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# FRANCE - EUROPE

The  
Washington  
Post

## Emmanuel Macron could fight off French populism. But it won't be with his ideas.

By James

McAuley

PARIS — They call him the “radical centrist.”

This is the way Emmanuel Macron, the photogenic, 39-year-old independent candidate poised to win the French presidency next weekend, is often described in the French and foreign press.

But even Macron's closest advisers say there is little about the political platform of a former investment banker that can be considered “radical.” In nods to both the left and the right that mirror the programs of third-way centrists such as President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair from the 1990s, Macron has proposed a middle way that would heavily invest in health and agriculture at the same time it would trim a costly public sector.

What is “radical” about Macron, his advisers insist, is the candidate himself, a political outsider who, against all odds, is the only option for those who wish to protect France's embattled political establishment. This, they insist, is Macron's not-so-secret weapon in combating the rising tide of populism: If what he proposes is not quite a departure from the political status quo, he is not a familiar face.

“It's an oxymoron, ‘radical centrism,’” Jacques Attali, a prominent French economist and public intellectual who has been an informal adviser to Macron for months, said in an interview. “What he is is what you call ‘bipartisan.’ He's not Marx; his program is not an ideology per se. It's pragmatism.”

Emmanuel Macron, a 39-year-old centrist, will face Marine Le Pen, the far-right nationalist in the presidential runoff May 7, leaving French voters with a stark choice. Macron takes on Le Pen for French presidency. Now What? (The Washington Post)

(The Washington Post)

In certain respects, Macron's “pragmatism” is traditional, the almost predictable orientation of a

centrist social democrat or a moderate American liberal. He has called for a massive 50 billion euro (\$55 billion) public investment, but at the same time, he has vowed to slash as many as 120,000 public-sector jobs and to continue liberalizing the French labor market — despite the immense difficulties the Hollande administration faced when it tried to do the same in 2016.

Not surprisingly, Macron has been called a French Bill Clinton.

But in the global political climate of 2017, those who have advocated ideas like these have not done well. Democrat Hillary Clinton lost the U.S. presidential election with a similar platform, and the British campaign to remain in the European Union was sorely defeated in the Brexit referendum. In both cases, a large number of voters railed against the “system.”

[Rising Right: The rise of insurgent parties in Europe]

Much of that same anti-establishment sentiment has defined the French presidential campaign. Although Macron came out on top in the first round of the vote, a staggering 49 percent of voters ultimately backed populist candidates on the far-right or the far-left whose central message, in different terms, has been anti-establishment fervor.

Furthermore, some of these candidates, especially the far-right Marine Le Pen, have targeted the former investment banker and onetime Socialist economy minister as the very essence of the “system” to be destroyed.

But the strategic problem for Le Pen is that Macron, an entirely unknown quantity just three years ago, cannot quite be written off as an establishment candidate, even if his ideas have captivated a significant number of establishment figures in the process.

Activists leaving a rally hosted by presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in 1995 threw a young Moroccan man into the Seine, where he drowned.

Rival candidate Emmanuel Macron paid homage to that man, 22 years later. Emmanuel Macron pays homage to a man thrown into the Seine by activists leaving a rally hosted by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1995 (Reuters)

(Reuters)

This is the balancing act for Macron: standing by his pro-E.U. views while acknowledging the anti-Brussels anger that led to Brexit and is animating Le Pen's underdog campaign.

In an interview with the BBC, Macron said E.U. leaders must take reforms to address complaints over its power and reach or risk a French movement to leave the bloc, which he dubbed a “Frexit.”

“I'm a pro-European, I defended constantly during this election the European idea and European policies because I believe it's extremely important for French people and for the place of our country in globalization,” he told the BBC.

“But at the same time we have to face the situation, to listen to our people, and to listen to the fact that they are extremely angry today, impatient and the dysfunction of the E.U. is no more sustainable,” he added.

Jean Pisani-Ferry, a prominent French economist and public policy expert, was among the principal collaborators on Macron's platform.

Its animating theme, he said, is that it offers a vision of an as-yet-untested future in a society that has rejected, for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, both the center-left and the center-right.

“The idea is that we can untangle French society, liberate, unlock — that we can do that, and that we can re-create the potential for innovation and development, a system of social protections that works well in a modern economy,” he said in an interview. “That's the aspiration.”

To that end, Macron's third-way pragmatism — “neither left nor right,” as the candidate frequently

reiterates — ultimately comes wrapped in the packaging of lofty idealism. Younger voters often say that it is the idealism — rather than the policies — of the man who would be France's youngest-ever president that ultimately defines his sprawling and, some say, nebulous agenda.

[Whoever wins France's presidency will still face a big challenge: Governing]

“The project I propose to you, is to build with you a new France, which innovates, searches, creates and lives, a France of prosperity reclaimed and of progress for everyone,” Macron's platform reads, promising a new “contract with the nation.”

Pisani-Ferry rejected the charge, from across the political spectrum, that pronouncements like these are vague.

“But more vague than what?” he said. “The people who criticize the program for not having all the marks of the left or the right are clinging to traditional approaches in political life.”

Strictly speaking, France has never before elected a centrist president. In an electoral campaign otherwise devoted to what the French call “dégagisme” — loosely translated as “throw them out-ism” — electing a centrist in 2017 could be the protest analysts and pollsters have anticipated for months.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Attali, the economist, said he does not see a Macron victory — which polls still unanimously predict — as a revolution, but rather as a potential reset for a political system mired in dysfunction.

“It's a parenthesis,” he said. “A necessary parenthesis.”

Brian Murphy in Washington contributed to this report.

## As Le Pen and Macron Fight for Presidency in France, Unions Are Split (UNE)

Aurelien Breeden

At a rally of his supporters in Paris on Monday, Mr. Macron reiterated his economic agenda and renewed calls for a “strong Europe.” But he said he would never “judge” a National Front voter, “because behind that vote there is always an anger, an outrage, a disappointment.”

Though he condemned Ms. Le Pen for seeking to exploit voters’ anger, Mr. Macron seemed to play to the same deep anxieties on Monday when he told the BBC that if elected he would have “to listen to our people, and to listen to the fact that they are extremely angry today, impatient, and the dysfunction of the E.U. is no more sustainable.”

Mr. Macron said that he was “pro-European,” but that if elected he would “reform in-depth the European Union and our European project,” lest he “betray” the French people.

“I don’t want to do so, because the day after, we will have a ‘Frexit,’” he said, referring to a French exit from the European Union, “or we will have the Front National again.”

Many on the French left, including union advocates who oppose the National Front, say the economic policies defended by Mr. Macron — free trade and a desire to loosen labor regulations — have fueled the National Front’s success.

Those voters, many of whom supported the hard-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round, do not want their votes for Mr. Macron to be construed as support for his platform. The latest polls have shown an increase in the number of voters who say they plan to abstain in the second round.

In Paris on Monday, the unions that supported Mr. Macron and opposed Ms. Le Pen marched separately, in stark contrast to 2002, when the different labor unions united to oppose Ms. Le Pen’s father, Jean-Marie, after he made it into the second round of the presidential elections.

Philippe Martinez, the head of the General Confederation of Labor, one of France’s biggest unions, told the newspaper *Le Parisien* on Sunday that while his and other unions agreed on opposing the National Front, “we are not in 2002 anymore.”

At the bigger demonstration on Monday in Paris, unions marched for workers’ rights and against Ms. Le Pen, without calling for support for Mr. Macron. Other demonstrators carried signs that read “No to Macron” and “No to Le Pen,” and some chanted “abolish the Macron law” or “abolish the labor law.”

Some hooded protesters clashed with the police on the sidelines of the demonstrations, throwing rocks and firebombs at the officers, who responded with tear gas. Five riot police officers were wounded in the clashes, the Paris police prefecture said.

Demonstrators at a smaller rally organized earlier on Monday in Paris by more moderate labor unions, who have endorsed Mr. Macron, said voters had to choose.

“Although we don’t support the politics of Macron, we advise our followers to vote for him, because we don’t want Le Pen,” said Olivier Belem, 56, a computer technician and union member. “The fact that the other unions don’t give voters clear advice will leave open the possibility of a blank vote and will

help Le Pen in her chances of victory.”

Analysts predict that abstentions could help Ms. Le Pen, especially if left-wing voters reluctant to vote for Mr. Macron stay home on Election Day. The latest polls suggest that Mr. Macron could beat Ms. Le Pen with roughly 60 percent of the vote in the second round.

On Monday, Mr. Macron also paid tribute to Brahim Bouarram, a 29-year-old man who was killed during a far-right demonstration in Paris on May 1, 1995, by skinheads who pushed him off a bridge and into the Seine. Mr. Bouarram’s son, who was 9 at the time of his father’s death, joined Mr. Macron as they laid flowers at a memorial plaque.

It was the latest attempt by Mr. Macron to draw attention to the National Front’s anti-Semitic and racist roots, from which Ms. Le Pen has tried to distance herself.

Last Friday, Mr. Macron traveled to Oradour-sur-Glane, a village in central France where an SS division killed 642 people in 1944; and on Sunday, he visited the Shoah Memorial in Paris.

The National Front’s unsavory past is embodied by Ms. Le Pen’s 88-year-old father and founder of the party, who on Monday addressed a couple of hundred supporters in Paris at a rally celebrating Joan of Arc.

Despite fears in Ms. Le Pen’s entourage that her father might make inflammatory remarks, Mr. Le Pen stuck to fairly routine anti-immigrant rhetoric and harsh criticism of Mr. Macron.

“He talks about the future, but he has no children; he talks about workers, but he’s a former banker at

Rothschild; he wants to revitalize the economy, but he’s one of those who dynamited it,” Mr. Le Pen said.

Ms. Le Pen, who announced last week that she would name a former right-wing rival prime minister if elected, said on Monday at a campaign rally near Paris that Mr. Macron was the candidate of “finance” and that he was an “adversary of the people.”

“I will be a president who protects,” Ms. Le Pen told her cheering supporters.

Manon Bouquin, 24, a Le Pen supporter at the rally, said she believed Ms. Le Pen could win on Sunday.

“Whatever the outcome, everything will have changed, and it was interesting to see people in the establishment of 40 years finally getting worried,” Ms. Bouquin said.

Ms. Le Pen has campaigned on an anti-elite, anti-immigration and anti-European Union platform that has tapped into deep frustration about unemployment, especially among the working class.

Even some Macron supporters at his rally said that, though they believed in his ability to win, they worried about his ability to unite disenchanted voters beyond their rejection of the far right.

“There are a lot of people who think that it is mostly important to vote against Marine Le Pen,” said Elfayed Sagaf, 18, a student who was holding a banner supporting *En Marche!*, Mr. Macron’s movement. “I would have preferred more votes of support.”

## Le Pen Targets Left-Wing Voters With Attack on Finance

Max Colchester

has been widely rejected by French left-wing voters.

PARIS—Far-right French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen heightened her rhetoric against global finance on Monday in an effort to rally leftist voters as the National Front leader continues to trail her rival Emmanuel Macron in polls.

With less than a week to go until Sunday’s runoff, Ms. Le Pen used a rally in northern Paris to paint Mr. Macron, a former investment banker, as a proxy for a “wild globalization” of the sort that

“On May 7, I urge you to block global finance, arrogance and the reign of money,” Ms. Le Pen said.

Mr. Macron has said France shouldn’t fear globalization, and instead use the European Union as a bulwark against unfair competition.

With polls showing Ms. Le Pen would lose to Mr. Macron 39% to 61%, she is under pressure to broaden her message and reach out to new pockets of voters.

Ms. Le Pen’s move to cast global finance as “an enemy” was targeted at supporters of far-left firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who garnered nearly a fifth of votes in the first round of the election on April 23.

Her hopes of converting large swaths of his supporters are slim, according to Jean-Francois Doridot of the IPSOS polling agency. But, he said, Ms. Le Pen would benefit if they decided to abstain from backing Mr. Macron. “Her goal is to stop them from voting,” he said.

Mr. Mélenchon has called on his supporters not to vote for Ms. Le

Pen, but hasn’t explicitly backed Mr. Macron.

Other left-leaning groups have shared that approach. Marching through Paris as part of a Labor Day parade, Philippe Martinez, leader of the CGT trade union, also declined to say how he would cast his ballot, but stated that “the fight against the extreme right is in our genes.”

During her political rally, Ms. Le Pen also paraded her newly founded alliance with conservative politician Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, a first-round candidate who she pledged would be her prime minister.

Notably absent from Ms. Le Pen's speech was any mention of what was once a flagship proposal: to withdraw France from the eurozone.

One major concern for voters across the political spectrum, polls have shown, was the economic ramifications of Ms. Le Pen's idea to organize a referendum on reinstituting a national currency.

In recent days Ms. Le Pen has

sought to soften her language on the issue, suggesting France could keep the euro as one of two currencies and any change in the status quo would take years to play out.

"We've heard their worries," the candidate's niece, Marion Maréchal Le Pen, told television channel BFM. "That is the kind of message that will allow us to get 51% of the vote."

On Monday, Ms. Le Pen received the backing of her father, longtime National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. Holding his own rally in Paris, he said his daughter had "the necessary character to lead the country."

The support could hinder Ms. Le Pen's bid to steer the National Front away from her father's xenophobic legacy.

But among participants at Mr. Le Pen's rally, some voiced frustration that his daughter had drifted too far from her voter base.

"She has betrayed the identity of the National Front," said Antoine Cohen. "I don't know yet how I will vote."

**Bloomberg**

## Bershidsky : Le Pen, Plagiarist and Plagiarized

Leonid Bershidsky

French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen on Monday delivered an almost verbatim rendition of an earlier speech by her less-successful center-right competitor Francois Fillon -- and her campaign staff appeared to be happy she got caught. If the intention all along wasn't for the plagiarism to be noticed, it should have been: It makes an important point about what center-right parties in Europe have done to remain competitive against populists.

Fillon was eliminated in the first round of the French presidential election last month, but he did win 20 percent of the vote. To have a chance at winning the run-off, scheduled for May 7, Le Pen needs to make inroads with his conservative voters, who now lean toward centrist independent Emmanuel Macron. For many of them, Le Pen is beyond the pale because of her party's anti-Semitic background and her opposition to the euro. So how does Le Pen break through that wall? She appears to be resorting to outright trolling to show those voters that she's not that different from their first choice, Fillon. "It proves that she's not a sectarian," Florian Philippot, vice president of her National Front party, responded to the plagiarism accusations.

QuickTake Populism

So it's easy to explain why Le Pen has done what she's done. What's more interesting is how she could pull it off and still sound natural.

The Fillon speech from April 15 was filled with pride about France's place in the world and its cultural achievements. Fillon spoke of the country's geographical position at the crossroads of various civilizations and the popularity of the French language with learners from Argentina to Poland. He went on to define France's "path for the 21st century":

The French path concerned with humanity, the human being, the path of free will, of reason, the path of culture, of doubt, of discussion, of compromise, of dialog, the path of balance, of liberty for the individual and for nations.

Le Pen repeated this almost word for word. The only slight divergence came when the two politicians discussed the alternatives. Fillon mentioned Nazism and Stalinism, but also "a blind and blinding religion" that is equivalent to totalitarianism. Le Pen spoke of globalism and "the Islamist ideology that seeks to enslave the world through terror and through a nihilist and obscurantist religious vision."

The difference, however, is as trivial as the gap between Fillon and Le Pen on immigration. Fillon proposed immigration quotas for non-EU nationals; Le Pen wants to stop all immigration or at least slow it to a bare minimum, EU nationals included. Le Pen's rhetoric has been more inflammatory ("Playtime is over," she has declared menacingly, addressing immigrants eyeing France's relatively generous social safety net), but both have spoken out against radical Islam and in favor of integration by assimilation.

In other words, Fillon moved the French center-right closer to Le Pen's long-held anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim stance -- and thus enabled Le Pen to quote him verbatim without batting an eyelash.

That's what's been happening to a number of European center-right parties this election year. Imitating the fiery rhetoric of his then-surgingly populist rival Geert Wilders, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told immigrants to "act normal or get out." Limiting immigration and demanding assimilation from Muslims became two key points of Rutte's program as the cunning centrist successfully defanged Wilder's challenge. Suddenly, for those Dutch who want "fewer Moroccans" on their streets, there was a respectable alternative. Rutte's party beat that of Wilders 21 percent to 13 percent in March.

The German center-right party, Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, has also shifted to the right to stop losing supporters to the anti-EU, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party. Merkel, who, in contrast to AfD leaders, has always said that Islam belongs in Germany, late last year declared her opposition to Muslim full-face covering. On a recent trip to Saudi Arabia, she rejected that country's strict dress code and didn't wear a headscarf. Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere, one of Merkel's closest allies, recently restarted the debate over what he calls Germany's *Leitkultur*, or dominant culture, calling, in effect, for immigrant assimilation into the German society with its traditional values. Merkel's government has

also worked to expel more unsuccessful asylum seekers and make family reunification more difficult for immigrants.

As in the Netherlands, it turns out that German voters have a chance to support a more restrictive immigration policy and more pressure on Muslims to integrate without backing the AfD, which proudly houses anti-Semites and historical revisionists. And, as in the Netherlands, it has worked for the center-right: AfD popularity has retreated from its 15 percent high and it's not going to be a threat in the upcoming election.

The European extreme right is failing in the current electoral cycle. Le Pen's chances of winning are vanishingly slim. Yet the once-fringe has succeeded in shifting the mainstream debate, and now it can use that shift to acquire additional legitimacy. Le Pen has just demonstrated, with her Fillon imitation, how it can be done.

This should worry right-of-center politicians who want to steer clear of outright populism: By the next election, they'll need to draw clearer lines between themselves and the nationalist populists. That they are more sober on the economy -- that's where the far-right populists are aligned with the left -- is not enough of a distinction in campaigns that are as intensely emotional as recent races on both sides of the Atlantic have been.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opini

**The New York Times**

## Echoes of Colonial Conflict in Algeria Reverberate in French Politics

Max Fisher and Amanda Taub

When France withdrew in defeat in 1962, the guns quieted, but those tensions over identity only intensified in France.

Settlers, along with their supporters in France, experienced Algeria's loss so profoundly that many still

speak of reclaiming France's lost glory -- often while explaining their support for Marine Le Pen, the far-right presidential candidate.

Questions over French identity, opened by the war, still pit the French against one another.

The politics of nostalgia and grievance so closely parallel the

American South, Mr. Stora said, that he has termed them "Sudisme à la Française."

The parallel has its limits, but it highlights how disputes over the Algerian war's legacy, while often too painful to confront directly, are reverberating in the French presidential election, which will end in a runoff on Sunday.

**'It Was Algeria That Was the Problem'**

Nearly one million settlers, known as *pieds-noirs*, fled Algeria after the war. Many arrived in southern towns where Ms. Le Pen's far-right National Front today draws heavy support, and that are dotted with gravestone-like monuments to the lost territory. Schools across France

are required by law to teach the benefits of French colonialism.

In conversation with voters in the area, questions about seemingly disparate topics of present-day politics — immigration, French republican values, the struggle against anti-Semitism, the rising support for the National Front — all come back to Algeria, as Mr. Stora suggested.

Christophe Tellier, a plumber in the town of Fréjus, when asked about immigration, brought up the so-called harkis, Algerians who fought alongside the French military during the war and who immigrated to France afterward.

"It was Algeria that was the problem," Mr. Tellier said. "And now the children of the harkis, they are a problem."

He added: "These immigrants, I hope they won't have all these advantages that they have the right to now. I hope they'll be taken away."

Much as in the American South, memory of defeat has blurred with its present-day social consequences. French citizens lost their once-superior status over Muslim and Arab subjects, a transition that today colors the debate over immigration and the treatment of France's Muslim communities.

Algeria, Mr. Stora said, has become a way to express "nostalgia for a lost era, for an era when there was a hierarchy based on ethnicity."

Terrence Peterson, a historian at Florida International University, compared debates over Algeria to those over the Confederate flag in the United States.

"History is a way to talk about France's relationship with its minority population," Mr. Peterson

said. "Like the Confederate flag, it means very different things to different people."

For those who see immigration or the European Union as an assault on French identity, Algeria provides a memory of a time when France was great and a way to argue against compromising that greatness ever again, whether by bowing to the European Union or broadening French identity to accept newcomers.

Ms. Le Pen has skillfully played on that nostalgia, saying colonialism "brought a lot, especially to Algeria."

After Emmanuel Macron, her centrist opponent for the presidency, called France's actions in Algeria a "crime against humanity" and "part of this past that we must face" during a trip there, he faced a chorus of criticism. Gérald Darmanin, a mayor and member of the center-right Republicans, accused Mr. Macron of "spitting on the graves" of those who died in Algeria "for a France they loved."

### Revolutionary France Or Imperial France

The Algerian war divided France between two visions of the nation that play out in politics today, Mr. Stora said.

One vision defined France through its revolutionary values, particularly equality and liberty, which many saw as in tension with colonial rule.

The 130 years of rule in Algeria culminated in an imperial identity that blended values like secularism with nationalism and the racial hierarchies of colonialism.

The dispute over whether to stay in Algeria brought France to the brink of a civil war that was averted by withdrawing from North Africa. But the cultural and identity issues were never resolved

The divisions were deepened by the sudden arrival of about one million pieds-noirs and thousands of harkis, followed by more Algerians who went to France to work. The ideological conflict for French identity, far from ended, was imported onto French soil.

Jean-Yves Camus, an analyst at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, traced the National Front's roots to popular opposition to leaving Algeria, culminating in a failed coup by military leaders. Ms. Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie, who founded the party, grew that "spark" of far-right activity into the National Front, Mr. Camus said.

### Integration and Core Values

Jennifer Sessions, a historian at the University of Iowa, said French far-right politicians used the language of colonization to talk about fears of immigration, warning that France is at risk of being "colonized" by immigrants.

The National Front also draws subtle parallels between the Algerian independence fighters and disorder in immigrant neighborhoods today.

The left also uses Algeria as a metaphor, drawing a parallel between colonial-era abuses and the policing of Muslims today.

But the heat of those arguments might obscure a deeper problem: Debates over integration of immigrants cannot be resolved without agreement over the core values into which new arrivals must integrate.

That question was raised in Algeria, but never answered. Some argued that Algerians could integrate only if they gave up their faith and culture, others that French Christians would have to widen their sense of identity to make room, and others still that France was only for the French.

This disagreement continues to divide French politics, though they are now argued in the subtler language of integration and secularism.

"Marine Le Pen uses the vocabulary of the Republic, but in a colonial sense," Mr. Stora said, referring to colonial-era demands that Algerians make themselves culturally French. The effect, he said, is still that outsiders "cannot access the Republic."

### A Divided Right

When Charles de Gaulle, the nationalist president, withdrew from Algeria in defeat in 1962, he opened a divide between the French center right and far right that never closed.

De Gaulle's enormous popularity led center-right voters to support him in abandoning Algeria. But the far right never forgave him.

"They wanted to kill de Gaulle, physically," Mr. Stora said of the far right in the early 1960s. "There were four assassination attempts against him."

Ever since, mainstream politicians have struggled to reconcile national grievance over Algeria with the establishment position that de Gaulle was correct to withdraw.

The National Front, long one of Europe's most popular far-right parties, thrived by taking up that French nationalism as its own.

This anger echoes Continentwide populist rage at the European Union and at elites who are said to have sold out the people. But it has been particularly loud in France, amplified by lingering humiliation and nostalgia over a national identity that is said to have been lost in a stretch of North Africa that was once French.

## The New York Times In 'Brexit' Talks, U.K. and E.U. Are Said to Be Miles Apart

Steven Erlanger

Mrs. May was said to have called for working on a trade deal simultaneously with talks on Britain's exit, arguing that since Britain is already a member and merely wants to leave, a trade deal should be much easier to complete.

Mr. Juncker somewhat theatrically dismissed the idea, reaching into his bag and pulling out two big stacks of paper: Croatia's European Union entry deal and Canada's free-trade pact, all 2,250 pages of it.

The two sides also differed on the question of how much Britain will have to pay as part of the "divorce settlement," with Mrs. May

reportedly saying it owes nothing because there is no mention of such payments in the European Union's founding treaties.

Mr. Juncker was said to have replied that without a payment there would be no trade deal.

Ms. Merkel was concerned enough to issue a strong statement to the Bundestag, the lower house of Parliament, on Thursday, saying that Britain can work out a new relationship with the European Union only after it leaves. "I must say this clearly here because I get the feeling that some people in Britain still have illusions — that would be wasted time," she warned.

She added: "We can only do an agreement on the future relationship with Britain when all questions about its exit have been cleared up satisfactorily," while pointing out that serious negotiations could not start until after the British elections in June.

The reports on Sunday were detailed enough — and one-sided enough — that officials at 10 Downing Street issued an official statement on Monday, a holiday in Britain, rejecting the German newspaper's version. "We do not recognize this account," the statement said. "As the prime minister and Jean-Claude Juncker made clear, this was a constructive

meeting ahead of the negotiations formally getting underway."

On Sunday, on television news talk shows, Mrs. May acknowledged that the talks would be difficult but said to the BBC, "I'm not in a different galaxy, but I think what this shows, and what some of the other comments we've seen coming from European leaders shows, is that there are going to be times when these negotiations are going to be tough."

She insisted that Britain could secure a comprehensive trade deal with the European Union alongside the divorce negotiations and

complete everything in two years, with an "implementation period."

Brussels officials regard that as unrealistic and point to the bloc's "Brexit" negotiating guidelines, which mandate that talks on a future relationship can begin only after "sufficient progress" has been on three major issues: guaranteeing the rights of citizens of European Union member states living in Britain; settling the divorce bill; and safeguarding the 1998 Good Friday

Agreement.

Mrs. May, who wants to resolve speedily the post-exit status of member-state citizens in Britain and British citizens in the bloc, suggested the issue could be settled at a summit meeting at the end of June. Mr. Juncker and his top officials considered that timetable unworkable given what they consider the complications of pensions, legal rights and the right to health care.

The issue is especially complicated because Mrs. May wants the exit to end the jurisdiction in Britain of the European Court of Justice, but it is that court that currently settles legal disputes among member states.

Britain also wants complete secrecy for the negotiations, which Brussels believes violates the principle of transparency — and as the various newspaper accounts prove, leaks will be numerous in any case.

While the dinner was about opening stances in the talks, the gaps reportedly made Mr. Juncker more skeptical that a deal could be done in two years, before Britain leaves the bloc, making a "hard Brexit" more likely. "I leave Downing Street 10 times as skeptical as I was before" about a deal, Mr. Juncker reportedly told Mrs. May as he left the dinner.

