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FRANCE - EUROPE



What next for Marine Le Pen and the National Front ?

Anne-Elisabeth Moutet

(CNN)Marine Le Pen was never going to win the 2017 French Presidential election, no matter what. But she could have lost less badly.

This time, the pundits said, the National Front was finally going to break the "glass ceiling" and score above 40% of the popular vote. Yet "Marine," as she wanted everyone to call her, didn't even quite reach 34%.

In her concession speech, she announced to the hundreds of partisans gathered at the Chalet du Lac at Vincennes that, after "the great gains" achieved since the last time there was a National Front candidate in the second round (her father, who scored 18% of the vote in 2002 against Jacques Chirac), she was going to rebuild the party entirely. This would even include changing its name.

But it is possible that her swift attempt to re-brand the party by

changing its name is an effort to seize the initiative before her detractors start bringing up her campaign mistakes try to get rid of her.

Throughout her early campaign she was, if anything, too subdued. Then, after reaching the second round, she adopted a Trump-like manner: blustery and aggressive, which was never more in evidence than at last Wednesday's debate.

The French of all social classes want a respectable president -- someone who will make the country look good.

Yet having cultivated a more mainstream image, after a three-hour contest in which she flubbed her lines and quoted fake news, "Marine" was back to being a "Le Pen": a toxic brand she'd been at pains to normalize that six years ago, she even excluded her father from the party he founded.

But who could take over from Marine? The party only has two MP's: Gilbert Collard and Le Pen's

own niece, Marion Maréchal Le Pen, 27, who seems the most obvious choice.

Marion is everything her aunt isn't: controlled, cool, competent and a workhorse. She also is a traditional Catholic, closer to those parts of the French hard right than her aunt, who appeals to working-class, former Communist voters.

Marion has protested that she is loyal to her aunt — together, they manage to appeal to a wide spectrum, from Marine's rust-belt northern constituency to Marion's southeastern one in Vaucluse, where resentment of immigration is the strongest.

Marion has even suggested that she could leave politics altogether. The reaction among the faithful after the debate fiasco was that Marion would have been a much more capable debater. Maybe they will decide that now is the time for her to step up -- although it is unlikely that she will do so before the party faces its next major test: the French parliamentary elections in six weeks.

For years, the Front has complained about the "unfair" first-past-the-post system, and it's true that two measly MPs hardly represent the party's real presence on the ground.

But another poor showing in the parliamentary elections will leave many wondering: is the National Front a real political party yet, or only a fleshed-out Le Pen cult?

The party has grown and enjoyed success in regional and European elections in 2014 and beyond. But an AFP report from 2016 suggested that in just two years, 28% of the lawmakers elected in 2014 had resigned, citing chaos in the party as the reason.

This kind of chaos is fine for a fringe party of troublemakers. But now that the Front has blown a serious chance to become the undisputed French opposition, the stakes are now much higher for the party — and for Marine Le Pen.



Another Le Pen bites the dust ?

Emily Tamkin

Marion Maréchal-Le Pen was thought by many to be the future of the far-right National Front after her aunt Marine's defeat in the presidential election.

Until Tuesday, that is, when she announced she was quitting politics.

Marion was quoted by *Le Parisien* as saying she made a "personal choice" to "change her life" and live privately. She added that she had told her aunt, who understood, respecting the choice because she — that is, Marine — knows how difficult political life can be.

It's possible Marine Le Pen was as relieved as she was understanding. After she lost the French

presidential election on Sunday, many thought that her niece, who became the youngest person to serve in French parliament back in 2012, would replace her as head of the National Front. Marion will not be participating in legislative elections this June.

A National Front headed by Marion would have pleased Marine's father and Marion's grandfather, Jean-Marie Le Pen, whom Marine Le Pen dethroned as party head in 2011, and who reportedly said ahead of the presidential election that he wished Marion had been the candidate. Some thought that meant the National Front mantle was soon to be thrust upon young Marion — after all, Jean-Marie Le Pen called his daughter a "disgraceful failure" after her loss (though what that

makes him must be even worse, given that when he ran in 2002, he earned only half the support she did.)

And many considered Marion, not Marine, to be the true future of the far-right, even though Marine was far from a softy. She wanted to cancel school lunch for children of undocumented immigrants; cut medical help to undocumented immigrants; render halal and kosher meat illegal; decrease legal immigration to 10,000 people a year; hold a referendum to take France out of the European Union; recognize Crimea as Russia; and denied the French state's role in the Holocaust. But the niece was considered more extreme. Jean-Marie Le Pen reportedly called

her decision to leave politics "a desertion."

In the short term, while Marion returns to private life, Marine Le Pen will likely set about doing what she told her supporters she would on election night: Putting in place a "transformation," or, at the very least, a rebranding of the Le Pen far-right party.

That's if Marion stays a private citizen. In 2015, Maréchal-Le Pen told the *Guardian*, "I'm here for the long term." Going away for a little while and allowing her aunt to fail at transforming the far right might be just the way to ensure that she doesn't ultimately go anywhere at all.

POLITICO You're fired ! Winners and loser from Le pen's defeat

Nicholas Vinocur

PARIS — Now that Marine Le Pen is no longer running to be president of France, her far-right party is heading into a period of

reckoning over what went wrong and who should pay for her defeat.

It won't be pretty.

The National Front party has a long history of internal feuds made

nastier by the fact that often they feature family members airing grievances in public.

There was the great schism of 1998 when a top lieutenant of then-

party chief Jean-Marie Le Pen split from the party and started his own group.

There was Marine Le Pen's decision in 2015 to kick her father out of the party he had led for decades.

And there was the public sniping between Le Pen and her popular niece Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who has a closer ideological affinity with her grandfather than with her aunt.

But as nasty as those fights were, this one could be more brutal.

It won't be another Le Pen family feud, though family will certainly play a role. It will be a larger showdown over who is to blame for the Front's defeat, and what needs to be done if the party is ever to win power.

Battle lines have already been drawn in a dispute that is not likely to break out into the open until after parliamentary elections in June.

Here is a look at who stands to gain and who stands to lose.

The losers

Marine Le Pen — party leader

There is no shortage of affection for Marine Le Pen in the National Front, where rank-and-file activists tend to see her as a protective aunt figure rather than a chief executive who should be held accountable for her actions. Even so, in the face of Le Pen's disappointing performance in a debate against President-elect Emmanuel Macron, even die-hard Marine fans are voicing doubts about her ability to lead them into the Elysée presidential palace.

"There are two explanations for how Marine performed during the debate," said one mid-level Front operative from the Auvergne region in central France. "One is that there was a medical issue. The other is that she was badly prepared to defend her program, particularly on the euro. I vote for option two ... We were unable to escape this angst-inducing narrative on the euro, and it contributed to a score that can in no way be described as a triumph."

For another Front official, this one based in southern France and close to Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the debate was the low point of a campaign already in trouble. "We started with the 'La France apaisée' ('France at peace') and ended up in Trump-mode with a more radical tone and this awful debate performance," said the official, who sits on a municipal council. "Le Pen should not bear all the blame, but you have to wonder about her ability to control her campaign and maintain a coherent, widely unifying message."

Despite the criticism, Le Pen is unlikely to withdraw from leadership of her populist movement anytime soon. She has already vowed to lead the party through parliamentary

elections in June, and will be present for a party congress early next year.

There is little risk, however, that she will face a full-scale rebellion. The National Front's brand, history and following are all wrapped up in her family name, and the party has never granted outsiders a strong leadership role.

But the family-focused, debate-averse culture is part of what led to Le Pen's defeat, said the Auvergne official. "We are not a party that knows how to manage officials with strong personalities. We don't know how to deal with them."

Likelihood of survival: 9/10

Florian Philippot — National Front vice president

Le Pen's top lieutenant's future is less secure. No one is more vulnerable than Philippot, the National Front's influential vice president who engineered its shift toward virulent Euroskepticism and embrace of the welfare state.

For years Philippot, a graduate of the elite ENA school of public administration, faced down internal critics who complained about his icy style and unwillingness to brook debate with "inferiors."

The Front won millions of new voters in the rustbelt regions of northern and eastern France that had previously been left-wing strongholds, fueling a spectacular rise heading into the 2017 presidential election. But after Le Pen's defeat, with a score much lower than polls had predicted, Philippot is coming under fire from critics at all levels of the party who, for now, are mostly speaking off the record.

Their biggest gripe: that Philippot and his allies stuck doggedly to a tough line advocating withdrawal from the European Union that polls showed was unpopular with most voters.

"If anyone is going to leave as a result of the 2017 presidential election, it would be Philippot," said the official from southern France. "He is very contested, especially in these regions."

Philippot himself hit back at such critics in a radio interview on Tuesday. His attackers had "nothing better to do with their lives," he said. But despite his sharp tongue, Philippot's reign of influence looks to be drawing to a close.

Likelihood of surviving: 4/10

Jean Messiha — Senior aide in charge of coordinating the presidential program

Another ENA graduate, Messiha became known over the past year as Le Pen's conduit to establishment networks in France. He was in charge of the "Horatii" — an informal working group composed of senior civil servants allegedly sympathetic to the National Front, but who chose to remain anonymous. Messiha was also in charge of coordinating Le Pen's 144-point campaign platform, which she unveiled in March and which included plans to rewrite the French Constitution.

Praised by several Front officials for his "intellectual rigor" and "structured approach," Messiha nevertheless appears vulnerable because of his defense of a hard line on withdrawal from the eurozone. Advocating a confrontation with Berlin and a referendum on French membership in the EU, he kept pressing the line on social media even after Le Pen's defeat Sunday. "Some 50 percent of the voters in this election were Euroskeptic. Stop telling me that the euro made us lose votes!" he tweeted.

Critics on Twitter were quick to pounce. "The euro exit is a source of anxiety," replied National Front backer Matthieu MDR. "The fact that so few of [conservative candidate François] Fillon's votes carried over to Le Pen is probably a result of it."

In a party that lacks many senior civil servants of his stature — Messiha also holds a doctorate in economics — he may well survive the upcoming storm.

Likelihood of surviving: 7/10

Philippe Olivier — head of "Ideas and Images"

Little known to the public and averse to interviews, Philippe Olivier took on a key role in the campaign as head of the "Ideas and Images" group.

There, along with other communicators like Sébastien Chênu, Le Pen's cultural adviser, and Philippe Vardon, a social media specialist and transplant from the extreme-right in southern France, he presided over campaigns to tar Le Pen's rivals for the presidency and fine-tune her messaging heading into the final dash.

Before the debate, Olivier told *Le Monde* that he thought Le Pen should be "more aggressive" between the two rounds of the presidential election and seek to "destabilize" Macron. The statement fueled speculation that Olivier may have been with her when she was preparing for her disastrous debate performance.

For Olivier, Le Pen's brother-in-law, the 2017 presidential campaign was

a way back into a party that he had left more than a decade ago, when he split with Jean-Marie Le Pen during a leadership battle.

If his contribution to Marine's debate performance is confirmed, he could soon find himself locked out of the National Front house once again.

Likelihood of surviving: 2/10

The winners

Marion Maréchal-Le Pen — MP, regional official

Marine Le Pen's defeat should be her niece's victory. The younger Le Pen represents a southern current within the National Front that advocates social conservatism and alliances with other right-wing groups, while opposing the "Philippot" line.

At a party congress next year, Maréchal-Le Pen could seek the backing of party activists to pressure her aunt into giving her a position on the party's executive committee. In doing so, she would have the support of many other Front members, such as MP Gilbert Collard and senior aide Nicolas Bay, who have also criticized the anti-European policy.

But Maréchal-Le Pen may not remain in the party long enough to seize the opportunity. Her staff told *Libération* and *Le Figaro* this week that she is unlikely to seek re-election in her southern Vaucluse district and would probably resign from the presidency of the Provence-Alpes-Cotes-d'Azur region. A withdrawal from politics fits with what the younger Le Pen told *POLITICO* in April.

Her withdrawal spells trouble for her aunt. She gets a potential rival out of the way but also loses a hugely popular figure who could have helped win seats in southern France in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The younger Le Pen may be bidding her time until France's next presidential election in 2022.

Likelihood of surviving: 3/10

Robert Ménard — far-right mayor of Béziers, Front critic

While Ménard, a former press-freedom activist turned far-right politician, may not be a member of the National Front, he had a stake in the election.

Ménard has been arguing for years that the National Front needs to drop its EU opposition and start forming alliances with other right-wing groups. In the wake of Le Pen's defeat, he was brutal about her campaign. "They have to stop talking nonsense about the euro," he told *Sud Radio*. "We should not leave the euro. It's been two years

that I've been telling this to the National Front's leaders. It's not just a source of anxiety — it's a huge mistake."

Now Mégnard stands to gain from Le Pen's pledge to "transform" her party into a broader, "patriotic" movement. As she tries to strike deals with members of the conservative *Républicains* party or smaller groups, she will be unable to avoid Mégnard's presence.

The New York Times

Benoît Morenne

PARIS — In a sign of the political shake-up in France, former Prime Minister Manuel Valls on Tuesday declared his party, the Socialists, dead and announced that he was running in parliamentary elections with the centrist movement of President-elect Emmanuel Macron.

But in another sign of a vastly transformed electoral landscape days after Mr. Macron's victory over the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, Mr. Macron's *En Marche!* movement said it might not have room for Mr. Valls.

"I must have missed his application," Benjamin Griveaux, an *En Marche!* spokesman, said ironically on Europe1 radio on Tuesday morning. "The procedure is the same for everyone, former prime minister included," he said, before adding that Mr. Valls still had 24 hours to apply before applications closed.

The confusion put *En Marche!* leaders in a quandary over whether to show deference to an internationally known and once-powerful political figure, while asserting themselves as a new generation determined to scrap the sort of customs and deals that perpetuated the country's elite and alienated many voters.

Likelihood of surviving: 10/10

David Rachline — campaign director

At age 29, Rachline has risen further and faster than almost anyone else in the National Front. Elected mayor of the Riviera town of Frejus in 2014, he was named as Le Pen's campaign director last year. But Le Pen's campaign quickly came under criticism for its lack of focus, for

vacillating between messages and, finally, for going full Trump in the final weeks — all areas for which Rachline should bear responsibility.

But Rachline was not a classical campaign director in the sense that he mostly oversaw logistics and had little say on Le Pen's program, several officials said.

That may prove to be a saving grace. While Rachline would seem a

likely target in any purge of "tainted" officials, his youth and star status in a party that lacks officials elected to national office is almost guaranteed to keep him around in the coming years.

Likelihood of surviving: 9/10

EN LIGNE - Manuel Valls, Ex-Premier of France, Seeks to Run With Macron Movement

Socialists to support Mr. Macron in the election, said on RTL radio Tuesday morning that he would be a "candidate for the presidential majority," and that he wished to run under the centrist party's banner in the June elections.

He said that while he would remain a member of the Socialists, that party was dead and "behind us," and the priority now was providing Mr. Macron with "a large and coherent majority" in Parliament.

"I think he has his chances," Christophe Castaner, another spokesman for *En Marche!* and a former Socialist lawmaker, said on Franceinfo radio, before adding that Mr. Valls would not be offered special treatment. "The republic of privileges is behind us," Mr. Castaner said.

Jean-Paul Delevoye, the head of the party's nominating committee, told BFMTV that a candidate had already been selected to run in Mr. Valls's district, in the Essonne department. "We will now have to see if that candidate remains or not," Mr. Delevoye said.

