. "I think you can see in some of the positions adopted, there is somewhat of a shift from the candidate to the president."

As to his own future, he insisted that he was "not going back to front-line politics," but was creating an institute to promote a "renewed center ground."

Looking back to the sunny day when he moved into the prime minister's office — a "new dawn," as he called it then — Mr. Blair said that "lots of things have changed," before adding, "But the single thing that's changed the most is change itself, and that's accelerated."

The Washington Post After hard-left turn under Jeremy Corbyn, Britain's Labour Party on course for historic defeat

LONDON — In 2015, Britain's Labour Party tacked to the left, repudiating the middle-way philosophy that had won it three elections under Tony Blair. Voters responded by handing the party its worst defeat in three decades.

Rather than scramble back toward the center, Labour lurched further left. The party elected as its leader Jeremy Corbyn, a white-bearded baby boomer from the back benches who, like Bernie Sanders in the

United States, ignited an improbable movement among young activists with his attacks on the rigged capitalist system and unquestioned fidelity to socialist ideals.

Now, with less than six weeks to go before Britain votes once more, the Corbyn-led Labour Party is on course for an electoral beatdown so broad and deep it would make the drubbing the party took in 2015 look like a triumph.

The ruling Conservative Party has a double-digit lead over Labour in pre-election polls, and Prime Minister Theresa May stands to win a parliamentary majority that would have been the envy of Margaret Thatcher.

The grim outlook for Labour has prompted insiders to preemptively concede defeat; one former party leader has despaired that at 75, he's unlikely to see another Labour prime minister in his lifetime. There's

even a chance that the party could fall apart altogether.

The decline of Labour — architect of the country's vaunted National Health Service and one of two major parties in Britain for the past century — offers a cautionary tale for Democrats as they attempt to rebound from a humiliating 2016 loss to Donald Trump.

Corbyn may have captured the hearts of left-wing true believers. But

unless something dramatic changes before June 8, when Britain votes, that's not enough to win a national election.

"He's still very popular with a lot of Labour activists. But he's a long way from the center of gravity among the British people," said Martin Baxter, a political analyst who runs Britain's Electoral Calculus website. "The lesson for Democratic voters who thought that Bernie Sanders would revitalize the party is that in Britain at least, with Jeremy Corbyn, it's not worked out."

Nor has it worked out in other places where center-left parties have attempted to placate their increasingly radicalized grass roots by shifting toward the margins.

[A youth revolt in France boosts the far right]

In France, for instance, the Socialist Party — beleaguered after a humbling five years in power marked by double-digit unemployment and a slew of terrorist attacks — rejected more centrist alternatives and picked as its presidential nominee Benoît Hamon, a proud radical who championed a 32-hour workweek and a universal basic income.

But in the first round of the vote on April 23, Hamon mustered only an embarrassing 6 percent, having split the far-left vote with a Socialist defector, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who proposed nationalizing France's biggest banks and withdrawing from NATO. Neither made the final round.

Meanwhile, 39-year-old Emmanuel Macron, a former economy minister under the incumbent Socialist government, ran to the center via his own upstart movement that aims to combine strands from both the left and right. He is now the favorite to become the next president of France.

The Socialists, said French political analyst Gérard Grunberg, suffered for too long under "an establishment that's aging, tired and not active in modern communication."

Now the election outcome has left in doubt the future of the party, which helped build one of postwar Western Europe's most generous welfare states.

Britain's Labour Party is facing its own existential angst even before the country goes to vote.

"Labour is the party of the industrial proletariat — that was its original function. But Britain doesn't have an industrial proletariat anymore," Baxter said of a party that traces its roots to 1900 and the workers' rights movements of factory-saturated northern England. "So there's a big question as to what the Labour Party is for."

Corbyn has sought to offer an answer by promising a more "socially just society." That involves passionate opposition to the austerity policies enacted by the Conservatives since they came to power in 2010, ending 13 years of unbroken Labour rule.

The 67-year-old has pledged to halt the cuts in public services, to renationalize banks and energy firms and to consider a "maximum wage" on private-sector executives. Corbyn has also been highly critical of NATO, the British nuclear deterrent and the European Union — though he grudgingly backed "remain" in last year's Brexit vote.

To his enthusiastic backers — who delivered the north London lawmaker a pair of landslide victories in party leadership races — Corbyn's prescription for Britain is exactly what the country needs.

"I love him — best leader ever," said Richard Crook, a 57-year-old telephone engineer from southeast London who cheered Corbyn on at the lawmaker's campaign kickoff. "We've all had enough of PR politics. We want the truth. He is a bit like Bernie Sanders. He's leading us into a fight back."

Such fervent support helps explain why Corbyn has insisted he does not believe the polls.

"I'm out on the streets and the doorsteps and the meeting halls

every day, and that's not what I'm finding," he said during a campaign stop last week.

But there's no getting around the fact that the polls for Labour are dire. The Tories now have a working majority of 17 in the 650-member House of Commons. Projections — which no doubt influenced May's decision to call the snap vote — show that could widen to 150 or more.

[Britain's snap elections won't reverse Brexit. Here's why.]

The gains are forecast across the U.K.

In Wales, where the Conservatives haven't won in nearly a century, a recent survey showed them leading. In Scotland, where Labour ran a virtual one-party fiefdom until the 2015 vote, the party is now a distant third.

May has gone on the attack even in working-class northern English constituencies that haven't voted Conservative in decades. And she's doing so by invoking Corbyn at every turn.

"I know this city is one of the places that people call a 'traditional Labour area'," May said at a Thursday night rally in Leeds, a Yorkshire city that was once renowned for its wool mills. "But here — and in every constituency across the country — it may say Labour on the ballot, but it's Jeremy Corbyn that gets the vote."

The strategy is not hard to understand: Polls show that fewer than half of Labour's own voters favor Corbyn in a head-to-head matchup with May, and his broader approval ratings are abysmal. His rigidly leftist views and reputation for incompetent management help explain why.

"He seems like a throwback to the 1970s," said Tim Bale, a politics professor at Queen Mary University of London. "He's not someone voters have warmed to. They neither like nor respect him. Indeed, he seems a figure of ridicule."

Blair, the last Labour prime minister to win a national vote but a reviled figure among the party's leftist grass roots, is among those who have declined to endorse Corbyn. In an interview with Britain's Sky News last week, he said the identity of the prime minister after the June election is no mystery: "It'll be Theresa May."

That's because even as Corbyn has energized some voters, he's alienated many more.

"The man is living in a cloud cuckoo world," said Gareth Bell, a 34-year-old business development manager and, until now, Labour voter.

Bell, an ardent pro-European who recently defected to the centrist Liberal Democrats, said he was disenchanted by Corbyn's muddling stance on Brexit. Five of his friends have also left the party, he said, "and the ones that are still there are holding on by their fingertips. The moderates are so disappointed in him."

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

If Labour does lose in a rout, Corbyn may be forced to resign as party leader. The party could also split apart.

Whether that happens or not, the center-left the world over will have to work out what it stands for and stop re-litigating internal battles that date back decades, said Stewart Wood, a Labour member of the House of Lords and top adviser to former party leader Ed Miliband.

"The center-left is struggling everywhere with a philosophical malaise," he said. "It has to be about the next 20 years, not the last 30. Any party that's busy trying to pick its favorite moment from the past is in trouble."

James McAuley in Paris contributed to this report.

INTERNATIONAL

The
Washington
Post

Diehl : Almost a month after Trump's airstrike, Syria remains a barbaric battlefield

Nearly a month has passed since a sarin gas attack on the Syrian village of Khan Sheikhoun prompted President

Trump to bombard a government airbase with cruise missiles. The good news since then is that there have been no further attacks on

civilians using sarin — though the regime of Bashar al-Assad is believed to possess several tons more of it — or chlorine, though

"barrel bombs" filled with that chemical were routinely dropped on hospitals, schools and apartment buildings before April 7.

Now for the bad news, which has been almost entirely ignored by a White House that long ago moved on to other issues: Syrian and Russian planes have been pounding civilian targets across Syria on a daily basis with bunker busters, cluster bombs, phosphorus and barrel bombs packed with shrapnel. On a typical day last week, between 70 and 80 people were killed in the civil war, according to reports from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights — about the same number as died from the gas attack in Khan Sheikhoun.

Did Trump make Syrians any safer? “Sadly speaking, no,” says Raed al-Saleh, the head of the White Helmets civil defense organization, which told the world about the sarin attack. “They managed to stop the use of chemical weapons. But the killing still goes on with all the other kinds of weapons.”

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During a visit to Washington last week, Saleh grimly described the rubble his teams have been digging through in the past several weeks. There was the Shaam Hospital,

which was built into an underground cave six miles west of Khan Sheikhoun: Russian planes dropped six bunker busters on it on April 22, collapsing it and trapping doctors and patients under heavy stone. On Wednesday and Thursday, three more hospitals were bombed in the same northwestern region. In two of those cases, the planes came back to strike the White Helmets’ rescue operations.

The organization has become a prime Russian target since it provided evidence of the sarin attack, Saleh said. In the days after the U.S. missile salvo the White Helmets’ center in Khan Sheikhoun was bombed; the staff survived in an underground shelter but all their vehicles were destroyed. Two other nearby White Helmets facilities were struck, including in Saleh’s hometown of Jisr ash-Shugur. Meanwhile Russia launched an all-out propaganda offensive: In a briefing in Moscow on Thursday, a Foreign Ministry spokeswoman accused the group of collaborating with the Islamic State and an al-Qaeda affiliate as well as providing “the U.S. a pretext to carry out an act of aggression.”

In fact the White Helmets have been an island of humanity in an otherwise bleak barbarian landscape. As of last week they had counted nearly 91,000 people saved since Saleh helped to establish the group in rebel-controlled northern Syria in 2013. He says it now has 3,300 workers in 120 centers across nine Syrian provinces. One hundred eighty-four have been killed and 500 injured, including eight who died in an airstrike Saturday. Many of the casualties came in deliberate bombings of rescue operations. Yet Saleh says there is a long waiting list of volunteers ready to join when spots open up: “When we request 10 volunteers we get applications from 700.”

The rescuers are paid a monthly salary of about \$150 — but their real motivation is saving their friends and neighbors. “Every time they pull a baby from the rubble they find the motivation to go on,” said Farouq Habib, an aid and training coordinator for the group. International support has been heavy: Most major Western governments have supplied funding, including more than \$20 million from the Obama administration; an online campaign has attracted more than

200,000 small donors and more than \$12 million in contributions.

The White Helmets have become a leading candidate for a Nobel Peace Prize. But the 34-year-old man who leads them is anything but sanguine. Wearing a black suit, black shirt and black tie with purple stripes, Saleh spoke in a funereal monotone as he described the group’s strategy for avoiding Russia’s “double-tap” strikes on rescuers: “We don’t have one. We have to be available immediately at the site. Minutes or seconds can save lives. So we don’t have the option to wait.”

When I asked Saleh how Syria’s carnage could end, he cited what he said was the only day since 2011 when no Syrians were killed: Feb. 28, 2016, when a cease-fire brokered by the United States and Russia went into effect. It soon crumbled, but Saleh says that is the only way out: “a political solution” that comes about from “serious will from the major political powers.”

In other words, a single U.S. airstrike isn’t enough. Unless and until Trump is willing to do more, the White Helmets will still be digging through rubble.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Palestinian President Pressures Hamas to Give Up Control of Gaza

Rory Jones

TEL AVIV—

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas is pressuring Hamas to cede control of the Gaza Strip to his Palestinian Authority in a high-stakes gambit to convince the White House he can strike a deal with Israel on behalf of the Palestinian people, according to Palestinian officials.

The move comes ahead of a meeting this week with President Donald Trump in Washington, as Mr. Abbas seeks to convince the White House he controls both the West Bank and Gaza, the two territories that would make up a negotiated future Palestinian state.

In recent weeks, the 82-year-old president has imposed a financial squeeze on Gaza by slashing the wages of teachers, doctors and other workers and refusing to reduce a tax on fuel used by the strip’s power plant. The Authority also has told Israel it would stop paying for electricity supplied by Israeli plants to Gaza, accounting for roughly 30% of power in the territory, Israeli authorities said.

Now, Mr. Abbas is threatening to make cuts to education and health care unless Hamas immediately relinquishes power to the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in a step toward participation in any future

parliamentary elections, according to Tayeb Abdul Rahim, an aide to Mr. Abbas. The Authority wants to return to the administration of all offices in Gaza and eventually reinstate its security forces there. Elections could see Hamas parliamentarians join in governing with the Authority.

“Time has come for Hamas to hand over the Gaza Strip to the legitimate Palestinian Authority,” said Mr. Rahim.

Mr. Trump has said he wants to negotiate a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, which would be a major foreign-policy win for his administration. A peace push could also help the U.S. launch a coalition of Sunni Arab nations with Israel against Iranian expansion in the Middle East.

The Trump administration hasn’t articulated a policy on working with the Palestinian leader, however. It initially set out a pro-Israel agenda, with a promise to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and discussed abandoning a two-state solution.

But Mr. Trump has moved to a more impartial approach to the conflict. He appointed as peace envoy his longtime lawyer Jason Greenblatt, who in recent months visited both Israel and the Palestinian Authority-

controlled areas of the West Bank and impressed officials on each side. After the visits, the Trump administration invited Mr. Abbas to the White House. The White House also has said it is examining a presidential trip to Israel in May.

“The president looks forward to hosting President Abbas at the White House and continuing discussions on how best to achieve lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians,” said Michael Anton, spokesman for the National Security Council.

For the White House, Mr. Abbas’s visit is a key component in efforts to maintain momentum in Mr. Trump’s push for a peace agreement. White House officials are encouraged by Mr. Abbas’s initial moves on Hamas, but officials said they would still like to see him do more.

“We want some movement,” a senior U.S. official said, citing the need for more action from the Palestinian leader to prevent the incitement to violence against Israelis and to remove anti-Israeli content from school textbooks.

The Palestinian Authority has said that it manages security with Israelis in the West Bank and can’t stop all Palestinians from inciting violence against Israelis.

Mr. Abbas’s pressure on Hamas is politically risky. His popularity has flagged after ten years of rule that has seen greater settlement construction in the West Bank and no peace agreement. He faces the prospect that cuts to Gaza will only deepen the divide between the two territories. Even ahead of the cuts, two-thirds of Palestinians wanted the leader to resign, according to a poll in March by the Ramallah-based Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research.

“Hamas has undermined Abbas’s sense of authority,” said Aaron David Miller, vice president at the Woodrow Wilson Center and former adviser to secretaries of state on Arab-Israeli negotiations. “He can’t represent himself as the leader that will silence all the guns of Palestine” in the event they make a deal, he said.

The Palestinian leader is also facing pressure from Marwan Barghouti, a Fatah official serving five life sentences in an Israeli jail for his involvement in killing Israelis. For two weeks, Mr. Barghouti has been on a hunger strike to protest prison conditions. But the campaign also appears aimed at boosting his popularity and undermining the position of Mr. Abbas, who shuns violent resistance and is willing to work with the Israelis.

Despite the domestic risks, Mr. Abbas knows that a peace agreement that maintains a Hamas government in Gaza is broadly unpalatable to a U.S. government that has designated the group as a terrorist organization.

"They ultimately need to be uprooted from Gaza," Daniel Shapiro, former U.S. ambassador to Israel and a senior fellow with the Tel Aviv-based Institute for National Security Studies, said of Hamas. "And the Palestinian Authority has to be part of that formula."

Hamas isn't likely to concede its territory easily, though. The group has said it is ready to form a national unity government with Fatah to run the Authority and govern Gaza but the two sides would need to work out the details.

"Gaza is not a car that Hamas will give to the PA," Hamas spokesman

Abed Al Lateef al Kanoo said, referring to the Authority.

Some Israelis and Palestinians fear Hamas would rather launch another war with Israel than concede Gaza. A 50-day conflict in 2014 between Israel and Hamas began, in part, after Israeli and Egyptian officials shuttered Gaza's borders and squeezed the Islamist group financially.

"A war is always an option for Hamas," said Mohammed Abu Jayab, editor-in-chief of Gazan weekly newspaper Al Eqtesadia.

But pressure on Hamas to compromise is growing. It has come under severe financial strain, as the Authority previously directed roughly a third of its budget to Gaza, and it is isolated diplomatically.

Gulf nations have barely disbursed a quarter of the money they pledged to rebuild Gaza after the last war, according to the World Bank.

Turkey, one of Hamas's key backers, resumed diplomatic ties last summer with Israel and hasn't appeared willing to jeopardize that relationship by significantly supporting the Islamist movement.

Gazans also are frustrated with Hamas. Thousands took to the streets in January to protest power cuts of more than 12 hours a day, leading to clashes with Hamas forces. Blackouts are likely to get worse after Mr. Abbas's refusal to help pay for power.

For months, Authority officials have warned payments to Gaza would need to be slashed. Assistance from the international community to the Authority fell to 6% of GDP last year, from 32% in 2008, according to the World Bank.

Gazan Hamouda Nassar worked in the Palestinian Authority police force before Hamas took over the strip in 2007. The 42-year-old hasn't

worked in security since but the Authority continued to pay his wage in the expectation that it would return Gaza. Last month, the Authority cut that salary by 30% to 1,000 Israeli shekels (about \$275).