**Bloomberg**

## Editorial : Theresa May's Brexit Platform

British Prime Minister Theresa May recently surprised the country -- and most of her ministers -- by calling an election for early next month. Up against self-imposed deadlines, and anxious to increase her majority in Parliament, she's scrambling to devise a policy platform.

With Brexit looming, this isn't a normal election, and the usual litany of detailed proposals won't serve. For the purposes of this manifesto and this election, less is more.

May needs to set out her basic approach to the Brexit talks, but she can't afford to get too specific, because she has a weak hand and will have to give way on many issues. What she can do, though, is set out the principles that will guide her team: Britain should seek the closest possible relationship with the European Union

while recovering its powers as a sovereign nation -- in particular, the right to control its borders and make its own laws.

Controlling the borders, May should note, doesn't mean an unduly restrictive policy on immigration. EU workers already in the country should be assured they can stay regardless of the EU's position on British workers in Europe. If the U.K. intends to be a beacon of outward-looking liberalism after its divorce, it can start with that.

QuickTake Why Britain Voted to Quit the EU

May should also say that Britain can agree to a temporary transitional agreement in which most of its obligations as an EU member would remain. This could be important if exit negotiations aren't completed in two years, which seems likely.

This election, though, is not just about Europe. Again, the Tory platform should avoid making promises the government would soon regret. May's manifesto should unmake some of the unwise promises of her predecessor, David Cameron, such as the "triple lock" that guaranteed increases in the state pension -- a policy that's fiscally unsound and increasingly unfair to poor people who don't happen to be pensioners.

Without offering hostages to fortune, May should instead give a fuller account of her brand of centrist Toryism. If she's smart, she'll quash the suspicion that she favors an interventionist industrial policy. But she should underline her determination to make the economy work better for the country outside London and for people with jobs who nonetheless struggle to make ends meet.

Policies that push public investment to the regions, empower growth-oriented local governments, improve public education, and lift the tax burden from the low-paid would all serve this purpose.

British election manifestos almost always promise too much, and disappointment follows with dreary regularity. May can break this cycle by making a forthright defense of the values and priorities of the government she intends to lead. If she does, and wins, she will have earned her mandate to govern.

To contact the senior editor responsible for Bloomberg View's

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## Giugliano : Italy Is Europe's Next Big Problem

Ferdinando Giugliano

Emmanuel Macron looks on course to become France's new president, ending the threat of a euroskeptic at the Elysee. Even if Macron wins, though, it'll be too soon to celebrate a new phase of stability in the euro zone. Across the Alps, an economic and political storm is brewing -- and there's no sign anyone can stop it.

Italy's economic problems are in many ways worse than France's. Public debt stands at nearly 133 percent of gross domestic product; in France, it's 96 percent. The last time Italy grew faster than France was in 1995. Both countries have struggled to stay competitive internationally -- but French productivity has risen by roughly 15 percent since 2001, whereas Italy's has stagnated.

Meanwhile Italian politics goes from bad to worse. The Five Star Movement, a populist force that wants to hold a referendum on Italy's membership of the euro system, is riding high in the polls and currently neck and neck with the center-left Democratic Party. The general election, scheduled for next spring, is unlikely to produce a clear winner -- and there's even a small chance it may result in a Eurosceptic government, if the Five Stars were to win enough votes and form an alliance with the fiercely anti-euro Northern League.

Europhiles in Italy are busily looking for an Italian Macron -- someone who could offer a liberal remedy for Italy's economic woes while fighting off the threat of "It-exit." Investors would like that. In the autumn, the European Central Bank looks set to slow its purchases of government debt. The prospect of political

instability in Rome could spook investors, raising doubts over the sustainability of Italy's debt.

In many ways, Matteo Renzi, Italy's former prime minister, who resigned after a heavy defeat in December's constitutional referendum, would be the obvious choice. At 42, he is only three years older than Macron. He too has sought to modernize the left, even though he preferred to climb through the ranks of his party, rather than set up a new one as Macron did.

The trouble is that Renzi looks increasingly like a spent force. He has just obtained a fresh mandate as party leader, but many Italians doubt his promises because he reneged on a pledge to quit politics if he lost the referendum. His message has also become muddled. He claims to be pro-EU, but never misses a chance to bash

Brussels -- for imposing fiscal austerity, especially. Why should voters opt for Renzi's half-hearted euroskepticism when they can have the real thing?

A year is a long time in politics. Italians could yet grow tired of the Five Star Movement and decide that Renzi offers a safer alternative -- but don't count on it. With luck, France is about to suggest that reason still prevails in European politics. Italy remains capable of proving otherwise.

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**Bloomberg**

## Gordis : Why Israel Got Into a Dust-Up With Germany

Daniel Gordis

Last Monday was Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel. It is a quiet, painful, introspective day, on which even highway traffic comes to a complete halt for two minutes. In his address opening the commemoration, a somewhat belligerent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu berated Europe for not doing enough to stem anti-Semitism. Then the next day, in an apparent breach of diplomatic protocol, Netanyahu snubbed Germany's foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, by canceling a scheduled meeting. What for? The German envoy had ignored Netanyahu's demand that he cancel a meeting with Break the Silence, a group deeply critical of the Israeli army's conduct in Palestinian territories.

Many people wondered why the prime minister chose to pick this fight with Germany. To be sure, his cabinet supported his decision, and he knew that he would earn points with his right flank, on which the future of his government depends. Breaking the Silence, an Israeli grass-roots organization, collects testimonies from soldiers about their military service, mostly in the territories, focusing particularly on alleged abuses by soldiers. The group is seen by many as irresponsible and treasonous. Many of the testimonies it publishes are uncorroborated; some critics say they are false. And because most of Breaking the Silence's work is done outside Israel, they are seen as trying to sully the Israel Defense Forces in

international settings, contributing to the possibility that Israeli soldiers could eventually be charged in the International Court of Justice. Particularly galling to Netanyahu is that most of the group's funding comes from Europe, which he considers fundamentally hostile to Israel.

Michael Oren, a member of Knesset who was formerly Israel's ambassador to the U.S., articulated Netanyahu's position better than even the prime minister: "It's unacceptable for European leaders to come here to help those who degrade our soldiers as war criminals, and that's what Breaking the Silence does," said Oren. Even some Europeans are now questioning the propriety of their support. In 2015, 10 members of the Swiss Parliament chastised their government for funding the group. "Disinformation and the political ideology of hatred are being directed against the Jewish state," they said, adding with irony that "it is shameful that Switzerland, on whose soil the nucleus of peaceful political Zionism developed in Basel, is participating in such activities."

Netanyahu's snub of the German envoy, therefore, was a safe domestic bet. But was there any diplomatic gain to be had? While Gabriel insisted that the episode would not harm Germany's "special relationship with Israel," Chancellor Angela Merkel hinted that matters were a bit more complex than that. "The chancellor finds it regrettable

that a meeting" did not take place, her spokesman, said. "It should not be problematic for foreign visitors to meet with critical representatives of civil society."

That statement, while an oversimplification, may have been key to Netanyahu's rage. Gabriel defended his position by saying, "You never get the full picture of any state in the world if you just meet with figures in government ministries," but even Ha'aretz, Israel's left-leaning daily, which rarely misses an opportunity to attack the prime minister, noted that foreign ministers generally do not meet with representative of NGOs in democratic countries. Was the visit an inadvertent indication that Israel is not a functioning democracy?

Netanyahu obviously values Israel's relationship with Germany, which is Israel's largest trading partner in Europe, and with which Israel enjoys significant military cooperation. But the prime minister has decided not to ignore what he sees as baseless attacks on Israel or Jews. When Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom accused Israel of extrajudicial killings of Palestinians in 2015, he called her remarks "outrageous, immoral, unjust and just wrong." He then added "stupid." When French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen said recently that France was not responsible for the killing of Jews under Nazi rule, Netanyahu's government minced no words and described her comments as "contradicting historical truth."

(Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, Marine Le Pen's just announced pick for prime minister, is a harsh critic of Israel who has compared Netanyahu to Hamas.) When U.S. President Donald Trump recently condemned anti-Semitism, Netanyahu used Trump's remarks as an opportunity to challenge Europe to do the same.

It is in that context that Netanyahu's snub must be seen. The dust-up with Germany was surely not his most elegant moment. Yet Gabriel made a series of probably unintentional gaffes. Around Holocaust Memorial Day, Israelis' sensitivities about Germany are at their height. So is their fear of weakness. In his speech that day, Netanyahu reminded his country, "The simple truth is that in our world, the existence of the weak is in doubt. ... The strong survive, the weak are erased."

Most Israelis are keenly aware that without the IDF, they would not survive. Of all weeks of the year, this was certainly not the moment for a German to come to Israel to meet with an organization that most Israelis believe wants to make Jews vulnerable once again.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## He fought with Russian-backed militants in Ukraine. Now he's a U.S. soldier.

A prominent militant who fought with Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine and participated in far-right European politics recently completed U.S. Army training and is serving in an American infantry division in Hawaii, according to Army and other records.

Guillaume Cuvelier, 29, shipped for basic training in January and graduated as an infantryman at Fort Benning, Ga., the records show. In a short exchange with The Washington Post, Cuvelier confirmed that he was actively serving in the U.S. Army.

With his well-documented history of espousing extreme right-wing views and his role in an armed group backed by a U.S. adversary, Cuvelier's ability to join the Army raises questions about the recruitment process and whether applicants are thoroughly screened before they are able to enlist.

Born and raised in France as a dual French and American citizen, Cuvelier spent his formative years alongside French ultranationalists before picking up a Kalashnikov in eastern Ukraine in 2014, according to social media posts, a documentary in which he was featured, and accounts from people who knew him. A year later he fought with the Kurdish peshmerga in northern Iraq before coming back to the United States.

Following inquiries by The Post, the military has "begun an inquiry to ensure the process used to enlist this individual followed all of the required standards and procedures," said Kelli Bland, a spokesman for the U.S. Army's recruiting command, in an email.

In Ukraine, Cuvelier, also known as Lenormand, fought for the Russian-backed Donetsk People's Republic, the breakaway state subject to U.S. government sanctions and labeled terrorist by the U.S.-allied

government in Kiev. Cuvelier's service with the group appears to be in direct violation of a March 2014 executive order that was applied to the republic that June. The order prohibits U.S. citizens from assisting by way of "funds, goods or services," any of the sanctioned entities covered by the order, opening up Cuvelier to possible federal prosecution.

The U.S. Army often forbids those who display "extremist views or actions" from entry, said Lt. Col. Randy Taylor, a spokesman for the Army's Department of Manpower and Reserve Affairs, in an email. Taylor added that "if an Army official determines an applicant has the potential for meeting Army standards, the official may in exceptional cases allow those who have overcome mistakes and past conduct, made earlier in their lives, to serve their country. However, in many cases a history of gang or extremist activity is disqualifying."

Cuvelier said he has changed.

"The [U.S.] army is my only chance of moving on and cutting with my past," Cuvelier said in a text message. "I realized I like this country, its way of life and its Constitution enough to defend it."

"By publishing a story on me, you are jeopardizing my career and rendering a great service to anyone trying to embarrass the Army. My former Russian comrades would love it. ... so, I please ask you to reconsider using my name and/or photo."

As a dual citizen, Cuvelier would be subject to more extensive background checks if he had sought an Army position requiring a security clearance, but he did not need one as an infantryman, Bland said. If Cuvelier had no outstanding criminal activity in the United States and didn't discuss his past, there would have been no reason to bar him from enlisting, she added.

Cuvelier grew up in Rouen, France, and graduated from university there



in 2009, according to his Facebook profile, which has since been deleted. His younger brother, Gabriel Cuvelier, said in a series of texts that his family is "fairly complicated," without providing details, but that Cuvelier had always been kind and peaceful and "never sought attention."

Online documents show Cuvelier was an active member in the Party of France, a political body that splintered from Marine Le Pen's National Front, in 2010. Jean-Yves Camus, a French analyst who studies the far-right and has tracked Cuvelier, compared the Party of France to an American white-nationalist group called "National Vanguard."

Cuvelier was also part of the neo-fascist group "Troisième voie" and an identity movement called the "Young Identitarians," according to Anton Shekhovtsov, a visiting fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, who focuses on right-wing movements across Europe and has written extensively about the Ukraine conflict.

Cuvelier's younger brother couldn't explain how his older sibling first got involved with France's far right, but said "his views led him to meet people."

"I believe that when he was in France, he sort of saw that no 'honest' way of going about 'politics' was possible, so he decided to take action differently," the younger Cuvelier said in a text. "That's all I can say."

Upon arriving in Ukraine in the middle of 2014, Cuvelier helped start a French-Serbian foreign fighter unit called the "Unité Continentale." The group's manifesto on its Facebook page states that NATO is "a terrorist military alliance" and that France is "a slave of the American Empire." The group's views are based on an ideology called "continentalism" espoused by the anti-Western Russian political scientist, Alexander Dugin. The group's page also has multiple posts from July and August 2014 that solicited donations directly to Cuvelier's bank account in France.

"Russia embodies a power. A power of resistance, what we want to bring back to the West. A society structured around tradition, family, patriotism," Cuvelier says, explaining his motives for joining the separatists during the 2015 documentary titled "Polite People."

Cuvelier eventually split from Unité Continentale, according to the documentary on Western militants

who joined the fight in eastern Ukraine. In the film, Cuvelier's band of fighters adopts the name "Team Vikernes" after the Norwegian black metal artist, self-proclaimed Nazi and convicted murderer, Varg Vikernes.

Videos posted on the Team Vikernes's page show its members firing around the Donetsk airport, the site of a bloody close-quarters fight between Ukrainian troops and separatists in the winter of 2014. Cuvelier declined to answer any questions about his service in eastern Ukraine and when pressed over a series of text messages said, "I was never really in DPR. It was a hologram." He declined any further comment.

In the documentary, there is a still picture of Cuvelier with a medal pinned to his chest standing shoulder to shoulder with Igor Girkin (who was the commander of the separatists during the summer of 2014). It appears in the documentary that Cuvelier may have been honored with the medal in Moscow in 2015.

Girkin has been sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury for his role with the separatists and on a Russian radio talk show admitted to having looters executed. He is also accused in a U.S. lawsuit of orchestrating the

shoot-down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH 17 over Ukraine in July 2014, killing nearly 300 people.

Following his time in Ukraine, Cuvelier traveled to northern Iraq in 2015 and set up another unit of foreign fighters, this time allied with the Kurdish Peshmerga.

The group, called Qalubna Ma'kum, was located near Daquq in northern Iraq from the end of 2015 to mid-2016.

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Rick Findler, a U.K.-based photographer who followed Qalubna Ma'kum for 10 days said, "They thought they could just show up with guns and start fighting. Instead they just sat in a room for months."

The Peshmerga eventually forced Cuvelier to leave Iraq after an incident in which he was accused of beating an American volunteer with a rifle, according to Heloisa Jaira, a Peshmerga medic, who treated the victim.

Weeks later, he arrived in the United States.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Greece Reaches Bailout Agreement With Creditors

ATHENS— Greece and its international creditors reached an agreement early on Tuesday on the austerity measures and economic overhauls the country must implement to keep its bailout program going, clearing the way for debt-relief talks.

"There is white smoke...Negotiations on all issues have been completed," Greek Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos said after a marathon meeting with a delegation of creditors. "I'm certain that there will now be negotiations on debt because there is no excuse."

The reforms agreed must now be approved by Greece's parliament in the coming days before the next

meeting of eurozone finance ministers on May 22.

"The swift implementation of these commitments should enable the Eurogroup to endorse this agreement at its next meeting," said Pierre Moscovici, the EU's economics commissioner.

Greece needs to make around €7 billion (\$7.63 billion) in debt repayments in July.

Under the accord, Greece commits to further fiscal cuts—after its current bailout ends—through pension reductions equaling around 1% of gross domestic product in 2019, and a similar amount in 2020 from a reduction in the threshold for paying personal income tax.

Greece's left-led government also committed to labor reforms, privatizations and overhauls to make its economy more competitive.

The two sides also agreed on a package of growth-enhancing measures, mostly consisting of tax cuts that would be implemented if Greece exceeds its targets.

The basic terms of the deal were agreed upon at the last meeting of eurozone finance ministers in April, and for the last several days a delegation of international inspectors had been drafting a final agreement with Greek officials.

But more important, as the creditors said in a written statement, the agreement sets the conditions for

them to discuss ways to ease the country's mounting debt.

"It is now for all partners to reach an understanding on the question of Greece's debt in the coming weeks," Mr. Moscovici said.

The IMF, which considers the country's debt highly unsustainable, hasn't officially joined the country's bailout yet. To resume lending, it wants Europe to commit to substantial debt relief first.

The German finance ministry said that the goal is to conclude the bailout program review during the next Eurogroup meeting.

—Andrea Thomas contributed to this article.

## INTERNATIONAL



### Chemical attack in Syria that drew U.S. response was just one in a series, rights group alleges

The Syrian government has employed nerve agents in at least four separate attacks since December 2016, a

rights group said in a new report, alleging a new level of banned chemical weapons use that is "widespread and systematic."

Human Rights Watch said the well-known April 4 incident in the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun, which prompted President Trump to launch the first U.S. military strike on Syrian government facilities, was just one of a series of recent incidents involving deadly chemical munitions.

"In at least some of the attacks, the intention appears to have been to inflict severe suffering on the civilian population, which would amount to crimes against humanity," the group said in its report, which was based on social media information and interviews with victims, chemical weapons experts and others with knowledge of recent events in Syria.

If substantiated, the repeated attacks would provide new credence to claims that the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has maintained a secret chemical arsenal in the wake of a 2013 disarmament deal and has used it against his adversaries. They would also raise the specter of additional U.S. military action against the Assad government, if it again uses chemical weapons.

The decision last month to send a barrage of Tomahawk missiles to strike a Syrian air base in the wake

of the Khan Sheikhoun attack was a signal of Trump's willingness to use military force in new ways, in this case to enforce a red line that officials said was ignored by the Obama administration.

[U.S. strikes Syrian military airfield in first direct assault on Bashar al-Assad's government]

In its report, Human Rights Watch documented 12 apparent chemical attacks since mid-December 2016, four of them involving sarin or another unidentified nerve agent. In addition to the Khan Sheikhoun incident, local reports suggest that nerve-agent attacks took place on March 30 and twice on Dec. 12, all of them in Hama province. Close to 70 people were reported killed in those three attacks, all of which occurred in rebel-held areas where government air bases were under threat.

The December attacks allegedly happened in areas under control of the Islamic State, making them harder to document, Human Rights Watch said.

The Syrian government has rejected accusations it uses chemical weapons and has suggested that the deaths in Khan Sheikhoun were caused by an airstrike that inadvertently struck a rebel chemical munitions depot.

**The  
New York  
Times**

## April Nerve Gas Attack in Syria Appears to Be One in a Series

Anne Barnard

The Syrian government and its main ally, Russia, deny that it uses such tactics.

At a news conference held at United Nations headquarters in New York to release the report's findings, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, Kenneth Roth, ridiculed what he described as "preposterous" assertions by the Syrian and Russian governments denying responsibility.

Mr. Roth said it was time for them "to stop these transparently false diversionary claims and come clean."

He also said the pattern of attacks as described in the Human Rights Watch report amounted to "a level of culpability and horror that cries out for prosecution."

So far, Russia has used its Security Council veto to block investigations of war crimes in Syria in the International Criminal Court. But even without a Security Council referral to the court, an accountability mechanism created last year by the General Assembly

can be used to look into the allegations. United Nations officials told reporters on Monday in New York and Geneva that the work could begin soon, and that member states have raised half of the required \$13 million initial budget.

Mr. Roth expressed impatience for the secretary general, António Guterres, to appoint a prosecutor, but Mr. Guterres's spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, said the process was underway, adding, "I don't think the secretary general is dragging his feet."

On Saturday, an attack on a headquarters of the White Helmets civil defense rescue group in the town of Kafr Zita killed eight of its members, the group and other witnesses say. And medical organizations working in Syria have tallied 10 government attacks in April alone on hospitals and clinics in rebel-held areas, part of a pattern of hundreds of attacks on medical workers and facilities that United Nations investigators have described as war crimes.

Human Rights Watch corroborated claims of two suspected nerve gas attacks on Dec. 12 that initially went

Executive Director Kenneth Roth, speaking at a news conference in New York, said that such a scenario was not plausible in repeated incidents across Syria. Western intelligence and military officials have said there is no evidence that Assad's opposition possesses chemical weapons.

"This pattern of the Syrian government using nerve agents makes the Syrian and Russian cover story preposterous," Roth said. Russia is a powerful ally for Assad, whose own military has been weakened by six years of fighting.

The report also provides details and witness accounts from the attack in Khan Sheikhoun, which Human Rights Watch said killed at least 90 people, 30 of them children. According to interviews with those involved, the effects of the deadly chemicals began to be felt after a series of airstrikes in the early morning of April 4, at least one of them falling near the town's central bakery. Residents and first responders were among those who exhibited symptoms consistent with sarin exposure.

"It was like Judgment Day — people were collapsing everywhere," one resident said in an interview.

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Medical analysis conducted in Turkey said the victims of the attacks appeared to have been exposed to sarin.

[Trump administration unveils intelligence discrediting Russia's claims on chemical attack in Syria]

Human Rights Watch said witness accounts, social media reporting and analysis by foreign governments suggested that the weapon used was one of two Soviet-made bombs, the KhAB-250 or the KhAB-500, designed to deliver sarin.

The report also alleges that the Syrian government's pattern of dropping chlorine-filled munitions from helicopters, which dates at least to 2014, has become "more systematic." Pro-government troops have also resumed the use of ground-based attacks using chlorine, it said.

The Chemical Weapons Convention, which Syria joined in 2013, bans the use of chlorine as a weapon.

Missy Ryan writes about the Pentagon, military issues, and national security for The Washington Post.

relatively unnoticed. This was in part because they took place when the world's attention was focused on the battle over Aleppo, and in part because of the difficulty of verifying information in the Islamic State-held areas where they occurred.

A Syrian girl receiving treatment at a hospital on Dec. 12 after a chemical attack in a village in Hama Province. Firas Faham/Anadolu Agency, via Getty Images

Medical organizations and social media accounts that day shared images of dead children bearing no visible wounds, as if sleeping, like those killed by a nerve agent in Khan Sheikhoun and in 2013 attacks near Damascus. But because people can be killed for sharing information online from Islamic State-controlled areas, it was difficult to verify them at the time.

Human Rights Watch said its investigators interviewed four residents by telephone and two medics through intermediaries. It said they gave consistent accounts of chemical weapons attacks in two villages in eastern Hama Province, amid clashes between government

and Islamic State forces, that killed residents sheltering in caves and in their homes.

The report also provides new details about the Khan Sheikhoun attack, as well as about an intensifying series of recent government bombings and shelling illegally using chlorine gas, with barrels dropped from helicopters and, in a new method, with improvised ground-to-ground missiles.

In those cases, too, the findings coincide with accounts residents and witnesses gave to The Times and with a Times analysis of public information online.

Human Rights Watch corroborated eight chlorine attacks this year, out of a larger number reported by residents. Possession of chlorine, unlike sarin, is not illegal under international law, but its use as a weapon is. The attacks took place in areas where government forces were clashing with rebel forces, near the cities of Damascus and Hama.

The intense battles around Hama led to three attacks, two believed to be with chlorine and one believed to be with a nerve agent, in the two

weeks before the Khan Sheikhouh attack. All of them were in al-Lataminah, a town in Hama Province between Khan Sheikhouh and the front line.

On March 25, ordnance crashed through the roof of a clinic that, because of previous attacks, had been reinforced with a metal roof covered with earth. Yellowish gas smelling of bleach filled the facility, killing a doctor, Ali Darwish, as he performed surgery, as well as his

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Julian E. Barnes

BRUSSELS—The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is considering appointing a senior official to oversee counterterrorism efforts, a move aimed at meeting one of President Donald Trump's demands that the alliance focus more on terror threats.

The proposal is similar to NATO's recent decision to create a top intelligence post, a move that Mr. Trump has repeatedly praised and that he has cited as evidence the alliance has responded to his criticisms and is no longer obsolete.

While no NATO country has vocally opposed the idea of a senior counterterrorism coordinator, some diplomats are skeptical about the role's impact unless alliance members also agree to expand the organization's counterterror efforts, including funding additional training initiatives.

NATO diplomats have been discussing how they can expand counterterrorism training, including ways to use allied special operations forces to better train antiterror commandos in the Middle East and Africa. Those proposals could include expanding the work or mandate of the NATO Special Operations Headquarters, which develops NATO counterterrorism plans.

No NATO member, including the U.S., has

patient and another person, according to the Human Rights Watch report and other witnesses. On April 3, munitions with a similar smell again hit the village, injuring at least a dozen.

On March 30, a bomb fell without the usual intense explosion — chemical weapons typically contain a smaller explosive charge, to disperse but not destroy the agent — injuring 169 people, many but not all of them believed to be

advocated the alliance conducting counterterrorism strikes or taking a direct attack role in the military fight against Islamic State in Syria, Libya or Afghanistan.

But expanding the alliance's use of its scarce resources, such as special-operations forces, is difficult and could weigh on NATO's budget, which some countries oppose expanding.

Bruno Lété, a security expert at the Brussels office of the German Marshall Fund, said the U.S. has indicated it wants NATO to do more to combat terrorism. "NATO allies are going to need to subscribe to Trump's desire for a new NATO that can engage in counterterrorism efforts," Mr. Lété said.

Allied ambassadors are set to formally discuss the counterterrorism post and other proposals at a May 5 meeting, officials said. Diplomats have been debating various proposals as they prepare for the meeting of allied leaders, including Mr. Trump, later this month. Turkish, British and French delegations have circulated papers.

The U.S. however hasn't submitted a paper or made any formal requests to the alliance. While Mr. Trump has said he wants the allies to do more on counterterrorism, neither he nor other U.S. officials have stated any specific desires, according to allied diplomats.

combatants. They reported symptoms similar to those from a nerve agent, including pupils constricted to pinpoints.

In the Dec. 12 attacks, two villages, Jrouh and al-Salaliyah, were hit, Human Rights Watch said. It quoted a Jrouh resident who said he found his wife, three children, brother, brother's wife and brother's three children dead in his basement. He said his neighbors, his uncle and the

families of his uncle's two sons also died.