More than 15,000 people have applied to *En Marche!* to run in the 577 voting districts. Applicants had to send a cover letter and a résumé through an online platform.

The episode highlighted the challenge facing Mr. Macron — namely, cobbling a majority in Parliament.

The president-elect has expressed confidence that he will gain the 289 seats needed to choose a prime minister and implement his policies without having to negotiate with the other parties, polls show he may fall short.

Richard Ferrand, the secretary general of Mr. Macron's movement, said at a news conference on Monday that the names of the party's candidates would be announced on Thursday.

Mr. Valls's statement did not go over well with some of his colleagues, and some questioned whether he could remain in the Socialist Party if he wound up sitting with Mr. Macron's organization in Parliament. "I'm a reformist and a progressive, but also a Socialist attached to his party and its values," Luc Carvounas, a lawmaker, said on Twitter. "No, Manuel Valls, I won't follow you this time."

For the first time since 1958, none of the mainstream parties qualified for the second round of the presidential election.

The Socialists have been reeling after their candidate, Benoît Hamon, received only 6.4 percent of the vote

in the election's first round. Mr. Hamon became the party's candidate earlier this year by defeating Mr. Valls in a stunning upset.

On Tuesday, the Socialists held internal talks to develop a new platform.

And many within Ms. Le Pen's National Front were questioning its nationalist, anti-European Union platform after her defeat. Critics included her niece Marion Maréchal-Le Pen.

Ms. Maréchal-Le Pen, who represents the southern department of Var in Parliament, made a surprise announcement on Friday evening when she said she would not stand for re-election in June.

Vaucluse *Matin-Le Dauphiné Libéré*, a regional newspaper, published excerpts from a letter in which Ms. Maréchal-Le Pen said "personal and political reasons" had motivated her decision, including the will to devote more time to her daughter.

"We have to prove to the French people that there are elected officials free and selfless, who refuse to cling to a status and their financial compensations whatever the cost," Ms. Maréchal-Le Pen wrote. "I'm not giving up on the political fight for good."



Meet Emmanuel Macron's Man on Terrorism, Professor Gilles Kepel

PARIS—In the closing days of the presidential campaign here, in this country that has suffered too much terrorism in too-recent memory, far-right candidate Marine Le Pen thought she could make fear a winning issue. In her only one-on-one debate with the young centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron, she talked tough about immigrants, borders, arrests, deportations—as if France could seal itself off from the world and forever purge the land of

foreign influences, dangerous aliens.

It was the kind of language that had gotten her a shout-out from U.S. President Donald Trump only a few days earlier, when he declared after a terror-related shooting on the Champs Élysées that the incident probably would help Le Pen, because she was the "strongest on borders, and she's the strongest on what's been going on in France."

So Le Pen was confident, smiling like the shark in "Finding Nemo." Anger and fear are her stock-in-trade, and Macron was widely perceived as weak on security. But he brought her up short. Leveling his startling blue eyes at Le Pen, the 39-year-old former economy minister told her she was playing the terrorists' game.

The jihadists were laying a trap for France, he said. "What the terrorists are looking for is for us to be divided against ourselves; what the

terrorists are looking for is the language of hate." Citing "Monsieur Kepel, a renowned university professor," Macron said, "The greatest wish of the terrorists is that Madame Le Pen takes power in France. The greatest wish? Why? Because they're looking for the radicalization, the division, the civil war that you bring to this country."

"Fighting the terrorists," said Macron, "means not falling into their trap—the trap of civil war—which they are looking for, which you bring

by dividing the French, by insulting French women and French men because of their religion, and sowing discord in this country.”

Four days later, Macron was elected president of France.

But... who was this Monsieur Kepel, whose analysis of terrorism Macron embraced with such vehemence and such conviction?

The night of the debate, as it happened, Prof. Gilles Kepel was in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where he was conducting fresh research, and he was not a little chuffed to see his work referenced this way at a critical moment in his nation's history. “Le Pen thought she had a very strong argument against Macron. She thought he was a softie,” Kepel told me afterward. “And not only did he destroy her point of view, but by using my name, she had to duck!”

We'll get back to that particular aspect of the story a bit later.

Kepel, who speaks fluent Arabic (and English and Italian and several other languages) as well as French, has been at the vanguard of jihadist studies since the 1980s. Indeed, his prominence has been such that he's on the hit list of the so-called Islamic State, and is now accompanied constantly by government-assigned bodyguards.

His first book, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh*, was a study of those who murdered Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981, and it became vital background reading decades later when many of the figures he profiled went on to play critical roles building al Qaeda. Kepel was also the first scholar, more than a quarter century ago, who wrote with granular detail about *Les Banlieues de l'Islam*: the growth of Muslim populations and of Islamism—a word he is said to have coined—in the housing projects on the far outskirts of French cities. Other works included a study of fundamentalism in the three Abrahamic religions, which managed to offend all of them, since believers always want to think extremism is limited to the others.

Kepel's book, *Jihad*, published in 2000, chronicled the rise and what looked like the fall of Osama bin Laden and parallel movements in the 1990s as, fresh from the victory they claimed against the Russians in Afghanistan, they tried and failed to mount revolutions in Algeria, Egypt, and elsewhere.

The attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, seemed a stunning refutation of Kepel's thesis that jihad was a spent force. But he argued, to use American vernacular, that 9/11 was essentially a hail Mary

pass—an act of desperation that, sadly for the United States and the world, proved all too effective. Not only did it revive Bin Laden's jihad, it sucked the United States into the endless wars that continue—and continue to inspire and spawn terrorists—to this day.

So, getting back to French President-Elect Macron's point, is it the goal of the so-called Islamic State, al Qaeda, and their franchises around the world to provoke civil war in the heart of Europe, and, perhaps, in the United States? Do they have reason to believe they actually could do such a thing? And do the rest of us have reason to fear that they can?

American readers now have a chance to decide for themselves, because Kepel's book, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West*, is now available in the United States. It's an updated translation of the best-seller Kepel published here in early 2016, which looked at the roots and ideology of the killers who made 2015 such a gruesome year for this country, from the *Charlie Hebdo* attack to the carnage at the Bataclan concert hall. This new addition also fits events from 2016—the Brussels bombings, the horror along the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, and several individual murders—into the overall picture.

As I wrote when the original French edition came out (much of which I will repeat here), no other book portrays in such granular detail the evolution of Islamist terror in this country, and the implications that that evolution has for the rest of the world, including and especially the United States.

The threat we're looking at now is what Kepel calls 3rd Generation or 3G jihad in the West, which blends extremist ideology with the emotions of the street, not only among some of those people of Muslim and Arab descent just coming of age in a society that has been loath to embrace them, but among disaffected converts to Islam who might have been drawn to other radical ideologies in the past.

Kepel has warned repeatedly in recent years that the organizers and proselytizers of Daesh, as the French call ISIS, will find ways to adapt their preaching and plans to the peculiarities of American society, too. Kepel notes that the murder spree in San Bernardino in December 2015 “was a blend of Columbine, the availability of and obsession with weapons, with the Daesh ideology.” The terrible massacre at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, last June was another example of 3G terror on American shores. And there is not much doubt, Kepel told me, “there

may be more Orlandos.” The long-term aim? “To try to blow up America.”

The original, working title of *Terror in France* was “Ten Years that Shook the World,” because the French jihad Kepel details had become the spearhead of a much bigger effort by both al Qaeda and Daesh to take their wars to the European and American heartlands.

The decade in question began in 2005 with two key events. The one most widely remembered was the stunning eruption of violence in the *banlieues* of cities all over France. “Paris is burning,” declared hyperventilating anchors on American cable news networks. It wasn't, but mobs in the forgotten housing projects on the distant outskirts of Paris and other cities set about torching cars and battling with police in a spontaneous reaction to the deaths of two young men electrocuted when hiding from the cops near a big transformer.

In the end, although the riots spread far and wide and lasted for weeks, the death toll, three people, was very low. (By comparison, in Los Angeles in 1992, 55 people were killed.) But in France the alienation and anger among the children of immigrants remained palpable.

That same year, 2005, the most important ideologue of new-generation jihad, Abu Musab al-Suri, published online his 1,604-page tome, *The Call for an International Islamic Resistance*.

Suri was originally from Syria, but knew Europe well. He had lived for a while in Britain, in the community of Arab and Muslim exiles there sometimes called Londonistan. His central argument was that Muslims in the West, though increasingly numerous, felt themselves isolated and under pressure, and this could be exploited to create a breakdown of society, develop insurgency, and launch a civil war where the forces of Islam eventually would be victorious.

Acts of terror, dubbed “resistance,” would heighten the already existing “Islamophobia,” and “exacerbate the contradictions,” as communist revolutionaries used to say, until hatred and suspicion ran high and integration became impossible.

At the same time, in the decade between the riots of October-November 2005 and the slaughter in Paris on November 13, 2015, the influence of Salafi Islam, one of the most conservative strains, grew dramatically in parts of France with large Muslim populations. Its proselytizers drew a bright red line—which for some became a blood

red line—between the Western values of mainstream French culture and those of people who believe they are emulating the medieval ways of the Prophet Muhammad.

France had faced the terror of jihad before. In the 1990s, jihadist groups made their first push to take power in North Africa from French- and American-backed governments. These “first generation” terrorists eventually attacked targets in France, including a commuter train at Saint-Michel, near Notre Dame de Paris, in 1995. But the police hunted down the leaders of the French cell, and in Algeria and Egypt by 1997 the groups' savage tactics alienated the people they had expected to support them.

The second generation of jihad, which grew out of the first, was al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden also hoped to overthrow the governments of Muslim countries around the world, but thought that would be possible only if he could intimidate their Western supporters with spectacular attacks like those on 9/11. In the end, while Bin Laden created chaos, his organization was never able to capitalize on it.

Although al Qaeda plotted to carry out attacks in France, including plans to hit the U.S. embassy here in 2001, the French intelligence services, working closely with the Americans, managed to stop it time and again. But perhaps the French cops and spooks grew complacent, or, more likely, overwhelmed. The numbers of people with files marked “S” for security risks kept growing—there are now about 15,000—and the cops couldn't track everybody.

In March 2012, at the height of the previous French presidential election campaign, a 23-year-old petty criminal named Mohamed Merah went on a rampage in the southern cities of Toulouse and Montauban, first killing off-duty French soldiers he believed were from Muslim backgrounds, then shooting up a Jewish school, where three children were among his victims, before, finally, after a long siege at his apartment, he was killed.

Described as a “lone wolf” terrorist at the time, Merah was anything but. Kepel traces meticulously the links among groups of extremists, many of them criminals radicalized in prison, which lead from Merah to the battlefields of the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and back to Paris with the attacks in 2015.

The model of a 3G jihadist, Kepel told me last year, is not Chérif Kouachi or his brother Saïd, who

murdered 11 people inside the *Charlie Hebdo* offices and a policeman (a Muslim) outside. They claimed they were exacting revenge for the publication of cartoons satirizing Muhammad and Muslims, and they were acting on a long-delayed mission from the al Qaeda affiliate in Yemen.

The model, says Kepel, is Ahmed Coulibaly, another terrorist who texted to a contact in Syria that the Kouachis were “*zigotos*,” weirdos. Coulibaly claimed to have funded the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* when the Kouachis apparently couldn’t get their act or their guns together, and he carried out his own attack on a kosher supermarket two days later, murdering four Jews before dying in a storm of police gunfire.

Coulibaly, whose family originally was from Mali, was born in France in 1982, and from the time he was a teenager spent much of his life in jail for various relatively minor crimes. But then he turned himself into the model ex-prisoner, winning in 2009 an invitation to the Élysée Palace to meet President Nicolas Sarkozy. Skilled at dissimulation, he married a woman who’d lost her job because she insisted on wearing a veil, but then the two of them posed for a selfie in which she wore a bikini. It was the kind of photograph that the authorities could look at and think, “This guy is no jihadist.”

In fact, Coulibaly was a deeply committed one, and well versed in the ways of social media.

In the days after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, Coulibaly left behind two testaments, one intentional, one not, and both very revealing.

In his video farewell to the world, after he had murdered a black policewoman and as he was preparing for his attack on the kosher supermarket, he pledged allegiance to the so-called caliph of the so-called Islamic State.

Coulibaly then laid out the arguments that were at the core of Abu Musab al-Suri’s call for “Islamic resistance”: The terror attacks are all about self-defense in a world where Muslims are constantly under attack, he says. And he calls on other young Muslims in France and elsewhere to follow his example to defend Allah, and their sisters, and “whole populations” under assault by the infidels.

The second, unintentional testament came when a French radio network called the kosher market during the siege and Coulibaly picked up the phone. He then put it down, but failed to hang up, and his chilling dialogue with the hostages he was getting ready to kill was recorded. The law he followed, he said, was an eye for an eye, and they should understand that, he told them.

Always, in 3G jihad, the killers claim that all they want is justice—as they see it, God’s justice.

A day after the Orlando massacre last June, in the small town of Magnanville outside of Paris, a lone jihadist trailed a senior police officer to his home and stabbed him to death in his driveway. Then he went after the man’s wife, who was also with the police, and murdered her. But that was not the end of the atrocity: the killer went on Facebook live and told his story, with the couple’s three-year-old son watching helpless and terrified, before finally more police arrived, rescuing the child and terminating the killer.

The Facebook live diatribe was of particular interest to Kepel, since the jihadist had read out a list of “journalists” who must be killed to appease God’s will, and Kepel was at the top. Soon afterward, the scholar was given a police protection detail that remains with him to this day.

Why you? I asked Kepel recently over oysters at a French bistro, with one of his bodyguards sitting nearby in direct line of sight.

As best he can figure, it’s because before the threat he had been asked by a de-radicalization group to debate jihadists held in the French prison of Villepinte, and he, who knows the Quran better than most would-be holy warriors, took some pleasure in humiliating them. Subsequently they were monitored making phone calls to ISIS intermediaries demanding that Kepel be killed as an enemy of Allah.

Authorities assigned to protect Kepel were especially concerned about an ISIS operative named Rachid Kassim, a French citizen working out of the caliphate’s territory in Syria, who they discovered had used the encrypted text messaging system Telegram to

stage manage the Magnanville murders and the killing, later in the summer, of an octogenarian parish priest in Normandy.

“Rachid Kassim condemned me to death three times,” Kepel told me. Kassim, too, is a kind of poster boy for 3G jihad: a former rapper from the town of Roanne, but originally from the Algerian port of Oran, who eventually went to Syria to join ISIS and its jihad. His specialty: long-distance grooming and recruiting of young people in France, including girls, some of whom he persuaded to take part in a failed bomb plot near Notre Dame.

According to Kepel, many Salafists in ISIS thought Kassim was crazy, and claimed that he had exposed the modesty of the “sisters” by getting them involved in the failed attack.

Demoted and sent to more exposed positions as outside forces closed in on ISIS, Kassim recorded a sort of last testament saying the caliphate was not as it should be, that its leaders were not in the field, but staying safer in the rear.

Earlier this year, an American drone strike ended the specific threat of Rachid Kassim.

But Kepel is still accompanied by armed guards, and he clearly is a man with a lot of enemies. Among them, although presumably less violent, is Marine Le Pen, who is under investigation and who recently was stripped of her immunity from prosecution by fellow members of the European Parliament because of the way she reacted to a radio-television interview Kepel gave to Jean-Jacques Bourdin, one of the country’s most prominent political correspondents, just a month after the Bataclan atrocity.