Mr. Nassar now can't afford to pay for a generator during the power blackouts. His teenage daughter, whose final exams are in May, studies by the light of her mobile phone. He's worried that Mr. Abbas's gamble will only worsen the situation.

"He wants to put as much pressure as possible on Hamas in order to make them give up," Mr. Nassar said. "I don't see Hamas responding in a positive way."

—Carol E. Lee in Washington, Abu Bakr Bashir in Gaza City and Nuha Musleh in Ramallah contributed to this article.

The
Washington
Post

Josh Rogin : If Trump has a strategy on Israeli-Palestinian peace, it's remaining a secret

If President Trump has a real strategy to make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, it's such a tightly held secret that even the parties involved don't seem to know what it is. When Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visits the White House this week, that mystery will be on full display.

"I want to see peace with Israel and the Palestinians," Trump said last week. "There is no reason there's not peace between Israel and the Palestinians — none whatsoever."

Setting aside the patent absurdity of that statement, what's clear is that the White House is willing to devote time and attention to new Middle East negotiations and the president wants to be personally involved.

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The problem is, there's a glaring gap between Trump's high-flying rhetoric and his still-unexplained strategy. As the Abbas visit approaches, there's no clarity in sight.

Last week, a high-level Palestinian delegation led by chief negotiator Saeb Erekat traveled to Washington to prepare for the visit. The group met with Trump's envoy on Middle East peace, Jason Greenblatt, as well as with White House and State Department officials.

Both sides are keeping expectations for the Trump-Abbas meeting low. Palestinian officials tell me the Trump team doesn't seem to know exactly what Trump wants to discuss or propose. White House staff declined to say anything at all about their goals for the meeting. Some experts think that's because there's no depth to Trump's approach.

"How you deal with Abbas is directly related to a broader strategy, which unless they haven't announced it, they simply don't have," said former Middle East negotiator Aaron David Miller. "It's hard to see that this is going to turn out to be much more than a stage visit."

In truth, there really isn't much Trump and Abbas can agree to. There's little hope that Abbas will give Trump what the U.S. side wants, namely a promise to address the issue of incitement in the Palestinian territories or a pledge to curb the Palestinian Liberation Organization's policy of paying families of terrorists who have attacked Israelis and Americans.

Likewise, there's no prospect that Trump will deliver what Abbas wants — a commitment to press the Israelis into a freeze of settlement-building that would meet Palestinian standards. The United States has secured an informal agreement with the government of Benjamin Netanyahu to place some limits on

building new settlements, a version of the "build up, not out" framework from the George W. Bush administration. But that falls short of what Abbas says is needed before negotiations can begin.

The meeting could be significant by itself, if Trump and Abbas can establish a personal rapport to build on in the future. But therein also lies a risk.

"The president has never met Abbas and that makes it an important meeting," said former White House and State Department official Elliott Abrams. "But if he forms the opinion that Abbas is not strong enough to do a deal and then implement it, that will have a real impact on American policy."

Sure to be present at the meeting is Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who is overseeing Greenblatt's work. Kushner and his wife, Ivanka Trump, will reportedly join Donald Trump for a trip to Israel in late May, one that may also include a stop in Saudi Arabia.

Administration officials sometimes talk about an "outside-in" approach whereby a framework for peace negotiations would be arranged with Arab states and then folded into the Israeli-Palestinian dynamic. Details of that plan are hazy, and the Trump team has yet to explain how it plans to incentivize Arab states to buy in.

Martin Indyk, who served as President Barack Obama's special envoy on this issue, said Trump's approach of trying to find avenues to pursue is positive but cannot overcome the inability of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to make the political compromises necessary for real progress.

"Based on experience, there's one principle that I operate on. By American willpower alone, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be resolved," he said.

There are things the Trump team can do constructively, including bolstering Abbas by promoting economic development in the West Bank, Indyk said. Making small progress on the margins could improve the chances for peace down the line.

But by going for headlines, not trend lines, Trump is raising expectations and putting his administration's already-thin credibility at risk. There can be dangerous consequences in the Middle East when high-stakes diplomacy fails. The new administration would be better off recognizing that peace is not in the offing.

U.S. watchdog finds major internal flaws hampering Afghanistan war effort

KABUL — Afghanistan's security forces are experiencing "shockingly high" casualties and conflict has displaced record numbers of civilians, a U.S. government watchdog said in a report Sunday on the grim challenge facing the country as it confronts the Taliban and other insurgencies with drastically reduced support from the United States and other NATO partners.

In its quarterly report to Congress, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) urged the Trump administration — which is reviewing U.S. policy toward Afghanistan at a time of sustained Taliban aggression and diminished American assistance — to take a hard look at its programs and priorities and to focus aid more narrowly.

"Security is the most obvious and urgent challenge" to rebuilding the country after 16 years of war, the report said. It noted that since 2002, 61 percent of the \$71 billion in U.S. reconstruction aid has gone to train, equip and support the 300,000-strong Afghan defense forces.

Nevertheless, the SIGAR report said, those forces continue to be hampered by internal problems — such as poor leadership and corruption — as well as by an agile and determined foe that is making it difficult for them to control territory. It noted that more than twice as many Afghan soldiers and police personnel were killed in 2016 as the 2,400 U.S. troops lost since 2001.

Turkey Purges 4,000 More Officials, and Blocks Wikipedia

Patrick Kingsley

It also ends opposition hopes that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan may ease the crackdown and build greater national consensus after his narrow victory in a recent referendum to expand the power of his office.

Instead, Mr. Erdogan has accelerated the process. Since the referendum, and before Saturday's move, the police had detained more than 1,000 workers and suspended a further 9,000 accused of having ties to an Islamic group founded by a United States-based cleric, Fethullah Gulen.

The organization was once allied with Mr. Erdogan, but is now accused by the government of masterminding the failed attempt to overthrow him in July. Those purged

[Afghan generals face charges in crackdown on military corruption]

In an interview here Sunday, Inspector General John F. Sopko noted that senior U.S. military officials, including Gen. John W. Nicholson, the commander of the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan, have described the conflict as being at a stalemate and have suggested that several thousand more U.S. troops are needed to tip the balance. The current troop level is 8,400.

"If there is a stalemate, the question is why and how it can be improved," Sopko said. "The why is corruption, the why is poor leadership. ... If leadership is poor, the people below don't care, and they wonder why they have to die."

The report said the Afghan armed forces are also plagued by illiteracy, an attrition rate of nearly 35 percent and overreliance on highly trained special forces for routine missions. A previous report by Sopko's office described military officers reselling supplies and food intended for combat troops. Such problems, the new report said, are "corrosive" and can undercut civilian progress in health care, rule of law and efforts to counter the soaring drug trade.

[Afghan forces withdraw from key district in embattled Helmand province]

A recent example of the deadly cost of these weaknesses was the Taliban attack on April 21 that killed at least 140 soldiers on a large Afghan army base in northern Balkh

on Saturday were also accused of having connections to Mr. Gulen.

The crackdown has also affected leftists, liberals and members of the secular opposition across most sections of public life, many of whom have long voiced their opposition to the Gulen movement. Those in jail or out of a job include academics, public transport employees, teachers and at least 120 journalists — more than in any other country in the world.

It was not immediately clear exactly why Wikipedia was targeted, but the ban is the latest salvo against freedom of expression in Turkey. More than 150 news outlets have been shut down by decree since July, according to one estimate.

The government justified the ban by claiming that the site's articles

province. It was the deadliest single insurgent attack of the war, and some of the contributing factors were the same systemic flaws mentioned in the report.

One factor was poor leadership based on nepotism. Sopko said the commander of the Balkh base was known as well connected but ineffective. Another was shoddy vetting of military personnel; several of the people suspected of carrying out or helping in the attack were military recruits or former base workers. Sopko said a new system of biometric identification had been planned for all soldiers but was taking far too long to implement. And, ultimately, Afghan special forces had to come in and quash the assault though the base trains thousands of soldiers.

The report, titled "Reprioritizing Afghanistan Reconstruction," also described a panoply of problems across Afghan society and government that hinder national reconstruction efforts, even as the international community has pledged substantial new aid through 2020 and wants as much of that aid to be spent and managed by Afghan agencies as possible.

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"Opium production stands at near record levels," the report noted. "Illiteracy and poverty remain widespread. Corruption reaches into every aspect of national life. The rule of law has limited reach.

constituted "a smear campaign against Turkey in the international arena," according to a statement published by Anadolu Agency, the state-owned news wire.

The ban followed Wikipedia's refusal to remove content that the Turkish government found offensive, the government said.

Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia's founder, criticized the decision on Twitter. "Access to information is a fundamental human right," he wrote. "Turkish people I will always stand with you to fight for this right."

In another restriction announced this weekend, the government decreed that television channels could no longer broadcast dating programs, a staple on Turkish daytime TV and a major source of advertising revenue.

Multiple obstacles deter investors. ... The ranks of the jobless grow as the economy stagnates."

Sopko said that the United States has a cooperative and "willing partner" in the government of President Ashraf Ghani and that senior Afghan officials "really care about improving their country," but he said they have been frustrated by old systems of ethnic patronage and palm-greasing that discourage building institutions based on professionalism and merit.

He said that the government has made noticeable progress on some U.S.-backed programs, such as a new anti-corruption task force, but that even this effort has taken only "baby steps" and needs to prosecute some "mafia big fish" to bring real change and build public confidence.

In its recommendations, the report said the White House and Congress need to be prepared to perform "triage" on less successful projects, impose more rigorous standards of management and accountability for all programs, prevent aid funds from inadvertently reaching insurgents, establish a new strategy to combat opium production and drug trafficking, and decide whether reductions made in U.S. military and civilian oversight need to be reversed.

The shows had been criticized by people from across the country's liberal-conservative divide, with over 120,000 people signing a petition against the format.

Feminists said the spiteful interactions that the shows sometimes encouraged were debasing to the contestants. Conservatives disliked how they often fast-tracked the betrothal process, which they said undermined the institution of marriage.

"Some of these shows are really out of control," Numan Kurtulmus, a deputy prime minister, said in a television interview before the ban. "They are against our family values, culture, faith and traditions."

Exiled Iranian TV Executive Is Assassinated in Istanbul

Patrick Kingsley

ISTANBUL — A dissident Iranian television executive was assassinated in Istanbul on Saturday evening, months after he was sentenced in absentia to a six-year prison term by an Iranian court for spreading propaganda.

Saeed Karimian, the owner of Gem TV, a network of television channels that broadcasts in Farsi and other languages, was shot as he drove through an upscale neighborhood of northern Istanbul "minutes after leaving his office," Gem announced on Sunday. Also killed was his Kuwaiti business partner, whose name has not been released.

The assailants fled, and their vehicle was found abandoned and partly destroyed in another part of Istanbul, according to reports by Gem and several Turkish news outlets. Sukru Genc, the mayor of the district in Istanbul where the attack occurred, confirmed the killing in an interview. The attackers' motive was not immediately clear. Mr. Genc said he had been told by

police investigators that Mr. Karimian had been killed because of "a dispute over money."

Mr. Karimian's company has made dozens of soap operas and holds the broadcasting rights to several famous Turkish dramas. Gem, which has offices in Istanbul and Dubai, has expanded beyond its Farsi programming and also broadcasts in Arabic, Azeri and Kurdish.

"At this stage, all I know is that the most likely motivation behind the assassination could have been financial disputes between Mr. Karimian and his wide networks of business partners from Dubai to Malaysia," said Ali Vaez, the senior Iran analyst for the Crisis Group, a research institute focusing on international affairs.

Others sensed the hand of the Iranian state. The National Council of Resistance of Iran, an exiled opposition group, claimed that Mr. Karimian was assassinated by Iran's Revolutionary Guard on the orders of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the

country's head of state. Iran has been accused of assassinating Iranian exiles in the past, most recently Abbas Yazdi, an Anglo-Iranian businessman who was kidnapped in Dubai in 2013 and is now thought to be dead.

In January, an Iranian court announced in a judicial newspaper that Mr. Karimian had been sentenced to six years in prison for spreading propaganda against the country's Islamic government, and acting against national security. The Iranian government sees westernized entertainment, such as the types of series broadcast by Mr. Karimian, as a threat to the conservative society it has built in Iran since seizing power in a revolution in 1979.

While satellite dishes are banned in Iran, they are widely used, and millions of Iranians watch Gem's programming. "The regime is very sensitive about culturally subversive media and entertainment broadcast from overseas," said Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for

International Peace. "Khamenei believes this is precisely the U.S. strategy — to overthrow the Islamic Republic via a soft revolution," he said.

Mr. Karimian had suggested that he hoped his work would change Iranian society. "We will do our best to create an Iran one day that we can take pride in," Mr. Karimian said in comments that were broadcast posthumously on his own network on Sunday. Analysts said it was possible that Mr. Karimian might have been targeted by the state. "One cannot rule out the possibility that he posed a serious threat to a powerful stakeholder in Iran," Mr. Vaez said. But he added that Mr. Karimian "doesn't fit" the profile of someone important enough for the Iranian government to assassinate on foreign soil.

The Iranian Embassy in Turkey, the Turkish Foreign Ministry and Gem did not respond to requests for comment.

How the Republican right found allies in Russia (UNE)

Growing up in the 1980s, Brian Brown was taught to think of the communist Soviet Union as a dark and evil place.

But Brown, a leading opponent of same-sex marriage, said that in the past few years he has started meeting Russians at conferences on family issues and finding many kindred spirits.

Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage, has visited Moscow four times in four years, including a 2013 trip during which he testified before the Duma as Russia adopted a series of anti-gay laws.

"What I realized was that there was a great change happening in the former Soviet Union," he said. "There was a real push to re-instill Christian values in the public square."

A significant shift has been underway in recent years across the Republican right.

On issues including gun rights, terrorism and same-sex marriage, many leading advocates on the right who grew frustrated with their country's leftward tilt under President Barack Obama have forged ties with well-connected Russians and come to see that country's authoritarian leader, Vladimir Putin, as a potential ally.

The attitude adjustment among many conservative activists helps explain one of the most curious aspects of the 2016 presidential race: a softening among many conservatives of their historically hard-line views of Russia. To the alarm of some in the GOP's national security establishment, support in the party base for then-candidate Donald Trump did not wane even after he rejected the tough tone of 2012 nominee Mitt Romney, who called Russia America's No. 1 foe, and repeatedly praised Putin.

[Inside Trump's financial ties to Russia and his unusual flattery of Vladimir Putin]

The burgeoning alliance between Russians and U.S. conservatives was apparent in several events in late 2015, as the Republican nomination battle intensified.

(The Washington Post)

President Trump addressed the National Rifle Association annual conference in Atlanta on April 28. "You came through for me, and I am going to come through for you," Trump said to cheers. President Trump addressed the NRA conference in Atlanta on April 28. "You came through for me, and I am going to come through for you," he said. (The Washington Post)

Top officials from the National Rifle Association, whose annual meeting

Friday featured an address by Trump for the third time in three years, traveled to Moscow to visit a Russian gun manufacturer and meet government officials.

About the same time in December 2015, evangelist Franklin Graham met privately with Putin for 45 minutes, securing from the Russian president an offer to help with an upcoming conference on the persecution of Christians. Graham was impressed, telling The Washington Post that Putin "answers questions very directly and doesn't dodge them like a lot of our politicians do."

The growing dialogue between Russians and U.S. conservatives came at the same time experts say the Russian government stepped up efforts to cultivate and influence far-right groups in Europe and on the eve of Russia's unprecedented intrusion into the U.S. campaign, which intelligence officials have concluded was intended to elect Trump.

Russians and Americans involved in developing new ties say they are not part of a Kremlin effort to influence U.S. politics. "We know nothing about that," Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov said. Brown said activists in both countries are simply "uniting together under the values we share."

It is not clear what effect closer ties will have on relations between the two countries, which have gotten frostier with the opening of congressional and FBI investigations into Russia's intrusion into the election and rising tensions over the civil war in Syria.

But the apparent increase in contacts in recent years, as well as the participation of officials from the Russian government and the influential Russian Orthodox church, leads some analysts to conclude that the Russian government probably promoted the efforts in an attempt to expand Putin's power.

"Is it possible that these are just well-meaning people who are reaching out to Americans with shared interests? It is possible," said Steven L. Hall, who retired from the CIA in 2015 after managing Russia operations for 30 years. "Is it likely? I don't think it's likely at all. ... My assessment is that it's definitely part of something bigger."

Interactions between Russians and American conservatives appeared to gain momentum as Obama prepared to run for a second term.

At the time, many in the GOP warned that Obama had failed to counter the national security threat posted by Putin's aggression.

But, deep in the party base, change was brewing.

At least one connection came about thanks to a conservative Nashville lawyer named G. Kline Preston IV, who had done business in Russia for years.

Preston said that in 2011 he introduced David Keene, then the NRA's president, to a Russian senator, Alexander Torshin, a member of Putin's party who later became a top official at the Russian central bank. Keene had been a stalwart on the right, a past chairman of the American Conservative Union who was the NRA's president from 2011 to 2013.

Neither Keene nor Torshin responded to requests for comment. An NRA spokesman also did not respond to questions.

Torshin seemed a natural ally to American conservatives.