"Everyone within 100 meters died," he told the rights group. "There was no one left." He buried his family and fled, and was interviewed by Human Rights Watch after finding refuge outside Islamic State territory.

## NATO Considers New Counterterrorism Post Following Trump Demands

Some NATO allies have said privately that without a formal proposal from the U.S., reaching consensus on new counterterrorism plans is difficult.

Some allied military officers have said current training efforts are disjointed and could be better coordinated. While there is currently a midlevel official assigned to coordinating NATO's various counterterrorism efforts, some officers say a high-level official could expand alliance and national training initiatives.

German diplomat Arndt Freytag von Loringhoven leads the new intelligence department that was formed by merging old functions. He was given the title of assistant secretary-general and a mandate to increase allied intelligence-sharing. Several allies have praised the office's early efforts.

NATO diplomats said a new department devoted to counterterrorism isn't under consideration. Instead, the counterterrorism portfolio would be given to an existing NATO official, likely Sorin Ducaru, a Romanian diplomat who is assistant secretary-general for emerging security challenges.

More broadly, other diplomats question whether a larger role for NATO in fighting terrorism is wise, or if money would be better spent on national efforts.

"We have trouble identifying what more NATO could do," said one European diplomat. "NATO is not the relevant body to do more fighting terrorism."

One senior diplomat said that while NATO will never be "the first responder," it can do more to combat terrorism and should continue expanding intelligence sharing on terror threats, such as providing more information about internal threats that could impact the wider alliance.

Some countries have revived the idea of NATO formally joining the coalition against Islamic State.

Germany and Italy remain skeptical of the proposal, alliance diplomats said. Officials from those countries have long argued it could put a Western focus on an effort that must encompass Middle Eastern partners. Other diplomats said they could support the idea if the U.S. makes clear that the step is important. Officials say it is unlikely to make a significant difference to the anti-Islamic State coalition.

U.S. officials in Washington have been debating how hard to push NATO to formally join the counter-Islamic State fight, according to people briefed on the discussions.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Rory Jones in Tel Aviv and Abu Bakr Bashir in Gaza City

The Palestinian militant group Hamas dropped its explicit call for Israel's destruction on Monday, a bid to overhaul its image as the Trump White House explores reviving Middle East peace efforts.

Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, also formally accepted in its revised charter the notion of a Palestinian

## Hamas Drops Call for Israel's Destruction (UNE)

state in territories Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war. But the group didn't recognize Israel and still expressed an ambition to take over all Israeli territory in the long run.

"This charter demonstrates our political vision and will be taught to our supporters," Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal said Monday. "The 1988 charter represented our vision at that time and this one represents our vision now."

U.S. and Israeli officials said they didn't see the move as a real change in the approach of Hamas, which has been designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. and other Western governments.

The change in the charter comes days before Mahmoud Abbas, president of the rival Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank, is scheduled to hold talks with President Donald Trump at the White House in which they are

expected to discuss how to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. It also comes as Hamas is increasingly isolated from longtime supporters in the region.

"Hamas is attempting to fool the world but it will not succeed," said David Keyes, spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "Daily, Hamas leaders call for genocide of all Jews and the destruction of Israel." A U.S. official

said the Trump administration hasn't changed its outlook on Hamas.

The timing of the document's release stems from the rivalry between Hamas and the Fatah faction of the Palestinian Authority, said Jonathan Schanzer, a former terrorism finance analyst at the Treasury Department and now senior vice president at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

"It's an attempt to grab market share," he said. "It's a very calculated shift, but I think the Trump administration is not going to see Hamas any differently...it's a softening of rhetoric, not a change of behavior."

Mr. Trump has said he wants to broker a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians. Mr. Abbas has stepped up pressure on Hamas in recent weeks in an apparent attempt to signal to the White House he is trying to unify the Palestinians, who have been politically divided since Hamas won control of Gaza 10 years ago.

Since then, Israel has frequently noted the difficulty of holding peace talks with Mr. Abbas and the Palestinian Authority on the grounds they don't represent all Palestinians.

Hamas is also under pressure on other fronts. It has strained ties with previous backers Iran and Syria over its support for Syrian rebels. Gulf states, which have deepened

their covert relationship with Israel, haven't passed along most of the money pledged to rebuild Gaza after Hamas's 2014 war with Israel. Turkey restored diplomatic ties with Israel last summer.

Mr. Mashaal unveiled the new charter on Monday in the Qatari capital of Doha, where the movement has its headquarters. The new charter states: "Palestine symbolizes the resistance that shall continue until liberation is accomplished, until the return is fulfilled and until a fully sovereign state is established with Jerusalem as its capital."

In its 1988 charter, drafted a year after it was founded, Hamas called for the destruction of Israel and the Palestinian takeover of all Israeli territory. Since then, it has fought three short wars with Israel and occasionally called for a 10-year truce with its neighbor. But it has never formally recognized the state of Israel.

In revising its charter, Hamas also dropped a reference to its connection with the Muslim Brotherhood, from which Hamas evolved in the 1980s. Egypt's current leader, President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, came to power in a 2013 coup that ousted Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt and other Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have in recent years designated the group a terrorist organization.

In recent months, Hamas has been conducting internal elections. Mr. Mashaal is expected to step down after more than a decade as the group's leader and to be succeeded by Ismail Haniyeh, who was the group's local chief in Gaza until earlier this year, when hard-liner Yahya Sinwar succeeded him.

Officials with Hamas have warned that attempts by Mr. Abbas to force them to give up control of Gaza will only deepen the group's political differences with the Palestinian Authority, which is dominated by Mr. Abbas's more moderate and secular Fatah party.

Mr. Abbas last month cut salaries to workers in Gaza and told Israel it would no longer pay for the electricity supplied by Israel to the coastal enclave.

In response, Hamas asked Arab nations, including Egypt, which shares a border with Gaza, to deal directly with the group and not go through the Palestinian Authority.

A spokesman for the Palestinian Authority didn't respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Mashaal has wanted Hamas to appear more moderate internationally with the eventual goal of replacing Fatah as the most influential group in the Palestine Liberation Organization, said Kobi Michael, former deputy director-general of Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs. The PLO

represents Palestinians in negotiations with Israel.

But current and former Israeli officials expressed skepticism that the more moderate charter would be adhered to by Messrs. Haniyeh and Sinwar, who are considered more militant than Mr. Mashaal. Mr. Sinwar was convicted in the 1980s of killing Israeli soldiers and sentenced to four life sentences. He was later released in a 2011 prisoner swap.

The Fatah-dominated PLO recognized the state of Israel as part of the Oslo Accords process of the 1990s. In recent years, Mr. Netanyahu and other Israeli political figures have called on Palestinians to recognize Israel specifically as a Jewish state as a prerequisite for peace. Palestinian officials have rejected that demand, saying one-fifth of the country's population is Arab Palestinian.

Mr. Netanyahu has said he won't accept the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders because of the security risks it poses.

He also has called it unrealistic for large numbers of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel, a key demand of both Hamas and Fatah. Such an influx, he and other Israeli officials say, would jeopardize the Jewish majority.

## The New York Times

### In Palestinian Power Struggle, Hamas Moderates Talk on Israel (UNE)

Ian Fisher

The split between the two groups — Fatah in the West Bank, Hamas in Gaza — has stood as one of the major obstacles in the peace process with Israel: Who, the Israelis ask, is their partner if the Palestinians are so deeply divided? That division has also been convenient for, and encouraged by, those on the Israeli right who do not want a peace deal.

But the Hamas document, which has been leaking for weeks, is less a change in Hamas's fundamental beliefs than a challenge for the credibility of Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank, as well as internationally.

"Whether it's a coincidence or it's connected, I have one thing to say: The Palestinian leadership is afraid of this Hamas moderation," said Mkhaimar Abusada, a political scientist at Al-Azhar University-Gaza. "Because the P.A. and Fatah are afraid that by this moderation, Hamas presents itself as the true representation of the Palestinian

people," he said, referring to the Palestinian Authority.

The official release came at a telling time and place: Hamas officials, normally secretive, held several events on Monday in Doha, the capital of Qatar, an American ally that would play a crucial role in a deal between the Israelis and Palestinians, which Mr. Trump is pushing.

Mr. Abbas was scheduled to meet with Mr. Trump in Washington on Wednesday as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

Experts on all sides of the complex struggle here say the new document is unlikely to represent any profound change in Hamas's true position toward Israel. The group recently chose a hard-liner, Yehya Sinwar, as its new leader in Gaza, and it has still in no way recognized Israel or renounced violence.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel quickly denounced the move. "Hamas's document is a

smoke screen," he said in a statement. "We see Hamas continuing to invest all of its resources not just in preparing for war with Israel, but also in educating the children of Gaza to want to destroy Israel."

Hamas is still considered a terrorist group by much of the West, including the United States, a status that has led to its exclusion from wider international talks about the Palestinians' future.

Fawzi Barhoum, a Hamas spokesman in Gaza, said the group had to move beyond its original charter to achieve its goals. "The document gives us a chance to connect with the outside world," he said. "To the world, our message is: Hamas is not radical. We are a pragmatic and civilized movement. We do not hate the Jews. We only fight who occupies our lands and kills our people."

The document is a distillation of various public statements over the years signaling an attempt by Hamas to appear more pragmatic

since it seized broad control of Gaza in 2007, after winning parliamentary elections a year earlier. Four years in the drafting, the document represents the consensus of Hamas's top leadership.

The paper calls for Hamas to distance itself from the Muslim Brotherhood in an effort to build stronger ties with Egypt, which controls the Gaza Strip's southern border. It reiterates the Hamas leadership's view that it is open to a Palestinian state along the borders established after the 1967 war, though it does not renounce future claims to Palestinian rule over what is now Israel. And the group specifically weakened language from its 1988 charter proclaiming Jews as enemies and comparing their views to Nazism, though the new document does not replace the original charter.

"Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish, but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine," the new document states.

Mr. Abbas is increasingly unpopular at home, though he is the recognized conduit to the wider world, and the race for succession is clearly heating up. And while the well-trained Palestinian Authority security forces have kept a tight check on Hamas in the West Bank, Fatah always fears support or action waiting in the wings.

In Fatah, Marwan Barghouti, a popular figure among Palestinians who is serving five life sentences for murders in the second intifada, is leading a hunger strike in Israeli jails, now two weeks old, that some experts say is aimed at raising his credibility as a leader.

Mr. Trump has expressed a desire for a peace process that brings in Sunni Arab nations aligned against Shiite Iran, itself allied with Hamas, even as Hamas seeks to become closer to those same Sunni nations.

"The P.A. and Hamas compete to get embraced by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arab states, but it seems the Arab embrace is not enough for two women," said Fayeze Abu Shamala, a Palestinian writer and political

analyst close to Hamas.

The new document, however, reveals a greater pragmatism and willingness to engage with the outside world, he said. "Hamas will be an influential political body in the next phase."

In Israel, which has fought three wars with Hamas since 2008, the document was greeted with skepticism.

"Not even one mind" will be changed in Israel, said Yossi Kuperwasser, a retired Israeli brigadier general who led the army's research arm. "Nobody will be affected by this."

Mr. Kuperwasser called it a "sugarcoating" of old positions that did not renounce Hamas's original charter and did not recognize Israel's right to exist. He did say, however, that it could be problematic for Mr. Abbas because the Palestinian Authority and Hamas platforms appear to be growing closer.

In the document, Hamas reiterates that Palestinians who fled or were expelled during wars with Israelis have the right to return — largely a

nonstarter in successive peace negotiations with Israel. And it does not renounce violence; "resistance" continues to be a main source of strength and credibility.

"Hamas rejects any attempt to undermine the resistance and its arms. It also affirms the right of our people to develop the means and mechanisms of resistance," the document says. "Hamas confirms that the resistance leadership can decide the level of resistance and can utilize a variety of the different tools and ways to administrate the conflict, without compromising the resistance."

In distancing itself from the Muslim Brotherhood, analysts said, Hamas was likely to improve its often-strained relationship with Egypt, even if it was unlikely to open the border between Egypt and Gaza for trade.

"It's a huge step for Hamas, but I think they should temper their expectations about the reaction from the Egyptians," said Abdelrahman Ayyash, a researcher on Islamist movements who is based in Istanbul.

Under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt frequently accuses Hamas of aiding Islamist militants in attacks against Egyptian security forces in Sinai and Egypt's main cities. Egyptian security officials and pro-government news outlets accuse Hamas, often without proof, of providing militants with training and guns.

At the same time, Egyptian intelligence has quietly renewed its relationship with Hamas in recent years, in an effort to secure Sinai and to bolster Egypt's role as a mediator in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Before Mr. Abbas's visit to Washington, the Egyptians are keen to establish their role as potential peacemakers. After a meeting between Mr. Sisi and Mr. Abbas in Cairo on Saturday, the Egyptian president's office issued a statement that noted Egypt's "pivotal role" and urged Palestinian unity as "essential to put an end to the plight of the Palestinian people."



## In Bid to End Isolation, Hamas Tries Out a Friendlier Face

Robbie Gramer

Hamas is putting forth a more moderate face, at least on paper. In an effort to dig itself out of international isolation, the Palestinian Islamic group is set to unveil a new charter on Monday at a press conference in Qatar that softens its stance on Israel.

The new document accepts a provisional Palestinian state, distances itself from the Muslim Brotherhood political group, and tones down its past anti-Semitic language. That's a stark change from its original 1988 charter, a fiery document that Israel and its allies regularly cite as proof Hamas stokes violence.

The changes to the group's charter signals the latest move in a complex power struggle with the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank. It also shows the group aims to mend ties with Gulf Arab states and Egypt, which labeled the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization last year.

Then there's the timing of the announcement. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is scheduled to meet U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday. Abbas is losing popularity at home, and rivals are jockeying for power to succeed him. Experts say Hamas, which controls Gaza, could be mainstreaming its platform to gain

more support at the expense of the Palestinian Authority.

"The document gives us a chance to connect with the outside world," said Fawzi Barhoum, a Hamas spokesman in Gaza. "To the world, our message is: Hamas is not radical. We are a pragmatic and civilized movement. We do not hate the Jews. We only fight who occupies our lands and kills our people."

But Israel's not buying it. "Hamas is attempting to fool the world but it will not succeed," said David Keyes, spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "They dig terror tunnels and have launched thousands upon thousands of missiles at Israeli civilians ... that is the real Hamas," he added.

Israel has fought three wars with Hamas since 2007, when the group first took political control of the Gaza Strip.

Trump repeatedly expressed interest in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has vexed every president since 1948. But out of the gate, he took a decidedly harder posture against Palestinians and lined his ranks with controversial pro-Israel hardliners, including current U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman.

A number of countries, including the United States, label Hamas a

terrorist organization, shutting it out of any peace negotiations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Snippets of the document, which Hamas leader-in-exile Khaled Mashaal will release Monday, have been leaking out for weeks. One of the most surprising aspects of the document is Hamas's willingness to accept a provisional Palestinian state using borders from 1967, when Israel first captured Gaza and the West Bank in a war with its Arab neighbors.

Despite its more moderate tone, Hamas still doesn't reject using violence in its new charter. "Hamas refuses to hinder the resistance or its weapons, and confirms the right of our people to develop resistance tools and equipments," the document says.

Japan's explicitly pacifist constitution turns 70 on Wednesday. Ahead of the big birthday, a mail-in survey was conducted as to whether the Japanese population wants the constitution revised — and it seems about half the country does.

The Japanese population slightly favors a revision to Article 9, the section of the constitution that renounces war. Some 49 percent of respondents believe Article 9 must be changed, while 47 percent say it shouldn't be touched. But most do not want it changed now, with 51 percent saying they are against

constitutional amendments under Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who then called for his country to make a historic revision to the document on Monday.

But all respondents are already living in a country that has a very different relationship to its military than it did in the very recent past. Even without changing the constitution, Abe has deliberately sought to loosen the fetters that bound the Japanese military since World War II — and to play a bigger part in global security.

Abe already passed laws that allow Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defense without violating Article 9, and lifted its ban on exporting weapons. Japan unveiled an initiative to further security with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, increasingly concerned as they are about China. On Monday, Japan sent its largest warship to accompany a U.S. supply vessel in Japanese waters.

Abe has already "achieved the goals that he wanted in terms of letting Japan be a more 'normal' nation" where military and defense are concerned, said Michael Auslin of the American Enterprise Institute.

But Abe still has work to do to garner enough support to formally codify the changes to Japan's security laws through a

constitutional change, said Jim Schoff of the Carnegie Endowment. That requires figuring out just what a revised Article 9 would say, and how unfettered Japan's armed forces would be. That is "the next big step in the staircase," he said.

Still, the fact that it is even up for discussion — with a good degree of

public support — is in part a reflection of the changing world around Japan. Tokyo is staring at an erratic North Korea, an unpredictable South Korea, and an increasingly aggressive China, whether in the South China Sea or closer to home in the East China Sea. Capping it all off, Japanese

leaders have in recent years sought to reassess their relationship with the United States, fearing too much reliance on Washington could leave them in the lurch.

That said, the Japanese people are still pacifistic, Auslin says. Beefing up the ability to defend themselves doesn't translate into much appetite

for interventions around the world, or even in Asia.

A leader who forgets that and tries to turn Japan's new freedom of maneuver into an interventionist approach might get a reminder — in the form of removal from office.



## Trump's Israel-Palestine Negotiator Is Perfectly Unqualified

Armin Rosen

This week's meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas may be an important public step toward restarting a Middle East peace process that has been stalled since 2014. It may even mark the first step toward making "the ultimate deal," the lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians that Trump has said he wants the chance to secure.

But it's important to note that the White House meeting won't mark the first point of contact between the 82-year-old Abbas and the Trump administration. A low-profile but potentially influential White House official by the name of Jason Greenblatt already met with Abbas in Ramallah, in the West Bank, on March 14 as part of a wide-ranging listening tour to Israel and the Palestinian territories — and then met with him a second time at an Arab League summit in Amman, Jordan, later that month. A former Trump Organization chief legal officer, Greenblatt has the official title of the White House's representative for international negotiations. But unofficially he's the administration's Middle East peace envoy. If an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is reached during the Trump administration, it will be Greenblatt — who earned his new position by virtue of his personal relationship with the president, despite little experience with his new duties — working to bring the parties to the table and keep them there.

Greenblatt has been placed at the very center of the radical political experiment Trump came into office promising. In the president's view, the entrenched political establishment was one of the primary sources of America's problems, and the country's social and political ills could only be remedied if people from outside the alleged Washington "swamp" were finally allowed to have a crack at them. The job performance of people like Rex Tillerson, who became secretary of state after years as an ExxonMobil executive, or school choice activist-turned-Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is a real-time test of one of the central value propositions of Trump's

presidency: That America is in need of bold new approaches to national governance that only Trump and his team of outsiders can provide.

Greenblatt is one of those outsiders. But unlike most of his colleagues in the West Wing and cabinet, he has been off to a strong start, at least judging by bipartisan accounts from policymakers and observers in the United States and the Middle East.

"What's impressed me about Mr. Greenblatt's early forays into Middle East diplomacy is his interest and willingness to listen to a broad range of voices," said Daniel Shapiro, who served as President Barack Obama's ambassador in Tel Aviv between 2011 and January of this year. "He seems to understand that the success or failure of Middle East peace efforts is not going to depend only on the decisions of the leaders."

Peace advocates have seen encouraging signs out of Greenblatt as well. "I think we've been positively impressed with the foundation that he's laid," said Jessica Rosenblum, the vice president of communications for J Street, which describes itself as a "pro-Israel, pro-peace" advocacy group.

Greenblatt's success so far reflects well on his own diplomatic abilities, but it may have as much to do with the nature of his assigned task.

Greenblatt's success so far reflects well on his own diplomatic abilities, but it may have as much to do with the nature of his assigned task. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process seems especially primed for a newcomer's fresh thinking. After all, a quarter century of careful, deliberative, and well-intentioned professional U.S. diplomacy hasn't resulted in an Israeli-Palestinian agreement or even a clear path toward one.

So far, the former real estate lawyer's record suggests that the peace process is one area where a fresh approach could actually pay off — assuming Trump has the focus and patience needed to seriously take on one of the world's most infamously intractable conflicts.

Greenblatt began working at the Trump Organization in 1997, after a career that included time as a real estate lawyer for a New York-based firm and a short-lived foray into the cappuccino-making business. Over the next two decades, the Yeshiva University and New York University law school graduate would work his way up to executive vice president and chief legal officer at the Trump Organization. As one of the top lawyers in the company, Greenblatt oversaw due diligence, contracting, and other legal dimensions of Trump's real estate deals — including some of the more controversial ones. Israel never came under Greenblatt's portfolio for the simple reason that Trump has still never taken on a project in the country and has no documented business interests there.

Greenblatt is an observant Jew and tweeted a photo of his tefillin bag while en route to the Middle East in March. As Greenblatt told me during an interview last July, Trump respected his religious observance and always wished him a restful Shabbat even when a tough negotiation came up against the weekend holiday.

Greenblatt's career as a Middle East hand began less than a year ago. During the campaign, Greenblatt was one of the co-chairs of candidate Trump's Israel Advisory Committee, along with David Friedman, a bankruptcy lawyer who is now serving as the U.S. ambassador to Israel. In contrast to the notably outspoken Friedman, who was also a fundraiser for a West Bank settlement, the soft-spoken Greenblatt had never tried to participate in Middle Eastern affairs and had never even publicly commented on the region until the campaign kicked off.

Early in the general election, Greenblatt's elevation to the height of the Middle Eastern policy firmament appeared to be just another example of Trump's reliance on dubiously qualified people who were already within his orbit — in April 2016, *The Forward* ran a Jewish Telegraphic Agency profile of Greenblatt with the headline "No Experience Necessary." When I interviewed him last July, Greenblatt candidly admitted just how much he

still had to learn about his subject area and acknowledged that he wouldn't even have been involved in politics if his longtime boss weren't running for president.

Today, Greenblatt's closeness to Trump and his lack of previous diplomatic experience are actually starting to look like assets. Greenblatt's listening tour in March took him to places that few other people in his position have been — like the Jalazone refugee camp, outside of Ramallah, where he met with local youth leaders. No American Middle East envoy had visited a West Bank refugee camp since the early 1990s. Greenblatt met with a range of political and civil society figures in the West Bank, as well as a "cross section of folks from Gaza," which is currently under the control of the U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas. Later that month, he attended an Arab League summit in Amman, a relative rarity for a senior American official. At the summit, he had a second meeting with Abbas, whom he has reportedly impressed, and sat down with a number of Arab foreign ministers.

Greenblatt's visits with Israelis displayed a similar broad-mindedness. He met with settlers, generals, and students and tweeted a picture with Gershon Edelstein, the head of the Ponevezh Yeshiva, one of the most respected religious academies in Orthodox Judaism. Someone more conscious of diplomatic convention, working for a more cautious or traditional administration, might have veered away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's thornier territory during a first official visit to the region. And a more traditional diplomat might not have seen the public diplomacy value in dropping by the Ponevezh refugee camp — or of visiting either place at all.

Trump's envoy approached the region with fresh eyes and won fans on both sides of the Green Line as a result.

Trump's envoy approached the region with fresh eyes and won fans on both sides of the Green Line as a result. Greenblatt "conveyed a very good impression that he is curious, that he wants to understand different

people, their take on the situation, their aspirations, and their aspirations and their concerns," said Nimrod Novik, a former foreign-policy advisor to Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and a fellow at the Israel Policy Forum.

Greenblatt is only in the world of Middle East diplomacy because his longtime boss was elected president, but in the context of Israeli-Palestinian affairs, the appearance of favoritism might actually help him. As Novik explains, both the Israelis and Palestinians are adept at gaming the negotiating process and at exploiting any perceived distance between an envoy and the administration back in Washington. It's harder to stall an envoy, or to go behind the envoy's back and appeal to other, friendlier administration officials or congressional allies, when the sides believe that the mediator is a direct extension of the president. "When the parties know that the envoy speaks for the president and directly with the president, they are very careful not to play games," Novik said.

That isn't always the case. Shapiro said both the Israelis and Palestinians tried to come between Middle East envoy George Mitchell and the White House during Obama's first term. "The Israelis looked for other channels besides Senator Mitchell, and even at a certain point the Palestinians weren't certain if he was the authority they should be speaking to." During Obama's second term, Secretary of State John Kerry's dogged peace efforts suffered from the perception on both sides of the Green Line that he cared about reaching a Middle East settlement more than his boss did.

Greenblatt is about as personally close to the president as someone in his position could be. And Trump has been remarkably and even uncharacteristically consistent on Israeli-Palestinian peace, repeatedly saying he wants to be the one to broker "the ultimate deal." Closeness with an engaged president is a powerful tool for an envoy — as long as there's a policy vision and a sustained commitment from the Oval Office underlying his work.

It's far from obvious that that's currently the case. Trump's policies on the peace process have been broadly in line with previous U.S. administrations, and the new president publicly put his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, on notice about settlement construction during a joint press conference after their meeting on Feb. 15, telling the prime minister he'd like to see him "hold back on

settlements for a little bit." But that hasn't yet translated into the kind of clear-cut U.S.-Israeli understanding on settlement construction that will need to be reached before Trump can really attempt to relaunch the peace process. Trump would also need to reassure an ever skeptical and often recalcitrant Abbas that entering into negotiations with Israel really is in his best interest — an objective Trump could advance by explicitly endorsing the U.S. government's official preference to date for a two-state outcome to the conflict. The president hasn't done that yet, though this week's meeting presents an ideal opportunity to change course.

Inevitably, the measure of Greenblatt's work is whether it actually brings the sides back to the negotiating table, creating space for the kind of diplomatic breakthrough that can change the dynamics of a now-static process. The Trump administration is up against the same challenges as its predecessors, obstacles like Israeli settlement construction, Palestinian terrorism and incitement, and a regionwide security vacuum. Traditional diplomacy hasn't had the answers to any of these problems. As to whether a Trump-style alternative will fare any better, a lot depends on the president's notoriously fickle intentions and commitment — regardless of how admirably his envoy performs.

As tensions rise on the Korean Peninsula, the world's eyes are on China's response. And "China" has given plenty of answers. "China Offers to Defend Kim Jong-un If He Gives Up His Nuclear Weapons," read one National Interest headline. "China Warns North Korea Not to 'Cross Point of No Return' With Nuclear Test," claimed Breitbart.

The problem is, it wasn't the Chinese government issuing these statements; it was a market-driven tabloid that strives for exactly this sort of attention.