A central point in Kepel’s analysis of the evolution of terror in France is that by the time of the last presidential elections in 2012, hundreds of thousands of young people of Muslim descent who were born and raised in this country were coming of age, and looking not to overthrow the political system, but to participate in it. They fielded candidates, and they played a major part electing Socialist candidate François Hollande as president five years ago, only to be—or at least to feel—ignored once he took office.

In many of the neighbourhoods where these young and aspiring French Muslims live, their unemployment rate has been stuck in the 40 percent range. And in the the Bourdin interview, as in his book, Kepel noted that disappointment and desperation led them toward the extremes of Salafism and jihad much as the desperation of working class whites in France had led them toward the extremism of Marine Le Pen.

Bourdin kept coming back to that point, and Le Pen simply flipped out. Her posts on Twitter might have appalled even Donald Trump as she pulled images off the Web of grotesque ISIS murders, including the beheaded body of American journalist James Foley, and posted the raw gore with the caption “Daesh c’est ÇA!”—THAT is ISIS.

She now faces charges of “disseminating violent images,” and, theoretically, a prison term of up to three years.

And while that may not be why Macron decided to cite Kepel by name in the debate, the reference made it hard for Le Pen to respond. That was why Le Pen “had to duck,” as Kepel put it.

But now comes the hard part.

The ongoing military offensive against ISIS in Syria and Iraq has sealed off what once were very porous borders and restricted the ability of its operatives to move back and forth to Europe. “The investment in digital technologies and cooperation with the American intelligence services have enabled us to break the encryption of electronic messaging services, leading to numerous preventive arrests,” says Kepel. “The jihadists are busy trying to save their own necks and have less time to plot attacks on the West.”

But if the terror attacks had continued at the same pace as in 2015 and 2016, Kepel told the weekly news magazine *Marianne*, “you can bet Marine Le Pen would have come in first place in the first round [of the two-round presidential election].” And as it was, she came in second.

For Macron, the challenge now is not only to break the cycle of fear and hate promoted by both ISIS and xenophobic populists like Le Pen, it is to offer real hope to the fractured French society they come from.

U.S. Warned France That Russia Was Meddling in Election, NSA Director Says

By Paul Sonne
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WASHINGTON—The U.S. warned France's security services before last weekend's presidential election that Russian cyber actors were carrying out operations that had penetrated some of the French campaign infrastructure, the director of the U.S. National Security Agency said Tuesday.

NSA Director Adm. Mike Rogers, speaking during Senate committee testimony, said he issued the warning after U.S. intelligence had become aware of Russian activity tied to the French presidential campaign.

"We had become aware of Russian activity," Adm. Rogers said. "We had talked to our French counterparts...and gave them a heads-up."

French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron's campaign said two days before the election that it had been the victim of a massive

cyberattack, with thousands of emails and electronic documents stolen from the accounts of party officials and some placed online.

Mr. Macron, a centrist who has criticized Russia, emerged victorious in the Sunday vote despite the cyberattack, defeating French far-right rival Marine Le Pen, who visited the Kremlin during the campaign and received Russian bank loans for her party in the past.

The U.S. warning came before the Macron campaign's announcement, but Adm. Rogers didn't specify whether the Russian meddling detected by the U.S. was directed at Mr. Macron or at other aspects of the French election. NSA officials didn't respond to a request for clarification.

Cybersecurity firms suspect Russian actors of being behind the hack, but the origin of the attack remains unproven.

The Kremlin has denied the accusation.

Adm. Rogers said Tuesday that before last weekend's election the U.S. told the French: "Look, we're watching the Russians. We're seeing them penetrate some of your infrastructure. Here's what we've seen. What can we do to try to assist?"

The NSA director declined to go into additional detail about what specifically the U.S. had seen, or what infrastructure he was referring to, citing the classified nature of the exchange.

Adm. Rogers said the NSA was "doing similar things" with its German and British counterparts, because both of those countries also have upcoming elections.

"We're all trying to figure out how we can try to learn from each other," he said.

The NSA director said the U.S. "should be concerned" about any efforts by American groups to try to undermine the French election by helping spread documents that

could be part of a Russian interference campaign.

He said he believed those issues would be a matter for the Federal Bureau of Investigation to examine.

Shortly after the Macron campaign hack became public, U.S. far-right supporters helped publicize the alleged unauthorized disclosure online, with the hashtag #MacronLeaks ultimately trending on Twitter.

News of the hack, however, emerged just as the French media entered a mandated blackout, during which formal campaigning and media coverage of the election must end before the vote. The timing, as well as the mundane nature of some of the disclosures, appeared to limit the impact of the hack on the election's outcome.

Mr. Macron's party said the hack occurred several weeks before his campaign disclosed the breach.

UNE - Hackers Came, but the French Were Prepared

By Adam Nossiter, David E. Sanger and Nicole Perloth

PARIS — Everyone saw the hackers coming.

The National Security Agency in Washington picked up the signs. So did Emmanuel Macron's bare-bones technology team. And mindful of what happened in the American presidential campaign, the team created dozens of false email accounts, complete with phony documents, to confuse the attackers.

The Russians, for their part, were rushed and a bit sloppy, leaving a trail of evidence that was not enough to prove for certain they were working for the government of President Vladimir V. Putin but which strongly suggested they were part of his broader "information warfare" campaign.

The story told by American officials, cyberexperts and Mr. Macron's own campaign aides of how a hacking attack intended to disrupt the most consequential election in France in decades ended up a dud was a useful reminder that as effective as cyberattacks can be in disabling Iranian nuclear plants, or Ukrainian power grids, they are no silver bullet. The kind of information

warfare favored by Russia can be defeated by early warning and rapid exposure.

But that outcome was hardly assured on Friday night, when what was described as a "massive" hacking attack suddenly put Mr. Macron's electoral chances in jeopardy. To French and American officials, however, it was hardly a surprise.

Testifying in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington on Tuesday, Adm. Michael S. Rogers, the director of the National Security Agency, said American intelligence agencies had seen the attack unfolding, telling their French counterparts, "Look, we're watching the Russians. We're seeing them penetrate some of your infrastructure. Here's what we've seen. What can we do to try to assist?"

But the staff at Mr. Macron's makeshift headquarters in the 15th Arrondissement at the edge of Paris didn't need the N.S.A. to tell them they were being targeted: In December, after the former investment banker and finance minister had emerged as easily the most anti-Russian, pro-NATO and pro-European Union candidate in the presidential race, they began receiving phishing emails.

The phishing mails were "high quality," said Mr. Macron's digital director, Mounir Mahjoubi: They included the actual names of members of the campaign staff, and at first glance appeared to come from them. Typical was the very last one the campaign received, several days before the election on Sunday, which purported to have come from Mr. Mahjoubi himself.

"It was almost like a joke, like giving us all the finger," Mr. Mahjoubi said in interview on Tuesday. The final email enjoined recipients to download several files "to protect yourself."

Even before then, the Macron campaign had begun looking for ways to make life a little harder for the Russians, showing a level of skill and ingenuity that was missing in Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and at the Democratic National Committee, which had minimal security protections and for months ignored F.B.I. warnings that its computer system had been penetrated.

"We went on a counteroffensive," said Mr. Mahjoubi. "We couldn't guarantee 100 percent protection" from the attacks, "so we asked: what can we do?" Mr. Mahjoubi opted for a classic "cyber-blurring" strategy, well known to banks and

corporations, creating false email accounts and filled them with phony documents the way a bank teller keeps fake bills in the cash drawer in case of a robbery.

"We created false accounts, with false content, as traps. We did this massively, to create the obligation for them to verify, to determine whether it was a real account," Mr. Mahjoubi said. "I don't think we prevented them. We just slowed them down," he said. "Even if it made them lose one minute, we're happy," he said.

Mr. Mahjoubi refused to reveal the nature of the false documents that were created, or to say whether, in the Friday document dump that was the result of the hacking campaign, there were false documents created by the Macron campaign.

But he did note that in the mishmash that constituted the Friday dump, there were some authentic documents, some phony documents of the hackers' own manufacture, some stolen documents from various companies, and some false emails created by the campaign.

"During all their attacks we put in phony documents. And that forced them to waste time," he said. "By the quantity of the documents we put

in," he added, "and documents that might interest them."

With only 18 people in the digital team, many of them occupied in producing campaign materials like videos, Mr. Mahjoubi hardly had the resources to track down the hackers. "We didn't have time to try to catch them," he said. But he has his suspicions about their identity. Simultaneously with the phishing attacks, the Macron campaign was being attacked by the Russian media with a profusion of fake news.

Oddly, the Russians did a poor job of covering their tracks. That made it easier for private security firms, on alert after the efforts to manipulate the American election, to search for evidence.

In mid-March, researchers with Trend Micro, the cybersecurity giant based in Tokyo, watched the same Russian intelligence unit behind some of the Democratic National Committee hacks start building the tools to hack Mr. Macron's campaign. They set up web domains mimicking those of Mr. Macron's En Marche! Party, and began dispatching emails with malicious links and fake login pages designed to bait campaign staffers

into divulging their usernames and passwords, or to click on a link that would give the Russians a toehold onto the campaign's network.

It was the classic Russian playbook, security researchers say, but this time the world was prepared. "The only good news is that this activity is now commonplace, and the general population is so used to the idea of a Russian hand behind this, that it backfired on them," said John Hultquist, the director of cyberespionage analysis at FireEye, the Silicon Valley security firm.

Mr. Hultquist noted that the attack was characterized by haste, and a trail of digital mistakes. "There was a time when Russian hackers were characterized by their lack of sloppiness," Mr. Hultquist said. "When they made mistakes, they burned their entire operation and started anew. But since the invasion of Ukraine and Crimea," he said, "we've seen them carry out brazen, large scale attacks," perhaps because "there have been few consequences for their actions."

The hackers also made the mistake of releasing information that was, by any campaign standard, pretty boring. The nine gigabytes worth of purportedly stolen emails and files

from the Macron campaign was spun as scandalous material, but turned out to be almost entirely the humdrum of campaign workers trying to conduct ordinary life in the midst of the election maelstrom.

One of the leaked emails details a campaign staffer's struggle with a broken down car. Another documents how a campaign worker was reprimanded for failure to invoice a cup of coffee.

That is when the hackers got sloppy. The metadata tied to a handful of documents — code that shows the origins of a document — show some passed through Russian computers and were edited by Russian users. Some Excel documents were modified using software unique to Russian versions of Microsoft Windows.

Other documents had last been modified by Russian usernames, including one person that researchers identified as a 32-year-old employee of Eureka CJSC, based in Moscow, a Russian technology company that works closely with the Russian Ministry of Defense and intelligence agencies. The company has received licenses from Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, to help protect

state secrets. The company did not return emails requesting comment.

Other leaked documents appear to have been forged, or faked. One purported to detail the purchase of the stimulant mephedrone, sometimes sold as "bath salts," by a Macron campaign staffer who allegedly had the drugs shipped to the address of France's National Assembly. But Henk Van Ess, a member of the investigations team at Bellingcat, a British investigations organization, and others discovered that the transaction numbers in the receipt were not in the public ledger of all Bitcoin transactions.

"It's clear they were rushed," Mr. Hultquist said. "If this was APT28," he said, using the name for a Russian group believed to be linked to the GRU, a military intelligence agency, "they have been caught in the act, and it has backfired for them."

Now, he said, the failure of the Macron hacks could just push Russian hackers to improve their methods.

"They may have to change their playbook entirely," Mr. Hultquist said.



French Businesses Hope Macron's Victory Will Ignite an Economic Revival

TROYES, France — As the results of France's presidential election rolled in on Sunday, Françoise Horiot watched with relief, optimistic about the prospects for her small aviation business.

The victory of Emmanuel Macron, an economic centrist, gave her hope that the mechanics in her factory could be more productive if he followed through on promises to ease regulations. And it erased fears that her ties with suppliers and clients in Europe, Turkey and China might founder if his opponent, Marine Le Pen, could have made good on promises to pull France out of the European Union.

"Macron has so much to do, both at the national and European level," said Mrs. Horiot, 69, who runs Entreprise Troyes Aviation, which employs 15 people in this industrial and agricultural region in central France. "I hope he'll have the power to improve the economy."

He may not.

During the campaign, Mr. Macron promised to swiftly pass measures to lower France's high unemployment rate and revive

growth, which has remained stagnant in the wake of Europe's financial crisis. A priority for the more than three million small and medium businesses that form the backbone of the economy is a revision of the nation's 3,300-page labor code, which they say makes it difficult to lay off employees and discourages them from hiring new workers.

But Mr. Macron, like many of his predecessors, will face political and social hurdles to change.

His new party, La République en Marche — Republic on the Move — must secure a parliamentary majority in legislative elections next month, or face years of possible political gridlock. French trade unions have also vowed nationwide protests to stop him from pushing France toward a less protected labor market, which they warn would fuel precariousness and nourish the populism that lifted Ms. Le Pen.

At least half of the battle may be simply persuading the French people — and French businesses, investors and workers — to feel more optimistic about the future after a long malaise.

"The best case is it takes some time, but he manages to implement at least half of what's needed to stop decreasing competitiveness and change the trajectory of France," said Olivier Marchal, the chairman of Bain & Co. France, a business consultancy.

"If he accomplishes that, then employment picks up, confidence is rebuilt, new investment comes in, and we shift from a vicious cycle to a virtuous one," Mr. Marchal added. If not, "then the economic situation is going to be a major issue, both for France and for Europe."

The Aube region of central France, of which Troyes is the de facto capital, has grappled with economic uncertainty for years. Unemployment has lingered around 13 percent, higher than the national average, as jobs were lost over the decades.

Layoffs recently swept through a nearby Michelin tire factory. Textile manufacturers once implanted in the region closed amid cheap global competition.

The breakdown of the votes belied the economic weakness. Mr. Macron won 54 percent of votes in the region in Sunday's election. But

Ms. Le Pen, who campaigned hard among disaffected workers, had 46 percent of the vote, more than 11 points above the national average.

Mr. Macron's platform plays well to businesses around Troyes, a town of 60,000 lined with 16th-century timbered houses and a phalanx of cafes and small shops. A handful of factories that have weathered global competition and the downturn dot the lush landscape on Troyes's outskirts.

Mr. Macron says he wants to lower the taxes employers pay to fund France's social welfare system, and to cut employee taxes to increase take-home pay. He proposes investing more than 15 million euros in retraining laid-off workers, and allowing company-level agreements on issues that are now decided by industrywide labor negotiations, such as working hours. And he vows to reduce the administrative burden on small businesses, which must negotiate a thicket of regulations.

"He acted like a businessman in his campaign," said Didier Duchene, the president of the Medef employers association for Aube and founder of CMD2, a metalworking company on the outskirts of Troyes that

specializes in making ornate iron grills and industrial doors. "He understands business, and he's got a strategic plan."

Mr. Duchene employs about 30 workers on full-time contracts in his iron workshop — many of them longtime employees with artisanal experience. When a big order comes in, he may need to hire 20 more, but only until the job is done. Because it is costly and complex to downsize, he must negotiate an expensive exit for employees, or consider taking additional people on short-term contracts.

"I'm always having to calculate: If I hire more people for a job, how much would it cost to downsize?" he said.

For workers who think they might be caught at the wrong end of Mr. Macron's policies, a sense of wariness lingers.

Antoine Dion, 23, said he had little hope that Mr. Macron would improve conditions for people like him who have had trouble finding a steady job. He moved to Troyes two months ago from Paris, where he could not find regular work, and was looking for jobs as a plumber, a salesman or anything that would bring a secure paycheck.