A friend of Mikhail Kalashnikov, revered in Russia for inventing the AK-47 assault rifle, Torshin in 2010 had penned a glossy gun rights pamphlet, illustrated by cartoon figures wielding guns to fend off masked robbers. The booklet cited U.S. statistics to argue for gun ownership, at one point echoing in Russian an old NRA slogan: "Guns don't shoot — people shoot."

Torshin was also a leader in a Russian movement to align government more closely with the Orthodox church.

"The value system of Southern Christians and the value system of Russians are very much in line," Preston said. "The so-called conflict between our two nations is a tragedy because we're very similar people, in a lot of our values, our interests and that sort of thing."

Preston, an expert on Russian law whose office features a white porcelain bust of Putin, said he had told Tennessee friends for years not to believe television reports about the Russian leader having journalists or dissidents killed.

Preston was an international observer of the 2011 legislative elections in Russia, which sparked mass street protests in Moscow charging electoral irregularities. But Preston said he concluded that the elections were free and fair.

By contrast, Preston said he and Torshin saw violations of U.S. law — pro-Obama signs posted too close to a polling place — when Torshin traveled to Nashville to observe voting in the 2012 presidential election.

In Russia, Torshin and an aide, a photogenic activist originally from Siberia named Maria Butina, began building a gun rights movement.

Butina founded a group called the Right to Bear Arms, and in 2013 she and Torshin invited Keene and other U.S. gun advocates to its annual meeting in Moscow.

The event, where about 200 people gathered at Moscow's convention center, included a fashion show in which models donned "concealed carry" garments with built-in pockets for weapons.

One American participant, Alan Gottlieb, founder of the Second Amendment Foundation, recalled that Torshin and Butina took him and his wife out for dinner and gave them gifts that displayed research into their interests — exotic fabric for Gottlieb's wife, a needlepoint enthusiast, and for Gottlieb, commemorative stamps that Torshin received as a member of the Russian legislature.

"They wanted to keep communications open and form friendships," Gottlieb said.

Butina, now a graduate student at American University in Washington, told The Post via email that her group's cause is "not very popular" with Russian officials and has never received funding from the government or from the NRA. She said she has never worked for the government and added that she and the American activists she has befriended simply share a love of gun rights.

"No government official has EVER approached me about 'fostering ties' with any Americans," she wrote.

Hall, the former CIA officer, said he was skeptical. He said he did not think Putin would tolerate a legitimate effort to advocate for an armed citizenry, and asserted that the movement is probably "controlled by the security services" to woo the American right.

When Torshin and Butina attended the NRA's 2014 annual convention, their profiles as scrappy Russians pushing for gun rights were rising. Butina attended an NRA women's luncheon as a guest of one of the organization's past presidents.

Interviewed by the conservative website Townhall, Butina called the NRA "one of the most world famous and most important organizations" and said that "we would like to be friends with NRA."

While Russians are allowed to own shotguns, Butina said her group hoped to reverse a ban on carrying handguns.

That year's turbulent events — in which Russia's incursion into Ukraine prompted the Obama administration to enact strict sanctions against Moscow —

illustrated the Russians' alliance with U.S. gun advocates.

Butina argued in a Russian interview that firearm sellers in her country, including the popular Kalashnikov, were among the "most impacted" by sanctions, which specifically blocked its assets.

In Washington, the NRA's lobbying arm blasted the order, saying that such restrictions have "long been used by the executive branch as a means of unilaterally enacting gun control."

[Trump vows to come through for NRA]

Relationships between Russians and American conservatives seemed to blossom in 2015, as the Republican presidential race geared up.

Butina posted social-media photos showing how she and Torshin gained access to NRA officials and the U.S. politicians attending events. That April, Butina toured the NRA's Virginia headquarters, and she and Torshin met Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (R), then a leading White House contender, at the NRA annual convention. Torshin told Bloomberg last year that he had a friendly exchange with Trump at the 2015 convention and sat with his son Donald Jr. at an NRA dinner the following year.

Walker's spokesman said the encounter was brief, as speakers mingled with attendees before their remarks. A senior White House official said Trump may have briefly interacted with Torshin at the 2015 convention but did not recall. At the next year's event, the official said Torshin briefly greeted Donald Jr. at a restaurant.

In June 2015, as Trump announced his candidacy, Butina wrote a column in the National Interest, a conservative U.S. magazine, suggesting that a Republican in the White House might improve U.S.-Russia relations.

She wrote that Republicans and Russians held similar views on oil exploration and that cultural conservatives would identify with Putin's party and its aggressive take on Islamic terrorism.

Butina that summer immersed herself in U.S. politics. In July, she showed up in Las Vegas at FreedomFest, a meeting of libertarians where Trump and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), a rival for the GOP nomination, were speaking.

She made her way to a microphone during Trump's speech and asked in accented English, "What will be your foreign politics, especially in the relations with my country?"

It was the first time Trump had been asked about Russia as a candidate.

"I know Putin and I'll tell you what, we get along with Putin," he said.

Trump would go on to repeatedly praise the Russian president as a strong leader.

But Trump, who at the time was considered a long shot for the nomination, echoed a sentiment then bubbling up from some corners of the conservative grass roots — that Putin was a potential friend.

That was the takeaway for Graham, the North Carolina-based evangelist, after his November 2015 Kremlin meeting with Putin.

The last time Graham had visited Moscow, with his father, Billy Graham, in the 1980s, the practice of religion was prohibited. On this trip, he said, conditions for Christians in Russia remained difficult. But Graham recalled that Putin listened as he described evangelical Christianity and the challenges facing Christians around the world. Putin explained that his mother kept her Christian faith even during the darkest days of atheistic communist rule.

"He understood," Graham said of the Russian leader.

Putin offered to help Graham organize an international conference on Christian persecution in Moscow, Graham said. Instead, a Russian delegation is expected when the conference takes place in May in Washington, Graham said.

At the end of 2015, Butina welcomed a delegation to Moscow that included Keene, by then a member of the NRA board, as well as top NRA donors. The group also included a rising star in GOP politics, Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke, who went on to be a campaign surrogate for Trump and has been mentioned as a contender for a high-level job at the Department of Homeland Security. Clarke did not respond to requests for comment.

The group toured a gun manufacturing company and met with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who was among the officials sanctioned by the White House following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Keene told the Daily Beast, which first reported the meeting, that the interaction with Rogozin was "non-political" and consisted of touring the headquarters of a shooting group that Rogozin chairs.

After Trump's victory, Torshin returned to the United States with a delegation of prominent Russians to attend the annual National Prayer Breakfast in Washington in

February. In addition to his gun-rights work, Torshin also had helped build a similar prayer breakfast in Moscow from an obscure monthly event a decade ago into one more resembling the annual ritual in Washington.

Putin now sends an annual greeting to the Russian event, a recognition of its value in allowing "Russian and American guests to come together under one roof in order to rebuild the relationship between the two countries that has degraded under the administration of President Obama," said breakfast organizer

Peter Sautov in an email.

Torshin, accompanied by 15 Russian church and government officials, requested to meet the new president before Trump spoke at the event, according to people familiar with the arrangement.

But they said the meeting was canceled as reports surfaced from Spanish authorities alleging that Torshin led an organized crime and money-laundering operation. Torshin has not been charged and denied wrongdoing in an interview with Bloomberg, which first reported the allegations.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

A White House official said the requested meeting was never confirmed in the first place. The proposed meeting was first reported by Yahoo.

That night, Torshin gathered for a festive dinner at a Capitol Hill restaurant with conservative thought leaders who have supported warmer ties with Russia.

"There has been a change in the views of hard-core conservatives

toward Russia," a participant, Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.), said in an interview. "Conservative Republicans like myself hated communism during the Cold War. But Russia is no longer the Soviet Union."

Andrew Roth in Moscow and Alice Crites and Karoun Demirjian in Washington contributed to this report.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Trump Leaves Open Possibility of Military Action Against North Korea

Josh Mitchell and Eric Morath

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump left open the possibility of military action against North Korea, adding that he wouldn't be happy if Pyongyang conducts another missile test.

When asked in a Saturday interview with CBS that aired on Sunday whether he was threatening military action, Mr. Trump said: "I don't know. I mean, we'll see."

Mr. Trump also addressed his thoughts on North Korea leader Kim Jong Un personally.

"People are saying, 'Is he sane?' I have no idea," Mr. Trump said. "I can tell you this, and a lot of people don't like when I say it, but he was a young man of 26 or 27 when he took over from his father....A lot of people, I'm sure, tried to take that power away, whether it was his uncle or anybody else. And he was able to do it. So obviously, he's a pretty smart cookie."

Mr. Trump's comments come days after North Korea attempted, but failed, to launch a missile as part of a test, U.S. and South Korean authorities said. The missile exploded minutes after launch.

Top Trump administration officials have previously indicated that military options

are on the table. On Sunday, Mr. Trump and his national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, reiterated that they preferred to solve the conflict without military action, mainly by pressuring China, North Korea's ally, to get more involved.

Mr. Trump said dealing with North Korea now overrode another priority of his administration, cracking down on China and what he has alleged to be unfair trade practices such as currency manipulation.

His administration has declined to label China as a currency manipulator, despite a campaign promise by Mr. Trump to do so.

"You're a negotiator; if you need something from somebody, you need China to help you with North Korea," Mr. Trump told CBS. He added, "I think that frankly, North Korea is maybe more important than trade. Trade is very important. But massive warfare with millions, potentially millions of people being killed? That, as we would say, trumps trade."

Mr. Trump also declined to answer whether the U.S. had any role in North Korea's technical failures during recent test launches. "Well, I'd rather not discuss it. But perhaps they're just not very good missiles," Mr. Trump said.

Gen. McMaster said in a separate interview that the administration's next move might be to push for tougher international sanctions on North Korea while preparing for "military operations if necessary."

"This is something we know we cannot tolerate in terms of a risk to the American people," Gen. McMaster said on Fox News, referring to North Korea's work toward developing nuclear weapons. He added that the administration preferred to work with other nations, including China, to ratchet up pressure on North Korea to "resolve the situation short of military action."

Vice President Mike Pence gave a separate interview on NBC on Sunday and focused on the administration's tax and budget plans, saying the White House is prepared to accept short-term increases to the federal deficit created by its plan to lower taxes, in exchange for the possibility of stronger economic growth.

The White House outlined a plan last week that would lower tax rates for businesses and individuals. Mr. Pence said the plan would accelerate economic growth in the U.S. Others have criticized it as being likely to cut the amount of taxes the government collects and add to the budget deficit.

The tax plan may increase the deficit "in the short term," Mr. Pence said. "But the truth is, if we don't get this economy growing at 3% or more, as the president believes we can, we're never going to meet the obligations that we've made today."

Any tax package that increases federal deficits could draw resistance from fiscally conservative Republicans. That complicates the pathway to pass legislation, given that Democrats are reluctant to support the president's plans.

"We said we'd work on tax reform for fairness and transparency," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) said ABC on Sunday. But she described the White House plan as "a wish list for billionaires."

The U.S. economy expanded at a 0.7% annual rate during the first three months of the year, the slowest quarterly growth rate since early 2014. Since the economic expansion began in mid-2009, the economy has grown at about a 2% annual rate, and many economists project the pace to be maintained this year.

While lackluster by historical standards, the current expansion in the U.S. has been stronger than in most other developed nations since the end of the recession.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Helprin : How to Defuse the North Korean Threat

Mark Helprin

North Korea has embarked at breakneck speed upon a slipshod effort to field land-, mobile-, and submarine-based ICBMs with nuclear warheads. Unlike the eight other nuclear powers, North Korea's doctrine resides unknowingly and capriciously in the mind of one man.

All nuclear doctrines are different, but most never go beyond the conditional when treating their

arsenals as instruments of deterrence. North Korea, however, issues an unrelenting stream of histrionic threats that comport with its recklessness in the shelling of South Korea and sinking of one of its warships, the kidnapping of Japanese citizens in Japan, assassinations abroad, executions and Stalinist gulags at home, criminal sources of revenue, proliferation of missilery, and, tellingly, its perpetual war footing.

The totality of its declarations, behavior, and accelerating nuclear trajectory cannot be ignored. Nuclear weapons alone radically change the calculus of any strategic problem. Given the complexity and fragile interdependence of the structures of American life, nuclear detonations in only a few of our cities constitute a true existential danger. North Korea's successful August test of the KN-11 submarine-launched ballistic missile—along with its construction of a second

ballistic-missile submarine and its development of longer-range land-based missiles—will put North America at risk.

Note that North Korea has no defensive need of nuclear weapons. Because of the vulnerability of South Korean population centers, it can exercise an almost equivalent deterrence with its conventional forces and huge stockpile of chemical weapons.

Over two decades the U.S. has run the extremes from President Clinton's foolish or deceptive claim that his diplomacy had solved the North Korean nuclear problem, through the serial procrastinations of subsequent administrations, until the belated realization that if nothing else works the U.S. will have to attack North Korea full force. The first option has failed. The second, to which it is possible we may be compelled, is catastrophic.

The heart of South Korea's economy and half its 50 million people are densely concentrated within range of the approximately 10,000 North Korean artillery pieces, rocket launchers, and short-range ballistic missiles capable of delivering chemical munitions, of which North Korea has an estimated 5,000 metric tons. Even conventional explosives would have a devastating effect. No matter how fast South Korean and American forces raced to suppress such fires, not to mention a nuclear attack itself, millions would probably die.

With such shock and escalation there is no guarantee that China or Russia would not come to North Korea's aid. Russia could also take the opportunity to feast upon Eastern Europe if American power

were monopolized by the battle, as it would be.

As undesirable are the two extremes of a North Korean nuclear strike or pre-emptive war in armament-saturated East Asia, America cannot accept the former. The U.S. will be forced to the latter if it fails to exploit the considerable ground that still lies between them.

North Korea is almost entirely dependent upon China, which is responsible for 85% of its trade, knows the country, and might have links to still-living potential replacements for Kim Jong Un. Given China's fearless and severe nuclear doctrine, it is itself invulnerable to North Korean threats. Until recently, China has been content with North Korea as a fleet-in-being—i.e., something with which to tie down competing powers in Asia, or unleash as another front in case of conflict elsewhere.

Now that things have gone too far, U.S. actions combined with the natural course of events can influence China to change this policy and move to defang the North. Throughout Chinese history instability has led to ruination. Seoul is closer to Beijing than San Francisco is to Seattle, and China does not want a major war on its

border, especially one that may draw in the U.S. and Japan, both now augmenting conventional forces in the area.

President Trump wisely has been willing to abandon demonization of China and modify his protectionist catchall in return for China's assistance. Yet it is of utmost importance for the U.S. to make clear that the Korean issue, unique and existential, will not be part of any *strategic* trade, such as in regard to the South China Sea.

China knows that the U.S. must respond to the North's ongoing breakout, but even should it have doubts, further pressure will automatically ensue. To wit, South Korea and Japan are already well within North Korean missile range and have every reason to mount a vigorous ballistic missile defense. Now the U.S. has deployed the Terminal High Altitude Air Defense system in South Korea. By obtaining early launch and trajectory data as it reaches deep into China, Thaad's X-band radar is capable of enhancing American missile defense to the point of seriously compromising China's nuclear deterrent.

Should the U.S., Japan, and South Korea further bolster missile defense in northeast Asia, it would

have commensurate effects on China's nuclear posture. Even more nightmarish for everyone, particularly China, would be if South Korea and (until now unthinkable) Japan developed their own nuclear deterrents, something that in the face of North Korea's nuclear capabilities and declarations the U.S. could not justly oppose any more than it opposes the British and French independent nuclear forces.

Avoiding an escalation crisis is in the interest of all involved, China no less than the U.S. Although America's outrageous neglect of the North Korean nuclear threat has led to this pass, there is still a way out. It requires steady nerves and a clear view of the strategic interplay among all parties. The fundamental dynamics of interests and security are now bringing China into a genuine, if temporary, alignment with the U.S., Japan, and South Korea. The U.S. should be wide awake to this in the days to come, because it may be, in fact, the only way out. If not, Katy bar the door.

Mr. Helprin, a senior fellow of the Claremont Institute, is the author of "Winter's Tale," "A Soldier of the Great War" and the forthcoming novel "Paris in the Present Tense."

**The
New York
Times**

U.S. Confirms It Will Pay for Antimissile System, South Korea Says

Choe Sang-Hun

SEOUL, South Korea — The Trump administration has reaffirmed that the United States will pay for a missile defense battery it is deploying in South Korea, despite President Trump's recent statement that he wanted Seoul to cover the cost, officials here said Sunday.

Mr. Trump caused alarm here on Thursday when he told Reuters that he wanted South Korea to pay for the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, known as Thaad, which is being installed as a defense against North Korean missiles. According to South Korea, the two allies had agreed that the Americans would pay for the system and its operation and maintenance, with Seoul providing land and supporting infrastructure.

On Sunday, the White House

national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, called his South Korean counterpart, Kim Kwan-jin, and "the two reconfirmed what has already been agreed" about the system's costs, Mr. Kim's office said in a statement.

General McMaster "explained that the recent statements by President Trump were made in a general context in line with the U.S. public expectations on burden sharing with allies," Mr. Kim's office said.

The Thaad system had been a contentious issue in South Korea well before Mr. Trump's remarks. China, the country's main trading partner, has objected strongly to the system, which it sees as a threat to its own security, and its state-run news outlets have published threats of economic retaliation against South Korea.