China is home to nearly 2,000 newspapers — many of them state-owned to some degree and all of them subject to increasingly tight censorship — but few come close to exerting the influence abroad that the Global Times does. Established under the ownership of the Chinese Communist Party's flagship paper, the People's Daily, in 1993, the nationally circulated daily claims a Chinese readership of several million. Since 2009, there has also been an English edition that shares editorial content with the Chinese flagship. It has earned attention — and notoriety — in China and abroad for its hawkish editorials and has been labeled by Western observers as "China's Fox News."

But that nickname is revealing in more ways than one. By its own admission, the paper's actual relationship with China's levers of power is tangential at best. And while the Global Times and the Chinese government have interests that overlap, they aren't nearly identical. Several current and former editors at the paper say business incentives drive it to be intentionally provocative whenever possible. Provocations that involve straying from the official line of the Chinese government are welcome, so long as they don't entirely sever the illusion of a tight connection between it and the newspaper.

The newspaper owes its outsized voice in international media and politics precisely to that illusion of "official" status. On its own, the Global Times's sensationalism (conveniently available in English) may have earned it an international audience, but not nearly the influence it currently enjoys. In his rambling interview with The Associated Press this month, U.S. President Donald Trump cited what was, most likely, the Global Times as evidence his policy was working. "You saw the editorial they had in their paper saying they cannot be allowed to have nuclear, you know, et cetera," he stated. "People have said they've never seen this ever before in China."

Western headlines regularly fail to distinguish between the Global Times and the Chinese leadership. Take the round of such stories after the election, following Trump's promises of targeting Beijing over trade. "China warns of 'tit for tat' on iPhone sales if Trump starts trade war," read one NBC headline. "China threatens to cut iPhone sales and replace Boeing with Airbus," reported the Independent. "China warns iPhone sales could be hurt," said Fox News. After Trump's call with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, headlines talked of China promising it would "take revenge." In every case, it wasn't "China" that was talking but one newspaper.

"As reporters in Beijing, we all loved the Global Times because they said a lot of wacky [things] and gave us something to quote," joked Barbara Demick, a longtime Beijing correspondent for the Los Angeles Times, at a PEN America event in September. "It was like this crazy ultranationalist, and if you were lazy, you could always get a good quote from them."

While official voices in China's government tend to issue sedate boilerplate statements in response to international events — if they say anything at all — the Global Times is often happy to fill the colorful quote vacuum. In the past year, the

paper has said Australia is "at the fringes of civilization," the British people have a "losing mind-set," and that war between China and the United States in the South China Sea may be "inevitable."

The Global Times shares a compound with its mother paper, the People's Daily, which legitimately lays claim to the title of "Communist Party mouthpiece." In contrast to the Global Times's famously antagonistic language, People's Daily editorials, which can be considered actual reflections of government attitudes and policy, tend to be committee-written, carefully screened, and packed with dry official-speak that rarely elicits much public interest.

David Bandurski, a researcher at the University of Hong Kong's China Media Project and editor of its website, said being under the umbrella of the People's Daily does afford the Global Times more leeway than most other publications, especially regarding international affairs. "But this does not mean that its positions correspond to those of the leadership," he said. "It is a more commercially oriented publication than many official party newspapers, and it panders to a more nationalistic and nativist — meaning, in this context, anti-Western — readership."

Since Donald Trump's victory, the Global Times has reached new heights of international relevance. While the Chinese government formally issued several "serious" but restrained expressions of concern toward the then-president-elect, the Global Times has cranked up the volume. In the wake of Trump's phone call with the Taiwanese president, it said China should prepare to "punish" Taiwan militarily and take it back by force. A separate editorial called Trump "as ignorant as a child" for his foreign policy.

These pieces all received extensive foreign media coverage that left readers with little to infer that the Global Times isn't a mouthpiece for the state. A common shorthand for the paper is simply a "state-backed" or "Communist Party-backed" newspaper — sometimes with qualifiers that indicate its role might be a bit more complicated, like "hawkish," "nationalistic," or "tabloid." Others suggest official sanction by emphasizing its ownership by the People's Daily or asserting that the Global Times has "close ties to China's ruling Communist Party" or is "one of the major state-controlled papers reflecting Communist party views."

Then there are the headlines that allow the Global Times to speak for the entire country, which is an approach that can pay off. One

Guardian article titled “China threatens to cut sales of iPhones and US cars if ‘naive’ Trump pursues trade war” was shared more than 18,000 times on social media.

But just as the designation of “Chinese beauty with sexiest bottom” by People’s Daily Online doesn’t necessarily indicate the official line, the Global Times has a complex mix of market, personal, and political motivations that are often a far cry from state-endorsed.

Hu Xijin, the editor in chief of both the English and Chinese editions of the Global Times, has said he personally writes or oversees most of the paper’s editorials. Staff say he often dictates them over the phone, which may account for their often incoherent quality. In an interview with Quartz last year, he claimed that he frequently speaks with officials in the Foreign Affairs Ministry and state security apparatus and that the paper’s views often overlap with theirs. “Some of my words are in line with their thinking,” Hu said. “They can’t speak willfully, but I can.”

He added that on very rare occasions, government authorities will try to dictate the content or style of his paper’s editorials (which no Chinese paper is immune to). But when the Quartz reporter asked if it’s accurate to call the Global Times a “Communist Party media outlet” or an “official Chinese state media outlet,” he replied:

“People’s Daily and Xinhua are party media and official media. You can’t understand our paper from this perspective. We are market-driven media.”

Hu went on to concede that the paper’s influence mainly comes from its commentaries and “especially its editorials.” When pressed on the idea that he loves getting quoted in foreign media, regardless of whether the coverage is positive or negative, he replied, “In general attracting attention is a good thing. But we don’t live for foreign media.”

Past staff noted the paper strives for foreign media mentions, good or bad, which incentivizes antagonistic positions and provocative language. A Global Times editor confirmed that the paper monitors foreign media coverage, “as other media

organizations do.” In the Global Times office in Beijing, a list pinned to a corkboard catalogs foreign media mentions every month.

“It pays to provoke” seems to be [the Global Times’s] motto,” said Shastri Ramachandaran, a former editor in the paper’s English opinion section. “The stance, tone, language, and topic are calculated with an eye on attention abroad.”

“This is to troll for clicks and media mentions,” he added. “It has paid off.... Foreign media revels in picking up these articles.” China’s neighbors are particularly susceptible to these tactics. By far, the most commented on articles at the Global Times are those attacking Vietnam or the Philippines, inciting angry nationalists from both sides to clash below the line.

The premium placed on foreign media attention was highlighted at a 2012 conference in Melbourne, Australia, where Global Times Deputy Chief Editor Wu Jie presented a chart showcasing “explosive growth” in international press citations of the paper, increasing from 201 in 2007 to 4,412 in 2010 (the year following the English edition’s launch). Among his examples of articles cited in foreign media were commentaries that mocked Japan’s “weakness,” made unsubstantiated claims about the blind lawyer and anti-forced-abortion activist Chen Guangcheng, and attacked the “aggressive political stance” of an Al Jazeera journalist who was expelled from China.

Former employees of the paper also reported that mischievous foreign editors routinely jazz up the language of translated articles they’re tasked with polishing for the English edition — sometimes with the aim of getting their prank picked up by foreign media. “This was a pastime at [the Global Times],” said Julie Bertoni, a former editor at the paper. “And sometimes a lifeline keeping us sane, for entertainment or for a sense of justice in an otherwise bleak political bind. Foreign staff traded stories about what had gotten slipped in over the years.”

Another former foreign editor, for instance, reportedly slipped the term “rascally varmints” into an editorial to describe members of the U.S. Congress. The quote was picked up

by the Diplomat, Tehelka, and Freedom House.

“[They know it will] play well to the ‘look how crazy Chinese media is’ audience at home,” said another former editor, describing frequent foreign media coverage of the Global Times’s mischievous language. “And why let facts and nuance stand in the way of comic gold?”

The paper undoubtedly does, on occasion, overlap with, or even sway, the government’s views. In late 2015, a Global Times editorial condemned a commentary by French journalist Ursula Gauthier in the magazine L’Obs that was critical of terrorism crackdowns in the volatile region of Xinjiang. The editorial sparked a series of state media attacks and online nationalist backlash that culminated in Gauthier’s expulsion from China.

It may be more useful, however, to think of the Global Times as serving as one end of a measuring stick gauging permitted public discourse in China at any given time. While privately owned media like the widely respected Caixin or Economic Observer may mark the limits of permissible liberal attitudes, the Global Times can serve as the marker for the most fiercely nationalistic. It can also act — wittingly or not — as a purveyor of more unpalatable propaganda while the party itself stays at arm’s length and maintains plausible deniability. “Global Times very often expresses viewpoints that are more hard-line than what we hear from the leadership or expresses them with a fire and vehemence we wouldn’t expect from the government,” Bandurski said. “The paper is often like an attack dog — and the problem with attack dogs is that they can also bite their masters.”

Undercutting the idea of the Global Times as a party voice is that it has, in many known instances, run afoul of party lines. In 2014, propaganda authorities ordered the paper to delete its reporting on terrorism in Xinjiang; it experienced similar rebukes after publishing an article on an open letter by overseas Chinese students condemning the 1989 Tiananmen massacre and another editorial that discussed the case of five kidnapped Hong Kong booksellers.

Last May, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the country’s chief internet censor, slammed the paper for running a poll on whether China should reclaim Taiwan by force, as well as a separate series of editorials the agency deemed sensitive and overly sensational. Global Times management was reportedly summoned for censure, and a written criticism was circulated to senior editors at other news outlets.

When these nuances of the Global Times’s political significance are lost, it has real effects. In late 2015, a Global Times editorial called then-presidential candidate Hillary Clinton a “rabble-rouser” who resorts to “ignominious shenanigans” because of her tweet that condemned Chinese President Xi Jinping for suppressing feminist activists. The quote was widely reported in foreign media (one CNN report was titled “China calls Hillary Clinton a ‘rabble rouser’ over Xi tweet,” which described the Global Times simply as a “state-run media outlet”). Clinton herself was apparently given the impression that the state had issued this peculiar insult: She released a statement saying, “If China believes defending women’s rights is ‘rabble rousing,’ then they can expect much more of it from me.”

This year, the Global Times has published editorials suggesting that China might accept a surgical strike on North Korea, that China should grow its nuclear stockpile, that “Beijing won’t fear setting up a showdown with the US, pressuring the latter to pay respect to China,” and that China should perhaps “reformulate its Taiwan policy” and “make the use of force as a main option.”

None of these positions represent the official line. But if the conflation of the Global Times and the Chinese government similarly influences other world leaders, such as a U.S. president who routinely buys into tabloid conspiracy theories and lashes out over things as simple as bad restaurant reviews and the size of his inauguration crowd, the consequences could be catastrophic.



## Hadley, Wilder and Worden: Four steps to winning peace in Afghanistan

Stephen J. Hadley, chairman of the board of the U.S. Institute of Peace, was U.S. national security adviser from 2005 to 2008. Andrew Wilder is the institute’s vice president of Asia

programs, and Scott Worden is director of Afghanistan and Central Asia programs.

The U.S. bombing of an Islamic State stronghold in eastern Afghanistan last month, and last

week’s news of two service members killed in an anti-Islamic State operation, are needed reminders of why we still have troops in Afghanistan. In mountains near those that once hid Osama bin Laden, a terrorist group that seeks

to attack the United States is again seeking sanctuary.

The devastating attack on an Afghan army base in Mazar-e-Sharif that killed more than 140 soldiers is a grim reminder of the challenges



confronting the Trump administration as it completes its Afghanistan strategy review. How can the United States eliminate international terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan while the Afghan government is fighting a war of attrition in which the Taliban has gained the upper hand?

During a U.S. Institute of Peace visit to Pakistan and Afghanistan last month, we met with senior officials and civil society and business leaders. Based on those discussions, we believe the solution lies in Afghan and regional politics, not just on the battlefield. The United States should shift its strategy to prioritize reaching a political settlement based on the Afghan constitution among all Afghan groups, including the Taliban. In doing so, the Trump administration can move from a policy of avoiding failure to one of achieving success.

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The right strategy should include four main components.

First, the United States should use its existing counterterrorism capability to destroy all Islamic State and al-Qaeda elements in Afghanistan. It must also enhance its support for the Afghan security forces so that they can deny the Taliban strategic battlefield successes. More Afghan special forces, greater close-air support

capability and better intelligence capacity are needed to maintain control of Afghanistan's major population centers and transport arteries. An Afghanistan that can clearly survive without a peace settlement is more likely to achieve one.

Second, such military assistance must be part of a political strategy to address the drivers of conflict that have allowed the Taliban to make steady territorial gains. A modest increase in military support will not stabilize Afghanistan if the Afghan government does not take tough measures to reduce the cancer of corruption. It must win greater public support by building the economy in a way that creates jobs, and conduct credible elections that will provide greater legitimacy for the government and strengthen its position in a future peace process. The United States and Afghanistan should make mutual commitments to support these efforts.

Third, the United States should make clear that a successful outcome will not require military defeat of the Taliban. The goal instead should be an Afghan-led and -owned peace process that produces a political settlement among all elements of Afghan society, including the Taliban. The settlement should protect the human rights of all Afghans as enshrined in the constitution and guarantee that Afghan territory will never be used to support international terrorism. This requires that the Afghans, Afghanistan's neighbors, and the

United States and its international partners agree on a framework for an inclusive peace process. As part of this process, the United States, in close coordination with the Afghan government, should consider direct talks with the Taliban.

Finally, the United States should work to rebuild a regional consensus for a stable Afghanistan. The Trump administration should revitalize an international contact group to align all relevant outside powers. The key message for Russia, China and Iran is that we want a political settlement. Our forces are there only as long as requested by the Afghan government. Once the country is stable, free of terrorist groups and able to prevent their return, we can discuss a timetable for the reduction and gradual withdrawal of our military presence.

Pakistan should be a strategic ally of the United States. But Pakistan hosts the Afghan Taliban leadership and provides material support. The United States should address Pakistan's legitimate strategic concerns about threats emanating from Afghan territory, the burden of hosting Afghan refugees and the need for better relations with India. In return, Pakistan must take measures to constrain the Taliban, starting with withdrawing support and halting the Taliban's freedom of movement within Pakistan. If no progress is made, the United States and its allies should take tough action targeted against those involved in supporting Taliban and transnational terrorist groups.

This strategy would be a cost-effective investment. Prior U.S. spending levels of \$120 billion per year have been reduced to \$20 billion to \$25 billion. This is a small sum compared with the estimated \$1 trillion-to-\$2 trillion loss from another 9/11-scale terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland.

A stable Afghanistan continues to be a top U.S. national security priority. In this region of the world, the current Afghan government is a rare and willing ally at the epicenter of the fight against the Islamic State and international terrorism. Its collapse would again create a haven for terrorist organizations that would threaten the United States and could destabilize nuclear-armed Pakistan.

The long-term goal of a prosperous Afghanistan is worthy of U.S. and international support. But that outcome is largely in the hands of the Afghans themselves. The immediate U.S. objective should be to end terrorist threats to the United States and our friends and allies emanating from Afghanistan, help Afghanistan stabilize itself and the region, and help initiate a process aimed at achieving a lasting political settlement of the conflict. It's time to redefine success in Afghanistan from winning the war to winning the peace.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

### Nicolás Maduro Calls for New Venezuelan Constitution

Kejal Vyas

CARACAS—Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro on Monday signed an order to convene a special assembly to redraft the country's constitution, the latest in a string of efforts to retain power in the face of mounting protests and civil unrest.

Mr. Maduro called for a vote—though it remained unclear among whom—to elect a so-called constituent assembly, which would in theory become the nation's highest authority.

The opposition responded by pledging to intensify antigovernment demonstrations. They called on protesters to block roads beginning as early as 6 a.m. Tuesday in rejection of what they said was the leftist leader's latest attempt to violate democratic order and avoid elections that polls show his ruling Socialist Party would overwhelmingly lose.

"Don't let yourselves be fooled. This is a fraud, a coup d'état," said Julio

Borges, who leads the country's congress, the National Assembly.

Mr. Maduro fired back by saying, "I am no Mussolini."

"We need to transform the state, especially that rotten National Assembly over there," Mr. Maduro told red-clad supporters at a May Day rally in downtown Caracas, referring to the country's congress.

Mr. Maduro said a constituent assembly would ease Venezuela's crippling economic crisis, guarantee peace and beat back what he alleges are efforts to destabilize his administration, without explaining in detail how. "I don't want a civil war," he added.

But legal experts said Mr. Maduro's decision was a last-ditch effort to sideline his rivals who control the National Assembly. While Mr. Maduro has largely neutered the legislature by barring it from passing laws, lawmakers have warned international investors that any deals with the government would be illegal

unless approved by congress, curtailing the cash-strapped Maduro administration's ability to secure credit lines overseas.

"This is an absurd proposal and an element of distraction to try to paralyze the opposition, which is united in the streets mobilizing to get rid of the government," said Antonio Canova, a law professor at Andrés Bello Catholic University. "Every day it is clearer that we're in a dictatorship."

Mr. Maduro's proposal, the first call for a constituent assembly since his mentor and predecessor, Hugo Chávez, rewrote the constitution in 1999, came as thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets Monday, facing tear gas and National Guard armored vehicles for the fifth straight week to demand an immediate end to the president's autocratic rule.

At least 29 people have died over a month of clashes between demonstrators and state security forces that are sometimes backed

by armed paramilitary gangs, work as the Socialist government's enforcers and often charge into opponents on motorbikes.

With polls showing that four out of five Venezuelans want Mr. Maduro out of office, all eyes are now on how the constituent assembly is convened. Mr. Maduro, in his speech, promised elections would be held, as they were in 1999 when Mr. Chavez pushed through a new constitution.

But he said he wanted at least half of the assembly to be comprised of the working class, farmers and unionists who have traditionally formed the backbone for the ruling party. Amid a punishing economic crisis marked by chronic shortages of food and medicines, however, even many former supporters of Mr. Maduro are now calling for him to step down, polls show.

After scrapping regional elections last year, Mr. Maduro in recent days has said that he would be open to holding those elections later this

year and has called for dialogue with his detractors. But the opposition has said anything short of general

elections to vote on the presidency would be insufficient. They have also forgone renewed talks with the

government after Vatican-mediated negotiations last year broke down.

**The  
New York  
Times**

## Trump's Volatility in Asia Distresses a Longtime U.S. Ally: Australia (UNE)

Damien Cave

DARWIN, Australia — South Korea, Japan and the United States have grown accustomed to North Korea's diatribes, but Pyongyang recently threatened a new target with a nuclear strike: Australia.

During a visit by Vice President Mike Pence to Sydney, the North warned Australia to think twice about "blindly and zealously toeing the U.S. line" and acting as "a shock brigade of the U.S. master."

Australian and American troops have fought side by side in every major conflict since World War I, and there are few militaries in the world with closer relations: 1,250 United States Marines recently arrived in Darwin for six months of joint exercises; the two countries share intelligence from land, sea and even outer space; and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull is slated to meet President Trump on Thursday on an aircraft carrier in New York.

But North Korea's threat against the country, far-fetched as it might seem, is an example of how Australia's most important military alliance faces a new challenge: the risk that President Trump will draw the nation into a conflict or other unexpected crisis that destabilizes the region, angers its trading partners or forces it to side with either the United States or China.

"The question is: What might America drag Australia into?" said Ashley Townshend, a research fellow at the United States Studies Center at the University of Sydney. "That's a very scary thought for Australians, many of whom perceive Donald Trump to be an erratic and highly self-interested commander in chief."

Mr. Trump has already embarrassed Australia once, with an abrupt phone call to Mr. Turnbull that seemed to dismiss Australia's historic role as a friend who often gives more than it gets. Now his unpredictable approach is fueling a national debate about Australia's relationship with the world, and especially the United States. Last week, Paul Keating, a prime minister during the Clinton years, reignited discussion by arguing that Australia must end its status as a "client state."

Australia is essentially caught between two powers: China, its largest trading partner, and the

United States, its faithful ally, with a military connection that has been strengthened by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and more recent agreements to gradually expand the American footprint in Darwin.

What Australia and the United States are now trying to work out is how to manage that military momentum in an increasingly tense part of the world. If the military is a hammer in the Trump era, at what point does every dispute start to look like a nail?

"It's always important that there's a balance between the military and the diplomatic — because of the scale of the military," Mr. Keating said in an interview. "In both economic terms and in strategic terms, they squeeze diplomacy out."

Darwin, a humid, crocodile-infested coastal city at the northern end of this vast country, captures the past, present and future of Australia's alliance with the United States.

Japan attacked the city on Feb. 19, 1942, killing 235 people, and residents are quick to point out that the raids were led by the same commander responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbor 10 weeks earlier.

Within a few months, Darwin became a hub for counterstrikes from bombers flown by Americans. A pocket guide for arriving American troops set the tone: "You're going to meet a people who like Americans and whom you will like."

During the Cold War, the relationship expanded.

Kim Beazley, a former defense minister and ambassador to the United States, cited the rise during the 1960s of three joint installations to maintain contact with American submarines in the Indian Ocean and provide infrared detection of Soviet capabilities, increasing the warning time for a potential Soviet strike to 30 minutes from 15.

Those installations and the ones that followed — especially Pine Gap, a joint Australian-American spy base that helps provide battlefield intelligence and early warnings for missile launches around the world — "are never talked about, but they're really the guts of the alliance," Mr. Beazley said.

On the ground in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, Australian troops are also peers in battle, said Lt. Col.

Brian S. Middleton, commanding officer of the Third Battalion, Fourth Marines — the American unit that just moved into Darwin for six months of training with the Australians.

As part of the American pivot to Asia, the long-term plan, negotiated under the Obama administration, is to send up to 2,500 Marines to Darwin — the largest deployment of United States forces to Australia since World War II. "It'll make us more effective in whatever conflict we end up serving in together," said Kelly Magsamen, the Pentagon's top Asia-Pacific policy official at the end of the Obama administration.

Other American officials said that in space, missile defense and cyberwarfare, the Australians are all in. Australia is working with the United States to relocate a special radar that helps better track satellites. The Australian military is also making a big push in innovation in undersea warfare and drones in the air and underwater.

And in many cases, that means purchases of American equipment. An Australian defense planning report last year laid out a \$20 billion increase in the annual military budget by 2025, including money for fighter jets, surveillance technology, submarines, surface ships and other equipment.

Australians are embedded at every level of the American military. Australian Air Commodore Phillip Champion's story is common: He first worked with the Americans as a young pilot in the early '80s, flying surveillance aircraft, and later as a commander all over the world, including Afghanistan.

"We've grown up together," he said in an interview by phone from Hawaii, where he has been posted to the United States Pacific Command since January. "We trust each other and know we can operate together."

Still, there have been challenges. In a discussion last year about the cost of the Marines in Darwin, the Australians came in with a data-heavy presentation asserting that United States Marines eat more than typical Australian soldiers, and therefore strain sewage systems more, and argued that the Americans should pay more of the costs of improving wastewater lines on military bases. The proposal stunned even the lead Australian

negotiators, who quickly dropped it, according to American defense officials.

The toughest issues have involved China, the crucial lever of influence with North Korea and the region. Some American officials have urged Australia to engage in robust freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea, where China has set up bases on disputed islands, but the Australians have resisted.

Last year, American officials also expressed alarm about a port in Darwin that local officials leased to a Chinese company for \$361 million, possibly making it easier to collect intelligence on American and Australian forces stationed nearby.

Allan Gyngell, who ran Australia's intelligence agency from 2009 to 2013, argues in a new book, "Fear of Abandonment," that Australia's foreign policy is still driven by worries about being left isolated, without the promise of security from a powerful friend: first Britain, now the United States.

Mr. Keating, the former prime minister, is among those urging a more independent foreign policy in which Australia accepts China as the region's dominant power.

In the discussion last week at the Lowy Institute, a think tank in Sydney, Mr. Keating said Australia should say no to the United States more often — as France and Canada do — especially on issues that affect Australia's relationship with China.

Those who reject this argument include John Howard, the prime minister who followed Mr. Keating and was in Washington on Sept. 11, 2001. In an interview at his modest office, with worn carpets and military memorabilia, Mr. Howard warned against being "mesmerized by China" and said his Liberal Party, which is the more conservative of the country's two largest parties, had "pulled off the daily double."

"We deepened our relationship with the U.S. — and China became our biggest customer," he said.

He added that too many Australians were jumping to conclusions about President Trump. "He's different," Mr. Howard said. "Whether he's good different or bad different is not the point; the world has to get used to him."

In Darwin too, there are divisions. Luke Bowen, who heads an economic development agency for the Northern Territory, which includes Darwin, would like to see even more American troops and equipment move in to the area, possibly from the Philippines.

"It's a priority for us to make the fit as comfortable as possible," he said. "It's not just about the Australian presence. It's

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

President Donald Trump widened his efforts to build cooperation in isolating North Korea with White House invitations to the leaders of Thailand and Singapore, following an invitation to the president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte.

The Southeast Asian nations could help Mr. Trump in a part of Asia where United Nations sanctions against Pyongyang over its nuclear and missile programs have been inconsistently enforced.

Mr. Trump's chief of staff, Reince Priebus, said the White House needed to build a consensus among Asian allies. "The issue facing us, developing out of North Korea, is so serious that we need cooperation at some level with as many partners in the area as we can get," he told ABC News.

"These are the three logical countries he would talk to if he wants some kind of push in Southeast Asia," said Justin Hastings, an expert on North Korea at the University of Sydney. "Thailand and Singapore are the two countries left in Southeast Asia that are still doing business with North Korea."

- Trump Says U.S. Willing to Take Unilateral Action on North Korea

President Donald Trump emphasized that the U.S. is willing to take unilateral action against North Korea if China doesn't move to contain the burgeoning nuclear power.

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- Trump Challenges North Korea in High-Stakes Game of Risk

Trading on its perceived higher tolerance for conflict and loss of life, North Korea for decades has used the prospect of war to gain leverage in negotiations—but this time Donald Trump seems willing to respond with brinkmanship of his own.

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about the combined presence."

But Justin Tutty, who works with a watchdog group that monitors the impact of the American Marines, said he was worried about "a one-sided relationship" in which the Americans lay out the priorities.

"The overinvestment in 'interoperability' ties us closer to our larger foreign partner's attack formation, and reduces our capacity

- China Pressure on North Korea Gives Peace a Chance, Says Pence

A peaceful end to growing tensions over Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic-missile ambitions remains possible thanks to China, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said.