"Macron is going to set up harmful policies for employment, and he wants to move jobs offshore, to cheaper countries," Mr. Dion said. "With Macron, everybody will be able to hire and fire easily — those are the ultraliberal values we are forced to adopt."

Unemployment has been stuck around 10 percent for more than four years as the economy failed to rebound from the European financial crisis as quickly as Germany and other countries. Around a quarter of young people are jobless, and the vast majority of new contracts are temporary or precarious, fueling an acute sense of inequality.

Yet at the unemployment office in Troyes, scores of other job seekers who have long been looking for work expressed hope.

"Macron talks about economic reforms and investing more in job training," said Damien Coffinet, 28, who was fired from his job as an insurance salesman two months ago and came to see if he could receive retraining to become a plumber or electrician. "The changes won't come easy, but I see a rosier future."

The problems are entrenched. Companies say they grapple with

high costs, whether from taxes used to fund the social safety net or from navigating complex regulations.

Denis Arnoult, the president of France Teinture, a fabric dye maker that employs 100 workers in Troyes on a seven-acre site, said the labor code created administrative burdens, time better spent dealing with clients.

While business slumped after the European financial crisis, it has picked up since a French fashion label, Le Coq Sportif, started placing orders. But Mr. Arnoult faces hurdles hiring new workers, partly because of social taxes that are among the highest in Europe.

In addition, state-run job placement programs do not provide adequate retraining to adapt potential employees to his needs. Even as he has tried to cut costs, he has had to fund in-house training.

"The costs on business are just too high," he said. "If we're going to have more economic dynamism, these need to come down."

Some of the pressures come from outside France, complicating Mr. Macron's economic puzzle.

Mrs. Horiot's business relies on orders from around the European Union, so she grapples with extra layers of European bureaucracy and regulations imposed by Brussels.

Too many European Union rules also make it hard for her mechanics to do their job, she says. When they repair the hood of a small plane, it adds an hour just to check off all of the safety requirements.

"We have to go through the same process as a giant like Airbus, but we're a small company," she said. "The labor code and E.U. regulations are not adapted for small companies."

Her worry was that Mr. Macron might be blocked from delivering on many promises, especially if he faces opposition in Parliament or if unions call for protests.

If he cannot follow through, the risks may be bigger than continued economic stagnation, Mr. Arnoult of France Teinture said.

"We are at a turning point," he said. "If Macron doesn't succeed, we'll have more populism when the next presidential election comes around."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Emmanuel Macron's Economic Plans for France Draw Pushback

PARIS—French President-elect Emmanuel Macron wants to reconcile his country with globalization. The modest economic changes he is proposing to do so are already provoking resistance.

The victor in Sunday's French presidential election ran as a reformer who would make France's economy more competitive, lightening tax and regulatory burdens on business, while preserving its cherished welfare state. His progress, particularly in bringing down France's stubbornly high unemployment, will make or break his presidency.

The 39-year-old centrist's proposals reflect an effort to apply to France the lessons of successful overhauls in Germany and Scandinavia, which have managed to blend business freedoms and social protections better than most other countries. Achieving change will require taking on France's powerful labor unions.

On Monday, a day after Mr. Macron's win, unions held a march through Paris to protest his policies. "We need all the opposition in France to converge and get into battle formation," said Romain Altmann, who took part as a

member of the CGT, one of France's biggest unions.

Those demonstrations were meant to forcefully display what Mr. Macron is up against. "He has a colossal job on his hands," said Maurice Lévy, chief executive of advertising giant Publicis Groupe SA. "Reforming the labor code is an indispensable reform and perhaps his most difficult challenge."

Mr. Macron is no free-market radical. Some of his policies show a traditional French penchant for state intervention. In a stint as economy minister, he took steps to strengthen state influence at major French companies—including by increasing a government stake in Renault SA that effectively gave the state a veto power at the car maker.

His campaign promises to keep the minimum retirement age at 62, and to preserve the 35-hour workweek as a general guideline, disappoint some business people who say his reforms aren't ambitious enough.

Bolder free-market policies have limited voter support in France, and Mr. Macron's proposals may already test those limits. They include cutting tax on corporate profits and payroll taxes on lower-paid workers; limiting the cost of laying off

workers; pressing unions to agree to flexible labor terms at company level; curbing the unions' control of the country's generous welfare system; and slightly shrinking the size of government.

Mr. Macron says he wants to cut the share of public spending in France's gross domestic product to around 52%, from around 57% in 2015, in part by shrinking the civil service. He has also pledged to cut France's budget deficit to well below 3% of GDP to comply with a European Union rule that France has frequently broken.

"The heart of his program is trying to solve some issues linked to the labor market," said Raphael Brun-Aguerre, an economist at J.P. Morgan in London. "In his mind the labor market is dysfunctional: Labor costs are too high, and you don't have enough flexibility. He links it also to education, where he argues many people are left aside because they don't have the right skills."

Mr. Macron's most ambitious changes, if implemented in full, would mimic some Scandinavian countries' mix of flexible labor markets, a universal social safety net, and government-sponsored training for people lacking marketable skills. Currently,

France's unemployment-insurance and pension systems are expensive yet patchy, offering stronger protections to employees in unionized sectors than to the self-employed or small entrepreneurs.

The hope, say advocates of such a combination of measures, is that it could make French workers more accepting of the disappearance of old industries and the rise of new ones, a process accelerated by globalization.

Changing France's welfare state, while decentralizing labor negotiations to give companies more flexibility on pay and working hours, challenges the powers of France's national union organizations, a formidable interest group that has repeatedly shown it can bring the country to a standstill. Departing President François Hollande scaled back proposals for changes to labor laws last year after strikes and protests. The changes were ultimately limited, drawing criticism from Mr. Macron at the time.

Allowing companies to negotiate contracts with local union officials, rather than national union bosses who are often more militant, would echo German practices and require a major transformation of French labor relations.

Acceptance is growing in France, however, that changes are needed. Years of sluggish growth have left unemployment at a stubbornly high level of around 10%.

In a risky tactic, Mr. Macron wants to overhaul labor laws by decree this summer to save time. Union leaders accuse him of an undemocratic

approach. He retorts that, under French law, parliament would have to later ratify his decree measures. "I'm explaining beforehand, I'm telling you, it's democratic," Mr. Macron told French radio last week.

"His program is aimed at helping companies better manage periods of lower activity and higher activity,"

said Florence Aubonnet, a lawyer at Flichy Grangé Avocats who advises foreign companies in negotiations with their French employees. "It's not a revolution, but he is clearly convinced that to fight against unemployment, companies must be able to adopt their own rules through local agreements."

"The goals are clear. What is less clear is what he can achieve," said Mr. Brun-Aguerre. The key, he added, will be France's parliamentary elections next month, in which Mr. Macron is seeking a majority for his new party, En Marche.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

France Is Ripe for Rebirth

By Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Somebody better versed in French politics will have to say whether Emmanuel Macron, who won the French presidency in a landslide Sunday, has any chance to enact a program. He's young and fabulous, to be sure, but his political arm does not reach deep.

He leads a party that's all of one year old and has no seats in Parliament. That may change with next month's legislative elections, though the big winners could still be the status quo parties he ran against.

Then again, his strong showing in the four-person preliminary round prior to Sunday's run-off indicates that his platform of economic renewal does have an organic following in France. Especially so among younger folk whose next purchase might otherwise be a one-way plane ticket to London, New York or Silicon Valley.

France is not Greece. It remains as powerful in the European Union as Germany, because Germany can do nothing without French support. The euro is nothing like the growth prison for Paris that it has been for Athens, since France is not controlled by creditors who have deliberately chosen penury for the patient rather than recovery.

France may well be one of the countries that survived fiscally only because of the invisible bailout engineered by the European Central Bank. If so, that's sad. France has the power to restore its creditworthiness on its own. If you woke up a year from now and the French economy was growing 3% or 4%, you would have zero fear about its survival in the eurozone or the European Union or even the long-term payability of its debt.

Yes, collective-action paralysis is a problem of modern interest-group society—the inability to deal with glaring but solvable problems. Yes, politicians say they care about the national good, though usually define the term to mean their own re-election.

Yet there is perhaps no country better suited to lead the Western world right now out of its slow-growth, overregulated, welfarist malaise. France presents a problem of extraordinarily low-hanging fruit. Its labor law, which is astonishingly anti-employer, requires only a vote and stroke of a pen to revoke. Reducing the size of the state can start with easy fasting, since any government that consumes 57% of GDP clearly has a lot of fat.

Remember, facing the same generation-long problems of stagnation and unemployment, its current president, François Hollande, decided his calling card

would be "I hate the rich" and a punitive tax on high incomes. Most of all, Mr. Macron can do a great deal just by not being that guy.

This lesson, if anything, has been under-learned in our rotely pessimistic era. Barack Obama, after his first year in office, became a president who would not stoop to do anything for growth. He signaled only hostility to business. He promoted only an agenda of increased taxes, regulation and redistribution. Donald Trump has rung up no major accomplishments and yet the return of optimism to investors, business and consumers is palpable.

Marine Le Pen's policies were objectionable and her party's history even more so. But it remains true, as many keep saying, that she flagged problems that France's leadership class had tried to ignore, concerning immigration, loss of sovereignty, the EU and the euro.

Yet, with the latter two, the EU and the euro, she always portrayed France as weak and oppressed by Germany. Her best line in the campaign was actually a head-scratcher. No matter how the race ended, she said, France would be governed by a woman, herself or Mrs. Merkel.

For somebody who ran as a French nationalist, this was strangely to underrate the importance and

influence of France no matter who its leader is.

Fourteen years ago, Germany was the sick man of Europe. A Socialist premier, Gerhard Schröder, quoting Margaret Thatcher, rammed through a package of unemployment, pension, health-care and tax changes, setting the stage for Germany's persistent strength while France and Italy have floundered. In a rare moment of perspicacity, this column even warned at the time of a future crisis for the euro if other EU members didn't grasp the reform nettle (they didn't).

The politician's job, in most times, is to attach himself to an innocuous slogan and steer a course that upsets as few special interests as possible. But it does not take a miracle to reawaken the animal spirits of a country as hugely blessed as France, with an educated and worldly population, rich culture, magnificent physical properties and powerful global appeal. Besides, the democratic, liberal nation-state as pioneered by Europe remains history's most successful political business model. In a way just about opposite to how most pundits currently describe the world, maybe the Trump-Macron wave signals its return to health and dynamism.



Macron Has Been Elected, But Not Yet Empowered

Pascal Emmanuel Gobry

Given that he won with 66 percent of the vote, you would think that French president-elect Emmanuel Macron would have a sweeping mandate to implement his agenda. But that's not the case, or at least not yet. First, the mandate is less than it would appear because Macron's run-off opponent was populist leader Marine Le Pen, who is reviled by many French voters and virtually all the political class.

But second, because under the French constitution, the president only has significant powers when he has a majority in the 577-seat

National Assembly, the lower house of parliament. This is a key question for Macron, since he has run without the support of a major party, having founded his own skeletal movement En Marche! only in 2016. On Monday, the party secretary announced the party will now be called République En Marche or Republic on the Move. Without a majority in parliament, his reform agenda is likely to remain a dead letter.

This is politics, and anything could happen. However, here are the three most likely scenarios.

Scenario 1: An En Marche sweep

To listen to the President-elect, it's straightforward from here: Macron's new party will sweep the legislative elections, and he will have his governing majority. The group will announce its candidates for the parliamentary election on Thursday and already the party said its candidate would include those from the country's center-right Republican Party and also the Socialist Party, which got crushed in the elections.

Even with that momentum, it looks like an uphill climb. According to a Harris Interactive poll for Atlantico.fr, only 42 percent of French voters want Macron to have a majority in case he is elected. A recent OpinionWay-SLPV poll for Les

Echos showed that En Marche! would come in first with 249 to 286 seats -- an astonishing accomplishment for a year-old party, but just shy of the 289 seats needed for a majority.

Still, Macron has pulled off the unprecedented before, and he could do it again. If the new République En Marche party wins a comfortable majority, Macron will have a governing mandate.

Scenario 2: A coalition led by Macron's party

Coming in first would entitle Macron to form a government, even though he would need a governing partner. But there are reasons to believe he

might not even accomplish that. France does not have proportional representation, where high polling support directly translates to party representation. Instead, voting is by district, which favors large incumbent parties. (This is why the National Front, whose support hovers around 20 percent, has only two members in the National Assembly.)

It's become a cliché in countries that have district representation that the parties that are behind in the national polls say that the election is not a national election but hundreds of local elections. But there is truth to that. The incumbent parties have field offices, staff, volunteers and local elected officials to hit the stump. Their candidates have been knocking on doors in their various districts for months, while Macron's party has not yet announced all its candidates.

In this case, *Republique En Marche* would have to build a coalition with an existing major party, either the Republicans or the Socialists. It

might even be the junior party. It is typical in France for major parties to forge "electoral alliances" with younger parties: the parties divide the constituencies among themselves, each endorsing the other's candidate in the various constituencies. Under this scenario, Macron's goal, then, would be not so much to win an outright parliamentary majority, but to have additional bargaining chips with the other parties in a pre-election negotiation.

The natural coalition partner for *Republique En Marche* would be France's Socialist Party, since Macron was an economy minister in a Socialist-led government and since most of his major backers are figures from the Socialist Party. This would represent a betrayal of his promise to depart from past practices, especially from the crushingly unpopular incumbent government. More broadly, France's Socialist Party is split between a reform wing and a hard-left wing; the party's hard left would, while nominally being in a coalition with

Macron, try to frustrate him at every turn.

Being a centrist, Macron could also form an alliance with the Republicans, the main center-right party. While the party maintains there will be no official alliance, Macron could conceivably form an alliance with a breakaway centrist wing of the party or with small factions from both the left and the right.

Whatever the scenario, the basic gist remains the same: While Macron would have a formal majority and be able to form a government, in practice, the majority would be weak because it would be riven by ideological differences, or made up of opportunists from different parties, or both. Macron has outlined an agenda of reforms to labor law and pensions, which are sure to trigger mass protests and strikes. In such a context, having a weak or fractured majority could doom controversial bills.

Scenario 3: A Republican-led government

VOX - 6 things to watch as Macron takes office in France

Sean Illing

French voters elected centrist independent Emmanuel Macron as president on Sunday. A 39-year-old former investment banker, Macron will become the country's youngest leader ever.

Although Macron defeated far-right populist Marine Le Pen, who leads the National Front party, by a whopping 33 points, France remains a deeply divided country. Anxieties persist over immigration, terrorism, globalization, and chronic unemployment.

And there is widespread disillusionment with the political establishment on both the left and the right. France's two major political parties, the Republicans and the Socialists, are in tatters. The Republican candidate, François Fillon, earned just under 20 percent of the vote in the first round, tying far-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The Socialist candidate, Benoît Hamon, was a complete disaster, earning last place in the first round with 6.2 percent of the vote.

Macron, who formed a new political party called *En Marche* in 2016, has promised to strengthen France's ties to Europe, simplify the tax system, overhaul the labor market, and scale back needless regulations. But without a clear governing coalition, he will face a number of obstacles. If he's unable to lift France out of its economic malaise, all those festering anxieties will come

bubbling up five years from now when the next presidential election is held.

To understand how France's political parties will respond to the outcome of this election, I reached out to Arthur Goldhammer, a Harvard professor who is a longtime commentator on French politics, writing about it regularly for the *American Prospect*, *Democracy Journal*, *the Nation*, and *Foreign Policy*.