Since Mr. Trump's remark, all of the major candidates in South Korea's May 9 presidential election had accused him of violating the Thaad agreement. One minor candidate, Sim Sang-jung, went so far as to say that the United States should "pack its Thaad and take it out of South Korea."

The candidate leading in the polls, Moon Jae-in, called for an immediate suspension of the Thaad deployment. Mr. Moon, a liberal, had already pledged to review South Korea's decision to accept the system if elected. He said Park Geun-hye, the conservative president who was ousted in March over a corruption scandal, should have sought Parliament's approval before agreeing to the deployment.

The United States military began installing the radar and other key components of Thaad in Seongju, 135 miles southeast of Seoul, the

capital, last week. South Korean and American officials have said that the system will be operational soon.

Mr. Trump's remarks added to unease here about the new American president, who as a candidate accused the country of not contributing enough to the costs of its own defense. Though most South Koreans value the country's military alliance with the United States as a bulwark against North Korea's escalating missile and nuclear threats, many were miffed by Mr. Trump's accusations.

South Korea already contributes nearly \$810 million a year toward the cost of maintaining the United States military presence here, in addition to providing land and infrastructure. The country is also one of the biggest buyers of American weapons.

**The
New York
Times**

As Economy Grows, North Korea's Grip on Society Is Tested (UNE)

Choe Sang-Hun

While North Korea remains deeply impoverished, estimates of annual growth under Mr. Kim's rule range from 1 percent to 5 percent, comparable to some fast-growing

economies unencumbered by sanctions.

But a limited embrace of market forces in what is supposed to be a classless society also is a gamble for Mr. Kim, who in 2013 made economic growth a top policy goal

on par with the development of a nuclear arsenal.

Mr. Kim, 33, has promised his long-suffering people that they will never have to "tighten their belts" again. But as he allows private enterprise to expand, he undermines the

government's central argument of socialist superiority over South Korea's capitalist system.

There are already signs that market forces are weakening the government's grip on society. Information is seeping in along with

foreign goods, eroding the cult of personality surrounding Mr. Kim and his family. And as people support themselves and get what they need outside the state economy, they are less beholden to the authorities.

“Our attitude toward the government was this: If you can’t feed us, leave us alone so we can make a living through the market,” said Kim Jin-hee, who fled North Korea in 2014 and, like others interviewed for this article, uses a new name in the South to protect relatives she left behind.

After the government tried to clamp down on markets in 2009, she recalled, “I lost what little loyalty I had for the regime.”

Unofficial Activity

Kim Jin-hee’s loyalty was first tested in the 1990s, when a famine caused by floods, drought and the loss of Soviet aid gripped North Korea. The government stopped providing food rations, and as many as two million people died.

Ms. Kim did what many others did to survive. She stopped showing up for her state job, at a machine-tool factory in the mining town of Musan, and spent her days at a makeshift market selling anything she could get her hands on. Similar markets appeared across the country.

After the food shortage eased, the market in Musan continued to grow. By the time she left the country, Ms. Kim said, more than 1,000 stalls were squeezed into it alongside her own.

Kim Jong-il, the father of the North’s current leader, had been ambivalent about the marketplaces before he died in 2011. Sometimes he tolerated them, using them to increase food supplies and soften the blow of tightening sanctions imposed by the United Nations on top of an American embargo dating to the Korean War. Other times, he sought to suppress them.

But since 2010, the number of government-approved markets in North Korea has doubled to 440, and satellite images show them growing in size in most cities. In a country with a population of 25 million, about 1.1 million people are now employed as retailers or managers in these markets, according to a study by the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul.

Unofficial market activity has flourished, too: people making and selling shoes, clothing, sweets and bread from their homes; traditional agricultural markets that appear in rural towns every 10 days; smugglers who peddle black-market goods like Hollywood movies, South

Korean television dramas and smartphones that can be used near the Chinese border.

At least 40 percent of the population in North Korea is now engaged in some form of private enterprise, a level comparable to that of Hungary and Poland shortly after the fall of the Soviet bloc, the director of South Korea’s intelligence service, Lee Byung-ho, told lawmakers in a closed-door briefing in February.

This market activity is driven in part by frustration with the state’s inefficient and rigid planned economy. North Koreans once worked only in state farms and factories, receiving salaries and ration coupons to buy food and other necessities in state stores. But that system crumbled in the 1990s, and now many state workers earn barely a dollar a month. Economists estimate the cost of living in North Korea to be \$60 per month.

“If you are an ordinary North Korean today, and if you don’t make money through markets, you are likely to die of hunger,” said Kim Nam-chol, 46, a defector from Hoeryong, a town near the Chinese border. “It’s that simple.”

‘Competition Is Everywhere’

Before fleeing in 2014, Mr. Kim survived as a smuggler in North Korea. He bought goods such as dried seafood, ginseng, antiques and even methamphetamine, and he carried them across the border to sell in China. There, he used his earnings to buy grain, saccharin, socks and plastic bags and took it back to sell in North Korean markets.

He said he had paid off border guards and security officers to slip back and forth, often by offering them cigarette packs stuffed with rolled-up \$100 or 10,000-yen bills.

“I came to believe I could get away with anything in North Korea with bribes,” he said, “except the crime of criticizing the ruling Kim family.”

Eighty percent of consumer goods sold in North Korean markets originate in China, according to an estimate by Kim Young-hee, director of the North Korean economy department at the Korea Development Bank in the South.

But Kim Jong-un has exhorted the country to produce more goods locally in an effort to lessen its dependence on China, using the word *jagang*, or self-empowerment. His call has emboldened manufacturers to respond to market demand.

Shoes, liquor, cigarettes, socks, sweets, cooking oil, cosmetics and noodles produced in North Korea

have already squeezed out or taken market share from Chinese-made versions, defectors said.

Regular visitors to Pyongyang, the showcase capital, say a real consumer economy is emerging. “Competition is everywhere, including between travel agencies, taxi companies and restaurants,” Rüdiger Frank, an economist at the University of Vienna who studies the North, wrote recently after visiting a shopping center there.

A cellphone service launched in 2008 has more than three million subscribers. With the state still struggling to produce electricity, imported solar panels have become a middle-class status symbol. And on sale at some grocery stores and informal markets on the side streets of Pyongyang is a beverage that state propaganda used to condemn as “cesspool water of capitalism” — Coca-Cola.

Leaning On Private Sector

When Kim Jong-un stood on a balcony reviewing a parade in April, he was flanked by Hwang Pyong-so, the head of the military, and Pak Pong-ju, the premier in charge of the economy.

The formation was symbolic of Mr. Kim’s *byungjin* policy, which calls for the parallel pursuit of two policy goals: developing the economy and building nuclear weapons. Only a nuclear arsenal, Mr. Kim argues, will make North Korea secure from American invasion and let it focus on growth.

Mr. Kim has granted state factories more autonomy over what they produce, including authority to find their own suppliers and customers, as long as they hit revenue targets. And families in collective farms are now assigned to individual plots called *pojeon*. Once they meet a state quota, they can keep and sell any surplus on their own.

The measures resemble those adopted by China in the early years of its turn to capitalism in the 1980s. But North Korea has refrained from describing them as market-oriented reforms, preferring the phrase “economic management in our own style.”

In state-censored journals, though, economists are already publishing papers describing consumer-oriented markets, joint ventures and special economic zones.

It is unclear how much of recent increases in grain production were due to Mr. Kim’s policies. Defectors say factories remain hobbled by electricity shortages and decrepit machinery while many farmers have struggled to meet state quotas

because they lack fertilizer and modern equipment.

More broadly, the economy remains constrained by limited foreign investment and the lack of legal protections for private enterprise or procedures for contract enforcement.

Plans to set up special economic zones have remained only plans, as investors have balked at North Korea’s poor infrastructure and record of seizing assets from foreigners, not to mention the sanctions against it.

But there is evidence that the state is growing increasingly dependent on the private sector.

Cha Moon-seok, a researcher at the Institute for Unification Education of South Korea, estimates that the government collects as much as \$222,000 per day in taxes from the marketplaces it manages. In March, the authorities reportedly ordered people selling goods from their homes to move into formal marketplaces in an effort to collect even more.

“Officials need the markets as much as the people need them,” said Kim Jeong-ae, a journalist in Seoul who worked as a propagandist in North Korea before defecting.

Ms. Kim fled North Korea in 2003 but has kept in touch with a younger brother there whom she describes as a donju, or money owner.

‘Loyalty Donations’

Donju is the word North Koreans use to describe the new class of traders and businessmen that has emerged.

Kim Jeong-ae said that her brother provided fuel, food and crew members for fishing boats, and that he split the catch with a military-run fishing company.

“He lives in a large house with tall walls,” she added, “so other people can’t see what he has there.”

Called “red capitalists” by South Korean scholars, donju invest in construction projects, establish partnerships with resource-strapped state factories and bankroll imports from China to supply retailers in the marketplaces. They operate with “covers,” or party officials who protect their businesses. Some are relatives of party officials.

Others are ethnic Chinese citizens, who are allowed regular visits to China and can facilitate cross-border financial transactions, and people with relatives who have fled to South Korea and send them cash remittances.

Whenever the state begins a big project, like the new district of high-rise apartment buildings that Kim Jong-un unveiled before foreign journalists in April, donju are expected to make "loyalty donations." Sometimes they pay in foreign currency. Sometimes they contribute building materials, fuel or food for construction workers.

"Kim Jong-un is no fool," said Kang Mi-jin, a defector who once ran her own wholesale business. "He knows where the money is."

Donju often receive medals and certificates in return for their donations, and use them to signal they are protected as they engage in business activities that are officially illegal.

They import buses and trucks and run their own transportation services using license plates obtained from state companies. Some donju even rent farmland and mines, working

them with their own employees and equipment, or open private pharmacies, defectors said.

"Donju wear the socialist hide, operating as part of state-run companies," Ms. Kang said. "But inside, they are thoroughly capitalist."

A Shifting View

Before Kim Jong-un took power, the government made a last attempt to rein in donju and control market forces. It called on citizens to shop only in state stores, banned the use of foreign currency and adopted new bank notes while limiting the amount of old notes that individuals could exchange.

The move wiped out much of the private wealth created and saved by both donju and ordinary people. Market activity ground to a near halt. Prices skyrocketed, and protests were reported in scattered cities.

The government eventually retreated and is believed to have issued an apology when officials convened villagers for their weekly education sessions. It also executed the country's top monetary official, Pak Nam-gi.

The crisis is widely considered the moment when the government concluded it could no longer suppress the markets. A year later, Pak Pong-ju, a former prime minister who had been ousted for pushing market-oriented policies, was restored to power. He now manages the economy under Mr. Kim.

As the markets develop, growing numbers of North Koreans will see the vastly superior products made overseas and perhaps question their nation's backward status.

"Thanks to the market, few North Koreans these days flee for food, as refugees in the 1990s did," said the

Rev. Kim Seung-eun, a pastor who has helped hundreds of defectors reach South Korea. "Instead, they now flee to South Korea to have a better life they learned through the markets."

Jung Gwang-il, who leads a defectors' group in Seoul called No Chain, said that with more North Koreans getting what they needed from markets rather than the state, their view of Mr. Kim was changing.

"North Koreans always called Kim Jong-un's grandfather and father 'the Great Leader' or 'the General,'" Mr. Jung said. "Now, when they talk among themselves, many just call Jong-un 'the Kid.' They fear him but have no respect for him."

"They say, 'What has he done for us?'" Mr. Jung said.

The New York Times Trump's 'Very Friendly' Talk With Duterte Stuns Aides and Critics Alike (UNE)

Mark Landler

"By essentially endorsing Duterte's murderous war on drugs, Trump is now morally complicit in future killings," said John Sifton, the Asia advocacy director of Human Rights Watch. "Although the traits of his personality likely make it impossible, Trump should be ashamed of himself."

Senator Christopher S. Murphy, Democrat of Connecticut and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said on Twitter, "We are watching in real time as the American human rights bully pulpit disintegrates into ash."

Administration officials said the call to Mr. Duterte was one of several to Southeast Asian leaders that the White House arranged after picking up signs that the leaders felt neglected because of Mr. Trump's intense focus on China, Japan and tensions over North Korea. On Sunday, Mr. Trump spoke to the prime ministers of Singapore and Thailand; both got White House invitations.

Mr. Duterte's toxic reputation had already given pause to some in the White House. The Philippines is set to host a summit meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in November, and officials said there had been a brief debate about whether Mr. Trump should attend.

It is not even clear, given the accusations of human rights abuses against him, that Mr. Duterte would be granted a visa to the United

States were he not a head of state, according to human rights advocates.

Still, Mr. Trump's affinity for Mr. Duterte, and other strongmen as well, is firmly established. Both presidents are populist insurgent leaders with a penchant for making inflammatory statements. Both ran for office calling for a wholesale crackdown on Islamist militancy and the drug trade. And both display impatience with the courts.

After Mr. Trump was elected, Mr. Duterte called to congratulate him. Later, the Philippine leader issued a statement saying that the president-elect had wished him well in his antidrug campaign, which has resulted in the deaths of several thousand people suspected of using or selling narcotics, as well as others who may have had no involvement with drugs.

Mr. Trump's cultivation of Mr. Duterte has a strategic rationale, officials said. Mr. Duterte has pivoted away from the United States, a longtime treaty ally, and toward China. The alienation deepened after he referred to President Barack Obama as a "son of a whore" when he was asked how he would react if Mr. Obama raised human rights concerns with him.

In October, Mr. Duterte called for a "separation" between the Philippines and the United States. "America has lost now," he told an audience of business executives in Beijing. "I've realigned myself in your ideological flow." He later threatened to rip up

an agreement that allows American troops to visit the Philippines.

Administration officials said Mr. Trump wanted to mend the alliance with the Philippines as a bulwark against China's expansionism in the South China Sea. The Philippines has clashed with China over disputed reefs and shoals in the waterway, which the two countries share.

Mr. Trump's chief of staff, Reince Priebus, drew a connection between a visit by Mr. Duterte and the tensions with North Korea. Building solidarity throughout Asia, he said on ABC's "This Week," is needed to pressure North Korea on its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

Experts said that argument was tenuous, however, noting that it was more important to corral a country like Malaysia, where North Koreans hold meetings to buy or sell weapons-related technology.

Mr. Trump has a commercial connection to the Philippines: His name is stamped on a \$150 million, 57-floor tower in Manila, a licensing deal that netted his company millions of dollars. Mr. Duterte appointed the chairman of the company developing the tower, Jose E. B. Antonio, as an envoy to Washington for trade, investment and economic affairs.

Certainly, the two leaders have similar agendas. Mr. Duterte is battling Islamist extremists who have terrorized the southern islands of the Philippine archipelago. He once declared that if he were

presented with a terrorism suspect, "give me salt and vinegar and I'll eat his liver."

They are also in tune on the need for a crackdown on drugs, even if Mr. Trump is not advocating Mr. Duterte's brutal methods. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has revived the language of the "war on drugs," which the Obama administration shunned as part of its policy to reduce lengthy prison sentences for nonviolent drug offenders.

Mr. Trump has drawn the line with one autocrat: President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, whose chemical weapons strike on his own people prompted the American president to order a Tomahawk missile strike on a Syrian airfield.

But Mr. Trump's affinity for strongmen is instinctive and longstanding. He recently called to congratulate President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey on his victory in a much-disputed referendum expanding his powers, which some critics painted as a death knell for Turkish democracy.

At his rally in Harrisburg, Mr. Trump went after many of the targets he vilified during the campaign: the news media, Democrats, immigrants. But he reversed course on one — China — and the reason may be that he met recently with China's president, Xi Jinping, in Palm Beach, Fla.

At home, Mr. Xi is cracking down on dissent and consolidating his power. But Mr. Trump has enlisted Mr. Xi to pressure China's neighbor, North

Korea, and is giving him the benefit of the doubt. "I honestly believe he's trying very hard," Mr. Trump told the crowd. "He's a good man."

Mr. Trump credited his relationship with Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, as a factor in obtaining the release of an Egyptian-American aid worker, Aya Hijazi, who had been detained there. Mr. Trump played

host at the White House to Mr. Sisi, who had not been granted an invitation since he seized power in a military coup nearly four years ago.

Then there is, of course, Mr. Trump's vow during the campaign to pursue a warmer relationship with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. That effort has faltered somewhat because of persistent

questions about links between the Trump campaign and Russian officials.

Even Mr. Trump's prime antagonist — the North Korean dictator, Kim Jong-un — has earned a surprisingly generous assessment from the president in recent days. Speaking on CBS's "Face the Nation," Mr. Trump expressed

admiration that Mr. Kim had been able to keep a grip on power.

"A lot of people, I'm sure, tried to take that power away, whether it was his uncle or anybody else," Mr. Trump said. "And he was able to do it. So, obviously, he's a pretty smart cookie."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Trump Invites Philippine Leader Duterte to the White House

Jake Maxwell
Watts

U.S. President Donald Trump invited President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines to the White House during a telephone call over the weekend, laying the groundwork for a first meeting after the maverick Filipino leader last year declared his "separation" from the U.S., a longstanding ally.