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- Trump Says He Offered China Better Trade Terms in Exchange for Help on North Korea

President Donald Trump said Wednesday he has offered Chinese President Xi Jinping a more favorable trade deal for Beijing in exchange for his help on confronting the threat of North Korea.

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- U.S. Floats Possible Talks With North Korea, Shuns Regime Change

The Trump administration said Thursday that it is not seeking to overthrow North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over his nuclear weapons program and would consider holding talks, if Pyongyang pursues "the right agenda."

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- Trump Presses U.N. on North Korea

President Donald Trump said the United Nations Security Council must adopt new and stronger sanctions on North Korea, telling visiting U.N. diplomats that "it's time to solve the problem" posed by the country's nuclear-weapons program.

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- North Korean Missile Launch Appears to Fail

A North Korean missile launch appeared to fail early Saturday morning, raising tensions again as the U.S. seeks to rein in the North's

to act, relate and think independently," he said.

Last week for Anzac Day, commemorating Australians and New Zealanders who died in battle, American Marines and Australian soldiers marched through Darwin's streets together. Later, there were friendly games of rugby, and infantrymen shared war stories.

nuclear and missile development programs.

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The North Korea Crisis

The three countries have long military and economic ties with the U.S., though relations have cooled dramatically with Manila since Mr. Duterte took office last year and embarked on a violent war on drugs, and to a lesser degree with Thailand since a military regime came to power in 2014.

Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong both said they had accepted the invitations, extended in phone discussions with Mr. Trump. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to uphold close relations with the U.S., the White House said.

In his call with Mr. Prayuth, Mr. Trump assured the Thai prime minister of his intention to play "an active and leading role in Asia" in close cooperation with Thailand, the White House said.

Thailand was the fourth-largest exporter to North Korea in 2015 after China, India and Russia, according to United Nations data. The Philippines was fifth.

Thailand and North Korea that year jointly issued commemorative stamps to mark 40 years of diplomatic relations, according to Thai media reports.

A spokesman for Mr. Prayuth said following the discussion with Mr. Trump that Thailand would "support the constructive role of the United States in maintaining peace and security in the region."

In February, a U.N. Panel of Experts report said representatives of Pyongyang had transited through Singapore dozens of times to conduct business. Until last year, when sanctions tightened, Singapore had a visa-free travel agreement with North Korea.

"Support of member states for strengthened sanctions" hadn't translated into effective

"The Australians have been fighting in the same places we've fought for over 100 years," said Colonel Middleton of the Marines. "When we operate with the Australians, we learn as much from them as they learn from us."

implementation, the U.N. report said.

In a speech on Saturday, Mr. Duterte urged Washington to be cautious on North Korea. "It behooves upon America, who wields the biggest stick, to just be prudent and patient," he said.

Mr. Trump has "to get Duterte back inside the tent," said Michael Barr, associate professor of international relations at Flinders University in Australia.

Prime Minister Lee of Singapore on Saturday called on the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations to urge North Korea to cease its provocations and "return to the path of dialogue," the Straits Times reported.

Malaysia, another Southeast Asian country with close ties to North Korea, recently had a falling-out with Pyongyang after the killing on Feb. 13 of Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half brother of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, by suspected North Korean agents at Malaysia's main airport.

The incident chilled what had been an unusually warm relationship between the countries. Malaysia, after initially expelling North Korea's diplomats in Kuala Lumpur, eventually decided to maintain its ties with Pyongyang, but it has rescinded an agreement allowing visa-free travel. It has also ramped up scrutiny of companies believed to have links to North Korea.

North Korea maintains diplomatic relations with all 10 nations of Southeast Asia. The country has used the region as a transit and shipping point to access global trading and financial systems, in some cases circumventing U.N. sanctions designed to cut Pyongyang off from global financial flows.

The U.S.'s longstanding ties with the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia—and increasingly close relationship with former adversary Vietnam—are under challenge from the rising power of China, and anxiety has grown in the

region about whether the U.S. will remain committed there as the Trump administration seeks to redefine the country's international profile.

Mr. Trump's outreach to the three leaders is also "sending a signal to Beijing that America is still interested" in the region, said James

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Here's an argument for the Trump Administration's tax reform from a surprising source: China's leaders fear the plan will lure manufacturing to the U.S. Forget a trade war, Beijing says a cut in the U.S. corporate rate to 15% from 35% would mean "tax war."

The People's Daily warned Friday in a commentary that if Mr. Trump succeeds, "some powerful countries may join the game to launch competitive tax cuts," citing similar proposals in the U.K. and France. Worst affected, the Communist Party's premier mouthpiece opined, would be "export-oriented countries that are powerless to compete in tax reductions"—i.e., China.

Beijing knows from experience how important tax rates are to economic competitiveness. Conventional wisdom holds that low labor costs turned China into "the world's factory." Less widely known is the role taxes played in its growth miracle.

China's double-digit growth streak began in the mid-1990s after

## The New York Times

Mark Landler

"Kim Jong-un would be delighted to meet with President Trump on the basis of one nuclear leader to another," said Christopher R. Hill, a career diplomat who was special envoy on North Korea under President George W. Bush. "If I were Trump I would pass on that."

Mr. Duterte's backhanded response to Mr. Trump, however, also showed the pitfalls of his personal brand of diplomacy. The president had already gotten fierce criticism from human rights groups for embracing a man viewed by many as being responsible for the deaths of thousands of people involved in the drug trade. Now he faces being snubbed by Mr. Duterte as well.

And he is working to keep open lines of communication with President Vladimir V. Putin, despite partially blaming the Russian leader last month for the continuing civil

Chin, an international-relations expert at the University of Tasmania.

With the invitations, the new administration is seeking to improve relations with governments that clashed with former President Barack Obama's government over human rights, most notably that of

government revenue as a share of GDP declined to 11% in 1995 from 31% in 1978—effectively a supply-side tax cut. But then taxes began to rise again as the Communist Party reasserted control over the heights of the economy. In 1999 the government set a revenue goal of 20% of GDP, and the tax man's take now stands at 22%.

China's big government doesn't stop there. The central government runs a fiscal deficit of 3%, and local governments fund their operations through borrowing from state banks. It's no coincidence that as government has grown, growth has slowed to below 7%.

Chinese companies have started to complain that the high burden is killing profits. Zong Qinghou, founder of the country's largest beverage company Wahaha, revealed that his company pays more than 500 different fees to government entities, in addition to taxes. The proliferation of such levies contributed to low private-investment growth last year.

war in Syria. Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin are scheduled to speak by telephone on Tuesday afternoon, the White House announced late Monday.

"The most serious risk with this series of uncoordinated and controversial statements is that they undermine the most important currency of U.S. power: the credibility of the president's words," said Evan S. Medeiros, who served as a senior Asia adviser to President Barack Obama.

Mr. Trump first broached the idea of sitting down with Mr. Kim during the 2016 presidential campaign. He revived it in an interview Monday with Bloomberg News, saying, "If it would be appropriate for me to meet with him, I would absolutely; I would be honored to do it."

The White House clarified that Mr. Trump would only consider a meeting if the North Korean leader

the Philippines. Mr. Duterte took deep umbrage at criticism of his antinarcotics campaign, which has resulted in more than 8,000 deaths since he took office in June. He has drawn closer to China, which has promised more investment.

Disarming North Korea of its strategic nuclear capability, a goal

Chinese windshield maker Fuyao Glass opened a \$600 million factory last October near Dayton, Ohio, and plans other facilities in Illinois and Michigan, creating 4,500 jobs. CEO Cao Dewang caused a stir in December when he told a reporter the decision was driven by tax differences: "Overall taxation for manufacturers in China is 35% higher than that in the U.S."

Mr. Cao said out loud what many entrepreneurs mutter under their breath. China's 25% profits tax may be lower than the U.S. 35% rate, but the country also imposes a 17% value-added tax as well as 16 other taxes. Inputs such as land, electricity and transportation are all much cheaper in the U.S., Mr. Cao said. Left unsaid is another big cost: Chinese officials demanding bribes. Together, these can cancel out China's lower labor costs.

When electronics giant Foxconn announced in January that it is considering a plant in the U.S., American commentators wondered whether pressure from the Trump Administration was a factor. But in China it was read as further proof

met a series of conditions, starting with a sharp curtailment of his provocative behavior. North Korea carried out its most recent ballistic missile test, which failed, only last week.

"We want to hold out the possibility that if North Korea were ever serious about completely dismantling its nuclear capability and taking away the threat that they pose both to the region and to us," the press secretary, Sean Spicer, said, "there is always going to be a possibility of that occurring." But he added, "That possibility is not there at this time."

For now, the Trump administration is pursuing a more traditional strategy of tightening economic pressure on the North — mainly through its neighbor, China — and backing that up with threat of military action. Mr. Trump said last week that while he wanted to solve the crisis with North

that has eluded Mr. Trump's predecessors, has dominated the president's foreign-policy agenda as Mr. Kim has ramped up missile testing. Mr. Trump, asked during an interview with CBS that aired on Sunday whether he was threatening military action, said, "We'll see."

that high taxes have started the process of "hollowing out."

President Xi Jinping began to address the problem about 18 months ago when he launched "supply-side reforms" to cut corporate taxes and regulation. The results have been modest because the government reverted to Keynesian spending stimulus. But the program's stated goal of restoring lost competitiveness shows that Beijing understands the importance of corporate tax rates to growth and prefers not to have to compete in a "tax war."

The U.S. inflicts one of the highest corporate-tax rates in the world, and reform is urgently needed to compete against other developed economies. If that's the stick, the People's Daily warning offers a carrot: A supply-side cut can make the U.S. attractive to Chinese companies suffering from big government at home.

Korea through diplomacy, a "major, major conflict" was possible.

Some experts said Mr. Trump's openness to diplomacy reflected the influence of China, which has long urged the United States to speak directly to North Korea. Since Mr. Trump met last month in Florida with President Xi Jinping of China, he has praised Mr. Xi for what he insisted was China's willingness to use its leverage over the North to curb its behavior.

"The Chinese have told Trump, 'You've got to talk to these people,'" said Joel S. Wit, an expert on North Korea at Johns Hopkins University, who was involved in diplomacy during the Clinton administration that led to a nuclear agreement with North Korea in 1994.

"They're trying to create the right circumstances for talks," Mr. Wit said, "ramping up the pressure on the Chinese, ramping up the

pressure on the North Koreans, and then opening up an escape route.”

But the timing of Mr. Trump’s overture, analysts and diplomats said, was hopelessly premature. In these types of negotiations, American presidents typically function as closers — taking over the process, after all the spadework has been done, to bridge the last gaps. So far, Mr. Kim has displayed no interest in even beginning such a negotiation.

Mr. Trump has spoken generously of Mr. Kim in recent days, noting that he survived the treacherous political circles in Pyongyang after he first assumed power as a young man. Mr. Trump suggested that Mr. Kim repelled an effort by an uncle to take power back from him. In 2013, Mr. Kim purged his powerful uncle, Jang Song-taek, who was later executed.

Human rights groups also suspect Mr. Kim was behind the

assassination of his exiled half brother, Kim Jong-nam, who was accosted in an airport in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, by two assailants wielding a liquid containing the nerve agent VX.

Beyond the palace intrigue, the Kim family has presided over one of the world’s most repressive regimes, leaving the country in tatters and its people in misery.

Asked to explain why Mr. Trump would consider it an honor to meet such a leader, Mr. Spicer said, “I guess because he’s still a head of state.” He noted that there were “a lot of potential threats that could have come his way, and he’s obviously managed to lead a country forward.” Mr. Spicer added, “He is a young person to be leading a country with nuclear weapons.”

For his part, Mr. Duterte appeared unimpressed by Mr. Trump’s invitation to the White House, which the president made during a phone

call on Saturday, to the surprise of his own staff. The Philippine leader said he and Mr. Trump had an amicable conversation, but he was noncommittal about visiting Washington, saying he had a busy schedule.

“I cannot make any definite promise,” Mr. Duterte said to reporters after touring Chinese warships in Davao City, his hometown. “I’m supposed to go to Russia, I’m also supposed to go to Israel.”

If Mr. Duterte rejected Mr. Trump’s invitation, he would spare him further criticism for playing host to a leader with a toxic reputation. On Sunday, senior officials said they expected the State Department and the National Security Council to resist a White House visit. But on Monday, an official said the White House did not pass word to Mr. Duterte to demur.

Mr. Spicer defended the invitation, saying the Philippines were important to isolating North Korea diplomatically and economically. Mr. Trump, he said, had been briefed about Mr. Duterte’s record before he made the call.

Josh Kurlantzick, a senior fellow with the Council on Foreign Relations, said he expected Mr. Duterte would still come to the United States, but might not want to seem too eager to do so. The Philippine leader has made a show of his independence from the United States, a treaty ally.

“Even though he welcomes a better relationship with this U.S. president, he wants to be cautious that he does not appear to be embracing the U.S. too much,” Mr. Kurlantzick said, “given that he has devoted a fair amount of diplomatic resources to courting China.”



## Editorial : Philippine President Duterte is a self-professed killer. Why did Trump invite him to a cozy White House schmooze?

President Trump’s decision to invite Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte to the White House is problematic in at least two ways. Since taking office nearly a year ago, Duterte has overseen a campaign of extrajudicial executions of suspected drug addicts and drug dealers that has claimed more than 7,000 lives. International human rights groups have condemned him, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights urged a criminal investigation after Duterte claimed to have killed at least three people himself while serving as mayor of Davao City. Duterte’s response? He called the high commissioner an “idiot,” threatened to torch the United Nations headquarters in New York City and called President Obama a “son of a whore.” Obama condemned the assassinations and canceled a planned one-on-one meeting that was to have taken place in Laos.

The second problem with Trump’s invitation to Duterte has to do with the new 250-luxury unit, 57-story Trump Tower in Manila that is nearing completion and set to open soon. Trump’s developer in the project is Jose E.B. Antonio, whom Duterte recently appointed as the Philippines’ trade envoy to

Washington. As with many of Trump’s hotels, it appears the Trump Organization licensed the name and brand to the project developed by Antonio, but that brand’s value in the Philippines now relies on the good graces of the Philippine government. That’s a problem.

Despite these two problems — the Philippine leader’s abysmal human record and the American president’s conflicts of interest — Trump has spoken warmly about Duterte, as he has about other world leaders with bad human rights records. While some claim to see a measure of realpolitik in Trump’s invitation, suggesting that perhaps he’s trying to build solidarity among Southeast Asian nations to counter China’s efforts to increase its influence in the region, the truth is that his easy embrace of authoritarian leaders is troubling.

The United States’ effort to include a respect for human rights in its foreign policy determinations has always been a bit of a juggling act. The cold reality of the modern world and the demands of diplomacy can make it difficult to maintain a consistent moral position. China, for instance, has a long record of repressing political dissent, but little

is to be gained and much could be lost by pursuing a policy of disengagement with such an enormous, nuclear-armed economic powerhouse. Similar concerns affect the U.S. relationship with Russia. Turkey hosts a major U.S. air base and is a key partner in trying to combat Islamic State, but President Recep Tayyip Erdogan embarked on a purge — including the imprisonment of thousands of journalists and political opponents — following a failed coup last year. Yet the U.S., for the sake of world stability and our national interests overseas, maintains relations with all those nations’ leaders.

The U.S. has enjoyed a long alliance with the Philippines. The two nations have been entwined since the U.S. annexed the Philippines at the end of the Spanish-American War, and Philippine immigrants now account for 4.5% of the 41.3 million immigrants living in the U.S. As a chain of islands marking the eastern edge of the China Sea, the Philippines is also strategically important in an increasingly tense region of the world. We do not mean to suggest that Trump should cut off communication with Duterte or that there might not eventually be a time when the two have to meet to

discuss serious matters of mutual interest. But Trump’s seemingly impulsive invitation appears to lack substance or urgency. He would be mistaken to reward Duterte’s murderous campaign with a White House visit.

Trump previously hosted Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi, despite the jailing of tens of thousands of political opponents, journalists and others (including some Americans) that made Sisi unwelcome in the Obama White House. In that visit, the Trump administration said it would not raise human rights abuses in public, but would consider discussing them with Sisi in private. Whether that ever happened is unknown, but it certainly should have.

Duterte’s encouragement of a violent vigilante culture to repress drug addiction and trafficking is indefensible. That Trump is willing to embrace him is worrisome. Defending human rights has been part of American foreign policy for four decades. Inviting the likes of Duterte over for a schmooze does not reflect well on the White House, or the nation.



## Editorial : Trump embraces yet another strongman

PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte poses a difficult challenge for the United States. He is the

democratically elected leader of a long-standing American ally whose strategic cooperation is important in checking China’s aggressive expansionism in the South China

Sea. But he is also the author of a heinous campaign of extrajudicial killings of suspected drug traffickers and users that has led to more than 7,000 deaths since he took office

last June. While a rupture with his government is not in the U.S. interest, tolerating his abuses threatens grievous damage to

America's moral standing in Asia and beyond.

A subtle U.S. policy would recognize the need for U.S.-Philippine cooperation without endorsing the contemptible offenses of the current president. Instead, President Trump has offered Mr. Duterte an unqualified embrace that effectively blesses his murderous campaign. In so doing, Mr. Trump sends Asians the message that there is no difference between China's amoral foreign policy and that of this U.S. administration.

Mr. Trump's extraordinary endorsement of Mr. Duterte came in a late-night White House statement issued after a phone call between the two presidents Saturday. The release described the conversation as "very friendly," adding that "the

Philippine government is fighting very hard to rid its country of drugs." "Fighting hard" is one way — the wrong way — to describe the wanton killing by police and vigilantes of accused dealers and users. It implies that Mr. Duterte's tactics are appropriate or necessary, which they are not. Mr. Trump ought to have shunned the Filipino leader until he reined in those practices. Instead, he invited him to the White House.

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White House invitations have often been withheld by presidents as a way of distancing themselves from unsavory leaders, but Mr. Trump dispenses them indiscriminately. He has already hosted Egyptian

strongman Abdel Fatah al-Sissi, and not long after speaking to Mr. Duterte he issued another red-carpet invitation to Thailand's Prayuth Chan-ocha, who led a military coup against an elected government in 2014 and has since overseen a sweeping crackdown on dissent.

White House officials contended that Mr. Trump's outreach was needed as part of his mobilization of pressure against North Korea. But the Philippines and Thailand have never played a significant role in the politics of the Korean Peninsula and are unlikely to do so now. The administration might more honestly argue that the Southeast Asian states are needed to help counter the Chinese regime of Xi Jinping — only Mr. Trump has lately been touting his good relations with Mr. Xi

and appears reluctant to say anything that might offend the Chinese Communist leader.

What must be particularly disturbing to U.S. democratic allies is that, even as Mr. Trump was heaping goodwill on the likes of Mr. Duterte and Mr. Prayuth, he was trashing a South Korean government that has been a critical U.S. partner. That drive-by may very well wreck the administration's effort to bring more pressure to bear on North Korea, regardless of what Southeast Asian nations do. Meanwhile, Republicans who faulted President Barack Obama for disrespecting U.S. allies while courting rogue regimes ought to ask themselves if Mr. Trump is not outdoing his predecessor.

**The  
New York  
Times**

## Editorial : Donald Trump Embraces Another Despot

The United States has long seen itself as a beacon of democracy and a global advocate of human rights and the rule of law. It has faltered, sometimes badly, undermining leaders whose views did not fit its strategic objectives and replacing them with pliant despots. Yet for the most part American presidents, Republican and Democratic, have believed that the United States should provide a moral compass to the world, encouraging people to pursue their right to self-government and human dignity and rebuking foreign leaders who fall short.

Like so much else under President Trump, though, this idea has now been turned on its head and people are worried about the very survival of the values on which America built its reputation and helped construct an entire international system, including the United Nations. The latest example is Mr. Trump's decision to invite Rodrigo Duterte, the president of the Philippines, to the White House.

Though the Philippines is an ally and a democracy, Mr. Duterte is

neither a democratic leader nor a worthy ally. For about two decades as mayor of Davao, he was accused of allowing death squads to roam the city and kill freely. Most victims were poor drug users and low-level criminals, but bystanders, children and political opponents were also caught up in the bloodshed.

After his election last year, Mr. Duterte took the killing campaign nationwide, effectively giving free license to the police and vigilantes. He has boasted about his tenure in Davao, and admitted to personally killing three kidnappers without trial. The mayhem got so bad that last week a Filipino lawyer formally asked the International Criminal Court to charge Mr. Duterte and 11 officials with mass murder and crimes against humanity over the extrajudicial killings of nearly 10,000 people over the past three decades.

During the last administration, Mr. Duterte disrespected President Barack Obama by calling him the "son of a whore" and threatened to abandon his country's alliance with the United States for one with China. This is obviously not a man

who should be welcomed to the White House.

Mr. Trump extended his invitation in a telephone call that was described as "very friendly." Administration officials said the call was one of several the president made to reassure Southeast Asian leaders of America's continuing commitment at a time when they were feeling neglected over Mr. Trump's focus on China, Japan and North Korea. Administration officials said that Mr. Trump was looking to mend ties with the Philippines as a hedge against China's expansion in the South China Sea. But there is no evidence that he consulted the State Department, or that the White House has done anything to prepare the groundwork for a Duterte visit. The normal way to mend diplomatic ties is to negotiate privately over months and have the process culminate in, not begin with, a White House meeting.

What is not in any doubt is Mr. Trump's own authoritarian tendencies and his fondness for other strongman leaders who, like him, chafe at governmental checks

and balances, including the courts. Mr. Trump reportedly admires Mr. Duterte's aggressive rhetoric about fighting the Islamic State and cracking down on drugs. He has praised President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey for winning a disputed referendum that will give him vastly more power and invited him to the White House on May 16. He has already given a friendly reception to President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, who was barred from the White House after staging a coup four years ago and arresting thousands of political opponents. He has replaced harsh criticism of China with praise for President Xi Jinping, and in the past displayed a bizarre affection for Russia's Vladimir Putin.

American presidents must work with foreign leaders of all kinds to advance the national interest. But Mr. Trump erodes America's reputation when he uncritically embraces those who show the least regard for human rights, rule of law and democracy.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Milbank : Trump and Duterte, brothers from another mother

The New York Times reports that President Trump's aides were "stunned" that he invited Philippine strongman Rodrigo Duterte to the White House.

I'm stunned that anybody would be stunned. In style, if not in scope, the two men are brothers from another mother.

Both have employed foul language in public, boasted publicly about their sexual performance and made

vulgar references to assaulting women. Both have threatened the free press, challenged the legitimacy of the judiciary, attacked opponents as corrupt — and insulted the pope.

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Certainly, Trump has attempted nothing so horrifying as has Duterte, who has boasted of personally killing people and whose

government has killed thousands of alleged drug dealers. Trump boasted that "I could ... shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters," but he hasn't tested the hypothesis.

Duterte is only the latest autocrat to earn Trump's admiration, following his earlier praise for the skills of Vladimir Putin, Saddam Hussein, Bashar al-Assad, Moammar Gaddafi and "smart cookie" Kim Jong Un. But the similarities between Trump's language and Duterte's are striking.

Is it a case of imitation? Or are they both using the same authoritarian handbook?

The man Trump would have as his guest at the White House has attacked Philippine judges as drug addicts, telling the chief justice not to "order me around" unless she would "rather that I declare martial law."

Trump tried to disqualify a federal judge from hearing a case against him because he's "Mexican" and

attacked the “so-called judge” who blocked his travel ban, proposing people blame the court system for future terrorist attacks. A top aide said Trump’s authority on national security “will not be questioned.”

Duterte, when he was mayor of Davao City, joked about the prison rape of an Australian missionary, saying “she was so beautiful. The mayor should have been first. What a waste.” He at first said that was just “how men talk.”

Trump, in footage that emerged during the campaign, boasted about assaulting women, saying he could “grab ‘em by the p---.” Trump’s campaign at first said this was “locker-room banter.”

Duterte has proclaimed: “I’m not impotent. What am I supposed to do? Let this hang forever? When I take Viagra, it stands up.”

Trump, in a presidential debate, spoke of the size of his genitalia: “He referred to my hands — if they’re small, something else must

be small. I guarantee you, there’s no problem. I guarantee you.”

Duterte, when Pope Francis tied up traffic in the Philippines, said he wanted to tell him, “Pope, son of a whore, go home.” Trump called it “disgraceful” of the pope to question Trump’s Christianity. He said Francis was “very political” and “a pawn” of Mexico.

The man with whom Trump would break bread in the People’s House also called President Barack Obama a “son of a whore.” Trump has questioned Obama’s American birth and called him a “threat to our country” and “founder of ISIS.”

Trump’s new friend, who has spoken favorably of Adolf Hitler, said, “If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself.” Duterte said he wouldn’t “stop because of the human rights,” daring opponents to assassinate him.

Trump once suggested that “Second Amendment people” — gun owners

— could stop judicial nominees. He has been accused in court of inciting violence at his rallies. He proposed paying legal fees of those who “knock the crap out of” protesters.

Duterte said “f--- you” to leaders of the European Union. Trump spoke of bombing the “s---” out of ISIS and said China was “ripping the s--- out of the sea.”

Duterte told drug pushers to “forget the laws on human rights,” saying, “I’d kill you. I’d dump all of you into Manila Bay and fatten all the fish.”

Trump once said that he would restore waterboarding and “much worse” for terrorists, and that the military would obey him.

Duterte made a Christmas video telling criminals it would be “your last Merry Christmas.” Trump had a New Year’s tweet for “my many enemies and those who have fought me and lost so badly.”

Duterte has attacked newspaper owners and told journalists “you are

not exempted from assassination.” Trump routinely blasts the “fake news” media and talks of restricting press freedoms (though happily not of assassination).

Duterte accused a senator leading an inquiry into his administration’s killings of being corrupted by the drug industry. Trump, who made “crooked Hillary” his campaign centerpiece, has lashed out at those investigating his administration’s ties to Moscow.

A report in March from the State Department — Trump’s State Department — said Duterte’s attacks on those “who have criticized his policies had a chilling effect on free speech and expression.”

Now Trump, after a “very friendly” talk with Duterte, wants to honor him with a White House visit. That’s not just chilling — it’s cold.



## Trump keeps praising international strongmen, alarming human rights advocates (UNE)

Vladimir Putin.

As he settles into office, President Trump’s affection for totalitarian leaders has grown beyond Russia’s president to include strongmen around the globe.

Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi has had his opponents gunned down, but Trump praised him for doing “a fantastic job.” Thailand’s Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha is a junta chief whose military jailed dissidents after taking power in a coup, yet Trump offered to meet with him at the White House. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has eroded basic freedoms, but after a recent political victory, he got a congratulatory call from Trump.

Then there’s the case of Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte. He is accused of the extrajudicial killing of hundreds of drug users, and he maligned President Barack Obama as a “son of a whore” at an international summit last year. Yet on Sunday, in what the White House characterized as a “very friendly conversation,” Trump invited Duterte to Washington for an official visit.

In an undeniable shift in American foreign policy, Trump is cultivating authoritarian leaders, one after another, in an effort to reset relations following an era of ostracism and public shaming by Obama and his predecessors.

(Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

President Trump has extended an invitation to the White House to Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, despite the bloody drug war Duterte is carrying out in his country. President Trump has extended an invitation to the White House to Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, despite the bloody drug war Duterte is carrying out (Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

For instance, it has become an almost daily occurrence for Trump to gush about Chinese President Xi Jinping since their Mar-a-Lago summit last month. Trump has called Xi “a very good man,” “highly respected” and a “gentleman,” as he tries to persuade Xi to convince North Korea that it should scale back or give up its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Trump’s praise is not limited to potential U.S. allies. Even as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ratchets up his provocations, Trump called Kim “a smart cookie” in a CBS News interview over the weekend. On Monday, Trump told Bloomberg News he would be “honored” to personally meet with Kim “under the right circumstances.”

[Trump takes a selective approach to the promotion of human rights]

Every American president since at least the 1970s has used his office at least occasionally to champion

human rights and democratic values around the world. Yet, so far at least, Trump has willingly turned a blind eye to dictators’ records of brutality and oppression in hopes that those leaders might become his partners in isolating North Korea or fighting terrorism.

Indeed, in his first 102 days in office, Trump has neither delivered substantive remarks nor taken action supporting democracy movements or condemning human rights abuses, other than the missile strike he authorized on Syria after President Bashar al-Assad allegedly used chemical weapons against his own citizens.

“He doesn’t even pretend to utter the words,” said Michael McFaul, a U.S. ambassador to Russia under Obama. “Small-d democrats all over the world are incredibly despondent right now about Donald Trump — and that’s true in China, in Iran, in Egypt, in Russia. They feel like the leader of the free world is absent.”

A tipping point for many Trump critics was his invitation to Duterte to visit the White House. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (Md.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he was “deeply disturbed” by Trump’s “cavalier invitation” and called on him to rescind it.

(Reuters)

President Trump said Kim Jong Un is a “tough cookie,” while

administration officials and other Republicans weighed in on North Korea’s latest missile test. Trump administration, Republicans weigh in on North Korean missile test (Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

“This is a man who has boasted publicly about killing his own citizens,” Cardin said of Duterte in a statement. “The United States is unique in the world because our values — respect for human rights, respect for the rule of law — are our interests. Ignoring human rights will not advance U.S. interests in the Philippines or any place else. Just the opposite.”

Yet Trump’s advisers said the president’s silence on human rights matters is purposeful, part of a grand strategy to rebuild alliances or create new ones. Trump’s outreach is designed to isolate North Korea in the Asia-Pacific region and to build coalitions to defeat the Islamic State in the Middle East and North Africa, senior administration officials said.

Inside the Trump White House, the thinking goes that if mending bridges with a country like the Philippines — historically a treaty ally whose relationship with the United States deteriorated as Duterte gravitated toward China — means covering up or even ignoring concerns like human rights, then so be it.

“The United States has a limited ability to direct things,” said Michael

Anton, the National Security Council's director of strategic communications. "We can't force these countries to behave certain ways. We can apply pressure, but if the alternative is not talking, how effective would it be if we had no relationships? If you walk away from relationships, you can't make any progress."

Anton explained that Trump is trying to "balance" interests. He said the decision to invite Duterte to the White House — a symbolic gesture that gives credibility to the autocrat's rule — was agreed to by most of Trump's advisers.

"It's not binary," he said. "It's not that you care about human rights so you can't have a relationship with the Philippines, or if you have a relationship with the Philippines you don't care about human rights."

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) described the Trump strategy as establishing commonality with offending nations before publicly chastising them for offenses.

"Their approach is to obviously continue to hold up the values that we have here in America," Corker said in a recent interview. "But their approach is to build some

commonality — never let go of that as an American cause, but to work on it in ways where they achieve a result, and to not go in on the front end."

White House officials cite the release last month of Aya Hijazi — an Egyptian American charity worker who had been imprisoned in Cairo for three years amid Sissi's brutal crackdown on civil society — as evidence that their strategy is paying dividends.

Trump and his aides worked for several weeks with Sissi and his government to secure Hijazi's freedom. The Obama administration had pressed unsuccessfully for her release, but once Trump moved to reset U.S. relations with Egypt by embracing Sissi at the White House, Egypt's posture changed.

[Freed Egyptian American prisoner returns home following Trump's intervention]

Tom Malinowski, assistant secretary of state for human rights and democracy under Obama, said Trump appears to be living up to his campaign promise.

"The whole idea of 'America First' is that we're not trying to make the world better," Malinowski said. "We're trying to protect the

homeland and the domestic economy, and the rest is all cutting deals with whoever is willing to cut deals with us. There's not much room in that equation for standing up for the rights, freedoms and well-being of other people."

Human rights activists are concerned that Trump is condoning the actions of dictators when he is warm to them or extends invitations to visit.

"Inviting these men to the White House in effect places the United States' seal of approval on their heinous actions," said Rob Berschinski, senior vice president at Human Rights First. He went on to say, "Nothing excuses President Trump's clear inclination to reward mass murderers and torturers with undeserved honors."

Asked at the daily White House press briefing whether Trump had "a thing" for totalitarian leaders, press secretary Sean Spicer suggested he was cultivating such leaders with the explicit aim of weakening North Korea.

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"The president clearly, as I said, understands the threat that North Korea poses," Spicer said. "Having someone with the potential nuclear capability to strike another country — and potentially our country — at some point in the future is something that the president takes very seriously."

But McFaul posited that the Trump administration may be naive in calculating that personal outreach and warm praise will convince authoritarian leaders to support U.S. interests.

"The converse of that is that these leaders are taking him for a ride," McFaul said. "He tends to over-personalize relationships between states. He says China's 'raping' us, then he meets President Xi and suddenly he's this wise man with whom he has a good chemistry. I hope this will produce outcomes that are good for us, but right now it's producing outcomes that are good for China."

Karen DeYoung contributed to this report.

## ETATS-UNIS



### Hunt : The Trump Tax Plan's Devilish Details

Albert R. Hunt

The Trump tax plan, unveiled in one sketchy page last week, is like a bottle of bad wine: It's not aging well.

Central questions remain unanswered. The White House says it will fill in the important details later, in the meantime pushing dubious and duplicitous claims.

Three illustrations make the point. Administration officials won't say whether the personal exemption would be eliminated, hardly an arcane detail. They falsely suggest that the plan will increase taxes on some wealthy investors by eliminating a tax loophole used by executives of hedge funds and private-equity firms known as "carried interest." And they rely on the dubious assumption that Congress will no longer allow state and local taxes to be deducted from federal taxes.

As more phony claims and higher costs emerge, the already tough task of reforming the tax system

becomes even more difficult. President Donald Trump's proposal favors more affluent taxpayers and would add considerably to the federal deficit.

The White House trumpets its proposal to almost double the standard deduction, from a maximum of \$12,600 to \$24,000. This would benefit many middle-income taxpayers and simplify the code by encouraging more people not to take itemized deductions.

But some of these families actually would face higher taxes if, as with earlier Trump and Republican plans, it also eliminates the personal exemption, currently \$4,050 per person. It's difficult to be precise since the plan lacks specifics on tax brackets where various rates would kick in.

Think of a middle-class couple with three kids. With the personal exemption gone, they'd have to add \$20,250 to their taxable income. That's nearly double the new "benefit" they'd get from the

increase in their standard deduction of \$11,400.

QuickTake U.S. Budget Deficit

The personal exemption costs the government somewhere between \$1.6 trillion and \$1.9 trillion over 10 years, based on estimates of previous Trump and congressional Republican tax plans. That's money that could offset other cuts if eliminated, or contribute to higher deficits if left in place.

Trump advisers insist that big cuts in tax rates would pay for themselves by generating strong economic growth, a highly speculative claim, to put it gently. They also claim they'd add revenue by eliminating most tax deductions, though not the politically popular write-offs for charitable contributions and home mortgage interest. But the plan doesn't specify which deductions would go, citing only the ones for state and local taxes paid.

Don't hold your breath. There are 35 Republican congressmen from the high-tax states of California,

New York, New Jersey and Illinois, and some of them are already balking. With a 22-vote margin in the House of Representatives and with no Democratic support, Republican leaders will be dealing with some brutal arithmetic when it comes to eliminating state and local tax deductions.

Buy some more red ink.

QuickTake Carried Interest

The idea of ending the carried-interest loophole was pushed hard by Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign as he sought to establish his populist credentials. His advisers have run with that theme since last week, claiming they're ready to end that special tax break, which lets hedge-fund and private-equity executives pay lower capital-gains rates instead of the regular rates on ordinary income.

But the Trump proposal would reduce the top corporate rate to 15 percent from 35 percent, meaning it would be lower than the maximum capital-gains rate. Since many



hedge funds and private-equity firms are partnerships, their executives would qualify for the

corporate rate under the administration plan. So ultimately

their taxes on carried interest would be cut, not increased.

So much for populism.

The  
Washington  
Post

## Editorial : The bipartisan budget plan is a temporary victory for common sense

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS have settled on a bipartisan spending plan to keep the government open for the next five months, and, to judge from the document, their priorities are not President Trump's priorities.

To be sure, the \$1.1 trillion measure includes \$1.5 billion in new border-security money and exceeds previously enacted defense spending caps to the tune of \$14.8 billion; Mr. Trump hailed both as victories for his agenda. But the president's border wall gets not one dollar — indeed, Mr. Trump's abandonment of a demand for funding was the concession that made this deal possible. Meanwhile, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Environmental

Agency, Pell Grants for college students and Community Development Block Grants were held essentially harmless, with respect to their fiscal 2016 spending levels. The National Institutes of Health gets a \$2 billion increase. All were targeted for big cuts in Mr. Trump's fiscal 2018 budget plan.

These results are a tribute to the Democrats' skillful leveraging of their power, even as a minority in both houses; to the Republicans' pragmatic fear of a politically costly partial government shutdown — and to the stubborn persistence of good old-fashioned political horse-trading, even under this supposedly disruptive president. The establishment is in low regard just now in politics. Yet when the government needs to function

despite polarization and division, the art of compromise — even of the least-common-denominator variety — is what keeps it going. Fortunately, House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.), Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) understand that.

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One heartening element of the bill incorporates a bipartisan commitment to the idea that America will keep faith with those who have served this country abroad — even if they aren't Americans. It provides for the admission to this country of 2,500

Afghans who worked as translators and the like for the U.S. military in Afghanistan, under the Special Immigrant Visa program. The program's authority had lapsed, forcing the government to stop processing new applications two months ago. Now that situation has been remedied — at least for five months.

It's a temporary victory for basic common sense — much like the spending bill itself. The measure keeps agencies operating, but no one should be under any illusion that it fixes government in the sense of actually restoring a sustainable long-term balance between revenues and outlays.

## POLITICO Ryan makes an unlikely ally: The Freedom Caucus

By Rachael Bade

There were rumblings just before the election that the Freedom Caucus might try to take out Speaker Paul Ryan. Now the group of rebel conservatives is locking arms with him — at least momentarily.

The fragile alliance has been sparked by their shared interest in finally tanking Obamacare, an eagerness to build momentum for the president's agenda and a belief among hard-liners and leadership that each side has moved cautiously toward the other on health care.

Story Continued Below

It marks one of the more unlikely turns in recent House Republican history. It's a sight rarely, if ever, seen since the Freedom Caucus' creation two years ago: The conservatives in Ryan's corner for once, helping him and his establishment brethren in House leadership, as they scramble to round up the votes on a controversial bill.

Or, at the very least, not standing in their way.

"Politics makes for the strangest of bedfellows," said Freedom Caucus member Mark Sanford. "Someone you may not have been working with on the last bill, you better stay

friends with them because you may need them on the next bill."

The South Carolina Republican is a perfect example: Just last month, President Donald Trump threatened to back a primary challenge to Sanford if he voted against the original version of the health care bill — a message Trump's budget director Mick Mulvaney personally delivered to his ex-colleague and friend.

Sanford now supports the new GOP Obamacare alternative and hopes Ryan and his team can pass it. "The Freedom Caucus is constructively engaged with leadership, with the administration, and it points to the way in which the caucus has been focused on ideas, not on personalities," he said.

Freedom Caucus Chairman Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) led the drive to push then-Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) into early retirement in late 2015. But on health care over the past week, Meadows has been nothing short of a savior for Ryan, who reluctantly accepted the speaker's gavel after Boehner left.

It's unclear how many Freedom Caucus members will ultimately vote for the bill, which the White House hopes to see passed this week. But senior House Republicans and administration sources say the Freedom Caucus chief has delivered all but just a few of the group's roughly three dozen

members to back the latest health care measure.

Freedom Caucus members opposed the original bill because it didn't repeal major Obamacare regulations. The latest draft, however, gives states the option to opt-out of key Obamacare requirements over what health plans must cover and how much insurers can charge sicker people with gaps in coverage.

Some conservatives have warmed to the deal Meadows struck with moderate Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-N.J.) after he commissioned an outside study for his members that showed the proposal would lower premiums on the individual market by 55 percent. (The Congressional Budget Office is not expected to produce its own analysis of the latest bill for another week or two.)

With the new batch of conservative "yes" votes locked in, Ryan and his whip team have been able to focus on winning skeptical centrist Republicans to secure a majority. On Monday night, they still didn't have the 216 votes needed for passage. But it was moderates and centrists they spent all day chasing — not conservatives.

"I think Mark Meadows has done a hell of a job" in winning over conservative support, said House Rules Chairman Pete Sessions (R-Texas) while exiting a GOP leadership meeting Monday night.

"He stayed after it rather than shying away. He didn't have to be a part of this, but he chose to engage and learn more about the issue and try to make it better."

Asked whether the Freedom Caucus' endorsement of the bill last week amounted to a monumental shift in the standoff between leadership and conservatives, House Majority Whip Steve Scalise (R-La.) responded: "Our conference has been coming together more and more each week. Obviously, we've had some rough patches in the beginning, but you're seeing a unification."

The détente is very unlikely to last, however. Freedom Caucus members will, in all likelihood, rage against a government spending deal hatched over the weekend by Republican and Democratic leaders. Some caucus members grimaced when asked about "cheering" on leadership, even if their imperatives happen to align at this moment.

"It's peace in the valley for five seconds," one half-joked.

Allies of leadership also argue that Ryan wouldn't need conservatives to bail him out if the Freedom Caucus had backed the original health care draft in the first place.

Rep. Dave Brat seemed amused by a question about a Freedom Caucus-leadership truce. The

Virginia Republican said the group of conservatives has backed leadership bills before, including some budgets and last year's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act tackling mental health and drug abuse.

"On this bill, we want to keep the president's momentum going and



can be found in Washington's debates over taxes, trade, budgets, and regulations, it is the difficulty of settling on actions that will bring back the high productivity that the United States enjoyed just 20 years ago. Productivity growth, or a rising output per worker, has slowed, as it has in much of the world, reducing living standards. What can bring it back?

The first step is for elected leaders to focus on ways to foster innovation, such as investments in education, infrastructure, and research. One model for such a singular political focus is New



On Friday the New York Times used it this way in the lead of a front-page story about Donald Trump's new tax bid: "President Trump's proposal to slash individual and business taxes and erase a surtax that funds the Affordable Care Act would amount to a multitrillion-dollar shift from federal coffers to America's richest families and their heirs . . ."

This is a curious way to put it, as if the country's millionaires and billionaires are readying to raid the American people of their money. Because before there can be any multitrillion dollar shift out of U.S. coffers, there has to be a multitrillion dollar shift into those coffers. Wouldn't it have been more accurate to explain that if the federal coffers won't be as full in the Trump years, it will be because people will get to keep more of their own money?

In the sour dynamic of the modern Beltway, alas, any bid aimed at allowing more Americans to keep more of what they earn will inevitably be presented through the Chuck Schumer filter of the rich robbing the poor. As if on cue, the Senate minority leader emerged on Sunday to characterize the Trump plan as "massive tax cuts for the very wealthy, crumbs, at best, for everyone else."

Which leads to a temptation the Trump administration would be wise

the Republican momentum going," Brat said. "And so, even though no one is totally happy, it allows us to get moving toward to tax reform, which is the most important thing we'll vote on this year."

Brat also said leadership's strategy in handling the conference has

Zealand. In 2010, it set up a Productivity Commission that reviews government actions on their ability to boost the productivity of people, ideas, and capital.

For the world at large, the International Monetary Fund plays a similar role. In a new report, titled "Gone with the Headwinds: Global Productivity," the IMF offers up a long list of solutions that should ignite a bipartisan consensus in Congress. With the US economy slowing down in 2017, the report is a must read for lawmakers on ideas. Two examples: better tax incentives for young tech firms and better support to help older workers retrain for jobs in new industries.

to resist. The impulse will be to make the argument that theirs is a tax cut for populists and not plutocrats on the basis of provisions such as the doubling of the standard deduction.

Let us stipulate that any time Americans get to keep more of what they've worked for, and in a way that makes filing taxes easier, this columnist cheers. But if the only benefit to middle- and working-class Americans from the proposed Trump cuts is a lower tax bill, the White House loses the argument. Because the promise here is something much larger than just a lower tax burden. It's a return to a booming American economy, the best way to fatten employee paychecks and open new opportunities for upward mobility.

True, Republicans start out with a rhetorical handicap here. The English language has few phrases as boring as "economic growth." Even so, the economic reality is that nothing delivers the extraordinary punch—especially for ordinary Americans—that sustained economic growth does.

When Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin presented the administration's tax plan, he argued that its primary purpose is to get the economy growing again. He's right, and that's how he should sell it.

John Cochrane, an economist at Stanford's Hoover Institution, calls sclerotic growth "the overriding

improved. Freedom Caucus members felt GOP leaders weren't listening to their concerns when they crafted and released the initial draft. Now, conservatives have a seat at the table.

"Paul Ryan came out and said our amendment moved the ball forward

In a recent speech, IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde drove home the point: "If productivity growth had followed its pre-2008 crisis trend, overall GDP [gross domestic product] in advanced economies would be about 5 percent higher today. That would be the equivalent of adding a country with an output larger than Germany to the global economy."

Today's economies need more than new technologies, such as robots. Innovation in the workplace also requires more certainty and direction from government – such as on taxes, trade, and regulation. "Leaning back and waiting for artificial intelligence or other

and was good policy, and that was helpful," Brat said. "Good will begets good will."

technologies to trigger a productivity revival is simply not an option," says Ms. Lagarde.

The US has long led the world in productivity growth, largely because of its flexibility and openness to new ideas, migrants, and global competition. Today's American worker needs to work only about 17 weeks to enjoy the real income of the average worker a century ago. That progress need not slow if US leaders practice their innovation by working together on ways to raise productivity.

economic issue of our time." For the last half of the 20th century, he notes, the U.S. economy grew at an average rate of 3.5%. This translated into real income per person in the U.S. rising from \$16,000 to \$50,000—a huge improvement for ordinary Americans.

Since 2009, unfortunately, the economy has been averaging about 2% growth per year, which some call the new normal. In a back-of-the-envelope calculation last year made at this columnist's request, Mr. Cochrane reckoned that for a worker making \$50,000, 2% growth means his income would rise to \$54,400 eight years from now. But if we could get the economy growing at 3%, his income would rise to \$58,675. Remember, too, these gains are compounded every year.

Still, the case for growth is not primarily about numbers. It's about the American Dream and the next generation doing better than the one before: a new home in a good neighborhood, college, paychecks that go further, maybe even the wherewithal for some wage slave to make a go of starting up her own business.

Democrats never talk about economic growth because their model is the "Life of Julia," the Obama-era cartoon showing a woman who at every stage in her life requires government to get ahead. The advantage of making the tax fight an argument about

growth (as opposed to focusing on the tax relief) is that it dovetails with other Republican initiatives, especially the liberation of American know-how and possibility through deregulation.

Here's something else. A prosperity-based argument would also help Mr. Trump appeal beyond his white working-class base. In his book "Coming Apart," political scientist Charles Murray notes that the dysfunctions associated with poor black populations in inner cities—bad schools, broken families, government dependency, lack of economic opportunity—also characterize many poor white communities.

The flip side of the Murray argument is this: Measures that would open opportunities for the white working class would likely help lift others in the same economic boat. Is it any coincidence, for example, that when Joel Kotkin's Center for Opportunity Urbanism looked to the cities where African-Americans are doing best economically, it's not the progressive North that dominates. It's the growing South.

So let the Times and Mr. Schumer holler about emptying federal coffers and giveaways to the rich. If the Trump White House hopes to win this argument, it starts with making this debate all about dreams—and the economic growth that can turn them into reality.

## Democrats confident they can block Trump's agenda after spending-bill win (UNE)

Democrats think they have set the stage to block President Trump's legislative priorities for years to come by winning major concessions in a spending bill to keep the government open.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) secured nearly \$5 billion in new domestic spending by exploiting disagreements between Trump and GOP lawmakers over spending priorities.

Democrats' lopsided victory on the five-month deal, which is likely to be approved this week, means it will be very difficult — if not impossible — for the GOP to exert its will in future budget negotiations, including when it comes to Trump's 2018 budget blueprint.

That's because Republicans are hopelessly divided over how much to spend on government programs, with a small but vocal minority unwilling to support such measures at all. That has forced Republicans to work with Democrats to avoid politically damaging government shutdowns.

And that means Democrats are in the driver's seat when it comes to budget battles, even with Trump in the White House.

"I think we had a strategy and it worked," Schumer said in an interview with *The Washington Post*. "Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate were closer to one another than Republicans were to Donald Trump."

The extra money for domestic programs will now be that much harder to strip out of future budgets, and Trump's priorities, such as money for a wall along the border with Mexico, could be more difficult to include.

"We can't pass anything without them," Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.), a top deputy to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), said of Democrats recently.

Hill Republicans remain skeptical of, if not openly hostile to, many of Trump's plans — including the wall and proposals to slash millions from programs such as the National Institutes of Health and foreign aid.

Democrats' gains

In addition to the \$5 billion in domestic spending, the bipartisan agreement released early Monday

morning is packed with Democratic priorities, such as protection for funding for Planned Parenthood, a permanent extension of health care for coal miners and money to help Puerto Rico make up a projected shortfall in Medicaid.

Pelosi celebrated in a letter to House Democrats on Monday, saying that the measure "reflects significant progress defeating dangerous Republican riders and securing key victories for Democratic priorities."

"In a defeat for President Trump, the [deal] does not fund the immoral and unwise border wall or create a cruel new deportation force," Pelosi wrote.

Republicans argue they were able to wrest several wins in the legislation, including a greater increase in defense than domestic spending and an agreement to provide money for Puerto Rico if it was shifted from elsewhere and not new money. House and Senate leaders also believe that key changes to environmental policy were taken care of through the administrative process and that they can further antiabortion goals through other budget proceedings.

Nonetheless, Democrats are counting on GOP infighting over spending to guarantee that those parts of Trump's agenda won't be funded in the next spending deal, either.

[ What's in the spending agreement? We read it so you don't have to. ]

Republicans could try to craft a new agreement to govern spending after Sept. 30, with domestic cuts and funding for Trump's wall. But such a measure would probably fail in the Senate, where Republicans hold a slim 52 to 48 majority, short of the 60 votes needed to pass most legislation.

Or, as they have often done in the past, lawmakers could abandon broad ambitions and decide to simply extend current spending levels, locking in Democrats' policy victories for another year.

Republicans in Congress were unusually quiet about the deal. But White House aides sought to put a positive spin on areas where Trump fell short, including the wall.

"I think it's great that the Democrats like the bill," White House budget director Mick Mulvaney told reporters during a Monday briefing.

"We thought it was a really good deal for this administration as well."

He said the White House agreed not to "push for bricks and mortar for the wall" but to instead focus on fixing existing fencing and installing new lights and sensors on the border. Mulvaney was one of several top Trump aides who insisted that plans for wall construction would soon begin anew.

"Make no mistake, the wall is going to be built," White House press secretary Sean Spicer said at his daily briefing, adding that there is plenty the administration can do to plan for construction between now and when Trump gets his next opportunity to secure funding.

But wall construction was one of several areas where GOP lawmakers' decision to punt this week could doom the president's priorities for the future.

Language in the deal explicitly prohibits money for border security from being used for building the wall, for instance. Trump has said he plans to revive the push this fall.

Both Spicer and Vice President Pence said they considered the \$21 billion in additional military spending — \$15 billion from an off-budget war fund and \$6 billion in budget increases — to be their biggest victory, even though it was about two-thirds of what Trump had sought.

In addition, there were no reductions in funding to "sanctuary cities"; a federal judge said last week that the Justice Department needed congressional approval to follow through on its threats to cut money for such places, which don't comply with federal immigration authorities. Nor was there money to fulfill Trump's promise of a hiring spree to build a deportation force at Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Trump also agreed to continue paying Affordable Care Act subsidies after his aides threatened last week to use that issue as a bargaining chip. The subsidies, which go to insurance companies, reduce out-of-pocket expenses for low-income people who get coverage under President Barack Obama's signature domestic initiative.

President's role disputed

Pence celebrated the deal Monday, saying Trump himself played a key role in reaching it.

"I think this morning's announcement about reaching a bipartisan deal on the budget says that the American people can be encouraged that Washington is working again, thanks to the strong leadership of President Donald Trump," Pence said on "CBS This Morning." "Thanks to his direct engagement with members of Congress, we're seeing real progress."

But Trump's involvement was seen by many congressional aides as unhelpful to reaching a deal in the bipartisan talks. Negotiators were nearing an agreement on the spending portions and were ready to move on to unrelated policy measures when Mulvaney publicly renewed demands that the bill include money for a wall along the southern border.

Mulvaney's demand was out of sync with GOP leaders, who long ago said they wouldn't seek any funding for a wall or cuts to sanctuary city funding.

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It also came weeks after Schumer personally told Mulvaney that the best way to avoid a government shutdown would be for the White House to stay out of budget negotiations and let Congress work its will, according to two people with direct knowledge of the conversation. Mulvaney nodded, they said, and proceeded to make the demand anyway.