I ask him what Macron's surprisingly large victory means for France's future, what becomes of the French left now that the Socialist Party has collapsed, and if he believes the far right is primed to succeed five years from now in the next presidential election.

Here's what he told me.

Macron's election is unprecedented.

It's probably too early to say how big a deal it is. It's certainly unprecedented that someone who comes out of no party at all becomes president of France. Nothing like this has happened before. The closest analogy would be [Valéry] Giscard d'Estaing's election in 1974, and that was a fluke because there was a split in the Gaullist Party and one faction supported Giscard, who came out of a centrist party. But it was already a party, and Giscard had considerable experience.

But this is a novelty; nothing like it has ever happened. At the same time, both major parties are in disarray in the wake of this election, so that's probably the biggest thing to note about the change in the political landscape. Their candidates were eliminated in the first round, and that leaves them scrambling to try to come up with a strategy to make up for lost ground in the legislative elections.

Macron's ability to govern depends on how the parties align.

I think what Macron is hoping for is some kind of realignment in the center so that he will govern with a grand coalition such as the one that exists in Germany, where elements of the right wing of the Socialist Party and the left wing of the Republican Party come together. So something like the Valls [France's former Socialist prime minister and an early ally of Macron's] faction and the Hollande [the outgoing French president] factions of the Socialist Party and the Juppe [an influential center-right figure in France's Republican Party] faction of the Republicans.

Le Pen is flawed, and the National Front could splinter after her defeat. I think Marine Le Pen scared away some voters who had been willing to contemplate voting for her in the way she behaved in the last two weeks. She had made some progress in redefining the party, softening its image, and purging anti-Semitic and Neo-Nazi elements that her father had tolerated or

A common phrase on the French right is "stolen election." With the incumbent Socialist Party highly unpopular, many on the right felt that it was their time to rule. François Fillon, the conservative nominee, was booted from the run-off not because his ideas but because he was tarred by a scandal that erupted right after his nomination. His Republican Party, and its junior partner, the UDI, have therefore stated their intention to win the legislative elections and rule the country from Matignon, the prime minister's residency.

In this case, we would have a period of "cohabitation." Having accomplished the unthinkable to become the youngest President in the country's history from a position outside a mainstream party Emmanuel Macron would be little more than a figurehead, at least on domestic policy. Macron's "march" would only be downhill from there.

actively encouraged in the party, and that had expanded her base.

But in the last couple of weeks, and particularly in the debate between the two rounds [of the election], she reverted to form. She shouted and yelled and refused to allow any actual in-depth discussion of issues, and I think that turned some prospective voters against her.

So there's a prospect of a split in the National Front, although it's probably too early for that to emerge. Marine Le Pen is contested internally by a group led by her niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who's a leader in the South. Marion is still quite young, and this is probably not the opportune moment, but there's already been criticism from within the party of people around Marine Le Pen, like Florian Philippot, who became her No. 1 spokesman, and who had helped her in trying to modernize the image of the party and turn more toward economic issues and away from the racial hatred.

The future of the far right in France is uncertain.

There are a number of possibilities. One is that it will hang together and try to seek alliances with the other parties. Marine La Pen indicated on Sunday that that would be her strategy. She's going to rename the party and seek alliances. And she made a step toward that between the two rounds when she made an alliance with [Nicolas] Dupont-Aignan, one of the minor candidates

for the presidency, and she had said she would make him prime minister if she were elected. So I think she's going to expand that effort. And that was the first time the National Front had made an alliance with someone who was not in the party.

So she might try to go in that direction. The right wing of the Republicans might begin to contemplate alliances of this sort, particularly in districts where the National Front is quite strong. But I think it's probably early for that and it may not be a paying strategy, so I'm not sure that will happen at all. But there is a leadership struggle, or there will be a leadership struggle in the Republican Party.

The National Front could win the next presidential election, but the populace is just as likely to turn more to the left if Macron fails.

The National Front has been moving steadily upward for years, and so it could certainly win in five years. This scenario was widely predicted before the election, that if Macron fails, this is the last straw. Things may have changed a bit since Marine La Pen did less well than expected and may start people

thinking anew. And five years ago, I don't think anyone would have predicted that Marine La Pen would have made as much progress as she did. So five years is a long time.

We don't know what will happen or what the mode of failure will be if Macron fails. Who knows, it could empower the far left. Mélenchon [the far-left candidate who quit the Socialist Party in 2008] did better than expected in the first round, so people might turn in that direction. If you were to ask me today, I would say that's the most probable direction in which things would turn if Macron became as unpopular as Hollande.

The left in France is badly fractured.

Well, the mainstream left is in shambles. Hamon's candidacy [Hamon is current President Hollande's center-left successor in the Socialist Party] was a disaster. There was an enormous amount of internal bickering in the party; quite a number of leaders bolted and endorsed Macron, including Valls, the former prime minister, and John-Yves Le Drian, the defense minister. Le Drian is being widely talked

about as a possible prime minister under Macron, and if that happens, I think there's gonna be an all-out battle for redefining the Socialist Party, or it may fall apart into factions that will try to rebuild from the ground up. It's just impossible to say until we see how the legislative elections go.

Macron faces a divided country and a complicated political landscape.

It's still a deeply divided country, and Macron's vote is by no means an endorsement of Macron's program. Estimates are that as many as 40 or 45 percent of the people who voted for him voted to block Le Pen and not for Macron positively. And he's probably going to alienate quite a number of those people because he said that his first move will be to reform the labor code, which even the mild reforms attempted under Hollande elicited quite a strong reaction and there were demonstrations in the streets, lots of union protests. So the divisiveness is going to come to the fore immediately, and we'll see how he responds to that.

If there's going to be any movement on loosening austerity and stimulating the economy, it has to come from Germany; it can't come from France. So I think Germany being reassured might well put more capital into the European Investment Bank, and that could be good news for Macron. But it's good news that will probably work a little too slowly for Macron's timetable. That kind of investment takes a while to produce results, and a lot of it will go to countries other than France.

So whether France will see a major reduction in unemployment over the next year as a result of more German flexibility, I think that's very doubtful. There have been a few signs of tentative recovery in France. Unemployment has come down a few points over the last few months, so that's good news, but still it's not going to be dramatic as far as we can tell now. And Macron has to hope that people remain optimistic and energized by his victory long enough for him to get something going that will show some positive results.



Macron's Moment Is Europe's Too

Ferdinando
Giugliano

A year and a half ago, together with another dozen or so reporters, I attended a luncheon at the residence of the French ambassador in London. The guest speaker was Emmanuel Macron, then France's economy minister, who had crossed the Channel to promote his country as an investment destination for banks and high-tech companies.

What struck me most about the man who last Sunday became France's youngest-ever president wasn't so much his unbounded ambition or workish attention to detail. It was his unashamed Europhilia, which a year later would become one of the defining traits of his presidential bid.

At a time of rising resentment against Brussels, Macron comes across as a time traveler from the pre-crisis era. At 39, he's the most prominent symbol of the "Erasmus generation" -- named after the European Union's flagship university-exchange program, which allows students to spend a year in another EU country. Now in their 30s and 40s, these well-educated young professionals have seen their careers and social lives flourish thanks to open borders. Many of

them have clung to federalist dreams, hoping that one day the EU will look more like a United States of Europe.

Now that he holds his country's highest office, Macron has an opportunity to make that generation's dream come true. He faces two main obstacles: The first is to convince Germany to accept the consequences of greater euro-zone integration. The second is to halt the tide of euro-skepticism, which is making inroads among the same youth who used to view the EU with enthusiasm. These are steep challenges.

However, if anyone who can overcome them, it's Macron. He envisions the euro zone as an integrated fiscal union, with a finance minister who manages a common budget and is accountable to the European parliament. This idea -- which many economists agree is necessary for the currency union to survive -- has met with fierce opposition from Germany. Leaders in Berlin fear that weaker member states will use money from German taxpayers to fund higher spending instead of seeking to improve their competitiveness. While German Chancellor Angela Merkel congratulated Macron on his

victory, she also made clear she had no intention of loosening the euro zone's strict fiscal rules.

Fortunately, Macron understands that a transfer union in which stronger states support weaker ones must be based on compromise. "You cannot say I am for a strong Europe but over my dead body for a transfer union ... or reforming my country," he told us at that London lunch. His reasonableness poses a dramatic contrast to other European leaders who've vowed to reform the EU. Matteo Renzi, Italy's former prime minister, has resisted greater oversight from Brussels over national budgets, while asking for greater budget "flexibility" to increase current spending -- hardly a way to get the Germans on board.

The other test facing France's new president will be convincing Europe's youth that the dream of the Erasmus generation is worth pursuing. Macron won by a margin of 2-to-1 in the second round of the presidential election, achieving a majority in every single age group. However, Marine Le Pen, his Euroskeptical opponent, did much better among younger and middle-aged voters. One decisive factor appears to have been frustration among young voters over the lack of

well-paid jobs. The same anger has boosted other populist parties in Europe, starting with the Five Star Movement in Italy, where youth unemployment stands at over 35 percent.

Macron may have arrived at just the right moment. The euro-zone economy is enjoying a mild recovery, which could gain momentum now that investors can stop worrying about the risk of a euro-skeptic president at the Elysee Palace. As economic growth strengthens, youth unemployment should fall, which should in turn boost support for the EU.

Of course, there are plenty of reasons to worry whether Macron can achieve even a small part of his ambitious program. He may fail to win a majority at next month's legislative elections, which would hamper his push for reforms at home. Germany may stubbornly refuse to play ball. A new economic crisis in a country such as Italy could bring the recovery to a sudden stop.

However, if there ever was a moment to feel hopeful for the euro-zone, this is it. The Erasmus generation looks to have come of age.

Putin Lost France, but He's Still Got a Chance in Germany

Emmanuel Macron's landslide victory on Sunday, for many, symbolized a defeat for Russia, whose meddling across recent Western elections pointed to a dire future for the European Union and democracy globally.

The French elections and their politics provide valuable lessons for insulating democracies against Russian manipulation. But while the West should cheer for France's successful countering of Russian interference, remember that Putin's gamble is not a complete failure. Several ominous signs suggest Russia's influence fight won't end soon and still has legs to run not only in France but across the West.

Russia pushed Vladimir Putin's preferred candidate, Marine Le Pen, for months, overtly backing her campaign through diplomatic engagement and covertly through "hack and release" cyberinfluence.

But France's two-stage runoff elections present Russian influence a tougher challenge for swaying votes toward its preferred candidate and away from its named adversary. Compromat, the timed release of stolen, compromising secrets on adversaries, provides the critical fuel for Russian influence of recent elections. Had the Russians released compromat on Macron prior to the first-round runoff elections, Putin may have taken out the top challenger to Le Pen but also elevated another viable opponent such as François Fillon or Jean-Luc Mélenchon, two candidates likely to absorb Macron's votes.

Any Russian compromat on Macron, thus, needed to be timed for maximum impact between the runoff and the second round of voting, leaving little time for dissemination of incriminating information and resulting media groundswell to decisively change French voter opinions. With only two weeks between rounds, as opposed to the months between American primaries and the presidential election, Russian measures had a limited window to swing votes toward Le Pen.

France's media blackout prior to election day also limited the damage

of late-breaking Russian compromat aimed at Macron. The French mainstream media, unlike America's through the summer of 2016, didn't go for Russia's bait, remaining firm against Putin's attempt to play Western democracies against themselves through the release of juicy secrets.

Ultimately, France's multi-party political landscape, two-tiered elections, and short time between runoff and final tally make it far more resilient to Russian influence than the extended, bipolar contests of the United States or the United Kingdom's Brexit vote, which pitted two numerically close sides in narrow battles.

We all must remember, too, that this was France. The French are more culturally immune to compromise than their uptight friends the Brits and Americans. The last two French presidents have allegedly been involved in extramarital affairs with little resulting consequence to their relative political power. Le Pen, unlike President Donald Trump, hasn't been the least bit squeamish about her Russian ties. French politicians hide less and when their secrets are revealed. They address potential compromises rather than wallow in them, providing Russia less space to influence elections.

Moreover, the French are less likely to receive their news and be influenced via social media than hyper-connected Americans are. France's social-media access rates are 20 percent lower than the U.S., and half as many Frenchmen over the age of 50 use social media. Facebook, having realized its unwitting complicity during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, also helped France in the final weeks before the election by removing 30,000 fake accounts from its platform. It's hard for Putin to conduct cyberinfluence via fake news when French voters don't see Russian influence online.

Russia's release of hacked Macron emails only two days prior to the second-round vote is revealing in itself. Despite successfully breaching Macron's networks, revelatory damaging compromat has yet to emerge from the cache, suggesting the Kremlin lacked the information nuclear missiles to launch in the way the Democratic

National Committee trawl yielded important story lines.

Macron claims false, manufactured emails were mixed in with true information. If his claim is true, it further suggests Russia didn't acquire what it needed to malign its opponent and instead needed to make up evidence to support influence themes. Putin's release of stolen emails so late in the game wasn't to win the election at the last minute, but to undermine Macron's win, withering his mandate to govern—a traditional backup line for Russian Active Measures.

In the coming weeks, should the Kremlin's email dump create conspiracy or suggest corruption, Macron will take office under controversy, be further challenged by Le Pen supporters, and be bogged down in achieving his political promises to the electorate. Only time will tell.

The West should rejoice for the moment in stopping the advance of Russian meddling but quickly realize it has won only one battle in a war with the Kremlin. From the start, Russia saw the rebirth of Active Measures via cyberspace as a multi-year campaign to bring about the end of the European Union and NATO through "the force of politics" rather than the "politics of force."

After helping bring about the U.K.'s exit from the European Union in 2015 and supporting Trump's victory and subsequent anti-EU and anti-NATO policies in 2016, Russia only needs one more election to bring about the fall of Western unions. France may be a loss for now, but the September 2017 German election provides one last and very ripe chance to disintegrate the European Union. The German parliament has already been hacked, and Russia has aggressively pushed anti-Merkel and fake immigrant-crime stories into the German landscape to great effect. Germany leaves Putin one last challenge to Western unity and opportunity to achieve his prize.

Beyond any single election, Russia in short order has won over and unified the alt-right from Eastern Europe to North America, creating a digital Kremlin insurgency. Le Pen may have lost this election, but she's increased her pro-Russian, anti-EU, anti-immigration base

substantially since the 2013 election, when she failed to get past the first round. Russia's state-sponsored RT and Sputnik News outlets grew their French market share considerably in the run-up to this election.

The launch of Macron's hacked emails allegedly came from U.S. citizen and Trump supporter Jack Posobiec, and Americans have now become witting agents of Russian Active Measures to influence a foreign election. Before France in 2017, alt-right-leaning Americans had not shown interest or influence in a foreign election in any sizable way.

And Macron, a young, inexperienced politician, will face considerable resistance domestically from the one-third of French voters who didn't vote for him and internationally from a dedicated alt-right trolling operation empowered by the Kremlin.

Some now say Russia overstepped in its election meddling, but what are the consequences? Obama administration sanctions sting, and Russians now feel a bit gloomy that Trump hasn't made the swing toward Kremlin foreign-policy positions they were expecting.

Still, Putin hasn't lost much. The financial costs of cyber-enabled influence have been minimal compared to other defense spending. He's gained a sizable audience across alt-right communities mobilized in ways never seen. The U.S. remains bogged down in political partisan bickering over Russian influence, further dividing American society and undermining Trump's mandate.