The conversation with Mr. Trump took place on the heels of a summit of Southeast Asian nations, chaired by Mr. Duterte, in which the region's leaders skirted the thorny issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, handing China a diplomatic victory.

Meanwhile, three Chinese naval vessels made a rare visit to the Philippines and were hosted in Mr. Duterte's hometown of Davao City, a Philippine military spokesman said.

Reince Priebus, the White House chief of staff, said in an interview Sunday with ABC that Mr. Trump has been seeking backing from Asian leaders, including Mr. Duterte, to counter the threat of conflict from North Korea. "He's been speaking to all of our partners in Southeast Asia—the issue on the table is North Korea," Mr. Priebus said, adding that Mr. Trump planned to speak with leaders in Singapore and Thailand.

Mr. Priebus defended Mr. Trump's warm welcome of Mr. Duterte, whose human-rights record has been criticized in the wake of a bloody antinarcotics campaign that has killed more

than 8,000 people since he took office at the end of June last year.

"If we don't have all of our folks together, whether they're good folks, bad folks, people we wish would do better in their country—it doesn't matter—we've got to be on the same page," Mr. Priebus said.

A spokesman for Mr. Duterte told local media that Mr. Trump expressed his commitment to the U.S. alliance with the Philippines and was interested in developing a warm relationship with his Filipino counterpart.

Mr. Duterte has shaken the U.S.-Philippines relationship, a cornerstone of Washington's projection of power in Asia at a time when China is wooing other Southeast Asian nations and rapidly asserting control over the resource-rich South China Sea, a key thoroughfare of international trade. Beijing claims nearly the entire area and has reinforced its position by building an ambitious network of artificial islands.

Analysts said the reluctance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to address China's moves, despite claims by several members including the Philippines over parts of the South China Sea, has been exacerbated by uncertainty over U.S. engagement under the Trump administration, an issue that Mr. Trump may seek to resolve if he meets Mr. Duterte.

"The region understands that Washington has been and will continue to be in a holding pattern at least for this year, [but] Southeast Asia's ability to wait for Washington

will be increasingly confronted by China's ability and pace to change the strategic landscape in the region," said Evan Laksmana, a senior researcher at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta.

Asean issued a final summit communiqué that avoided addressing Chinese land reclamation and militarization of the South China Sea. China's role in the region is an issue that has imploded Asean meetings in recent years.

The statement, published Sunday several hours after the summit ended, scrapped harsher language in an earlier draft seen by The Wall Street Journal that included references to China's building islands that could be used for military purposes.

The published draft mentioned Chinese activity in the South China Sea only to welcome Beijing's cooperation with Asean on issues such as a framework for a maritime code of conduct. The statement said Asean reaffirmed the importance of pursuing peaceful resolution of disputes. China is not a member of Asean and was not officially present.

"The uncertainty about U.S. policy here tends to dampen any initiatives on the part of Asean," said Aileen Baviera, an expert in maritime disputes at the University of the Philippines Diliman. "Issues such as the presence of China on the islands and military activities are really quite beyond what Asean is capable of."

The Philippines is swiftly emerging as a fulcrum of the Southeast Asia power balance. Mr. Duterte's

predecessor favored a greater American role to counterbalance Beijing and launched an international arbitration case at the Hague that invalidated China's claims last year.

But Mr. Duterte hasn't pressed the case and instead vowed to chart a more independent foreign policy, winning investment from China. Last week, Mr. Duterte said there was no point raising the arbitration ruling during the Asean summit, asking, "Who will dare pressure China?"

The election of Mr. Trump has added further uncertainty, especially as the Trump administration has focused on crises in North Korea and shaking up domestic policy.

"The Trump administration has yet to show its hand on the South China Sea," said Ian Storey, senior fellow at the Iseas-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. "I hate to say this, but [Mr. Duterte] has a point. The asymmetries of power are growing day by day."

Vice President Mike Pence, the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit Southeast Asia under the Trump administration, said in Indonesia earlier this month that the region's countries "have no better partner and no better friend." Regional officials responded positively to news that Mr. Trump would attend a series of Asian summits in the Philippines and Vietnam later in the year.

—Eric Morath contributed to this article.

The New York Times

Editorial : Push and Pull on Cuba

In recent weeks, as the White House has been consumed by loud debates over health care, taxes and trade, there has been another, quieter debate occurring beneath the surface. Government agencies and lawmakers have been pulling the administration in two directions on whether to continue the Obama administration's path on relations with Cuba.

A small but vocal group of lawmakers, including Senator Marco Rubio, have pressed the White House to roll back the process of normalization President Barack Obama set in motion in 2014. The Cuban government, they contend, has become no less despotic and must be pressured to reform through strict enforcement of existing sanctions, public admonishment and diplomatic isolation.

Meanwhile, a large pro-engagement coalition that includes lawmakers from both parties, businesses and young Cuban-Americans, is calling on the White House to build on the foundation of engagement it inherited. By charting out narrow areas of cooperation with Havana — while agreeing to disagree on human rights issues — the Obama administration enabled the freer flow of people, goods and information between the countries.

Among the fruits of this approach have been bilateral agreements on health care cooperation, joint planning to mitigate oil spills and coordination on counternarcotics efforts. Havana also recently agreed to start accepting some Cubans who have been ordered deported. Regulatory changes have made it easier for most Americans to visit Cuba — though going there purely for tourism is still technically illegal — and enabled broader exchanges

among scholars, journalists and artists. Google, meanwhile, is negotiating a series of agreements with Cuba that could significantly expand access to the internet on the island, one of the most unplugged nations on earth.

Mr. Trump's public remarks on Cuba policy have been brief and thoughtless. Shortly after being elected, Mr. Trump tweeted: "If Cuba is unwilling to make a better deal for the Cuban people, the Cuban/American people and the U.S. as a whole, I will terminate deal."

That put Cubans and Americans on notice that Mr. Trump was contemplating reversing Mr. Obama's easement of American

sanctions. The White House began an assessment early this year and agencies, including the Departments of State, Treasury and Commerce, have given their input. It is unclear when, or whether, an announcement of a decision will come. Mr. Trump could undo many regulatory changes with the stroke of a pen. For instance, he could tighten rules on sending remittances to Cubans, suspend the newly re-established commercial flights between the nations and stop American cruises from docking in Havana.

If he were to take those sorts of steps, Mr. Trump would make the small pro-embargo coalition in Capitol Hill very happy. But doing so would mean reversing course on a policy change that is widely popular

among Americans and nearly universally supported by Cubans.

He also would be putting American farmers and businesses at a disadvantage by curtailing their access to a market that is gradually opening to global trade. In 2016, the European Union formally abandoned a policy predicated on pursuit of a democratic transition and struck a broader agreement with Havana that includes cooperation on trade and development and a dialogue on human rights.

Most damagingly, putting the relationship with Cuba back on a confrontational track would all but certainly subject Cubans to greater repression and privation. In the past,

Havana has ratcheted up its repressive tactics during moments of heightened tension with the United States.

Instead of waiting for the Cuban government to "make a better deal with the Cuban people" — whatever that means — Mr. Trump can continue to make it easier for Americans to travel to Cuba and do business with Cubans. Strengthening ties does not guarantee that Cuba will reform its one-party system or overhaul its centrally planned economy. But it would empower Cubans as they contemplate the future they want for their country.

ETATS-UNIS



Bernstein : The Only Real Lesson From Trump's 100 Days

Jonathan Bernstein

Presidents have had worse weeks than the one ending Donald Trump's first 100 days in office, but most of the examples I can think of include resignation and worse. So far this week (and he still has one more day!) Trump has retreated or been defeated on his Mexico wall, on NAFTA, on sanctuary cities, and on health care reform. The administration went through something like three positions on North Korea. Trump rolled out a tax reform "plan" that not only has been ridiculed from all sides, but is also basically dead on arrival; Trump's one-page of bullet points is vague enough that any Congressional product may resemble it, but he's not likely to be a significant player in shaping what House and Senate Republicans choose to do.

Beyond that, Trump gave a series of interviews which mostly served to furnish up new humiliations for him, whether it was complaining to Reuters about how unexpectedly hard the job was or obsessing to AP about cable TV news. Other 100-days profiles featured White House staff and Trump friends basically saying the president is ... a moron?

"If you're an adviser to him, your job is to help him at the margins," said one Trump confidante. "To talk him out of doing crazy things."

A toddler?

Advisers have tried to curtail Trump's idle hours, hoping to prevent him from watching cable news or calling old friends and then tweeting about it. That only works during the workday, though—Trump's evenings and weekends have remained largely his own.

Also this week, investigations on the Trump-Russia scandal continued with new revelations about former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, and a misfire by Ivanka Trump (rapidly walked back) reminded everyone of Trump's other big scandal involving conflicts of interest, nepotism, emoluments, and more.

I suspect I'm missing a few more.

The good news? It's always possible Trump could at least somewhat turn it around. He could hire a real chief of staff empowered to clean up the White House. He could start doing the work he's supposed to be doing -- learning about policy and process. Yes, he does have some potential assets to build on if he is capable of doing so. For that matter, he could still divest his holdings and put an end to what is basically a lawless presidency.

Realistically, however? What's happening is exactly what anyone with any sense knew what would happen if he became president --

indeed, I agree with Ross Douthat that we've been relatively lucky that it hasn't been worse. We can hope he'll improve as he goes along, but there's really no sign of it so far, and no realistic reason to expect it.

So what's the big lesson in Trump's first 100 days?

It's the same one that's been obvious all along: Republican party actors should have done whatever it took to defeat his nomination when they had the chance. Nominations matter, and none more so than the presidential nomination, and they are worth fighting -- hard -- over.

That's mainly because a party only gets so many opportunities at the presidency, and it's a disaster for groups within the party to waste them -- think Jimmy Carter and the Democrats' failure to achieve important policy goals in 1977 to 1980. It's also because of the electoral damage an unpopular presidency can inflict on the party, as we've seen in the last three midterm elections.

And it's because presidential nominations are part of defining and (re-)creating the party itself, so that once a party is stuck with a nominee they are stuck with whatever that nominee does. Especially if that nominee wins the White House. As a result of Trump, some groups will be elevated within

the Republican Party and others will be sidelined; the party will come to stand for some policies and not others; some individuals who rose with Trump will be empowered within the party or at least become credentialed as high-profile representatives of the party for years, maybe decades, to come.

We'll never know whether another Republican would have won the 2016 election or not. We'll never know how, as a worst-case scenario for defeating Trump, how an ugly convention with the party "stealing" the nomination from him would have played out. My guess is it would have been just fine; Trump's a paper tiger, and those who swore they were loyal to him would have wound up happy to support any nominee against Hillary Clinton. I certainly can't prove that, however.

But it doesn't matter. Nominating Donald Trump damaged the Republican Party, with the only remaining questions having to do with how bad that damage is. Party leaders let everyone else down by letting this happen. They deserve the blame, and their successors need to learn from this: Never again.



Ghitis : American democracy is winning... so far

Frida Ghitis
(CNN)On the 100th day of his

presidency, Donald Trump again attacked the media and stoked the

embers of divisiveness that fueled his election. But on the very same

day, Americans -- even the majority who disapprove of Trump's

presidency -- could find reasons to celebrate.

No, Trump has not turned out to be any less inflammatory as a president than he was as a candidate. And it's far too early to claim the US has averted disaster. But the American people's reaction to Trump's election has proven much stronger than anyone expected.

And with the 100-day marker signaling the end of the beginning of his presidency, Americans, and a closely-watching world, can take note: America's system of democracy is strong. It's strong enough to stand up to a man with visceral authoritarian tendencies and who came to power surrounded by conspiracy-minded ideologues vowing to "deconstruct" the system.

As Trump spoke before a large crowd (not an "all-time record," as he claimed) in Pennsylvania, journalists gathered in Washington to highlight the importance of a free press for the survival of democracy.

Trump was the first president to stay away from the White House correspondents' dinner since 1981, when Ronald Reagan couldn't attend because he was recovering from an assassination attempt. Reagan sent his regrets.

Trump insulted the press, calling them "enemies of the people" -- a phrase favored by Stalin -- in the hopes that people will ignore the news that is not to his liking, including approval ratings that are lower than any modern president's at this point in his term.

Complaining about his failure to achieve very much, Trump also called the American system "archaic," or bad for the country.

The reality is rather the opposite.

The system is working surprisingly well.

From the day he took office, it became clear that Americans who saw Trump as a threat to the country's fundamental values would not sit home and mope -- or run off to hide in Canada.

Incensed to see a man who bragged about sexual assault become president, women on Inauguration Day organized marches in every state of the union. And they succeeded, with millions taking to the streets in what may have been the biggest single day of demonstration in US history. That sent a powerful message to Congress and helped energize the nation.

By then, Trump's disdain for the First Amendment, his constant efforts to discredit the media, his blatant efforts to cash in on the presidency, his verbal attacks on refugees and immigrants and his entourage of conspiracy theorists and climate deniers had already sounded the alarm. Many started calling themselves "the resistance," a term more commonly used during times of foreign occupation, and a sign that they view Trump not as a president with whom they disagree, but as a genuine and severe threat to the country.

Popular resistance to Trump started paying off immediately. When the White House issued an executive order banning immigrants from seven Muslim majority countries from entering the country, spontaneous demonstrators swarmed airports across the country. Lawyers with laptops sitting on airport floors drafted legal documents. Attorneys general and state prosecutors filed emergency cases before judges in several states.

Incredibly, Trump's orders were blocked. The president was furious. And when he rewrote the plan, it was blocked again.

The separation of powers worked. Independent judges did their job. The federal system worked. Independent states challenged the federal government. The Constitution worked. The Founding Fathers, who might have been turning in their graves hearing Trump's multiple verbal assaults on the freedoms they espoused, would have been happy to see their design hold up under fire.

A free press has shone a bright light on the Trump team's secret ties to Russia. Because of journalists, we learned that Mike Flynn, Trump's dangerous choice for National Security Advisor, lied about meetings with Russian officials and was paid as an agent of Turkey. Trump replaced him with Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, a widely praised addition to a foreign policy team that now includes some well-qualified, reasonable figures.

In the meantime, multiple congressional investigations and an FBI probe are looking into Russia's involvement in the election and the possible links with Trump's campaign. The Republican-led congressional side of the investigations is far from impressive, but it is occurring. In most countries, this would be unimaginable. The FBI and Congress, investigating a foreign government the president praised repeatedly on the campaign trail and in the early days of his administration, are seemingly open to following the evidence as far as it leads, even if it leads to Trump himself.

But perhaps nothing is more astonishing that Trump's failure to

make progress on most of his signature promises, even though his party controls all three branches of government.

The Republicans may have a majority in the House and the Senate, but when Trump tried to pass his promised "repeal and replace" of Obama's health care plan, members of his own party balked. The same was true for his idea for a wall on the Mexican border. Trump had absurdly promised to have Mexico pay for the wall. When he asked Congress to approve money for the project, he got nowhere.

That is not to say that Trump's presidency has been inconsequential. He has already done a great deal of harm. His contempt for facts, his "gaslighting" techniques -- tampering with reality to cast doubt on truth -- his embrace of dictators and disregard for human rights around the world have already stained America's credibility and its cherished position as a champion of democratic values and freedom.

So far, the presidency has proven a difficult and frustrating exercise for Trump. No wonder he said the job is harder than he expected. But it's early yet. One hundred days still leaves more than 90% of a presidential term.

History will record that the Trump presidency was a major test for American democracy and its system of government. The good news is that Americans are actively defending their rights. Democracy is winning. So far.



D'Antonio : The Trump spectacle continues to dazzle

Michael D'Antonio is the author of the book "Never Enough: Donald Trump and the Pursuit of Success" (St. Martin's Press). The opinions expressed in this commentary are his.

(CNN)Having failed, at least so far, to deliver on his promises on healthcare, a border wall and tax cuts, President Donald Trump ended his first 100 days in office the way they began, with a deeply negative, divisive speech that served as a booster shot for his followers' rage. Included in the tirade, which he delivered in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, were attacks on the press, immigrants and progressives.

Once again, he flailed Democrats who "don't mind the illegals pouring in, the drugs pouring in. They don't mind." He also referred to the members of the media as "very dishonest people" and "enemies of the people," before returning to his diatribe against immigration and the need for a border wall. All of this was offered in a rambling style worthy of a reality TV star -- not the President of the United States.

Of course it was style and not substance that Trump traveled to deliver, and it was style that many came to hear. The Saturday spectacle in this swing state was politics practiced as a dark art, designed to entertain the crowd while distracting from the cruel fact

that Trump hasn't been able to fulfill his campaign pledges.

As so often occurs with Trump, reality took a back seat as he celebrated his 100 day mark. Although empty seats could be seen from the podium where he stood,

he announced

that attendance "broke the all-time record." He praised the mythological substance called "clean coal" and falsely claimed that The New York Times had apologized for its coverage of the 2016 election.

The decidedly unpresidential tone of Trump's address was consistent with his motivation for going to

Pennsylvania in the first place. The appearance coincided with the annual White House correspondent's dinner, which has been a tradition in Washington since the 1930s. The event, essentially a roast of the sitting President and others in the power elite, marks the one night of the year when the powerful agree to accept ridicule and even admit to their own flaws, all in the name of charity and amity.