His office did not return a request for comment on the subject.

Democrats also think that the White House created a public relations crisis when Trump threatened to end payments for the subsidies, which help cover about 6 million people under Obamacare. The president later withdrew the threat, and the White House decided to continue the payments, in hopes of reducing the number of sticking points in the spending bill.

But the president put a spotlight on the issue just as public polls were starting to show overwhelming support for the subsidies and the ACA in general. Democrats were thrilled to add the attack on the health-care law to the mix in the spending fight because they thought the public would blame Republicans if a deal couldn't be reached to fund the government, according to

several Democratic aides familiar with the strategy.

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL.**

## Editorial :: Pre-Existing Confusion

Insurance coverage for pre-existing health conditions can be confusing, as President Trump and a journalist showed in a television interview over the weekend. Allow us to explain how the GOP reform would work in practice and why pre-existing conditions have been exaggerated as a political problem.

Mr. Trump told CBS's John Dickerson that "I watch some of the news reports, which are so unfair, and they say we don't cover pre-existing conditions, we cover it beautifully." Mr. Dickerson seemed surprised: "Okay. Well, that's a development, sir. So you're saying it's going to be pre-existing to everybody?" Mr. Trump said the House bill had "evolved" but as usual didn't explain how.

House conservatives rebelled over the original version of the American Health Care Act, which only partially deregulated insurance markets. The bill maintained the rule known as guaranteed issue, which requires insurers to cover all applicants regardless of medical history. It also relaxed community rating, which limits how much premiums can vary among beneficiaries.

The media and the left thus claim that conservatives want to allow insurers to charge sick people more, and some conservatives

agree, which spooks the moderates. But the latest compromise between conservatives and centrists doesn't repeal guaranteed issue or community rating. It keeps these regulations as the default baseline, and states could apply for a federal waiver if they want to pursue other regulatory relief.

But the waivers aren't a license to leave cancer survivors without insurance. States can only receive a waiver if they avail themselves of the bill's \$100 billion fund to set up high-risk pools. These state-based programs, which were run in 35 states until they were pre-empted by ObamaCare, subsidize coverage for older and sicker patients. This helps these individuals and keeps coverage cheaper for everyone else.

Why might a Governor prefer such an arrangement over the ObamaCare status quo? Well, the law's price controls are a raw deal for most consumers, which leads to a cycle of rising premiums and falling enrollment. Average premiums rose by 40% or more in 11 states this year, and insurance markets in states like Tennessee, Kentucky and Minnesota are in crisis.

Community rating and guaranteed issue also punish the sick by degrading quality. When insurers

can profit by being the best plan for, say, cancer or diabetes, they invest in such care. When both the healthy and sick pay the same rates, the incentive is to load up on healthier people and discourage people with expensive ailments or chronic conditions from enrolling by using higher copays, narrow provider networks or tiered prescription drug formularies.

In a recent study of the Affordable Care Act, Daniel Prinz and Timothy J. Layton of Harvard and Michael Geruso of University of Texas-Austin conclude that insurers are using benefit designs to screen for unprofitable consumers. The result is that people with expensive conditions cannot obtain adequate coverage.

Pre-existing conditions are an understandably emotional issue, because people fear losing their plan or a financial catastrophe if they develop a serious health problem. But only about 4% of the population under age 65 is high risk. ObamaCare's Pre-Existing Conditions Insurance Plan was created from 2010 to 2014 as a transition until the entitlement debuted nationwide: Anyone could sign up for heavily subsidized coverage if they were denied in the private market. Enrollment topped out at merely 115,000 people in 2013.

This debate is also distorted by a misunderstanding of health risks. The actuarial probability that a healthy person will become sick is already priced into premiums, meaning it is true insurance for unknown future health outcomes. People with pre-existing conditions don't need insurance—they need help paying for expensive treatment that is already known.

High-risk pools are a fairer and more equitable solution to this social problem, rather than hiding the cost by forcing other people to pay premiums that are artificially higher than the value of the product. The waivers also include protections for people who renew continuous coverage from major premium increases if they become ill.

Liberals are inflating the pre-existing conditions panic with images of patients pushed out to sea on ice floes, but the GOP plan will ensure everyone can get the care they need. Republicans can win this argument, but first they need to join the debate and explain their ideas.

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**The  
Washington  
Post**

## House Republicans continue health-care push, may leave changes to Senate (UNE)

The aim has become very simple for House Republicans stumbling closer to passing a bill to revise the Affordable Care Act: just get it off their plates and over to the Senate.

In the messy effort to rally their often unruly party around a measure to replace big parts of President Barack Obama's health-care law, House leaders have been forced to leave other objectives by the wayside and focus on one simple, political goal: pass a bill they can say repeals Obamacare — even if it has no hope of survival in the Senate — to shield their members in next year's elections.

"I would hope it gets changed over there," Rep. Peter T. King (R-N.Y.) told Bloomberg News, echoing other center-right members who explicitly said they were willing to pass the new revision in hopes that the Senate would strip out the harsher provisions.

Even that goal, however, is proving elusive. By late Monday, House

leaders had collected more votes than ever but still appeared to be shy of the 216 Republicans they need to pass the measure. They're stuck between conservatives and moderates, both keenly aware of how they can be attacked on the issue next year.

"If you're in the House, what you should be thinking now is that if it doesn't survive, it all comes back to you," said Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.). "I think what they should be focused on is getting the process moving and, frankly, passing the obligation over to the Senate."

(Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

President Trump promised on April 30 that new GOP health-care legislation will preserve coverage for people with preexisting medical conditions — but critics say that's at odds with his promise to lower premiums. Will the GOP health care bill cover people with preexisting

conditions? (Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

The White House, where aides have suggested a Wednesday vote is possible, continued to lobby members Monday even though no vote had been scheduled. Vice President Pence hunkered in his office on the House side of the Capitol, with undecided and yes-voting members stopping by to talk.

Rep. Joe Barton (R-Tex.), a conservative member of the whip team who had endorsed the previous version of the bill, told reporters that the votes were there to pass the new version. Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) said he's "pretty confident" of the same. But several members from swing seats, including Rep. Mike Coffman (R-Colo.) and Rep. David Valadao (R-Calif.), said outside Pence's office that they remained undecided on how they would vote.

Even some members who won their seats partially on promises to repeal

the ACA are blinking, citing changes to the proposed replacement that would allow insurers to charge higher premiums to patients with preexisting conditions if their state got permission from the federal government.

In 2010, Rep. Billy Long (R-Mo.) campaigned for a safe Republican seat in Congress by pledging to fight "government-run health care." Every two years, he won easy victories while telling voters he was "fighting to repeal Obamacare."

On Monday, Long came out against the American Health Care Act with a few kind words about the law it was designed to replace. During unrelated votes Monday night, Long could be seen in a lengthy conversation with House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.).

"I have always stated that one of the few good things about Obamacare is that people with preexisting conditions would be covered," Long said in a statement. "The MacArthur

amendment strips away any guarantee that preexisting conditions would be covered and affordable.”

[How preexisting conditions could derail House Republicans' health-care bill, explained]

Over the weekend, President Trump hadn't helped. In an interview on CBS News's "Face the Nation" Sunday, Trump said the latest bill would "beautifully" protect those with preexisting medical conditions — which is not fully true.

[Trump guarantees protection for those with preexisting medical conditions — but it's unclear how]

As Republicans have struggled to find a health-care bill on which they can reach a consensus, Ryan agreed to support an amendment that would allow insurance providers in some states to deny coverage or charge higher premiums to people with preexisting conditions or costly health problems, as long as that state set up "high-risk pools" that could help cover the cost of care.

Proponents have said this would lower premiums for healthy individuals, but critics have argued that it would dramatically drive up costs for those who are seriously ill. Proponents also noted that states can choose to leave current mandates in place.

Conspicuously absent from the House

Republican effort to get to 216 is much talk about what happens in the Senate. There, Republicans will run up against the Senate parliamentarian, who must rule on whether some provisions are allowable in a budget reconciliation bill — the vehicle they're using to repeal the health-care law to avoid a Senate rule requiring a 60-vote win that would require Democratic votes.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) is likely to introduce a substitute version removing those provisions, just as he did back in 2015, when Congress passed a bill repealing the Affordable Care Act that Obama then vetoed.

"All of the policy considerations and policy constructs assembled by the House over the past couple of months may become moot," said Chris Jacobs, who advised the House Republican Conference on health policy while the 2010 health-care law was being passed.

Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) said the House should move "quickly" on passing its bill. "I'm not going to tell them what to do, but I am going to say that if they don't move pretty quickly, we ought to see what we can do in the United States Senate," Grassley said.

But Sen. Rand Paul (Ky.), the one Republican who opposed a Senate test vote on repeal in January — arguing that it did not go far enough

— warned that even the new version of the AHCA fell short of his standard.

"It still could be improved a great deal, but it's an open question of whether the Senate would fix it or make it worse," said Paul. "I'm not excited about having taxpayer money going to insurance companies. That was a big part of Obamacare, and it's a big part of this."

There's also no talk of getting a score from the Congressional Budget Office on how the changes would affect the cost of the bill or how many Americans it would cover, even though Republicans came under heavy fire in March for advancing their original measure without an estimate from Congress's official scorekeeper.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) dismissed concerns that the GOP bill will have to undergo major revisions in the Senate — or that Republicans won't even be able to pass it in the House.

"Legislating takes time," he said. "It's worth remembering it took Obama 14 months to pass Obamacare," he said. "The House repeal bill was on the floor for 14 days. That's not nearly long enough to draft legislation as consequential as this."

Despite the resistance from some members, House Republicans can't get around the fact that for seven years, they have promised to repeal

the Democrats' health-care law. As the pressure mounts, they're striving to just get the bill passed and let the Senate worry about how it could actually become law.

The Daily 202 newsletter

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Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) noted that reality in a Monday interview with CNN. He said that the House bill remains a "work in progress" and that some of it would be scrapped in negotiations.

"The House has to pass a bill," said Cassidy, who has written a replacement bill that retains much of the Affordable Care Act. "It'll go to conference committee. I'm sure the administration will be involved. There will be two other times when what the White House is advocating can be addressed."

Cassidy was skeptical of the modified AHCA, which creates high-risk pools for people with preexisting conditions.

"I suspect the advocates for the bill will say that's their guarantee," he said. "I will insist that the president's pledges be met. And the president pledged that he would take care of people with preexisting conditions."

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Donald Trump Gambles on Big Health-Care Victory (UNE)

Stephanie Armour, Kristina Peterson and Natalie Andrews

WASHINGTON—The White House is pursuing a twisting path in Congress this week, yielding to Democratic demands on a major spending bill while aggressively pushing a partisan health-care measure, gambling on a big win on health but risking setbacks on both fronts.

House GOP leaders hope to corral enough votes on health care by Thursday, since Congress departs for recess next week and Republicans want to begin tackling taxes, another complex issue, when they return.

Leaders were tight-lipped Monday night on precisely how many votes short they remain, according to lawmakers leaving a regular meeting of the whip team. Although some lawmakers are still pushing for changes to the bill, others said time had run out. At least 19 House Republicans are currently opposed to the bill, with at least 17

undecided, according to a Wall Street Journal survey of the lawmakers. The GOP can only afford to lose about 22 votes, depending on absences.

Meanwhile, frustrating some conservatives, President Donald Trump has backed off his longtime demands for immediate funding for a wall on the Mexican border in the spending bill. The White House also has declined to insist on its plans to cut Environmental Protection Agency funding and to deny funding to "sanctuary" cities.

Democrats are cheering the spending outcome as a big win, while the White House says it reflects a conscious strategy—getting the best deal it can on spending while focusing its efforts on the health bill this week. "A strictly partisan vote on health care makes the budget deal more difficult," one White House official said Monday.

Sen. Orrin Hatch (R., Utah), an ally of Mr. Trump, said every new president must learn how to steer

bills through Congress. "Of course, there's always a learning curve," Mr. Hatch said. "I've seen a variety of presidents, Democrats and Republicans, who have had to learn—how do you work with Congress? What's the best way to win them over, and how do you get them to cooperate?"

The risk for Mr. Trump is that it is far from clear that Republicans can round up the 216 votes they need on health care, especially from GOP centrists, after making changes in their initial proposal to win over conservatives. The centrists are especially spooked by a provision allowing insurers in some states to charge higher premiums to patients with pre-existing medical conditions who have let their coverage lapse.

Republican leaders on Monday ramped up their efforts to persuade this group, assuring centrists that the Senate would make changes to allay their concerns and insisting that few states would actually use the waivers allowing higher premiums for pre-existing

conditions, according to people familiar with the matter.

One centrist, Rep. Mike Coffman (R., Colo.), seemed receptive. "There are many moderates who overreacted to the amendment, thinking that it does more than it actually does," he said. "So I think people are taking a second look at it." Even so, Mr. Coffman is working on an amendment that would strengthen protections for those with pre-existing conditions. But some senior Republicans said Monday that the time for fiddling with the bill may have passed.

Meanwhile, Rep. Billy Long (R., Mo.) came out against the bill on Monday, citing its treatment of people with pre-existing conditions.

The White House is pushing aggressively for a vote on health care this week, eager for a victory on the politically potent subject. House leaders, including Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.), embarrassed by having to pull an earlier version of the bill at the last moment, have not committed to a timeline.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer told reporters on Monday he was optimistic on the health measure, but "I would never want to get in front of the speaker.... Ultimately, the speaker and the House leadership determine when to call a vote."

If the House passes the bill, it would almost certainly be changed in the Senate. Republicans there are already mulling amendments to the Medicaid portion of the House bill, in order to make smaller cuts to the program, say people familiar with the talks.

Some GOP senators, including Sens. Rob Portman of Ohio and Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, said they remain concerned about a provision in the House bill that would freeze the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid

expansion. Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the third-ranking Senate Republican, has meanwhile put together a measure seeking to better compensate older Americans for high health-insurance costs.

"I have some of the same concerns I had before with the Medicaid expansion piece," as well as the size of the tax credits for rural residents and older people, Ms. Capito said.

Overall, the Republican proposal aims to topple most of the ACA and set up a new system based on refundable tax credits and cuts to Medicaid. The bill would also let states roll back certain coverage areas such as maternity care.

While GOP leaders are focusing on unifying all their party's factions behind the health proposal, they

have frustrated some conservatives by essentially teaming up with Democrats on a compromise spending measure, likely to be voted on later this week.

Several of Mr. Trump's top priorities were left out of the must-pass \$1.1 trillion dollar bill, in deference to Democrats in both chambers whose votes are needed for passage. Some Republicans worry that if a standoff led to a government shutdown, the GOP could suffer a backlash since the party controls Congress and the White House.

The bill includes an additional \$137 million for border security, but it will be used for technology and infrastructure, not the wall that Mr. Trump repeatedly promised on the campaign trail. The \$1.5 billion total for border security is half of what Mr. Trump requested.

Mr. Trump's proposed budget called for cuts to National Institutes of Health funding, but the current version instead boosts NIH funding by \$2 billion.

"It seems like Democrats were really the winners," said Justin Bogie, a senior policy analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation.

The White House denied Monday that the spending bill represented a setback, noting that it includes spending on defense and border security, well as policy provisions on school choice and other matters. "I think the president got a lot out of this bill," said Mr. Spicer.

—Michael C. Bender and Michelle Hackman contributed to this article.



## If GOP Passes Trumpcare, It's Dead

Michael Tomasky

Here's the parallel universe Washington has become these days: The new Republican health care bill is even worse than the old ones, because they had to placate the hard-right members. Naturally, this worse bill seems to have a much better chance of passing.

House Republicans may hold a vote Wednesday. One presumes that after that late March fiasco, they now have the sense to schedule a vote if and only if they're certain they have the votes for passage. They'll be counting noses right up to Wednesday afternoon.

Passage of this bill into law would be a disaster for the country. Up to 20 million people could lose their health care coverage. People with serious illnesses could be screwed out of coverage again or charged far more than others under a provision that would allow states to bypass Obamacare requirements about covering those with preexisting conditions. The whopping cuts to Medicaid in the bill, wrote Jonathan Cohn Monday, would probably constitute the biggest single cut to a public benefit in the country's history, bringing "widespread hardship to the millions of people who depend on it for everything from opioid treatment to cancer care."

Fortunately, whatever the House does, the Senate seems, to most people watching this, like a heavier lift. Passage is certainly possible there—remember, Republicans

wouldn't need any Democratic votes to pass it under reconciliation, which also would mean the Democrats couldn't filibuster it. Then the question would be whether three GOP senators would be willing to vote against Mitch McConnell—and of course their president. A second question would be whether McConnell really wants the GOP to be known as the party that threw 20 million people off their health insurance.

For the sake of those people, and all the others who'll suffer under the Scrooge-Marley health care act, I can't in decent conscience say that I hope the Republicans pass their bill. But right now, on my right shoulder, I'm feeling a little tap-tap-tap—it's the little devil Tomasky, and he's whispering in my ear: "C'mon, let 'em do it! They pass that bill and they'll be handing the Democrats a huge pile of ammo for 2018! Write it!"

He's right. If Trump and the Republicans actually do manage to repeal Obamacare, I think it would then be a near-certainty that they'd lose control of the House of Representatives. Why? Because a large number of the vulnerable House Republicans are in one of two circumstances, or sometimes both. One, they're in states that took the Medicaid expansion, which means they're representing many flesh-and-blood humans who will lose their coverage. Or two, they're in districts that aren't deep red, or are even a pale shade of blue, where approval for Obamacare is presumably pretty high.

For example, the Cook Political Report rates 13 seats held by Republican incumbents as being either toss-ups or "leaning" Republican, which means the incumbents are definitely vulnerable. Of the 13, eight are in states that took the Medicaid money. Of the remaining five, the Cook "partisan voting index," which measures how Republican or Democratic a district is, either leans in the Democrats' direction or is barely Republican in four. The only one of the 13 that on paper looks like it ought to be a fairly safe GOP seat is the Georgia seat that Democrat Jon Ossoff is seeking now (the election is June 20). But as we know, Ossoff appears to be the slight favorite.

Cook rates another 24 Republican-held seats as being possibly competitive. Of those 24 districts, 19 are in states that took the Medicaid dough. Most of those 19 would presumably vote against their own party on this one, but even so, they really don't want to have to defend what their party will have done here, and as their Democratic opponents will inevitably be pointing out, "Congressman X may have voted against Ryan care, but he did vote to make Paul Ryan speaker, and Ryan made Ryan care happen."

If they pass this bill, they are dead men (and women).

I think McConnell knows it. I imagine Ryan knows it, too, but he has that Freedom Caucus to assuage, so he has to press on. Does Trump know it? On Face the Nation Sunday, he was all over the

place on the question of preexisting conditions and other matters. Of course, he insisted that people with such conditions were covered "beautifully." When host John Dickerson informed him that the Republicans had passed an amendment to the opposite effect last week, Trump just waved it away. You'd think at this point that he'd actually care a little bit about substance, given that his success or failure now rides on the results he gets.

So here's what we have: a Republican president who has lied repeatedly to the American people for nearly two years now about how he'd bring them health care coverage that was much cheaper and far better than Obamacare. And a Republican Congress that has lied repeatedly to the Americans for the last several years that they can pass a bill that's vastly superior to Obamacare cuz, y'know, freedom. Trump's lies were of ignorance; the GOP's of ideological belief.

But even though they were different, they revealed the same truth: You can't just magically make this better. It's hard and complicated, and Obamacare can be improved, certainly, but only by people working in good faith to do so. The American people, finally, seem to have figured all this out.

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# If Trump Would Only Stop Tweeting, He Might Actually Be a Good President

Max Bost

Having passed the 100-day mark of his presidency, Donald Trump has not lived up to either the worst fears or the greatest hopes that he had elicited.

His most devoted fans had hoped — and his most fervent critics had feared — that this would be a Breitbart-Stephen Bannon presidency, a populist-nationalist bacchanalia that would result in the deportation of more than 11 million immigrants living illegally in the country, the banning of all Muslim visitors, the pullout of American troops from overseas bases, a deal with Russia to recognize its annexation of Crimea, the imposition of steep tariffs, and a border wall that Mexico would pay for. That hasn't happened. Nor, needless to say, has Trump imposed a fascist dictatorship; the checks and balances of the Constitution remain alive and well.

But nor, as some of Trump's more optimistic supporters in the Republican establishment had hoped, has this turned into a Mike Pence-Paul Ryan presidency, with those two conservative paladins pushing through a conservative wish list of legislation while Trump devotes his time to golf. The president has hit the links a record number of times (17 outings so far), but he has hardly excused himself from governance. This presidency has been all Trump, for good and ill.

His policies have largely been conventional Republican ones, but they have been promoted so ham-handedly and surrounded by so much bombastic, boastful, deceitful, and threatening rhetoric that the amount of alarm generated by the administration has been out of all proportion to how little it has actually done. The Associated Press reports: "Of 38 specific promises Trump made in his 100-day 'contract' with voters — 'This is my pledge to you' — he's accomplished 10, mostly through executive orders that don't require legislation, such as withdrawing the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal." In fact, Trump's most substantive achievement to date has been the appointment of a superbly qualified conservative to the Supreme Court who could easily have been nominated by a President John Kasich or a President Jeb Bush.

In retrospect, two turning points caused the protean president to water down the 100-proof

Bannonism expressed in his apocalyptic "American carnage" inauguration speech. The first was the executive order on immigration, issued on Jan. 27, which was designed to make good on his ill-advised campaign pledge to exclude as many Muslims as possible from the United States. The implementation was a fiasco, with protesters mobbing airports and the courts instantly blocking it. Any hopes that Bannon and his White House confederate, Stephen Miller, might have had of issuing similar executive orders, such as a rumored initiative to use the National Guard to round up immigrants living in the country illegally, were thereby scotched.

The other turning point was the firing on Feb. 13 of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn as national security advisor after he had lied about his pre-inauguration conversations with the Russian ambassador. Flynn appeared to be favorably disposed toward Russian President Vladimir Putin (and was paid more than \$33,000 by a state-funded TV network to attend a Moscow banquet), ill-disposed toward Islam ("Islam is a political ideology," he said, that "hides behind the notion of it being a religion"), and ready for military confrontations (on Feb. 1, he officially put Iran "on notice"). He might actually have tried to implement the kind of foreign policy that Trump's ultra-nationalist supporters want. His downfall ushered in a much more thoughtful replacement, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who has succeeded in exiling Bannon from the National Security Council's Principals Committee and, together with Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, in pushing Trump toward the center.

But while the administration is becoming more moderate, it still has a long way to go before it is the "fine-tuned machine" that Trump boasts of.

But while the administration is becoming more moderate, it still has a long way to go before it is the "fine-tuned machine" that Trump boasts of. That was evident last week. In the frenetic rush to bolster his thin résumé of 100-day achievements, Trump pushed for a vote on legislation to repeal Obamacare that has not even been drafted after the initial version had failed to win enough support to pass the House. Once again Trump showed that he is neither an effective craftsman nor an effective

salesman for legislation he does not truly understand. He also unveiled a dramatic tax-cut plan that would explode the deficit and that was not ready for prime time; some of the op-eds written about the plan were longer than the plan itself. Trump even flirted with nullifying NAFTA, America's most important trade accord, as a 100-day publicity stunt before being talked off the ledge.

The flirtation with terminating NAFTA was typical Trump: His wild talk needlessly alarmed financial markets and America's close allies Mexico and Canada, but ultimately he recoiled from doing anything too radical. The same has been true in his approach to North Korea: While engaging in saber rattling ("There is a chance that we could end up having a major, major conflict with North Korea," Trump told Reuters last week), he has not given any indication that he is likely to take military action anytime soon. In fact, his approach toward North Korea — reaching out to Beijing while pressuring Pyongyang — is only a slightly intensified form of former President Barack Obama's policy.

The Islamic State is a similar situation: After having made bloodcurdling threats to "bomb the shit" out of the terrorist group, and to "extinguish" it, Trump has largely followed the Obama blueprint in Syria and Iraq, albeit with slightly fewer restrictions on the use of air power. His willingness to use cruise missiles against a Syrian air force base looks increasingly like a one-off event that masks the fact that, just like Obama, he is basically resigned to leaving Bashar al-Assad in power.

The biggest change may be in Trump's contempt for human rights in foreign policy. Having fulsomely praised Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt and Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, he has now extended the love fest to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who has set death squads loose to murder supposed drug dealers. To the astonishment of his own aides, Trump has invited Duterte to the White House. But the difference is more symbolic than substantive. Even Obama, who expressed his concern for human rights, did nothing to stop the mass killings in Syria.

The amount of policy continuity is easy to overlook because the current president's intemperate language is such a contrast to his thoughtful and measured predecessor.

The amount of policy continuity is easy to overlook because the current president's intemperate language is such a contrast to his thoughtful and measured predecessor. Trump called the media the "enemy of the American people." He attacked the ruling of a "so-called judge" who stayed his immigration order. He accused Obama, with zero evidence, of having stooped so low as to "tapp [sic] my phones during the very sacred election process. This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!" With an equal lack of evidence, he then accused Obama's national security advisor, Susan Rice, of having committed a "terrible" crime by supposedly unmasking the identities of Trump aides in wiretap transcripts. He has even disparaged actors Meryl Streep and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Just last week, he again insulted a U.S. senator who claims Native American heritage by calling her "Pocahontas."

Those kinds of histrionics are good for ratings but bad for governance. They make it nearly impossible to achieve any bipartisan agreement, they demean the presidency, and they dent the president's credibility. The Washington Post reports that Trump has averaged nearly five false or misleading claims a day during his first 100 days. When the president says something in the future, what reason is there for anyone, including America's enemies, to believe it?

The good news from the first 100 days is that the administration's cautious actions so far have not lived up to the president's hyperbolic and incendiary words. If only Trump could curb his rhetoric and improve his execution of policy, his presidency could turn out to be more successful than naysayers (including me) have feared, if less revolutionary than some of his fans had wished. For a start, he could fill more than 5 percent of the top 556 administration posts. That should be at the top of his to-do list for the next 100 days.

This week's meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas may be an important public step toward restarting a Middle East peace process that has been stalled since 2014. It may even mark the first step toward making "the ultimate deal," the lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians that Trump has said he wants the chance to secure.