And if Germany opts out of the EU, or NATO crumbles under the combined forces of Brexit, Trump, and a Russian proxy in Germany, Putin has achieved his goals of crumbling the West and reasserting Russia's international stature.

So remember that the French battle was won, but the war is not over. Putin's influence plan will remain on course in Germany until the U.S. gets a Russia policy and comes together with its European allies to firmly counter Russia's aggression. The Kremlin won't stop until it's challenged.

Germany's Enthusiasm for Macron Won't Last

Clive Crook

When German Chancellor Angela Merkel congratulated Emmanuel Macron on his "magnificent" victory over Marine Le Pen in the French presidential election, there was no reason to doubt her sincerity. President Le Pen would have been such a disaster for Europe that the Brexit calamity would have seemed trivial in comparison.

Even so, Macron's success and the U.K.'s decision to quit the EU present Germany with mutually reinforcing problems. They put the German conception of Europe's future under pressure.

Macron is pro-Europe in the traditional French way: He wants a deeper European Union, with closer integration of fiscal policy in particular. Germany is pro-EU as well, of course, but has generally preferred making the union broader rather than deeper. Its goal has been to spread the blessings of peace and prosperity more widely, and especially to its east, rather than pursuing with French zeal a United States of Europe (to be led, incidentally, by France).

Seen in this light, the creation of the euro -- an act of radical economic deepening -- was Germany's great

strategic mistake. In effect, it was the price Helmut Kohl paid for French acquiescence to German reunification, but German voters were never in favor of the single currency, rightly suspecting its constitutional implications. In case anybody needed reminding, Macron spelled these out during his campaign.

To work well, a single-currency area needs a prominent fiscal dimension. In the euro zone, monetary policy cannot work on a country-by-country basis to attenuate the ups and downs of the business cycle. Without targeted monetary stimulus, countries can get trapped for longer, and perhaps indefinitely, with slow growth and high unemployment. Fiscal policy has to be brought to bear. Yet, at Germany's insistence, the EU's Stability and Growth Pact, imposing limits on deficit spending and public debt, makes this difficult. And Germany has consistently resisted the idea of a "transfer union"; the European Union's budget amounts to a mere 1 percent of the total income of its 28 member states.

Now that the euro exists, dismantling it would be a financial nightmare, so economic logic strongly favors a more deeply integrated EU. Macron gets that. He has talked about an EU budget ministry and centrally coordinated

public investment financed with eurobonds, presumably with an EU guarantee. He's right -- but that's exactly what Germany doesn't want. Magnificent as she believed the election result to be, Merkel was quick to add that "German support cannot replace French policy-making," and her officials said Germany wouldn't be dropping its longstanding opposition to eurobonds.

Macron fought Le Pen by calling for more Europe, not less. It's true that a majority of French citizens count themselves pro-Europe, but compare Macron's stand with Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands, who dealt with the Dutch brand of militant populism by making rhetorical concessions to it. This shows the strength of the French elite's commitment to deeper integration. If Germany isn't alarmed about that, it should be.

In resisting these political and economic pressures, Germany used to have an ally in the U.K. Not anymore. The principal skeptic on deeper integration -- so skeptical it refused to join the euro system -- is no longer around to provide cover for Germany's reservations and help check France's ambitions for the union. Almost all of that burden will now fall on Germany.

Merkel's dilemma will soon be apparent. Macron, with unsteady parliamentary backing at best, will struggle to get his way in Paris -- so the French structural reforms that he promised and Merkel is calling for will be hard to deliver. This will raise the political stakes for EU policy reform: Gains in that area will matter more for Macron, yet be harder for Merkel to justify to her own voters. If she continues to resist Macron's proposals, she'll embarrass the new president and further inflame French euroskepticism. If she gives way, her own euroskeptics will be energized.

Merkel might come to regret -- if she isn't regretting it already -- her failure to help Britain's David Cameron save face last year. His attempt to wring yet more concessions and special favors from the U.K.'s EU partners was brusquely rebuffed, and Cameron was humiliated. Much to his surprise, rather than accepting this refusal to budge any further, the Brits decided to go, leaving Merkel to make the *case against deeper integration without their help*. How do you say in German, "You don't know what you've got till it's gone"?



The forever Chancellor

Cammeron Abadi

It's time to admit there's a chance Angela Merkel will be chancellor of Germany forever. Her only real rival in terms of political longevity on the world stage is Russian President Vladimir Putin, who of course isn't subject to democratic laws of gravity. But Merkel has defied so many such laws over the course of her career that it's hard to know if there are any that still apply to her, including the most basic -- that power plus time equals public fatigue.

With a dozen years under her belt in Germany's highest political office and a national election approaching in September, this was supposed to be the year that Merkel's leadership came under threat. Her rivals in the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) overcame their recent pattern of stumbling by nominating a candidate, Martin Schulz, widely considered a plausible head of government. That was in January. Since then, Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has decisively won two state elections and is threatening to win a third next

Sunday, in North Rhine-Westphalia -- Germany's most populous state, a traditional SPD stronghold. Germans are already whispering Schulz's candidacy may not survive next weekend. Either way, Merkel seems to have little to fear in her reelection bid: The most recent national poll gives her a lead of 11 points.

What's strange about Merkel's record of electoral success is how consistently she has confirmed the adage that policy failures are an unavoidable part of politics, while avoiding its corollary: that erosions of public support are inevitable, too. The mystery, however, lies less with Merkel than the German public -- or, rather, with Merkel's assessment of what the public wants and expects from politics. That assessment speaks well of Merkel's intuition. It speaks less well of Germany's political maturity.

Consider Merkel's handling of the euro crisis. In contrast to France's newly elected president, Emmanuel Macron, who campaigned with an impassioned endorsement of the European project and specific plans

for permanently reforming it -- including a joint EU finance minister and common euro bonds -- Merkel has never offered anything of the sort. When Merkel has been obliged to discuss Europe's economic future, she has typically relied on hollow phrases about the need for "more Europe" and vague warnings about how "the failure of the euro would mean the failure of Europe." Her lack of vision even prompted rare criticism from Germany's recent former president, Joachim Gauck, who publicly blamed her for "a lack of energy to tell the population very openly what is really happening."

Merkel's reticence is partly a matter of her personality. But chalking up Merkel's hesitance in the euro crisis to her temperament or biography fails to appreciate the strategy informing it.

Merkel has long believed that Germans, above all, want prudence from their politicians.

Merkel has long believed that Germans, above all, want prudence from their politicians. An object lesson arrived in 2005, after her first

run to become chancellor. Merkel received only 35 percent of the vote -- enough to take office, but only by forming a coalition with the rival SPD. That disappointing showing was widely attributed to her detailed plans for tax cuts, which her opponents portrayed as a radical plan to redistribute wealth to the rich.

Since then, Angela Merkel has had a rather disillusioned understanding of German political culture. A recent Merkel biography by the German journalist Nikolaus Blome described a study commissioned by the SPD in 2006, which seemed to confirm that theory. It presented two findings: First, the German public didn't like the reforms passed by Merkel's government in its first year; second, when the public was presented with arguments and data justifying the reforms, it liked them even less. "Even if there were a revolution underway, Germans would only want to be told about it afterwards," she told her advisors afterward, according to Blome.

In domestic politics, her signature political method has been an

expression of that cynical assessment. Call it leading-from-behind on steroids. Rather than initiate political discussions, she generally allows other politicians to debate issues of their own choosing; Merkel steps in only when a consensus has formed among the public that a particular reform is indispensable. Germans have come to accept this as Merkel's style in domestic politics on matters ranging from mandatory military conscription (she was for it before she was against it), nuclear power (ditto), and a national minimum wage (against it before she was for it). In instances

like her decision not to intervene in Libya, and to resist calls from the United States for more troops in Afghanistan, Merkel's decision-making was simplified by the fact that German society had already reached a firm consensus on matters of national sovereignty. In all these cases, she's gotten credit for pushing popular measures, while managing to keep her fingerprints off any positions with even the slightest potential of alienating the public.

It's gone less remarked upon that she has handled European politics in precisely the same fashion.

Invited to give a speech in 2009 setting out her vision for Europe's future, she admitted that her vagueness about her intentions was a deliberate strategy, not an accidental oversight. "I don't think much of these debates," she said. "I think they contribute to citizens losing trust in the EU of the present." From Merkel's perspective, high-flying proposals to fundamentally restructure the European economy are nothing more than fantasies — a psychological balm for Europe's economic victims, and an invitation for the Continent's would-be revolutionary politicians to indulge in

vanity. There's a political calculus at work here, too: She intuitively understands that these aggressive positions alienate the German public that is her country's ultimate decision-maker.

Merkel appreciates that Germany has become the de facto leader of the European Union. But she also thinks that most Germans sooner privilege the comforts of security — in terms of economic well-being and psychological peace of mind —

**The
Washington
Post**

He says he went to Syria to rescue his wife from ISIS. Now he sits in prison.

BRUSSELS — Ahmed Abu Fouad was vacationing with his children two years ago when he got word that his young wife had run away to Syria. With the family out of town, she quietly packed her bags, flew to Turkey and slipped across the border to join the Islamic State, warning her husband in a text message not to follow her.

Abu Fouad, a 48-year-old hospital orderly, went anyway, taking his two kids with him. After a months-long ordeal, the reunited family finally returned to Belgium in December, only to be greeted by police bearing handcuffs. Today, both parents are incarcerated, and Abu Fouad sees his children only during prison visits.

"I am a victim," he told prosecutors in March, in a sworn statement rejecting charges that his travel to Syria betrayed a sympathy for terrorist causes. "I'm not connected, in any way whatsoever, with the Islamic State."

Belgian officials can't be certain of that, so Abu Fouad sits in jail, along with scores of his countrymen who have returned to Europe after spending time inside the Islamic State's self-declared caliphate. Their presence in Belgium represents a new phase in the evolution of the terrorist threat and a fresh dilemma for security services: what to do with hundreds of Europeans who went away to Iraq and Syria and now want to come home.

In Belgium alone, at least 120 citizens — about a quarter of the 470 Belgians believed to have traveled to the terrorist enclave since 2012 — have come back to a country that now takes a much harsher line on returning Islamist militants in the wake of last year's deadly terrorist attack in Brussels. Other homeward-bound Belgians are waiting in Iraqi and Turkish

detention facilities that receive fresh arrivals weekly as conditions inside the caliphate grow increasingly desperate.

"What worries us now are no longer the ones who depart, because Daesh has lost its attractiveness," said Paul van Tigchelt, director of Belgium's Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis, using a common term for the Islamic State. "What worries us now are the returnees."

The reverse migration is straining European governments as police and social workers attempt to assess each case amid real worries that some of the returnees might be terrorist operatives. Complicating matters, many of the new arrivals are children — including some who were born in Islamic State territories — as well as adults who claim to have traveled to Iraq or Syria for humanitarian reasons or to be with spouses. Still others are avowed defectors who could provide useful intelligence or aid official efforts to counter the Islamic State's propaganda.

Regardless of their motives for returning, nearly all face prosecution under new rules in effect across the European Union. But while jailing the returnees may ease public fears, officials acknowledge that a comprehensive solution — one that involves long-term monitoring as well as extensive rehabilitation and de-radicalization programs — isn't yet in place.

"We're adding resources, but it will take a few years for new people to be hired and trained," said Thomas Renard, a Belgian terrorism expert. "We may not have a few years."

Fighters from the Islamic State march in Raqqa, Syria, in this image posted online in 2014. (Militant website/Associated Press)

According to his account of events, it was love that prompted Abu Fouad to make his desperate journey to northern Syria two years ago.

The story of his wife's flight and his unlikely attempt to rescue her is recorded in hundreds of pages of sworn statements and depositions generated by Belgian prosecutors and defense attorneys since the family's return to Belgium on Dec. 29. The Washington Post obtained copies of the confidential records, which collectively offer an unusually detailed portrait of a European family who was pulled into the Islamic State's magnetic field and later escaped. Fearing that the couple may be targeted by Islamic State operatives or sympathizers in Belgium, a lawyer for the pair requested that their middle names and Arabic "kunya," or informal family names, be used instead of first and surnames.

In the documents, Abu Fouad and his wife, Aicha Umm Dounia, both Belgian citizens of North African descent, describe a tumultuous marriage that culminated with the couple's separation in 2014. Umm Dounia, 14 years younger than her husband, had been hospitalized for depression and had a history of abrupt departures from the family home after a "blow of bad temper," in her husband's words.

In the summer of 2015, as Umm Dounia was living with a girlfriend and working in a sandwich shop, she became increasingly drawn to Internet chat rooms devoted to discussions about the Islamic State and the fighting in Iraq and Syria. Though she had never been particularly pious, she yearned to get involved in some way.

"Muslims around the world were called upon to help, in one way or another. I felt called," she told Belgian prosecutors in a sworn

statement. "On the Net — social networks — I saw people leaving for Syria and saying that they stayed there for 15 to 20 days to help, and then came back. It seemed so easy to get in and out."

Her chance came when Abu Fouad and her two children left the country in July 2015 for a month-long vacation with relatives in Algeria. Umm Dounia packed her clothes, including beachwear, and told friends she was going on vacation in Turkey.

Three days later, she sent the first of several texts to family members saying that she was bound for Syria and that neither Abu Fouad nor her relatives should try to find her. A month later, she was posing for photographs holding a rifle and wearing a *niqab*, a veil that covers the hair and face except for the eyes.

Anxious relatives sent word to the vacationing Abu Fouad, who then heard the news directly from his wife in a series of texts. A delegation of family members met with Brussels police to alert them to the possibility that Umm Dounia had joined the Islamic State. She "says without any ambiguity that she has gone jihad," one of her brothers told police, according to court records.

In a sworn statement months later, Abu Fouad would describe how shocked he was by his wife's decision, noting that Umm Dounia had never hinted about her plans, wasn't religious and couldn't even speak Arabic. He broke down as he recounted to prosecutors a message from his wife relayed to him by one of her brothers, according to the transcript.

"She says she's sick of life with you. She says that she has to settle in the land of Islam," Abu Fouad said, recalling his brother-in-law's words. "She wants to do jihad to protect her

sisters, to live in Islamic State under sharia [Islamic law] until death."

Prosecutors would sharply question Abu Fouad about his decision to pursue his wife. Was it truly a rescue mission, or had he hoped to rekindle the relationship by moving the family to Syria and joining the caliphate?

Abu Fouad explained that his intention had been only to travel to Turkey with his children, hoping that together they could persuade Umm Dounia to come home. But when he arrived in Turkey, he received troubling news: Islamic State officials in Raqqa, Syria, apparently suspicious that Umm Dounia was a spy, had confiscated her travel documents and placed her in a detention cell. There she learned that she would soon be assigned a new husband.

"I was told that I absolutely had to marry if my husband did not come ... that the women who came to Syria were to get married," Umm Dounia told prosecutors.

She was allowed a two-minute phone call to relay this news to Abu Fouad. Days later, he paid money to smugglers who ferried him and his children across the border into Syria.

Arriving in Raqqa, the Islamic State's Syrian capital, Abu Fouad says he lied to local officials about his intentions, telling them he wanted to live with his wife as a resident of the caliphate but not as a fighter, since he suffered from a bad back. After a long ordeal that Abu Fouad says included beatings and torture, Umm Dounia was allowed to rejoin her family. Eventually the couple were assigned a new home and new jobs at a Raqqa maternity hospital — Umm Dounia as an anesthetist's aide and her husband as a security guard. For his job, Abu Fouad was given a gun but was never taught how to use it, he told prosecutors.