Trump, whose idea of humor is to mock others, is the first President to skip the dinner since Ronald Reagan was recovering from the bullet wounds he suffered in an assassination attempt. For him, there would be no good-natured acceptance of jibes from comedians

and politicians. Instead he chose to alienate the majority of Americans who disapprove of his presidency thus far and rally his supporters with an ill-tempered tirade.

Like a sulking child who hosts a competing party when the other kids gather to celebrate, Trump intended to upstage the WHCD, and to some extent he did. His rally got plenty of TV airtime and was live-streamed online.

It reminded his supporters that he can be relied upon to stir their resentment. The event also served the President's ego, bringing an energy and enthusiasm to his face that has been missing ever since that night when he seemed stunned to see that he had gained the White House while losing the popular vote.

Always a man with a chip on his shoulder, Trump has often seemed quite miserable in the office of the

President, and it's easy to imagine him alone in the White House (with his wife Melania living in New York) dialing up old friends to chat as darkness falls on Washington.

Except for being amused by the fact that he can

press a button

at his desk and suddenly receive a fresh glass of Coke, Trump has appeared quite grumpy as he struggles to get anything significant accomplished. His legislative failures on health care have been matched by multiple defeats in the courts in his effort to ban visitors from several majority-Muslim countries from our shores. Investigations into his team's connection to Russia continue, and members of his staff make more headlines for their feuds than for their policy agendas.

The work product of the Trump administration betrays the malaise gripping the man at the top, who only seems like himself when he's on stage performing as an angry provocateur. He is, at his core, the personification of the politics of division. This quality was fully established when he declared his run for the presidency and has been his *modus operandi* ever since. In his most authentic moments as President, most recently in Harrisburg, he has made himself into a riveting but also terrifying spectacle that is the shame of the Republican Party and the nation.

On the morning after the Harrisburg speech, the Trump administration announced

that the White House would welcome a visit from the President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, who has

admitted to killing

suspected drug dealers without first granting them trials. In his embrace of Duterte, who is a global pariah, a leader who loves to talk like a strong man honors a President who kills like one. It is a demonstration of character just as clear, and even more disturbing, than what he gave us in Pennsylvania.

If Trump has proven anything as President, it is that he unable or unwilling to do the job to which he was elected. This weekend alone, he has shown us he is not interested in uniting the country, inspiring action and fashioning a bright American future. Instead, he is content to take Theodore Roosevelt's description of the office of the presidency as a "bully pulpit" quite literally.

the Atlantic Gray : Trump's Entertainment Presidency

Rosie Gray

The conventional wisdom is that Donald Trump didn't get much done in his first 100 days in office. His signature campaign promises—the Muslim travel ban, the border wall—are no closer to fruition than they were when he took office. He has not figured out a way to work with Congress to repeal and replace Obamacare. Despite an appearance of perpetual activity—a flurry of executive orders, leaks to the media about the inner workings of the West Wing—and a real win in nominating and confirming new Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, this White House hasn't made much of an impact policy-wise.

All of this adds up to an impression akin to the sound of a balloon deflating. "I've got an entirely conventional view of this: He's done basically nothing," said one Washington conservative who speaks to Trump.

But there are ways in which the presidency matters that have little to do with policy or legislation. Where Trump has unquestionably had an impact, both as a candidate and now as president, is in the shifting of culture and the breaking of political norms. Trump changed the rules of how people can run for office; his ability to steamroll his way through gaffes and scandals, disregard for the infrastructure and leadership of his party, and lack of any experience in government didn't prevent him from winning the presidency. His victory has thrown decades of political conventional wisdom out the window.

Trump never "pivoted," as candidates are supposed to do when they win their party's nomination and begin campaigning in the general election. And he has continued to not pivot as president, even despite pundits breathlessly observing him "becoming president" on the night of his first speech to a joint session of Congress. Despite the presence of moderating influences in the White House who have, sometimes successfully, pulled him away from the nationalist impulses that drove his candidacy, Trump hasn't changed—and there's no evidence he ever will. He is one of the least conventional candidates to ever win the office.

Trump has had a profound effect on an American political culture already heavily weighted toward entertainment. The battles in the White House play out on cable news, the palace intrigue akin to a season of *The Real World*. Who will win this round — Steve Bannon or Jared Kushner? Gary Cohn or Peter Navarro? Trump himself views the world through the prism of media coverage, is obsessed with cable news, and acts accordingly. It's the entertainment presidency. And despite the stasis on policy—the U.S. is still in the North American Free Trade Agreement, and serious tax reform looks unlikely this year—Trump's unconventional approach has changed the debate surrounding these issues in ways that could eventually have real impact. It's Trump who has made renegotiating or terminating NAFTA into a live issue, and who has expanded the range of tax proposals being seriously debated.

Those two issues offer a glimpse into how much Trump has changed the presidency, even as he struggles to change policy. He came close last week to signing an executive order that would withdraw the United States from the North American Free Trade Agreement, which he has repeatedly promised to renegotiate if not terminate—only to back down after speaking to the leaders of Canada and Mexico.

On tax reform, his team rushed out a one-page plan last week that was roundly mocked in Washington as half-baked; a source close to the White House said that Sean Hannity and most of the presidential staff had encouraged the president to focus first on health care, saving taxes for after Obamacare had been repealed. (Hannity declined to comment.) Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin had said previously that tax reform probably couldn't get done this year.

But after an op-ed by Larry Kudlow, Stephen Moore, Steve Forbes and Art Laffer in *The New York Times* last week urging tax reform forward, the plan went ahead.

Kudlow said he had been at the White House on Tuesday and Wednesday and he and the others have "made their views known."

"We were down there yesterday, we were in the West Wing," he said on Thursday. It was a dramatic example of how Trump's willingness to operate outside the usual policy process, and to accept advice from informal advisors, has reshaped the way debates are unfolding.

Whether Trump's challenges to convention permanently change Washington's culture, though, or become a cautionary tale for future politicians, may largely be less determined by his success in reshaping debates than by his ability to deliver substantive results. "If you are viewed as successful, yeah, you may have altered the presidency," said Tim Naftali, a clinical associate professor of history and public service at New York University. "But if you're viewed as a failure, no."

"The long-term effects of his allergy to existing norms will depend on how well he does as president," Naftali said.

And, at the moment, views of Trump are starkly polarized. His approval ratings are historically low for a president at this point in his tenure. A Gallup poll this week put Trump's approval at 43 percent.

But Trump has never much cared about pleasing everyone. This weekend, he ditched the White House Correspondents Dinner to hold a campaign rally in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He thrives off the adulation of his core supporters, and he still has it, despite not delivering on some of the signature promises that drew them to him.

"Trump never suffers politically if he tries and fails," said the longtime Trump confidant Roger Stone. "He only suffers politically if he stops trying. His voters don't blame Trump because the travel ban has been knocked down by two federal judges exceeding their authority."

And on a range of other equally contentious issues, he's still trying. "There's a lot of speculation about

what he might do on taxes and I'm glad he put this out," Kudlow said of the tax plan. "He's writing his own

page, not letting others write the page."



Donald Trump Is America's Experiment in Having No Government

Rosa Brooks

In a signature theme of its first 100 days, the Trump administration, encouraged by conservative media outlets, has launched an assault on civil servants the likes of which should have gone out of style in the McCarthy era. Attacks on their credibility, motivations, future employment, and basic missions have become standard fare for White House press briefings and initiatives. In doing so, the administration and its backers may be crippling their legacy from the start by casting away the experts and implementers who not only make the executive agenda real but provide critical services for ordinary Americans. But in a move that should trouble all regardless of political affiliation, they also run the risk of undermining fundamental democratic principles of American governance.

Searching for policy-based or political rationale for these moves overlooks a key point: that the United States civil service can be an enormous asset for presidential administrations regardless of party, and undermining it belies a misunderstanding of what public servants actually do. These good folks, the vast majority of whom do not live in Washington, get up in the morning to cut social security checks, maintain aircraft carriers, treat veterans, guard the border, find Osama bin Laden, and yes, work hard to protect the president and make his policies look good. Many of them earn less than they would in the private sector and are deeply committed to serving the American people. Any effort to undercut them is irrational on its face.

The attacks continue several themes from Mr. Trump's campaign that made for good television then, but poor governance now.

Trump spent his campaign painting Washington as corrupt and inept, an overblown charge that nevertheless has some merit. There is certainly room to clean up D.C.'s act. But Trump's supporters, and at times even the mainstream press, go further today, accusing civil servants of conspiracy against the president, leaks designed to embarrass his administration, and even manipulation of geopolitics (some absurdly blamed the "deep state" for the tragic chemical weapons attacks in Syria) — all

without evidence. Civil servants present an easy target: They are rarely portrayed as societal heroes and have few external advocates. Likewise, they aren't generally permitted to publicly respond to charges against them, no matter how preposterous — or even explain the value of their work. For all these reasons, it's been simpler for Trump's spokespeople and surrogates to blame them for the administration's own growing pains and infighting. After all, who knew how complex being president would be?

Trump's aggressive villainization of anyone who disagrees with him has continued into his administration. In contrast, policymaking by its nature involves dissent. Trump and his team have shown little tolerance for it, even when it would make their policy execution stronger — a habit consistent with anti-intellectualism and anti-expert sentiment in their political base. As a result, policymakers and analysts practicing their craft by dissenting or offering contrasting advice are deemed out of line rather than competent. The intelligence community has long been in Trump's sights, particularly since presenting findings on Russian efforts to influence the 2016 election against Hillary Clinton.

For such actions, career analysts have been deemed politicized, when the very act of offering uncomfortable analysis to their boss is perhaps the most important and apolitical pursuit they could undertake. Signatories of the State Department "dissent channel" cable — a long-standing forum of policy debate — on Trump's travel ban were likewise advised that they'd be better off quitting their jobs than offering alternative views. Just as troublesome is the apparent loyalty screening of civil servants and candidates for non-political positions in the executive branch. A talented career hire tapped to run a Defense Department think tank was pressured to withdraw from his prospective role after it resurfaced that he was among the Republican national security experts who had signed a "Never Trump" letter during the campaign. Trump's advisors seem content to isolate themselves from awkward advice or even a whiff of constructive criticism.

During his campaign and transition, Trump and his surrogates suggested military or intelligence

officials involved in policies he did not support would be purged from the ranks. Such a purge as such hasn't come to pass; indeed, Trump has lauded both communities on their own turf at Langley and the Pentagon. But the administration has concurrently taken baffling actions against civil servants in senior appointments, leaving consequential posts — such as those responsible for embassy security, nuclear security, and ambassadorships empty for months rather than invite career appointees put in place by President Barack Obama to stay. (The degree to which such vacancies put the United States at risk will, frighteningly, probably not be revealed until a crisis occurs.) Worse, conservative media supporters of Trump have lobbied hard against individual staffers. Career servants rarely see themselves in the press, but recently experts like Chris Backemeyer, Alan Eyres, Andrew Quinn, Yael Lempert, and Sahar Nowrouzadeh, among others, have been subject to personal attacks in conservative media outlets for the sin of working on portfolios that were part of Obama's policy agenda. That these staffers were involved for their expertise, rather than partisan or positional affiliation, seems lost on pundits advocating their dismissal.

Cutting off your nose

These anti-civil servant campaigns have been neither solely rhetorical, nor anecdotal. Trump's administration, in some cases supported by Congress, is well into a broader campaign for the "deconstruction of the administrative state." Concrete steps can be found in the recently lifted federal hiring freeze (a step that offers little savings in the long run and prevents the government from recruiting much-needed talent); actively excluding expert staff from deliberations and decisions; reviving a congressional procedure permitting appropriations amendments to reduce an individual federal employee's salary to \$1; and proposing devastating budget cuts to many non-defense agencies. Recent revelations about the gutting and restructuring of U.S. foreign assistance is perhaps the most egregious, but likely not the last example.

Trump and his team have a right to their make their own decisions, even the right to be wrong.

However, in electing him the American people trusted that he would not only occupy the bully pulpit and be the populist leader-in-chief but someone who would make use of the full scope of the federal government's expertise, capabilities, and reach. (On this note, his apparent unawareness of, and surprise at, the full extent of the bureaucracies under his authority should be grounds for yet further alarm).

His failure to do so is likely to cause damage beyond Trump's agenda. That he is tacitly or actively undermining civil servants' ability to do their jobs should be deeply worrisome not only to Trump's detractors, but to all Americans in two respects: It slows down and, in some cases, brings to a halt a range of critical government functions, and it undermines the broader democratic principles that Americans have long held (or should hold) dear. Both are wholly unrelated to politics or the administration in question. They are also generally independent of the interests of the bureaucrats themselves, although some concern for their well-being shouldn't be controversial.

Pulling qualified people from important civil service postings or otherwise preventing them from doing their jobs will undermine the government's ability to perform basic functions in support of the American people and their interests. This will sound either obvious (to those who have regard for the importance of a healthy government), or advantageous (to the likes of Steve Bannon and others who apparently loathe what they have erroneously deemed the "deep state"). But for the many who fall between these extremes, the rank and file in Washington is irrelevant, interchangeable, even superfluous — none of which is true to fact. In reality, most of the individuals serving the U.S. government (including those in more arcane and cobwebbed corners) exist to keep the trains, roads, planes, and hospitals running (somewhat) on time, or even running at all. As in all sectors of employment, there exists bloated payrolls, poor performers, duplication, and even fraud in the federal workforce. And given that they are employed on taxpayers' dime, and in their interest, the highest expectations and oversight are merited. But for the most part

these are trained individuals with expertise and motivation who are making some piece of the machine that needs to run, well, run.

In addition to expertise, these individuals often bring experience to the processes of policymaking which, again, is not easily replaced. This includes not only the ability to cite federal code or navigate budget procedures, but also the ability to say, “we tried that and it didn’t work” — something that can save a new administration a lot of effort, assuming they’re willing to listen. Having employees who have been around the block not only helps the president avoid making the same mistakes as his predecessor, but it means preserving relationships with foreign and domestic entities. This makes the business of government run much more smoothly and reduces opportunities for misinterpretation. It’s hard to imagine a more critical skill than being able to pick up the phone and call a congressional staffer, a religious leader, or foreign diplomat, and explain a situation or make a straightforward ask. This is all the more relevant in a crisis, for which Trump’s current strategy makes his government frighteningly ill-prepared. Analysts, policymakers, and implementers can also offer the ground truth of how key audiences will react to policy change. Such advice may not be valuable to an administration set on disruption but should be highly prized by the American people. Even if the administration never budges from its original policy positions, proposals that are scrutinized, red-teamed, and launched by experts will be better considered and informed by the type of expertise and experience described above.

An assault on democracy

Depending on how far Trump takes these attacks, all these concerns may be secondary to the potential for erosion of democracy and good governance. First, there is the easy and unnerving comparison to the McCarthyism of the early 1950s, during which the senator from Wisconsin orchestrated a government-wide witch hunt for

those considered to be “soft” on communism, if not actual communists themselves. (Trump’s personal connection to McCarthy by way of the latter’s lead counsel, Roy Cohn — a longtime Trump friend and advisor — is perhaps not entirely coincidental.) McCarthy’s campaign sowed distrust and paranoia across the U.S. government and American society, stifling freedom of expression and leading to the firing of dozens of public servants for their beliefs, or in many cases suspected beliefs (many targeted were in no way sympathetic to communism). This may seem an extreme comparison, as there is not yet any indication the president plans to hunt down and prosecute those who hold a particular set of beliefs; however, a mentality and atmosphere of suspicion, in which one might be fired for expressing certain ideas or simply working in certain offices is fundamentally opposed to the principles of democracy and civil rights on which the U.S. government is based.

Pushing away civil servants who are perceived to disagree with the party in power also sets up the U.S. electoral system as winner-takes-all contest more closely resembling a third-world dictatorship than the United States (other Trump tendencies, such as placing immediate family members in senior posts, make this comparison all the more apt). While historically a new administration replaces senior policymakers with its own ideological allies, the bureaucracy itself has remained apolitical. This allows for each party — and specifically the party *not* in power at any given time — to feel at least somewhat assured that critical national security decisions will be informed by something other than pure politics, i.e., that the individuals in power will not take steps which first and foremost serve their continued reign and personal interests as opposed to the larger interests of the nation. When this assumption is challenged, the stakes of a presidential election and electoral politics in general become astronomically higher, and can create the underlying conditions for

violent conflict or even civil war. When political entities view victory as the only means of survival and see their rivals’ success as a guarantee of their own political demise, the gloves of civility come off in ways that could make the tactics of 2016 seem benign.

Whether they realize it or not, Americans rely on the continuity of the U.S. civil service regardless of political environment. From predicting hurricanes to providing independent military advice, from monitoring pandemics to managing air traffic, assuming the basic trustworthiness of the average bureaucrat is foundational to day-to-day life. Testing their competence and pressing the basis of their views is valid and worthwhile. Undermining them and treating them as a foe to be vanquished should be disturbing to those in and out of Washington. It is one thing to offer substantive criticisms — welcome in the U.S. political system — and another to take on “institutions in American life that are traditionally charged with establishing the factual basis that inform national-security decisions.” Writing in January in the *Atlantic*, Jon Finer, former chief of staff to Secretary of State John Kerry, continues: “If Trump prevails in these fights, he could do more than simply enact his agenda; he could alter aspects of our political culture in ways that will be difficult to reverse.”