But it's important to note that the White House meeting won't mark the first point of contact between the 82-year-old Abbas and the Trump administration. A low-profile but potentially influential White House official by the name of Jason Greenblatt already met with Abbas in Ramallah, in the West Bank, on March 14 as part of a wide-ranging listening tour to Israel and the Palestinian territories — and then met with him a second time at an Arab League summit in Amman, Jordan, later that month. A former Trump Organization chief legal officer, Greenblatt has the official title of the White House's representative for international negotiations. But unofficially he's the administration's Middle East peace envoy. If an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is reached during the Trump administration, it will be Greenblatt — who earned his new position by virtue of his personal relationship with the president, despite little experience with his new duties — working to bring the parties to the table and keep them there.

Greenblatt has been placed at the very center of the radical political experiment Trump came into office promising. In the president's view, the entrenched political establishment was one of the primary sources of America's problems, and the country's social and political ills could only be remedied if people from outside the alleged Washington "swamp" were finally allowed to have a crack at them. The job performance of people like Rex Tillerson, who became secretary of state after years as an ExxonMobil executive, or school choice activist-turned-Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is a real-time test of one of the central value propositions of Trump's presidency: That America is in need of bold new approaches to national governance that only Trump and his team of outsiders can provide.

Greenblatt is one of those outsiders. But unlike most of his colleagues in the West Wing and cabinet, he has been off to a strong start, at least judging by bipartisan accounts from policymakers and observers in the United States and the Middle East.

"What's impressed me about Mr. Greenblatt's early forays into Middle East diplomacy is his interest and willingness to listen to a broad range of voices," said Daniel Shapiro, who served as President Barack Obama's ambassador in Tel Aviv between 2011 and January of this year. "He seems to understand that the success or failure of Middle East peace efforts is not going to depend only on the decisions of the leaders."

Peace advocates have seen encouraging signs out of Greenblatt as well. "I think we've been positively impressed with the foundation that he's laid," said Jessica Rosenblum, the vice president of communications for J Street, which describes itself as a "pro-Israel, pro-peace" advocacy group.

Greenblatt's success so far reflects well on his own diplomatic abilities, but it may have as much to do with the nature of his assigned task.

Greenblatt's success so far reflects well on his own diplomatic abilities, but it may have as much to do with the nature of his assigned task. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process seems especially primed for a newcomer's fresh thinking. After all, a quarter century of careful, deliberative, and well-intentioned professional U.S. diplomacy hasn't resulted in an Israeli-Palestinian agreement or even a clear path toward one.

So far, the former real estate lawyer's record suggests that the peace process is one area where a fresh approach could actually pay off — assuming Trump has the focus and patience needed to seriously take on one of the world's most infamously intractable conflicts.

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Greenblatt began working at the Trump Organization in 1997, after a career that included time as a real estate lawyer for a New York-based firm and a short-lived foray into the cappuccino-making business. Over the next two decades, the Yeshiva University and New York University law school graduate would work his way up to executive vice president and chief legal officer at the Trump Organization. As one of the top lawyers in the company, Greenblatt oversaw due diligence, contracting, and other legal dimensions of Trump's real estate deals — including some of the more controversial ones. Israel never came under Greenblatt's portfolio for the simple reason that Trump has still never taken on a project in the country and has no documented business interests there.

Greenblatt is an observant Jew and tweeted a photo of his tefillin bag while en route to the Middle East in March. As Greenblatt told me during an interview last July, Trump respected his religious observance and always wished him a restful Shabbat even when a tough negotiation came up against the weekend holiday.

Greenblatt's career as a Middle East hand began less than a year ago. During the campaign,

Greenblatt was one of the co-chairs of candidate Trump's Israel Advisory Committee, along with David Friedman, a bankruptcy lawyer who is now serving as the U.S. ambassador to Israel. In contrast to the notably outspoken Friedman, who was also a fundraiser for a West Bank settlement, the soft-spoken Greenblatt had never tried to participate in Middle Eastern affairs and had never even publicly commented on the region until the campaign kicked off.

Early in the general election, Greenblatt's elevation to the height of the Middle Eastern policy firmament appeared to be just another example of Trump's reliance on dubiously qualified people who were already within his orbit — in April 2016, The Forward ran a Jewish Telegraphic Agency profile of Greenblatt with the headline "No Experience Necessary." When I interviewed him last July, Greenblatt candidly admitted just how much he still had to learn about his subject area and acknowledged that he wouldn't even have been involved in politics if his longtime boss weren't running for president.

Today, Greenblatt's closeness to Trump and his lack of previous diplomatic experience are actually starting to look like assets. Greenblatt's listening tour in March took him to places that few other people in his position have been — like the Jalazone refugee camp, outside of Ramallah, where he met with local youth leaders. No American Middle East envoy had visited a West Bank refugee camp since the early 1990s. Greenblatt met with a range of political and civil society figures in the West Bank, as well as a "cross section of folks from Gaza," which is currently under the control of the U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas. Later that month, he attended an Arab League summit in Amman, a relative rarity for a senior American official. At the summit, he had a second meeting with Abbas, whom he has reportedly impressed, and sat down with a number of Arab foreign ministers.

Greenblatt's visits with Israelis displayed a similar broad-mindedness. He met with settlers, generals, and students and tweeted a picture with Gershon Edelstein, the head of the Ponevezh Yeshiva, one of the most respected religious academies in Orthodox Judaism. Someone more conscious of diplomatic convention, working for a more cautious or traditional administration, might have veered away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's thornier territory during a first official visit to the region. And a

more traditional diplomat might not have seen the public diplomacy value in dropping by the Ponevezh fresh off a visit to a Palestinian refugee camp — or of visiting either place at all.

Trump's envoy approached the region with fresh eyes and won fans on both sides of the Green Line as a result.

Trump's envoy approached the region with fresh eyes and won fans on both sides of the Green Line as a result. Greenblatt "conveyed a very good impression that he is curious, that he wants to understand different people, their take on the situation, their aspirations, and their aspirations and their concerns," said Nimrod Novik, a former foreign-policy advisor to Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and a fellow at the Israel Policy Forum.

Greenblatt is only in the world of Middle East diplomacy because his longtime boss was elected president, but in the context of Israeli-Palestinian affairs, the appearance of favoritism might actually help him. As Novik explains, both the Israelis and Palestinians are adept at gaming the negotiating process and at exploiting any perceived distance between an envoy and the administration back in Washington. It's harder to stall an envoy, or to go behind the envoy's back and appeal to other, friendlier administration officials or congressional allies, when the sides believe that the mediator is a direct extension of the president. "When the parties know that the envoy speaks for the president and directly with the president, they are very careful not to play games," Novik said.

That isn't always the case. Shapiro said both the Israelis and Palestinians tried to come between Middle East envoy George Mitchell and the White House during Obama's first term. "The Israelis looked for other channels besides Senator Mitchell, and even at a certain point the Palestinians weren't certain if he was the authority they should be speaking to." During Obama's second term, Secretary of State John Kerry's dogged peace efforts suffered from the perception on both sides of the Green Line that he cared about reaching a Middle East settlement more than his boss did.

Greenblatt is about as personally close to the president as someone in his position could be. And Trump has been remarkably and even uncharacteristically consistent on Israeli-Palestinian peace, repeatedly saying he wants to be the one to broker "the ultimate deal." Closeness with an engaged



president is a powerful tool for an envoy — as long as there's a policy vision and a sustained commitment from the Oval Office underlying his work.

It's far from obvious that that's currently the case. Trump's policies on the peace process have been broadly in line with previous U.S. administrations, and the new president publicly put his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, on notice about settlement construction during a joint press conference after their meeting on

Feb. 15, telling the prime minister he'd like to see him "hold back on settlements for a little bit." But that hasn't yet translated into the kind of clear-cut U.S.-Israeli understanding on settlement construction that will need to be reached before Trump can really attempt to relaunch the peace process. Trump would also need to reassure an ever skeptical and often recalcitrant Abbas that entering into negotiations with Israel really is in his best interest — an objective Trump could advance by explicitly endorsing the U.S. government's official preference to

date for a two-state outcome to the conflict. The president hasn't done that yet, though this week's meeting presents an ideal opportunity to change course.

Inevitably, the measure of Greenblatt's work is whether it actually brings the sides back to the negotiating table, creating space for the kind of diplomatic breakthrough that can change the dynamics of a now-static process. The Trump administration is up against the same challenges as its predecessors, obstacles like Israeli

settlement construction, Palestinian terrorism and incitement, and a regionwide security vacuum. Traditional diplomacy hasn't had the answers to any of these problems. As to whether a Trump-style alternative will fare any better, a lot depends on the president's notoriously fickle intentions and commitment — regardless of how admirably his envoy performs.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Walter Russell Mead: 'Nationalist' Shouldn't Be a Dirty Word

If Donald Trump were a liberal Democrat, some of the media's descriptions of "chaos" and "disarray" in the White House probably would be replaced with stories about "creative tension" among a "team of rivals." As it is, the struggle between "nationalists" like Steve Bannon and "globalists" like Gary Cohn is characterized in near-apocalyptic terms. Yet as Mr. Trump told *The Wall Street Journal* last week, "I'm a nationalist and a globalist." That is good news: Mr. Trump and the Republican Party should be weaving nationalist and globalist themes together rather than picking them apart.

Nationalism—the sense that Americans are bound together into a single people with a common destiny—is a noble and necessary force without which American democracy would fail. A nationalist and patriotic elite produces leaders like George Washington, who aim to promote the well-being of the country they love. An unpatriotic and antinationalist elite produces people who feather their nests without regard to the common good.

Mr. Trump is president in large part because millions of Americans, rightly or wrongly, believed that large sections of their country's elite were no longer nationalist. Flawed he may be, but the president bears an important message, and Trump-hating elites have only themselves to blame for his ascendancy. A cosmopolitan and technocratic

political class that neither speaks the language nor feels the pull of nationalist solidarity cannot successfully lead a democratic society.

The president symbolized his nationalist commitment by hanging a portrait of Andrew Jackson in a place of honor in the Oval Office. Now Mr. Trump must stay true to that commitment or he will lose his political base and American politics will spin even further off balance. But life is rarely simple. Jacksonian means will not always achieve Jacksonian goals. Sometimes, they even get in the way.

Jackson learned this when his populist fight against the Second Bank of the United States ultimately led to a depression that turned the country over to his hated Whig rivals. As Mr. Trump comes to grips with the tough international economic reality, he is realizing that not everything the Jacksonians think they want will actually help them. The president has already discovered that ripping up the North American Free Trade Agreement won't help the middle-class voters who put him in office.

Jacksonian voters don't want North Korea to have the ability to threaten the U.S. with nuclear weapons. They also don't want a second Korean War. Reaching the best outcome on Korea could mean giving China a better deal on trade than many Trump voters would desire. Populists like to rail against globalization and world order. Yet

the security and prosperity of the American people depend on an intricate web of military, diplomatic, political and economic arrangements that an American president must manage and conserve.

Mr. Trump is learning that some of the core goals of his Jacksonian program can be realized only by judiciously employing the global military, diplomatic and economic statesmanship associated with Alexander Hamilton. Bringing those two visions into alignment isn't easy. Up until the Civil War, the American party system revolved around the rivalry of the Jacksonian Democrats with the Hamiltonian Whigs. Abraham Lincoln fused Jacksonian unionism with Henry Clay's Hamiltonian vision when he created the modern Republican Party. Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan revitalized the party of their times by returning to the Jacksonian-Hamiltonian coalition that made the old party grand.

The future of the Trump administration and the Republican Party largely depend on whether the president and his allies can return to these roots. The elements of fusion are there. While Jacksonians are skeptical of corporate power and international institutions, they like economic growth that benefits the middle class, and they strongly believe in an America that stands up for itself and its allies. They are less worried about budget deficits than they are about a strong

economy. If the tide is lifting the rowboats, they do not care all that much that the yachts are rising too.

For the coalition to work, Hamiltonians need to realize that the health and cohesion of American society is fundamental to the world order that allows corporations and financial firms to operate so profitably in the global market. In other words, Peoria matters much more than Davos. It was American power and will that built the present world order and ultimately must sustain it. A divided society with an eviscerated middle class cannot provide the stable, coherent leadership that is required.

The U.S. must be simultaneously a nationalist power, focused on the prosperity and security of its own people, and a globalist power working to secure the foundations of international order that Americans need. Mr. Trump appears to understand this truth better than many of his most vituperative critics. The task now confronting the president and his team is to develop and execute a national strategy based on these insights. Nothing in today's world is harder than this, and nothing is more essential.

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## The New York Times

### Trump Discards Obama Legacy, One Rule at a Time (UNE)

Michael D. Shear  
The result was a historic reversal of government rules in record time. Mr. Trump has used the review act as a regulatory wrecking ball, signing 13 bills that erased rules on the environment, labor, financial protections, internet privacy, abortion, education and gun rights. In the law's 21-year history, it had been used successfully only once

before, when President George W. Bush reversed a Clinton-era ergonomics rule.

The effort has surpassed its architects' most ambitious hopes. Andrew Bremberg, the president's domestic policy chief, said he had thought Congress might be able to use the act to pass five or six bills reversing Mr. Obama's regulations. During the transition effort, no one

contemplated more than a dozen, Mr. Bremberg said.

"It is a strong and very potent and powerful tool," he said.

But critics say Mr. Trump's aggressive use of the Congressional Review Act amounts to a blunt and thoughtless assault on rules that would have increased people's safety, secured their

personal information, protected federal lands and improved education.

An early Obama rule that Mr. Trump and Congress reversed would have required coal companies to make sure that waste from mountaintop mining was not polluting local waterways. Now, steps to prevent illness from contaminated drinking water will not be taken.

Another rule would have required the Social Security Administration to provide information about mentally incapacitated people to law enforcement agencies that conduct background checks for gun purchases. Now, these individuals — an estimated 75,000 a year — will not need Justice Department waivers to buy guns.

One eliminated regulation would have prohibited internet providers from collecting, sharing or selling consumers' information without their permission. One would have required some businesses to keep records of work-related injuries and illnesses for five years instead of six months. And another would have prevented states from denying funding for women's health services to facilities that also provided abortions.

Republicans viewed those rules and the other eliminated regulations as unnecessary burdens enacted by a president who had resorted to executive action because he could not get his agenda through Congress. While initially skeptical of using administrative power to govern, Mr. Obama increasingly embraced the use of regulation, reshaping government more by writing new rules than by passing new legislation.

"The biggest frustration in the last eight years was not knowing where the next regulation was coming from, the next rule, and that uncertainty stifled investment," said Marc Short, Mr. Trump's legislative affairs director, who participated in planning for the regulatory assault.

Mr. Trump's efforts to unwind Mr. Obama's regulations go beyond the use of the Congressional Review Act. He has issued executive orders, including one instructing the Environmental Protection Agency to begin the process of rolling back far-reaching rules that would shut down many of the country's coal-fired power plants.

But reversing regulation through executive authority requires long periods of study, notice to the public and hearings. The final outcome is often challenged in court, adding to the delay.

Under the Congressional Review Act, the process is cleaner and simpler. It requires only an up-or-down vote, and the outcome cannot be challenged legally.

The use of that tool to attack Obama-era regulations was coordinated by a small group, including Mr. Short; Mr. Bremberg; Eric Ueland, a veteran Republican who works for the Senate Budget Committee; Rick Dearborn, the director of the transition effort and

now a deputy chief of staff at the White House; and House and Senate aides. The group's members settled on a list of rules they thought could be eradicated.

"We knew we had a short window of time in order to do them," said Don Stewart, a spokesman for Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader. "That was an important part of the coordination effort."

Many Obama-era rules may survive Mr. Trump's efforts to unwind them. Republicans have yet to repeal the Affordable Care Act, for which many of the most significant rules were written. Still, Mr. Trump's critics say he has set a dangerous precedent with what they call his indiscriminate use of the Congressional Review Act.

The critics are especially concerned about a key provision in the act that seeks to prevent all future presidents from replacing the eliminated regulations with anything similar. That part of the act has never been tested in court, but experts said it would chill efforts to draft new regulations even after Mr. Trump leaves office.

"The Congressional Review Act used in this way is kind of like a nuke," said Robert Hahn, a professor of economics at Oxford and an expert on American

regulations. "We had a Democratic president who was reflecting his policy preferences toward regulation. Trump has a tool now to undo those political preferences, and he's using it."

Public Citizen, a liberal watchdog group, said in a statement that Mr. Trump and congressional Republicans "have been using the C.R.A. to reward the corporate and ideological special interests that funded their campaigns. It's an escalation of the corrupt insider-dealing that Trump campaigned against."

But what Democrats viewed as important new protections, Republicans saw as unneeded encumbrances on insurance companies, banks and other businesses.

"It's not as if there aren't an enormous number of regulations still on the books," Mr. Short, the president's legislative affairs director, said. "I don't think that we feel like there is some sort of threat by passing this legislation."

He added, "I think it would be unfair to paint it as if you are moving into an anarchical society."



## Editorial : President Trump Is Asked to Show His Cards

Late on Friday, the Office of Government Ethics sent a little-noticed memo to the White House, with the subject, "Data Call for Certain Waivers and Authorizations." It could have been titled: "You Said You'd Clean Up Government. Now Prove It."

On the campaign trail and in office, President Trump proclaimed his determination to keep his administration free of lobbyists, foreign agents and special interests, who have "reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost," as he said in his inaugural address.

A week later, Mr. Trump signed an executive order requiring executive branch employees to obey a list of rules designed to prevent conflicts of interest. But the order is rendered practically worthless by a clause allowing waivers to ethical rules for any White House staff, without any written explanation or public disclosure. That's why the ethics office, which ensures that public

servants enter government free from potential conflicts of interest, is demanding that the White House provide the names of executive branch officials who have received waivers, on what issues, by June 1.

The Obama administration required that waivers to its anti-lobbying rules be accompanied by a detailed explanation written by administration ethics lawyers, and filed with the ethics office. In 2009, Republican Senator Charles Grassley, a veteran Senate investigator, demanded that the ethics office release the waivers. "The American people deserve a full accounting of all waivers and recusals to better understand who is running the government and whether the administration is adhering to its promise to be open, transparent, and accountable," Mr. Grassley wrote.

Now, in the absence of any action from Congress, the government ethics office is on its own with a White House that openly flouts ethical norms. Top-tier government

and regulatory positions have gone to friends of Wall Street, Big Oil, Big Coal, Big Pharma and for-profit education. Ivanka Trump, a White House senior adviser, reaps trademarks and promotional opportunities from China and Germany. Jared Kushner, Ms. Trump's spouse, is a United States envoy to countries where his family has business ties. But why should anyone in the White House bother to separate business and government service when the president himself promotes everything from his Washington hotel to his private Mar-a-Lago beach club.

Presiding over this ethical morass is Stefan Passantino, the White House ethics officer. Mr. Passantino is a lawyer who has represented former House Speakers Dennis Hastert and Newt Gingrich in their ethical tangles. In 2009, when the Obama administration was criticized for granting a waiver so William Lynn, a former Raytheon lobbyist, could become deputy defense secretary,

Mr. Passantino seemed to take the wrong lesson about the disclosure. "Very often in Washington and in politics there are efforts to make grand pronouncements reflecting a grand change in policy," he said. The results, he added, are "the law of good intentions running headlong into the law of unintended consequences."

It seems unlikely that good intentions have anything to do with Mr. Trump's grand ethics pronouncements. It's Mr. Passantino's job to release to the ethics office, and to the public, the names of public servants whom Mr. Trump has allowed to bypass the rules. If he stonewalls, we look again to Republicans like Mr. Grassley, now chairman of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, to remind this administration that the American people deserve an accountable government, and to make sure they get it.



## Ben-Ghiat : Trump at his most dangerous

Ruth Ben-Ghiat is a frequent contributor to CNN Opinion, and professor of history and Italian studies at New York

University. She is currently working on a book entitled "Strongmen: From Mussolini to Trump." The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.

(CNN) Sometimes political change happens suddenly. You wake up, and a military junta has taken over your country, or some other kind of revolution has happened. But other times, the climate shifts little by little. A few big gestures of aggression, and then things settle down. Then the cycle repeats, until one day the tipping point is reached and you find your democracy has been transformed into an autocracy.

We're at serious risk of this happening in America.

Trump's first 100 days have been a lesson for him in what he can and cannot easily do. He's followed the authoritarian playbook in attacking those sectors of society that uphold the value of evidence (the judiciary, the press, researchers). He's purged the bureaucracy; hired family members (who thumb their noses at conflicts of interest); bullied critics on Twitter; and incited a climate of hatred toward targeted groups (Muslims, Latinos, immigrants, and more).

Many of those attacks have been successfully thwarted thus far. Trump has faced significant and sustained pushback to his programs and methods -- including cherished measures like the travel ban and repealing and replacing Obamacare -- from the press and the judiciary, and even by factions of his own party. Civic engagement and political activism have also grown exponentially in response to the

dangers to our freedoms that he represents -- as has funding and support for investigative journalism.

Authoritarians, however, are most dangerous at such moments, when they feel vulnerable. With the #TrumpRussia scandal widening, we can expect the White House to become much more aggressive in imposing its agendas. Non-whites will bear the brunt of this, under the guise of crackdowns on immigration, crime and drugs. Certainly, drugs are a flashpoint of late, because of President Trump's invitation to his counterpart in the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte -- whose regime's extrajudicial killings in his "war on drugs" and other human rights abuses have made him notorious -- to visit the White House.

Political change announced itself formally with the blitz of executive orders that followed President Donald Trump's January 2017 inauguration. Kellyanne Conway's tweet from that period remains all too relevant. "Get used to it. @POTUS is a man of action and impact. Promises made, promises kept. Shock to the system. And he's just getting started."

We should get ready for another round of such "shocks": Trump's been sending signals that he's preparing to accelerate his consolidation of personal power. In an interview Friday with Fox News, Trump criticized the "archaic" rules of the House and Senate, saying "maybe at some point we are going to have to take these rules on, because for the good of the nation things are going to have to be different."

His attitude toward filibusters received the most press, but in discussing the "bad concepts" under the current "archaic" system, he also mentioned voting. Perhaps Trump meant voting procedures in the Senate -- here, as so often, he's evasive. In any case, his questioning of a main index of democracy -- allowing our elected representatives to cast votes on our behalf -- should be front-page news.

Like many demagogues before him, Trump bills himself as a modernizer who can "repair" a broken system. Apparently, checks and balances are in the same category for him as old bridges and leaky borders: things that need fixing to work efficiently. Ian Bassin, a former White House counsel for President Obama and director of United to Protect Democracy, a watchdog organization led by former White House and administration lawyers and constitutional litigators, noted to me that if Trump isn't content with upending democratic norms and starts to change their underlying laws, "there's no end to how much power he could try to amass."

But, many might ask, wouldn't government run better in a more streamlined manner, allowing Trump to manage by decree, as he does in his business life? A supporter interviewed by the Washington Post at his Harrisburg, Pennsylvania rally, thinks so. "I wish we had no parties -- they just lock into left or right, and nothing gets done. [Trump] wants to fix stuff." It's a common theme heard among Trump's followers: just let him come in and run things "like a business."

But there's a name for a system with no parties and a strongman leader at the helm: dictatorship.

As for Trump's other main targets, his staunch ally, National Rifle Association head Wayne LaPierre, summed them up well at the NRA's Leadership Forum (where President Trump also spoke): "Academic elites, political elites, and media elites are America's greatest domestic threats." This weekend, while the media celebrated its resilience at the White House Correspondents' Dinner, the White House, according to chief of staff Reince Priebus, has "looked at" how to change constitutional law to restrict press freedoms. Talking about changing liberal laws is another ominous sign of Trump's aspiration to strongman status.

Authoritarians are often ungenerous people, but they do give us one gift: they tell us what they are going to do before they do it, both as an intimidation and as a challenge. Trump always follows this rule. At his weekend rally, he recited the lyrics of a song by Al Wilson about a woman who rescues an ailing snake, only to find that as soon as the snake feels better he bites her. When she protests, he grins and says, "Oh shut up. You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in."

Like the woman who helped the snake, we have been warned. Democracy dies not only in darkness, but also with advance notice, in clear view. Trump's letting us know that he intends to act. It's up to all of us to make sure he is not successful.



## Editorial : Campus mobs muzzle free speech

Respect for free speech is withering on campus.

At Claremont McKenna College in California, protesters blocked the doors to a lecture hall preventing conservative author Heather Mac Donald from speaking. At Middlebury College in Vermont, a professor accompanying libertarian author Charles Murray was injured by an angry mob. At the University of California-Berkeley and its surrounding community, protests against scheduled speakers have turned ugly.

In just the place where the clash of ideas is most valuable, students are shutting themselves off to points of view they don't agree with. At the moment when young minds are supposed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments, they

are answering challenges to their beliefs with anger and violence instead of facts and reason.

As much as university administrators lament student-led intolerance and narrow ideas about free speech, they played a roll in their creation. For decades, colleges and universities, public and private, have been fighting in court to maintain ridiculous restrictions on expression. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education catalogs them exhaustively. Last month, Fairmont State University in West Virginia finally accepted that students have a right to gather signatures on a petition without a school permit. In March at Regis University in Colorado, the school shut down a student sale that charged different prices for baked goods based on the buyers' race, gender, religion or sexuality to protest affirmative action. That's the

same month the University of South Alabama tried to force a student to take down a Trump/Pence sign from his dorm room.

And just like university bureaucrats who try to shut down speech they don't like, student governments get in the act, too. Last month, Wichita State student government backed down from its decision to deny recognition to a student group, not because the group engaged in "hate speech," but because the student group argued that hate speech is protected by the First Amendment.

More often than not, cases where universities or student governments restrict student speech like those in Kansas, Alabama, Colorado and West Virginia are overshadowed by the celebrity speech fights that get national headlines. Ann Coulter, the author

and pundit, has been relishing the attention she has gotten from her on-again, off-again appearance at Berkeley. Not only did the pointless battle help her sell books and get booked onto television shows, it also made her seem more like a First Amendment heroine and less like a partisan bloviator.

Campus administrators and student groups, who defend the growing intolerance for unpopular ideas on campus, see themselves as protecting what New York University Vice Provost Ulrich Baer calls "the rights, both legal and cultural, of minorities to participate in public discourse" in a unique moment when Donald Trump, nationalism and the "alt-right" are on the rise. But those who'd restrict freedom of speech and association always have an important excuse for their actions. The grave threat of global communism abroad was no excuse

for McCarthyism in Hollywood. Campus protesters are right that First Amendment rights are the  
European carnage in World War I President Trump's America-first answer to the threat, not its cause.  
was no excuse to shutter the German-language press at home. nationalism is a grave threat to  
many Americans. But unfettered