In the months that followed, Umm Dounia felt increasingly remorseful about putting Abu Fouad and her children in such peril, according to her account. "My husband came only to look for me. He never had other intentions," she told prosecutors.

Both thought about trying to escape but decided it was too dangerous. They continued at their jobs, Umm Dounia said, animated by the hope that they would eventually find a way to get home.

"We had the will," she said, "to dream of Belgium."

Nearly 7,000 Europeans have trekked across the Turkish border to

join the Islamic State since the militant group established its Syrian capital four years ago. For most of them, getting into the self-proclaimed caliphate was the easy part.

Intelligence officials believe that up to half of the group's foreign recruits have died on the battlefield or in airstrikes. Some who survive may eventually choose to stay behind to form an insurgency after the militants' capital falls, analysts say. But about a third of the total will attempt to flee — a dangerous prospect, since the penalty for desertion is often beheading.

Each week, a few are caught by anti-Islamic State forces as they try to cross into Turkey. Abu Ali al-Sejju, a Free Syrian Army commander whose soldiers patrol a stretch of the border popular with smugglers, said he has captured dozens of the defectors over the past year, including Europeans and even some Americans.

"Many of these guys are defecting now because ISIS is weak and they are afraid of airstrikes," he said in an interview at a cafe in Kilis, a Turkish border town that until recently was a departure hub for Europeans heading in the opposite direction.

In most cases his men refuse to let the defectors pass, fearing that they will be blamed if the escapees carry out terrorist attacks in Turkey or Western Europe, Sejju said. He said some of the defectors are eventually turned over to "legitimate authorities," scoffing at published reports suggesting that the militias trade defectors for cash.

"If we hand them over for money, for sure they will go and blow themselves up somewhere," he said.

Until recently, Sejju's group was holding several French citizens among about a dozen escapees locked inside a three-story house near the Turkish border, he said. Among them was a widow from Toulouse, France, who fled with her two children after her husband died in battle, leaving her vulnerable to being forcibly married to another Islamic State fighter. The woman, called Sara, was sent home after the rebels worked out a deal with French authorities, Sejju said. A German woman was recently repatriated along with her three children in a similar arrangement, he said.

Most of those who manage to get as far as Kilis have endured a perilous journey across battle lines and checkpoints, often with the help of smugglers who typically charge hundreds or thousands of dollars for

the trip. Once in Turkey, some wander into embassy offices seeking help, often to face days of grilling from skeptical consular officials.

European governments have been reluctant to offer assistance, especially to those who lack convincing travel documents or who possess dual citizenship, according to Western and Middle Eastern intelligence officials familiar with the vetting process for returnees. The wariness has only increased after recent terrorist attacks in France, Belgium and Germany, the officials said.

Sejju said most of the defectors he meets seem sincere about wanting to quit the Islamic State, but he acknowledged that some may have other motivations.

A Ukrainian man in the group's custody raised suspicions when he kept changing his story during questioning, he said. What's more, the man's blond hair and European features instantly marked him as a foreigner. How could such a man pass through Islamic State checkpoints unless the terrorists themselves had dispatched him on a mission?

"Even a smuggler," Sejju said, "wouldn't take this risk."

Belgian troops block a street in the eastern city of Verviers on Jan. 15, 2015, when counterterrorism units foiled what authorities said was a jihadist plot in that city. (Francois Lenoir/Reuters)

The same kinds of suspicions dogged Abu Fouad and his wife through every step of the arduous journey that brought them back to Belgium just before the start of the new year.

With Islamic State officials increasingly preoccupied with the war, the couple seized on a chance to escape in early October. Abu Fouad met with a smuggler in a bombed-out house and paid \$2,400 — savings from the couple's hospital jobs — for the first leg of the trip back to Turkey. After a five-hour, moonlit hike across farm fields and olive groves, the family was turned over to a detachment of Syrian rebels and then to a different team of smugglers who guided them across the border near Kilis. From there, they traveled by taxi and bus to Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, where they went to the Belgian consulate.

The reception they received at the consulate was less than enthusiastic. The family was handed over to Turkish immigration authorities and shuffled through a

chain of holding cells and detention centers for undocumented immigrants.

Finally, on Dec. 29, more than 10 weeks after their flight from Raqqa, the family boarded a Turkish Airlines plane for Brussels. At the airport, they were met by police officers who searched their luggage and brought them before a court to be formally charged with aiding a foreign terrorist group. The parents were led away to separate prisons while the children, now ages 10 and 8, were turned over to a government child-welfare agency.

The family's fate now rests with a judge who will decide whether there are sufficient extenuating circumstances to warrant a lesser charge or perhaps a more lenient sentence. Until then, the couple will remain in jail, officials say, under policies adopted to ensure safety and to reassure a population still on edge after last year's Islamic State attack on the Brussels airport.

Belgian officials say they take no pleasure in separating parents from children or putting the spouses of suspects in prison. But they say the exodus of European citizens from the Islamic State poses new dangers to the country and its neighbors that governments are not fully prepared to address. The risks are likely to remain long after the caliphate ceases to exist, said van Tigchelt, the Belgian counterterrorism official.

"Those persons who want to return now — it's not like they want to return with a suicide belt around their waist, so they are not an imminent threat," he said. "But, of course, those women and also the children, they are brainwashed, they saw cruelties and could also be radicalized, so we have to follow them when they come back."

Thus, Belgium's strategy for dealing with families such as Abu Fouad's will be one of strict "criminal justice," he said.

Under questioning from Belgian prosecutors, Umm Dounia, the wife and mother whose decision launched the family's life-altering journey two years ago, said she is painfully aware of her mistake and hopes eventually to have a second chance — "even if it is under strict conditions," she said.

"I want a peaceful life here. I want my children to have a normal life," she said. "I'm sorry. I feel bad for what I did."

She continued in a ramble. "Never again," she said. "I do not know what to say."

INTERNATIONAL

**The
New York
Times**

Schmitt

UNE - Trump to Arm Syrian Kurds, Even as Turkey Strongly Objects

By Michael R. Gordon and Eric

WASHINGTON — President Trump has approved a plan to arm Syrian Kurds so they can participate in the battle to retake Raqqa from the Islamic State, a strategy that has drawn deep opposition from Turkey, a NATO ally.

American military commanders have long argued that arming the Y.P.G., a Kurdish militia fighting alongside Syrian Arab forces against the Islamic State, is the fastest way to seize Raqqa, the capital of the militants' self-proclaimed caliphate.

And Mr. Trump, who made fighting Islamist militants a priority during his campaign, again showed the high regard he has for Pentagon generals by endorsing their advice when faced with a policy dilemma.

Turkey has objected vociferously to such a move, raising fears of a backlash that could prompt the Turks to curtail their cooperation with Washington in the struggle against the Islamic State.

A high-level delegation of Turkish officials was informed of the decision by Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, Mr. Trump's national security adviser, when they visited the White House on Monday, and the Pentagon announced the move on Tuesday.

Mr. Trump's decision on arming the Syrian Kurds comes as Iraqi forces, backed by American and allied air power and artillery, are making headway in Mosul. American military commanders have argued for simultaneous offenses in Raqqa and Mosul so the Islamic State would be forced to defend multiple fronts.

The president's decision also comes as his top advisers recommended sending 3,000 to 5,000 more American troops to try to break a stalemate in another hot spot: the 15-year war in Afghanistan.

Dana W. White, the chief Pentagon spokeswoman, said in a statement that the arming was necessary to ensure that Raqqa could be taken "in the near future."

"Yesterday, the president authorized the Department of Defense to equip Kurdish elements of the Syrian Democratic Forces as necessary to ensure a clear victory over ISIS in

Raqqa, Syria," she said, using the name of the umbrella group for Arab and Kurdish fighters battling the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Ms. White added that the United States would take steps to ensure that Turkey did not face "additional security risks."

There was no immediate comment from the Turkish government, which considers the Kurdish force to be terrorists, and it remains to be seen whether the assurances the Trump administration is offering the Turks will be sufficient to ease the concerns of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is scheduled to meet with Mr. Trump in Washington next week.

The weapons that the United States will provide Kurdish and Arab fighters in the anti-Islamic State coalition include heavy machine guns, mortars, anti-tank weapons, armored cars and engineering equipment.

American military officials have said that weapons are needed to help the lightly armed Kurdish and Arab fighters cope with urban warfare in Raqqa against unyielding Islamic State militants who are equipped with car bombs and even some tanks they captured from the Syrian Army.

To address Turkish concerns that the arms might be used against their forces one day, the supply of weapons and ammunition will be limited to what the Kurds and Arab fighters need to carry out specific operations, American officials said.

After the battle is over, an effort will be made to retrieve any excess equipment. American advisers will also monitor the weapons that are provided to the Kurds and will cut off the supply if they discover that they are being smuggled for use elsewhere or misused, United States officials said.

To further mollify the Turks, most of the fighters who will be involved in the assault on Raqqa are expected to be Arabs, and the Pentagon said the Y.P.G. would not occupy the city after Islamic State fighters had been ousted. "Raqqa and all liberated territory should return to the governance of local Syrian Arabs," Ms. White said. "We do not envision a long-term Y.P.G. presence."

The United States has long worked with the Y.P.G., or People's Protection Units, under the umbrella of the Syrian Democratic Forces. The American military has always emphasized that those forces includes Arab fighters, who make up nearly half of the total force and most of the fighters near Raqqa. But the Y.P.G. is generally considered to have the most experienced and battle-hardened fighters.

The Turkish government has long insisted that the Kurdish militia is closely linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a separatist group known as the P.K.K. That group is listed by Turkey, the United States and Europe as a terrorist organization.

Any hope that Mr. Erdogan might soften his position on arming the Y.P.G. after winning a referendum that gave him vast powers appeared to fade last month after Turkish warplanes carried out an airstrike against the Syrian Kurds.

According to Turkish news reports, the officials who met with General McMaster on Monday included Gen. Hulusi Akar, the commander of the Turkish armed forces; Hakan Fidan, Turkey's intelligence chief; and Ibrahim Kalin, the presidential spokesman. Their mission, the Turkish news media reported, was to talk the Trump administration out of arming the Kurds. Instead, they were informed that the decision had already been made.

Syria analysts, as well as current and former senior American officials, said Mr. Trump's decision was not surprising given the military's insistence on arming the Kurds for the impending battle for Raqqa, but they warned it could damage broader relations with Turkey.

"This decision was probably necessary if the coalition to defeat the Islamic State was to take Raqqa without huge numbers of U.S. troops being directly involved," said Andrew Exum, a former top Pentagon Middle East policy official who served as an Army Ranger. "But this decision — to arm a group closely associated with a foreign terrorist organization, and one that has waged a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state — will likely reverberate through U.S. relations with Turkey for decades to come."

James F. Jeffrey, a former United States ambassador to Turkey and a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, agreed that the decision would add to the tension in American-Turkish relations. "We're putting Turkey in a very difficult position," he said.

Syrian Kurds, however, hailed the move. Alan Hassan, reached via internet messaging in Qamishli, in northeastern Syria, part of the de facto semiautonomous zone Kurds have carved out during the Syrian war, said that Mr. Trump's decision gave new legitimacy to an existing partnership with the Y.P.G.

"In the beginning, American support was secret," he said. "Now it is public. The relationship has changed from undeclared to declared."

Former President Barack Obama also favored arming the Kurds, although divisions among his aides were so pronounced that he did not come to that view until his last week in office. During his administration's deliberations, American diplomats in Ankara warned of a possible Turkish backlash, while military officials insisted that the Y.P.G. was the only option if Raqqa was to be taken in the coming months.

Gen. Joseph L. Votel, the commander of American forces in the Middle East, has acknowledged the challenges of dealing with two pivotal allies in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria who essentially loathe each other — the Turks and the Syrian Kurds.

But General Votel and senior American counterterrorism officials have said it is essential to rout the Islamic State from its stronghold, principally to weaken its ability to plan, direct and enable terrorist plots against the West.

In recent weeks, analysts said, the Islamic State has tried to slip some of its senior planners and operatives out of Raqqa before the battle to maintain essential functions like command and control, recruiting, handling of finances and the ability to help carry out plots against the West.

That is one reason that even as the American-backed Syrian Kurdish and Arab forces have increasingly tightened a noose around the city, and the coalition has pummeled it with airstrikes, allied fighters have

also struck targets south of Raqqa, where many of the senior Islamic State members have fled. near Deir al-Zour and Mayadeen,

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

UNE - Trump Set to Arm Kurds in ISIS Fight, Angering Turkey

President Donald Trump approved plans to directly arm Kurdish fighters battling Islamic State in Syria, U.S. officials said Tuesday, paving the way for an offensive against the extremist group's de facto capital but angering Turkish allies who view the Kurdish fighters as terrorists.

The decision to arm the YPG, the Syrian Kurdish militia the U.S. considers its most reliable military ally in the country, comes after a long debate within the Trump administration.

Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally, considers the YPG to be a terrorist group that threatens its borders, and it has long opposed the U.S. plans.

The decision sets the stage for the YPG and its Arab allies to launch an offensive on Islamic State in Raqqa, one of the extremist group's last major strongholds in the region.

But it also complicates Mr. Trump's efforts to repair U.S. relations with Turkey that reached a low at the end of the Obama administration.

It remains to be seen how Turkey, a pivotal member of the U.S.-led coalition battling Islamic State, will respond. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is scheduled to fly to Washington next week for what could be a tense first White House meeting with Mr. Trump. Turkey's Incirlik Air Base serves as the main launchpad for U.S.-coalition airstrikes against Islamic State in neighboring Syria. While Turkey could kick the U.S. out, Turkish officials said that was unlikely.

Mr. Trump's decision comes amid a broader strategic review of the U.S. fight against global Islamist extremism. Mr. Trump is also considering a proposal to send more than 3,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan to help fight resurgent Taliban fighters.

The president has already lifted a cap on how many forces the

Pentagon can send to fight Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. His decision to arm the YPG sets the stage for the U.S. to accelerate the push to seize Raqqa.

U.S. officials in the State Department and U.S. Central Command, which oversees the fight against Islamic State, pushed the administration to directly arm the YPG, despite Turkish concerns, according to officials involved in the discussions.

Mr. Trump faces a challenging task in persuading Mr. Erdogan to cooperate. One of the most pressing concerns is the risk to U.S. special operations forces who work side-by-side with YPG fighters in Syria.

Two weeks ago, over American objections, Turkish warplanes bombed YPG forces, killing at least 18 fighters. U.S. officials said Turkey gave them less than an hour's notice of the planned attack, which gave them little time to ensure that American forces were out of harm's way.

In a risky attempt to defuse tensions, U.S. military vehicles flying the American flag started patrolling in Syria near the Turkish border after the Turkish airstrikes.

Turkish officials have said they would continue to attack the YPG in Syria, despite U.S. objections, creating a risk for U.S. forces and complicating efforts to focus on seizing Raqqa from Islamic State.

U.S. officials hope to assuage Turkish concerns by assuring them that the YPG will receive limited amounts of arms and ammunition for the fight in Raqqa. The U.S. has no plans to provide the YPG with advanced weaponry that could be smuggled into Turkey and used against Turkish security forces and civilians.

The U.S. will provide small arms, ammunition and machine guns, and possibly some nonlethal assistance, such as light trucks, to the Kurdish

forces, said a U.S. official. Many of the arms and other shipments of equipment have been pre-positioned in anticipation of a decision to arm the Kurdish force, U.S. officials have said.