Even if, with all of that, one still views the civil service with extreme skepticism, treating the bureaucracy as an enemy makes it more difficult to address some of its very real flaws, of which there are many. Longevity is rewarded over merit. Hiring practices are lengthy, burdensome, and make it almost impossible to rapidly bring on board either young or experienced talent for temporary or permanent needs. Security clearance policies are both out of date and poorly managed, as evidenced by real challenges facing Trump’s own administration. Performance evaluation is inconsistent and too often has little impact on whether employees are retained, promoted, or let go, even

when serious problems are identified. Talent management, skill identification and development, and the flexibility toward new challenges are frequently employed buzzwords that are rarely internalized.

Despite all that, many talented and passionate Americans are drawn to public service, carving out careers that work for themselves and for the nation despite these flaws. Trump, his administration, and Congress could — rather than declaring the civil service the enemy — offer agencies the flexibility and tools to recruit, develop, promote, and retain talent — and shed poor performers. Civil service reform like the proposals offered by the Bipartisan Policy Center in its recent report is an unsexy pursuit (and not likely one to receive much attention in *Breitbart*), but will advance Trump’s agenda far more than casting away civil servants altogether or conducting targeted witch hunts against those he views as threats.

Continuing to discredit and dissemble the civil service would be a grave mistake for the president. He and his team were elected in part due to their status as outsiders which, while they may be loath to admit, means there are a lot of things they don’t know. An apolitical body of experts and administrators exists specifically to fill this gap. To ignore it — or worse, to destroy it — risks not only the Trump administration’s ability to implement its agenda and succeed, but the entire premise on which the American system of government rests. It is incumbent on Secretary of Defense James Mattis, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, and veteran bureaucrats like Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Tom Shannon — individuals who came from that world but now have Donald Trump’s ear — to defend their people and the bureaucracy as a whole, while allowing that it has flaws which can and should be repaired. Without them, the system will likely break in ways we can’t predict or easily fix.

POLITICO Trump starts dismantling his shadow Cabinet

Michael Grunwald

The White House is quietly starting to pull the plug on its shadow Cabinet of Trump loyalists who had been dispatched to federal agencies to serve as the president’s eyes and ears.

These White House-installed chaperones have often clashed with the Cabinet secretaries they were

assigned to monitor, according to sources across the agencies, with the secretaries expressing frustration that the so-called “senior White House advisers” are mostly young Trump campaign aides with little experience in government.

Story Continued Below

The tensions have escalated for weeks, prompting a recent meeting among Chief of Staff Reince

Priebus, Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner, and other administration officials, according to two sources familiar with the meeting. Now, some of the advisers are being reassigned or simply eased out, the sources said, even though many of them had expected to be central players at their agencies for the long haul. The tumult underscores the growing pains that are still being felt throughout Trump’s

government, more than 100 days into his term.

“These guys are being set up for failure,” said one administration source. “They’re not D.C. guys. They’re campaign people. They have no idea how government works.”

The White House began deploying the advisers throughout the bureaucracy in January, assigning

them to report back on what was happening in their departments. But according to several sources, their meddling quickly began to irritate high-powered officials accustomed to running their own shops -- including Defense Secretary James Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly, both former generals; Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, a successful financier; and Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, who's been a Cabinet secretary before.

Mnuchin assigned his minder to the Treasury basement, according to senior officials at the Treasury Department. Meanwhile, administration sources said Mattis blew up when his White House-assigned senior adviser insisted on reviewing one of his briefings. And EPA administrator Scott Pruitt's senior leadership team repeatedly clashed with its uninvited guest, Don Benton, and iced him out of meetings, according to people close to EPA officials. Eventually Trump shifted Benton to a new job leading the Selective Service System.

Some officials have also been mocking the regular meetings of the senior advisers at the White House to discuss what's going on at their agencies and how they can advance Trump's agenda, calling these meetings brainstorming sessions for suck-ups.

"It's like a roomful of Jonahs from 'Veep,'" one administration official said.

Now the White House seems inclined to let Cabinet secretaries decide whether they want their minders to stay. A White House official said the advisers were hired on 120-day

assignments that were never intended to be permanent, serving as points of contact for the White House while the administration has staffed up but officially reporting to the Cabinet secretaries or their chiefs of staff. The official pointed out that at some Cabinet departments, the advisers have already been hired for permanent jobs, while other advisers have moved elsewhere in the administration or left altogether.

"Most individuals serving in the temporary positions during the present transition will have the opportunity to move into a more permanent role within the Administration -- either in the agency they now serve or in another area of the federal government," the official said.

But sources outside the White House said that many of the senior advisers made it clear that they saw themselves as much more than temporary liaisons, claiming a mandate to ensure that Trump's wishes were being carried out throughout the government.

For example, Kelly and his staff have often been at odds with the senior White House adviser at Homeland security, Frank Wuco, a former Navy intelligence officer, according to two people familiar with the situation. One person close to Kelly said Wuco "knows nothing about the mission" of the department and "serves little purpose or value." The person said Wuco and Kelly's staff have disagreed about staffing decisions, adding that only the White House's slow pace in filling key jobs at the department has kept Kelly from ousting him.

"Dysfunction with personnel keeps these types of folks there," the person said. Neither Wuco nor a A DHS spokesman responded to requests for comment.

At Treasury, career staffers have clashed with Camilo Sandoval, the senior White House adviser who once served as director of data operations for Trump campaign, over control of various projects, and Sandoval is now working from the department's basement.

Sandoval doesn't have a relationship with Mnuchin and is expected to leave the department next month, according to Treasury officials; he's now seeking a job at the Japanese embassy, one official said.

Treasury staffers have also tussled with Andrew Smith, the department's White House liaison, who has also been exiled to the basement. He isn't expected to stay, either, the official said.

The tension between the senior advisers and Cabinet secretaries has put the White House in a tricky spot. Rick Dearborn, a White House deputy chief of staff, was instrumental in setting up the system of senior advisers and he's seen as one of their biggest defenders in the White House, arguing that Trump needs to know what's going on in his own government. And some former Trump campaign officials have complained to POLITICO that they're being pushed aside in favor of Cabinet secretaries and their hand-picked staffers, portraying it as a betrayal of the president.

Nevertheless, the administration has already begun reassigning

some senior White House advisers, starting with Benton at EPA. Jason Botel, a former senior White House adviser at the Education Department, was recently tapped as deputy assistant secretary at the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. And a Transportation Department source said its White House chaperone, a former Pennsylvania lobbyist named Anthony Pugliese, is expected to be transferred soon.

The source said Pugliese got off to a rough start when he ordered the blocking of all outgoing mail in the early days of the administration, supposedly to prevent last-minute Obama decisions from going out the door, then neglected to lift the order. The result was a giant stack of mail full of obscure bureaucratic missives that nobody knew what to do with, the source said. A Transportation Department spokeswoman did not respond to a request for comment.

Chao, who already served as President George W. Bush's labor secretary, was also taken aback when Pugliese told her he expected to sign off on all department policies before they went public, the source said.

"He told the secretary that once we both agree on something, then we can push it out," the source said. "The Secretary was like, 'Um, what's your name again?'"

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Jill Lawrence: Trump is a nightmare negotiating partner

Every time President Trump changes his mind about a fundamental position in a matter of minutes because somebody said something to him, somewhere out there a few negotiators do not get their wings. They get hives and a migraine.

Trump's recent dizzying reversal on the North American Free Trade Agreement reportedly came about when two Cabinet secretaries showed him a map of who'd be hurt if he killed the pact with Canada and Mexico: his own voters. But you would not be safe in assuming Trump will change his mind if he learns something will hurt his voters. If that were the case, he'd be trying to save Obamacare instead of destroy it. There is plenty of evidence and even a map that show the House Republican health

plan would hit hardest by far in the states he carried.

Maybe Trump's position depends on the views of the relevant Cabinet member (Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price is a fierce opponent of Obamacare). Or which way the wind is blowing among Republicans in Congress (they like NAFTA, and they ran on repealing Obamacare). Maybe the key is what a foreign leader says. Fundamental flips have been known to happen following such tutorials — that is, conversations.

The only constants with Trump are unpredictability and expediency. These are not, suffice it to say, the traditional cornerstones of getting to yes in politics. The real pillars are trust and discretion. Can you rely on your negotiating partner to be consistent, to not leak or tweet or make counterproductive headlines,

to be truly interested in a win-win outcome and understand what that will take?

This is how political compromises are achieved, as I reported in my book, *The Art of the Political Deal*. The Trump White House, however, is a gush of leaks. Trump himself is obsessed with winners, losers and public relations. It's unclear from day to day where he stands on issues, whether he is familiar with them and whether he even cares. This has turned off Democrats and Republicans alike.

Nor do Trump's explanations increase confidence in his reliability as a negotiating partner. He didn't realize health care was so complicated until he became president. He also apparently didn't realize that he'd need China's help with North Korea, that NATO might be useful, that NAFTA was actually

doing some good, and that Mexico could not be bullied into paying for a border wall. Thus NATO is no longer obsolete. China is not going to be branded a currency manipulator. And that border wall could turn into fencing, technology and manpower financed by U.S. taxpayers.

The obvious solution to Trump's compulsive disruption would be to cut him out of the negotiating loop — let some experienced hands and Congress take care of things. But there's no way to do that. This president enjoys hurling curve balls and wrenches, whether it's threatening to move on from health care if the House couldn't pass a bill (that lasted less than a month) or tweeting provocatively about Puerto Rico's problems paying for Medicaid (an issue congressional negotiators were discussing as they worked last

week to avoid a government shutdown).

If Trump suddenly demands a tax plan to beat the 100-day clock, as happened last week, drop everything — health care, funding the government, the complicated planning for the real tax push — and start scribbling on that napkin. One can only hope he doesn't suddenly demand an immediate attack on North Korea. Napkin time.

Successful negotiators of the past did not have to deal with public presidential ultimatums and social media outbursts. For instance, House Speaker Paul Ryan and Sen. Patty Murray negotiated a major budget deal in 2013 when they chaired their respective Budget committees. They got to know each other over several months,

and nothing they said to each other in confidence ended up in the news. They knew it was important that both could claim some wins. And what constituted a win didn't change. Ryan and his party had longstanding positions, as did Murray, President Obama and their party. Some things were simply non-negotiable; others had wiggle room. These were familiar to both sides, and they stayed constant.

POLICING THE USA: A look at race, justice, media

Another success was a 2014 public lands package that included scores of development and conservation projects and left out scores of others. Leaks and indecision would have blown it up. But House and Senate negotiators, a sprawling cast from both parties, did not go

wobbly or public. They all certainly had plenty to complain about. An acre for a cemetery to expand that was counted on the development side of the ledger? A permanent end to eminent domain as a tool to protect parks, rivers and wilderness? And yet no one was out there on Twitter bemoaning the horror of it all. They kept everything quiet until they had a final product. Their trust in one another had not been misplaced.

Fragmentation in Washington, between Republicans and Democrats but also among Republicans themselves, means we're in for months of intensive negotiation to get anything done. This week, Trump and lawmakers need a deal to keep the government open and funded until Oct. 1. By fall, Congress will have to

raise the debt ceiling to keep America solvent. Deals will be necessary to move forward on health care, tax reform, infrastructure spending and Trump's enormously contentious budget proposal.

But no amount of talking will get anyone anywhere if members of Congress can't trust Trump to stick to a position, forgo revenge and threats, and demonstrate convincingly that he's interested in more than his own polling, branding and wealth. Trump said he alone could fix Washington. At the moment, there's a real case that he alone is breaking it.

The New York Times **Bipartisan Agreement Reached to Fund Government Through September (UNE)**

Thomas Kaplan and Matt Flegenheimer

The deal should spare Republicans the embarrassment of seeing the government shut down on their watch. But it also gave a glimpse of the reluctance of lawmakers to bend to Mr. Trump's spending priorities, like his desire for sharp cuts to domestic programs, with the increase in funding for medical research a prime example. And it leaves the border wall looming as a fight in future spending negotiations, especially if Mr. Trump presses the issue, as he vowed to do during a rally Saturday night to mark his 100th day in office.

Details of the agreement were not yet public on Sunday night, but several congressional aides described key parts of it. The measure will cover the rest of the fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30.

Lawmakers had already taken action to keep the government open while they finalized the spending agreement. On Friday, Congress approved a one-week spending measure that averted a shutdown on Saturday.

In recent days, the spending talks on Capitol Hill had seemed unlikely to result in the kind of impasse that

could lead to a shutdown, the last of which occurred in 2013. Some key obstacles, including the border wall and a standoff over subsidy payments to insurers under the Affordable Care Act, seemed to fall away as congressional negotiators worked on a deal. The White House said last week that it would continue to make the payments, and that message reassured Democrats who wanted to ensure that the payments, which go to insurers to lower deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs for low-income consumers, would not be cut off.

Lawmakers were able to reach a resolution in the spending package on another potential sticking point, the fate of retired coal miners who faced losing their health coverage, an issue that brought lawmakers close to a government shutdown in December. The deal provides a permanent extension of health coverage for the retired miners.

Though the spending agreement saves the president and congressional Republicans from the specter of a shutdown during a period of one-party rule, it does deprive Mr. Trump of a major victory on the border wall, and Democrats seemed pleased with how they fared.

"This agreement is a good agreement for the American people and takes the threat of a government shutdown off the table," Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader, said in a statement. "The bill ensures taxpayer dollars aren't used to fund an ineffective border wall, excludes poison-pill riders, and increases investments in programs that the middle-class relies on, like medical research, education and infrastructure."

He added that Democrats had "clearly laid out our principles" early in the debate, and argued that the final measure "reflects those principles."

Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, the Democratic leader, cheered the deal as a "sharp contrast to President Trump's dangerous plans to steal billions from lifesaving medical research" and expressed relief that the bill would not pay for an "immoral and unwise border wall or create a cruel new deportation force."

As of late Sunday, neither Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, nor the House speaker, Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin, had issued statements appraising the agreement. A

spokeswoman for the House Appropriations Committee, Jennifer Hing, said, "The agreement will move the needle forward on conservative priorities and will ensure that the essential functions of the federal government are maintained."

The negotiations took place in recent days amid a furious scramble inside the White House to demonstrate progress before Mr. Trump's 100th day in office. Republicans in the House still hope to advance a revised version of their bill to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

Last week, the revised bill earned the backing of the hard-line House Freedom Caucus, though the changes gave pause to numerous moderate Republicans, including some who had backed the initial proposal.

It was unclear when a vote on the revised measure might occur, despite pressure from the White House. Republican leaders in the House have said repeatedly that a vote will come when they have enough support to pass the bill.

The Washington Post **Congress reaches deal to keep government open through September (UNE)**

Congressional negotiators reached an agreement late Sunday on a broad spending package to fund the government through the end of September, alleviating fears of a government

shutdown later this week, several congressional aides said.

Congress is expected to vote on the roughly \$1 trillion package early this week. The bipartisan agreement includes policy victories for

Democrats, whose votes will be necessary to pass the measure in the Senate, as well as \$12.5 billion in new military spending and \$1.5 billion more for border security requested by Republican leaders in Congress.

The agreement follows weeks of tense negotiations between Democrats and GOP leaders after President Trump insisted that the deal include funding to begin building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Trump eventually

dropped that demand, leaving Congress to resolve lingering issues over several unrelated policy measures.

The new border-security money comes with strict limitations that the Trump administration use it only for technology investments and repairs to existing fencing and infrastructure, the aides said.

"This agreement is a good agreement for the American people and takes the threat of a government shutdown off the table," said Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.). "The bill ensures taxpayer dollars aren't used to fund an ineffective border wall, excludes poison pill riders and increases investments in programs that the middle class relies on, like medical research, education and infrastructure."

Schumer and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) boasted that they were able to force Republicans to withdraw more than

160 unrelated policy measures, known as riders, including those that would have cut environmental funding and scaled back financial regulations for Wall Street.

Democrats fought to include \$295 million to help Puerto Rico continue making payments to Medicaid, \$100 million to combat opioid addiction, and increases in energy and science funding that Trump had proposed cutting. If passed, the legislation will ensure that Planned Parenthood continues to receive federal funding through September.

The package includes \$61 million to reimburse local law enforcement agencies for the cost of protecting Trump when he travels to his residences in Florida and New York, a major priority for the two New York Democrats involved in the spending talks, Schumer and Rep. Nita M. Lowey.

Among the bipartisan victories is \$407 million in wildfire relief for

western states and a decision to permanently extend a program that provides health-care coverage for coal miners.

"The agreement will move the needle forward on conservative priorities and will ensure that the essential functions of the federal government are maintained," said Jennifer Hing, a spokeswoman for House Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.).

The Daily 202 newsletter

A must-read morning briefing for decision-makers.

House Republicans have struggled in recent weeks to keep their members focused on spending as White House officials and conservatives pressed leaders to revive plans for a vote on health-care legislation. The health-care fight became tangled last week in spending talks as leaders worried that forcing a vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act risked angering

Democrats whose votes are necessary to avoid a government shutdown.

Leaders worked last week to determine whether the House has enough votes to pass a revised health-care bill brokered by the White House, the head of the conservative House Freedom Caucus and a top member of the moderate Tuesday Group.

House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) and his top lieutenants announced Thursday that they did not have sufficient votes to be sure the measure would pass but vowed to press on.

"We're still educating members," House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) told reporters after a late-night health-care meeting last week. "We've been making great progress. As soon as we have the votes, we'll vote on it."

POLITICO Budget deal reached in Congress

By Susan B. Glasser

The agreement would avoid a government shutdown.

Congressional leaders released the text early Monday of a more than 1,600-page spending bill that would fund the government at updated levels through the end of September.

The bipartisan deal struck Sunday night would increase defense spending by \$25 billion over current levels and provide \$1.5 billion in new border security spending aimed at repairing existing infrastructure and increasing technology, though it would not allocate any new money to a Southern border wall with Mexico despite the president's insistence.

Story Continued Below

"This agreement is a good agreement for the American people,

and takes the threat of a government shutdown off the table. The bill ensures taxpayer dollars aren't used to fund an ineffective border wall, excludes poison pill riders, and increases investments in programs that the middle-class relies on, like medical research, education, and infrastructure," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.).

The legislation will permanently extend expiring health insurance benefits to coal miners, a major priority of senators from Appalachia. It includes \$2 billion in new spending for the National Institutes of Health, a down payment on former President Barack Obama's cancer moon-shot.

Under the plan, Congress would also deliver \$8.1 billion in emergency and disaster relief funding, including money to aid California, West Virginia, Louisiana and North Carolina and fight fires in

the West, as well as new investments in fighting the opioid epidemic.

Congress was forced to pass a stopgap, week-long funding measure last Friday to avoid a government shutdown as the two parties sparred over the GOP's attempts to repeal Obamacare, as well as Puerto Rico's beleaguered Medicaid coffers.

The legislation delivers wins to both parties, though the Republicans and Democrats also had to compromise on some key issues. The Trump administration had demanded that the bill include a down payment on a physical barrier along the Southern border, as well as a rider blocking sanctuary cities from getting new grant funding. The White House received neither though did garner significant new investments in border security. Trump insists now he will still get his wall built imminently and will seek

money for the structure in the new spending bill this fall.

Democrats were seeking a permanent commitment to funding Obamacare's subsidies for low-income Americans' insurance as well as more money to fill Puerto Rico's Medicaid coffers. Instead the Trump administration is only indefinitely funding the Obamacare subsidies, and Puerto Rico's Medicaid solution mostly relies on redistributing existing accounts.

Democrats also fended off riders they view as anti-environmental and anti-abortion.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump Pushing for Vote on Health Bill, but Stumbling Blocks Remain (UNE)

Louise Radnofsky and Kristina Peterson

WASHINGTON—Congressional leaders reached a bipartisan deal late Sunday to fund the government until October, while Republicans scrambled to pull off an even more significant legislative achievement that has eluded them this year: an overhaul of the health-care system.

Both President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence in television interviews Sunday suggested confidence that they could win enough votes to pass a bill to undo the Affordable Care Act. But skepticism among centrist members of the party remains a stumbling block, and it's unclear that congressional leaders have made enough progress to call a roll, as they grapple with Republicans

who have expressed concern that recent changes to satisfy more conservative lawmakers may push coverage costs higher.

Adding to the difficulties for passing any major piece of legislation is the fact that the administration is also pressing lawmakers to flesh out a massive tax cut that the Trump administration unveiled last week, while congressional leaders struggle to reconcile his principles

with very different views they have on how to rewrite the tax code.

"The question is whether we can get 218 votes in the House to do big things," said Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R., Fla.), referring to the number of the votes generally needed to reach a majority in that chamber. Though Republicans have 238 members, they haven't been able to unify them around legislation such as the health-care bill. Mr. Diaz-Balart said

a tax-code rewrite would be even harder: "It's no secret we have some serious, serious challenges."

Still, congressional leaders were celebrating a small victory Sunday night, when they announced a deal on a measure that would fund the government through September before a Saturday shutdown deadline. Lawmakers announced late Sunday that they had reached agreement on a package, and would vote on it early this week. The bill only nods to some of Mr. Trump's priorities—like higher defense funding, and more money for border security—and does not pay for the wall he wants to build along the Mexican border. The measure also leaves largely intact funding for programs Mr. Trump wanted to squeeze, like the Environmental Protection Agency.

That agreement gives Republican leaders a much-needed boost to show they can govern now that they have unified control of government. But it's only a modest, routine step. Health-care is a bigger challenge.

While House Republicans, in conjunction with the White House, continue to tinker with their health-care plan to win sufficient votes, officials have refused to set a fresh deadline for a vote.

Members of Congress are also working with the Trump administration to craft a tax bill they can show to members, but haven't yet given a schedule for that. Work is proceeding on both simultaneously, and congressional leaders have yet to say which one is a higher priority.

In an interview broadcast Sunday, Mr. Trump suggested the health-care plan was near completion, telling CBS: "I didn't put a timeline" on it, but adding: "Now we have a really good

bill....I think they could have voted on Friday."

Mr. Pence, in an interview with NBC, said "repealing and replacing Obamacare is just around the corner."

Lawmakers in the middle of the process offer a more cautious assessment. "People that are insinuating this could happen really soon are building false expectations," said Rep. Steve Stivers (R., Ohio) Friday. "We're close, but there are people who have individual issues and you need to work the individual issues one by one."

The policy wrangling comes as Mr. Trump passed his 100-day mark without a major legislative accomplishment. Asked Sunday to reflect on what he had learned in the 100 days, Mr. Trump answered: "I think things generally tend to go a little bit slower than you'd like them to go."

"Obviously there are a lot of bumps and stumbles along the way," Rep. Charlie Dent (R., Pa.) said of Mr. Trump's first 100 days, though he cited rolling back regulations as what he saw as a positive step. "I just hope the second 100 days are better than the first."

While Congress may have frustrated his agenda, Mr. Trump has in the first 100 days used the powers of the White House to take executive action, and he has signaled—including at a raucous Pennsylvania rally Saturday night to celebrate the marker—that he plans to continue doing so in the weeks ahead.

One of the main ones looming: whether to pull the U.S. out of the 2015 Paris climate accord aimed at curbing climate change. The president said Saturday night that

he would soon be "making a big decision" on the pact, which he blasted as a "one-sided" deal that could "ultimately shrink" the U.S. economy and result in factory and plant closures.

His predecessor, Barack Obama, has said the deal had helped make the U.S. economy more efficient and was essential to encouraging big developing countries like China and India to reduce carbon emissions.

The White House will continue to focus on rewriting American trade policy, and three senior aides said in recent days that trade orders may dominate the remainder of the year. "There is going to be breaking news on trade every week," one official said. The trade issue illustrates the internal tussles between Mr. Trump's more nationalist aides and his more business-oriented advisers.

In a sign that the more hard-edge trade skeptics maintain a central role in the administration, Mr. Trump was joined in Pennsylvania Saturday by Peter Navarro, who has aggravated business leaders by pushing new trade threats, and the president signed an order creating a new trade office to be run by Mr. Navarro.

But even rewriting American trade policy ultimately requires congressional support—something Mr. Trump has learned the hard way, as various congressional rules continue to block his ability to launch a formal renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, another priority. And it will get even harder to deal with Congress next year, as the November 2018 midterm elections near.

The health-care bill has taken on a significance beyond the specific

policies involved, as a symbol for whether Mr. Trump's team has learned how to work with Congress. The past two weeks suggest relations still aren't smooth.

Some Republican aides have complained they are being set up to fail after members of Mr. Trump's team had previously predicted a House vote was going to take place last Wednesday.

At the time of the suggestion, members of Congress were scattered across the country and the world for a recess, making it impossible for leaders to accurately count votes.

House Republicans tried to cobble together a majority last week, but they again came up short, and on Thursday conceded they would have no swift vote in the immediate days that followed.

And even if Mr. Trump succeeds in pushing the health bill through the House, it faces an uphill battle in the Senate.

Mr. Trump on Sunday expressed his frustration with the many ways that Washington has stymied his agenda.

"It's just a very, very bureaucratic system," he said on CBS. "I think the rules in Congress and in particular the rules in the Senate are unbelievably archaic and slow moving. And in many cases, unfair. In many cases, you're forced to make deals that are not the deal you'd make."

—Siobhan Hughes, Janet Hook and Michael C. Bender contributed to this article.

The
Washington
Post

Amid immigration setbacks, one Trump strategy seems to be working: Fear (UNE)

In many ways, President Trump's attempts to implement his hard-line immigration policies have not gone very well in his first three months. His travel ban aimed at some Muslim-majority countries has been blocked by the courts, his U.S.-Mexico border wall has gone nowhere in Congress, and he has retreated, at least for now, on his vow to target illegal immigrants brought here as children.

But one strategy that seems to be working well is fear. The number of migrants, legal and illegal, crossing into the United States has dropped markedly since Trump took office, while recent declines in the number of deportations have been reversed.

Many experts on both sides of the immigration debate attribute at least part of this shift to the use of sharp, unwelcoming rhetoric by Trump and his aides, as well as the administration's showy use of enforcement raids and public spotlighting of crimes committed by immigrants. The tactics were aimed at sending a political message to those in the country illegally or those thinking about trying to come.

"The world is getting the message," Trump said last week during a speech at the National Rifle Association leadership forum in Atlanta. "They know our border is no longer open to illegal immigration, and if they try to break

in you'll be caught and you'll be returned to your home. You're not staying any longer. If you keep coming back illegally after deportation, you'll be arrested and prosecuted and put behind bars. Otherwise it will never end."

The most vivid evidence that Trump's tactics have had an effect has come at the southern border with Mexico, where the number of apprehensions made by Customs and Border Patrol agents plummeted from more than 40,000 per month at the end of 2016 to just 12,193 in March, according to federal data.

[Blame game: Trump casts immigrants as dangerous criminals, but the evidence shows otherwise]

Immigrant rights advocates and restrictionist groups said there is little doubt that the Trump administration's tough talk has had impact.

"The bottom line is that they have entirely changed the narrative around immigration," said Doris Meissner, who served as the commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in the Clinton administration. "The result of that is that, yes, you can call it words and rhetoric, and it certainly is, but it is

changing behavior. It is changing the way the United States is viewed around the world, as well as the way we're talking about and reacting to immigration within the country."

Experts emphasized that it is still early and that the initial success the administration has had in slashing illegal border crossings could be reversed if it fails to follow through on more aggressive enforcement actions that will require more than just rhetorical bombast.

Many of the other initiatives Trump has called for — including additional detention centers and thousands of new Border Patrol officers and immigration agents — are costly. Others, such as his vow to withhold federal funds from "sanctuary cities" that protect immigrants, are facing legal challenges.

Yet unlike areas such as trade, health care or foreign policy, where Trump has moderated his extreme campaign positions or failed to advance his agenda, the administration has systematically sought to check off the president's immigration promises.

Most notably, Trump signed an executive order during his first week in office that, among other things, vastly expanded the pool of the nation's 11 million illegal immigrants who are deemed priorities for deportation.

(The Washington Post)

President Trump reassured cheering supporters at a rally in Harrisburg, Pa., April 29 that he still plans to build a wall along the border with Mexico. President Trump addressed supporters on immigration at a rally in Harrisburg, Pa., on April 29. (The Washington Post)

Deportations had fallen sharply in the final years of the Obama administration as the former president tightened enforcement guidelines to focus on hardened criminals. But under Trump, Immigration and Customs Enforcement has

begun to ramp up the number of immigrants who are being placed in removal proceedings.

Federal agents arrested 21,362 immigrants, mostly convicted criminals, from January through mid-March, compared with 16,104 during the same period last year, according to federal data. Arrests of immigrants with no criminal records more than doubled, to 5,441 in that period.

"This is the Trump era. Progress is being made daily, and it will continue," declared Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who has begun to reorganize the Justice Department to prosecute more immigration cases. "This will be the administration that fully enforces our nation's immigration laws."

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates for lower immigration levels, called Trump's first few months a "mixed picture," but he said the administration "has clearly made some progress."

"The decline at the border is not something that happened on its own — it's a reaction to concerns Trump is going to restore the enforcement of immigration laws," Krikorian said. "It won't last if that fear isn't realized, but if it is, if Trump follows through, we're likely to see a sustained reduction in border crossings."

The question is how successfully the administration can translate the tougher talk into sustainable policies.

[Trump administration moving quickly to build up nationwide deportation force]

Internal planning documents from the Department of Homeland Security leaked recently showed that the agency is preparing to significantly ramp up the nationwide deportation force that Trump promised on the campaign trail.

The agency has secured 33,000 additional detention beds and is considering waiving some

requirements, including a polygraph exam and a physical fitness test, to speed up the hiring of more immigration agents. ICE and CBP also are working with dozens of local police departments interested in being more deeply involved in immigration enforcement.

But the administration's boldest actions have been blocked by the courts, including Trump's attempted temporary freeze on the nation's refugee program, the entry ban targeting majority-Muslim countries and the administration's attempts to withhold some federal funds from sanctuary cities that do not cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

And like President Barack Obama before him, Trump has struggled to deport some foreign-born criminals whose home countries refuse to take them back.

"The administration is doing a good job signaling to the rest of the world they will be cracking down on abuses of the illegal immigration system," said Leon Fresco, an immigration attorney who previously served in the Obama Justice Department and as an aide to Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.). "That should be the point without needing to create the excesses of the travel ban. There is a balance that can be reached if this administration simply signals it will be enforcing immigration law that does not need to be unduly draconian in a way that is not permitted by law."

Immigrant rights advocates point to the lessons learned from legal battles in recent years in several states, including Arizona and Alabama, that enacted laws granting local police broad powers to arrest and imprison immigrants. Most of those laws were gutted or struck down by federal courts.

"What they've done is to export the failed enforcement strategy from the state level that was anti-immigrant to the national level," said Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center.

The goal is to "make life so impossible and difficult for people that they would self-deport," Hincapié said. "That's not the case. People just went underground. Here, a big part of the strategy is to instill fear and create a chilling effect."

Trump is unlikely to back off from his approach, and the administration has found ways to slow the flow of immigrants despite legal setbacks. The number of refugees entering the United States has plummeted from nearly 10,000 last October to fewer than 2,500 in April.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Immigration hawks have also continued to press the White House to do more, including overturning a deferred action program started under Obama that has granted work visas to more than 700,000 "dreamers" who arrived illegally when they were children. Although he promised to overturn the program on Day One, Trump has yet to end it.

But just over three months into Trump's tenure, the frame of the political debate over immigration policy has begun to shift.

"One thing this administration has done that the Democrats' message has to recalibrate for is that it's not credible to the American people to say enforcement plays no role in [reducing] the numbers of immigrants coming illegally," Fresco said. "Some have tried to perpetuate a myth that it is not linked. To the extent the numbers stay low, one thing the Trump administration has been able to say that is a correct statement is that enforcement does factor into the calculus."

**The
New York
Times**

Krugman : On the Power of Being Awful

Paul Krugman

Well, if consumers really are feeling super-confident, they're not acting on those feelings. The first-quarter G.D.P. report, showing growth slowing to a crawl, wasn't as bad as it looks: Technical issues involving inventories and seasonal adjustment (you don't want to know) mean that underlying growth was probably O.K., though not great. But consumer spending was definitely sluggish.

The evidence, in other words, suggests that when Trump voters say they're highly confident, it's more a declaration of their political identity than an indication of what they're going to do, or even, maybe, what they really believe.

May I suggest that focus groups and polls of Trump voters are picking up something similar?

One basic principle I've learned in my years at The Times is that almost nobody ever admits being

wrong about anything — and the wronger they were, the less willing they are to concede error. For example, when Bloomberg surveyed a group of economists who had predicted that Ben Bernanke's policies would cause runaway inflation, they literally couldn't find a single person willing to admit, after years of low inflation, having been mistaken.

Now think about what it means to have voted for Trump. The news

media spent much of the campaign indulging in an orgy of false equivalence; nonetheless, most voters probably got the message that the political/media establishment considered Trump ignorant and temperamentally unqualified to be president. So the Trump vote had a strong element of: "Ha! You elites think you're so smart? We'll show you!"

Now, sure enough, it turns out that Trump is ignorant and

temperamentally unqualified to be president. But if you think his supporters will accept this reality any time soon, you must not know much about human nature. In a perverse way, Trump's sheer awfulness offers him some political protection: His supporters aren't ready, at least so far, to admit that they made that big a mistake.

Also, to be fair, so far Trumpism hasn't had much effect on daily life. In fact, Trump's biggest fails have

involved what hasn't happened, not what has. So it's still fairly easy for those so inclined to dismiss the bad reports as media bias.

Sooner or later, however, this levee is going to break.

I chose that metaphor advisedly. I'm old enough to remember when George W. Bush was wildly popular — and while his numbers gradually deflated from their post 9/11 high, it was a slow process. What really pushed his former supporters to

reconsider, as I perceived it — and this perception is borne out by polling — was the Katrina debacle, in which everyone could see the Bush administration's callousness and incompetence playing out live on TV.

What will Trump's Katrina moment look like? Will it be the collapse of health insurance due to administration sabotage? A recession this White House has no idea how to handle? A natural

disaster or public health crisis? One way or another, it's coming.

Oh, and one more note: By 2006, a majority of those polled claimed to have voted for John Kerry in 2004. It will be interesting, a couple of years from now, to see how many people say they voted for Donald Trump.