Although Kurdish forces are highly regarded and trusted by U.S. special operations forces, the arms will still be parceled out, at least initially, in what the U.S. official characterized as "drop, op, and assess" approach. The shipments will be dropped, an operation will be performed, and the U.S. will assess the success of that mission before providing more arms, according to the U.S. official.

"We will be supplying them only with enough arms and ammo to accomplish each interim objective," the U.S. official said.

Once the shipments of the arms begin in coming weeks, they will be provided to Kurdish forces in increments as a way of building trust and ensuring that the shipments don't exceed the capability of the Kurdish forces to absorb them, said the U.S. official.

Turkey views the YPG as one and the same with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a separatist group in Turkey's mainly Kurdish regions that the Turks have been battling for years. Both the U.S. and Turkey have designated the PKK as a terrorist group.

The U.S. doesn't designate the YPG as a terrorist group, and it has helped the group rise to become a force of about 25,000 fighters that serves as the backbone of ground forces battling Islamic State in northern Syria. Turkish officials view the force as a direct threat and say they have no confidence that the YPG will limit its ambitions to Syria.

Gen. H.R. McMaster, Mr. Trump's national security adviser, delivered the news Monday evening to top Turkish officials in a tense White House meeting. The Turkish officials weren't pleased, but "took it about

as well as could be expected," said one person familiar with the meeting.

After delivering the news, Gen. McMaster brought the Turkish delegation, which included the country's top general, its intelligence chief and the president's spokesman, into the Oval Office to meet Mr. Trump for a brief chat, the person said.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer said he didn't know if Mr. Trump had yet discussed the issue with Mr. Erdogan but said the U.S. is committed to protecting Turkey from additional security risks. "The fight for Raqqa will be long and difficult...and another step towards eliminating ISIS," Mr. Spicer said.

The decision sets the stage for the U.S. military to provide the YPG with more firepower to take on Islamic State.

The U.S. has pushed back on long-held Turkish fears that U.S. arms would enable the Kurdish forces to push across the border into Turkey.

Turkey has pushed the U.S. to sideline the YPG and instead work with the Sunni Arab forces it has armed and trained. But the U.S. ultimately decided that the Turkish-backed fighters weren't up to the task, especially since they refused to work with the YPG to take Raqqa.

Turkey and its allies are concerned the YPG will use the new arms to retain control over Raqqa, something U.S. officials say they are trying to avoid.

"The Kurds won't hand over any piece of land they have occupied except through force, or if the U.S. abandons them," said Col. Ahmed Othman, a leader of the Sultan Murad Brigade, a militant group backed by Turkey and fighting alongside the Turkish military in Syria.



What US-Kurdish alliance means for ISIS fight, and for Kurds

The symbolism of American solidarity with its problematic but highly valued Kurdish allies could not have been more potent.

With American flag patches affixed to the chests of their uniforms, US military officers attended the

funerals last week of Syrian Kurdish fighters of the People's Protection Units (YPG), pivotal US allies in the fight against the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria.

The Kurdish fighters had been killed in airstrikes by another US ally,

NATO member Turkey, which considers the YPG to be terrorists.

That wasn't the only American flag-waving on behalf of the YPG: To deter further Turkish attacks, convoys of US armored vehicles flying the stars and stripes snaked

along Syria's northern border with Turkey, creating a human buffer to protect a local fighting force that the Pentagon has invested in for more than 2-1/2 years, despite constant Turkish complaints.

"I'll tell you, it was like a wedding was going on," Ivan Abu Zeid, a resident of Qamishli town, told Syria Direct website about the US arrival. "People were thrilled, clapping and waving at the American soldiers."

With the US help, Syrian Kurds have become the only local fighters capable of knocking ISIS out of Raqqa, the capital of its self-declared caliphate, and are advancing to do so at America's behest.

And they are not the first Kurdish force to have helped the United States achieve its military goals against ISIS in the region. In Iraq, the peshmerga were instrumental both in containing the breathtaking advance of ISIS in 2014 and, since then, in rolling them back, including the fight that has cornered ISIS in its last urban toehold in northwestern Mosul.

The fight against ISIS is just the latest instance in which the US and Kurdish fighters have joined forces. At times, US and Kurdish interests have coincided. At others, they've been complementary.

Yet often, from the Kurds' perspective, these joint ventures came to be defined by betrayal. Among their most bitter memories: the 1991 Kurdish uprising against Saddam Hussein that the US encouraged but allowed to be crushed.

The Kurds' gamble

The Kurdish experience with America raises the question: How strong is the US-Kurdish alliance this time? What do the Syrian Kurds expect in return for their sacrifice? And, despite the optics of current US military support, do Syria's Kurds risk being abandoned once the anti-ISIS operations are over and Turkey demands that the US choose between its allies?

"This is a big risk that the YPG and PYD have been taking," says Noah Bonsey, a senior Middle East analyst for the International Crisis Group (ICG), using the acronym PYD for the Syrian Kurds' political arm, the Democratic Union Party.

"Their gamble all along has been that working with the US will not only steadily expand their territorial holdings and gradually increase their international political legitimacy, but indeed it will deter Turkish attack," says Mr. Bonsey.

Yet the Turkish airstrikes on April 25, which killed 20 YPG fighters in northern Syria and struck northern Iraq, were a surprise wake-up call that US and Russian influence over Ankara may be limited – and that Turkey, if it chooses, could be a spoiler to the Raqqa offensive.

Already, US and YPG deployments in Syria have been altered to defend against Turkish attack instead of focusing solely on the Raqqa offensive.

Here's why the YPG is a problematic US ally: While its fighters command and lead the 50,000-strong umbrella Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which include some Arab and other units, it is also the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has conducted a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state that has flared anew since mid-2015.

The PKK is officially considered a terrorist group by the US and Europe, as well as by Turkey. And the backbone of YPG leadership are PKK cadres, often with years of fighting experience.

What the YPG wants

In its approach to Raqqa, the White House has expanded a YPG-centered plan inherited from the Obama administration. In March, President Trump added 400 US Marines to the 300 Special Operations Forces already assisting the SDF in northeast Syria. And May 8, according to NBC News, the White House authorized the transfer to the YPG of infantry arms and ammunition and engineering breaching equipment such as bulldozers.

But Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, when he meets Mr. Trump May 16, will insist again that the US stop working with the Syrian Kurds and embrace a Turkish plan to use non-Kurdish forces in the Raqqa offensive.

Wading through the confusing jumble of acronyms, US officials carefully distinguish between the PKK and their YPG allies. But Mr. Erdoğan last week again compared the YPG to ISIS and Al Qaeda, saying "they are all the same," and that it was a "common responsibility to eradicate those terrorist organizations."

Turkey was "seriously concerned to see US flags in a convoy that has YPG rags on it," Erdoğan said earlier, adding he would raise the issue with Trump.

Syrian Kurds reject the terrorist label, and the YPG counted 67 Turkish attacks on its positions in April. In turn, it said it destroyed Turkish tanks and armored vehicles.

"We will not give in to Turkey's attempts to drag us into conflict because our goal is to fight terrorist organizations ... and liberate the areas that [ISIS] control," SDF spokesman Talal Silo told the AraNews website, saying the group

expected that the US presence would prevent Turkish attacks.

The result is a careful balancing act for the White House, as it prioritizes forcing ISIS out of Raqqa over ties with a strategic ally. But it also raises questions about what Washington can deliver in return to the Kurds.

"You are hitting Raqqa, not because Raqqa is a Kurdish town – it isn't – but because the US is asking you to do it. They are going to shed blood in the expectation of something," says Bulent Aliriza, director of the Turkey Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington.

The YPG expectation will be for support for a de facto autonomous zone, he says, similar to that set up for Iraqi Kurds in 1991 in northern Iraq. Such a zone was included in one unofficial paper circulated last week by Russia during Syria peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan. But the final agreement – signed by Russia, Iran and Turkey on Thursday – to set up four areas it called "de-escalation" zones made no provision for the Kurdish region of northeast Syria.

For Turkey, an unacceptable threat

Turkey has refused such an outcome, stating that a Kurdish entity along its southern border would present an unacceptable opening for the PKK to launch attacks. But that is not the prism through which much of the anti-ISIS coalition is looking, which complicates Turkey's argument to drop the YPG.

"The entire world, for better or for worse from the Turkish point of view, is seeing [the YPG] as fighters, men and women, fighting against guys who are cutting people's heads off and making women sex slaves. The entire world is going to cheer when Raqqa falls," says Mr. Aliriza.

"So Turkey's ability to stop this process, and stop the support given to the YPG from across the board – not just the US, not just Russia – is going to be difficult," he says.

While that may suit the Pentagon, by not delaying the Raqqa offensive, the risks for Turkey extend beyond Syria. Its battle with the PKK in southeast Turkey and northern Iraq has escalated for two years, and included high profile Kurdish bombings that have targeted Turkish security forces all the way to Ankara and Istanbul.

"If Turkey carries out more attacks into Syria, we will definitely see a rise in attacks in Turkey by the PKK against the Turkish Army ... and we

see for the first time the YPG responding to Turkish attacks," says Güney Yıldız, a specialist on Turkey and Kurds, who has advised the British Parliament.

"The dichotomy is that if the US has to choose between Turkey and the YPG, they will definitely choose Turkey. But the question is whether they have to," says Mr. Yıldız. "That's a dichotomy pushed by Turkey or the Kurds, but what the Americans have been doing since autumn 2014 onwards is using both, and using both as leverage against each other."

But how sustainable can that be, with the current trajectory of tension? Turkey's noisy opposition to Kurdish gains in northern Syria first spilled over last August with Operation Euphrates Shield, a cross-border incursion that ostensibly sought to push ISIS back from Turkey's border – but also aimed to prevent Kurdish forces from connecting individual cantons under their control into contiguous territory.

What happens when ISIS falls?

As the Raqqa offensive has neared, with US-backed Syrian Kurds ready to claim the prize, so have Turkey's rhetoric and actions increased.

"It's a very dangerous situation," says Bonsey of ICG. But the longer-term problem for the YPG may be what happens in post-ISIS Syria, if the US moves its focus elsewhere.

While the YPG has proven to have "some very impressive tactical proficiency," it may have also overestimated long-term US commitment, he says. "The YPG just does not seem to have a strategic answer for what to do, if and when that US role declines."

Which leaves many wondering if Syria's Kurds are being set up for the kind of betrayal that ethnic Kurds have been stung by repeatedly, for decades. Analysts note cases infamous among Kurds, such as the US selling them out to Iraq in 1975, when they believed the US guaranteed them aid from then-ally Iran.

They felt betrayed again by US military support for Saddam Hussein in the late 1980s, when the Iraqi dictator carried out a genocidal campaign against Kurds. And when President George H. W. Bush encouraged Kurds to rise up in 1991 – as Iraq's Kurds remember it – the US allowed Mr. Hussein to crush the rebellion by not intervening to stop his helicopters and tanks.

"Kurdish history is littered with promises that were made to them," says Aliriza from CSIS. But he

doesn't think it will necessarily happen again this time.

"I would argue that the level of engagement with the Syrian Kurds, because of its breadth and content, as well as its openness, is

extraordinary," says Aliriza. "This level of US military engagement is unprecedented."



Trump's Plan to Arm Kurds Lays Bare the Strategic Vacuum in Syria

James Jeffrey

President Donald Trump has his work cut out for him next week in his first meeting with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. While many issues crowd their agenda, the situation in northern Syria will be the most difficult. Tensions remain high between the United States and Turkey about the role of the Syrian Kurdish PYD and its military wing YPG, in the fight against the Islamic State, following a Turkish air attack on YPG bases along the Iraqi-Syrian border on April 23. In private and publicly, at an Atlantic Council meeting on April 28, Erdogan stressed that he is ready to act further against the PYD.

But, as Foreign Policy reported on May 5 and confirmed by the Trump administration on May 9, the United States plans to move against the Islamic State in Raqqa using — and arming — the PYD. Tactically, the United States, whose troops were close to the airstrikes, and which sees no immediate military alternative to the PYD, is in the right. But less so strategically, as the administration appears uncertain or ill-informed about the larger issues at stake in Syria. This tension, if not resolved between the two presidents, could provoke a confrontation between Ankara and Washington in the geostrategic great game looming in the region.

This game in and around Syria isn't the one the United States is now fighting single-mindedly against the Islamic State in its last strongholds in Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqa, Syria; rather, it's the larger carving up of the Levant following the Islamic State's inevitable demise. The Turkish airstrike and a recent Israeli attack on Hezbollah depots at the Damascus airport, are chess moves in the larger game: efforts by the Turks, Israelis, Iraqi Kurds, the region's Sunni Arab majority, and (they all hope) the United States to push back against an Iranian- and Russian-led upheaval of the regional order. This is exactly what Trump will hear from regional leaders in Israel and Saudi Arabia in two weeks.

The PYD, from Turkey's standpoint, is part of this upheaval. The strategic difficulty for Washington is that it's not sure, beyond general hostility, what its policy toward Iran and its Hezbollah and Syrian vassals should be — nor its relationship with the PYD — once the Islamic State is defeated.

For Erdogan and the Turkish military, the PYD, as a geographical extension of its parent organization, the Turkish-Kurdish insurgent PKK, threatens Turkish territorial integrity at two levels. Ankara and the PKK have been at war in Turkey's southeast for more than 30 years. The PKK claims to represent Turkey's roughly 15 million Kurds, almost one-fifth of the population. Ankara cannot militarily defeat the PKK, but it has effectively blocked it from uniting the Kurdish population, now divided into several basic camps: a pro-PKK element; religious Kurds in the southeast who often vote for Erdogan's AKP party; and a large minority assimilated by language, family, and geography with ethnic Turks. The result is a bloody stalemate broken by temporary cease-fires without any real resolution, as the PKK's Marxist core — loyal to imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan — seeks ultimately a Kurdish state carved out of much of Turkey.

Thus, Erdogan's great worry about the United States arming the Kurds in Syria. Were the PYD to form a contiguous state along Turkey's southern border it would dramatically increase the PKK's reach, forcing Turkey to deal simultaneously with the PKK insurgency inside the country and a PKK-allied state to its south. Even if an uneasy truce with the PYD endures, Turkey's strategic situation would worsen, and push many Turkish Kurds to choose sides.

Ankara has long warned what it sees as a naïve Washington not to support the PYD against the Islamic State

Ankara has long warned what it sees as a naïve Washington not to support the PYD against the Islamic State, which it fears would facilitate a PYD-dominated northern Syria

after the Islamic State is defeated. Turkey's alternative against the Islamic State, a Turkish-trained Syrian Sunni force, is not favored by the Pentagon, however.

Even worse, the PYD, with close trade ties with the Syrian regime, could form common cause with Bashar al-Assad, the Iranians, and Russia to surround Turkey, opening an Iranian ground corridor through northern Iraq and PYD territory to Damascus. These concerns motivated the Turkish intervention in Syria last August, as much to push back against the Islamic State as to block a contiguous Kurdish zone. The April strikes against PYD/PKK targets in northeastern Syria and in Sinjar, Iraq — along the aforementioned corridor, where PKK forces are arrayed against Turkey's Iraqi Kurdish ally Masoud Barzani — again confirmed this willingness to use force to advance Turkish territorial concerns.

Washington appears in turn clueless and furious at Erdogan, particularly with the latest bombing. (Erdogan's bombast, authoritarianism, and dismissal of U.S. concerns generates strong reactions, especially after Trump congratulated him on his controversial referendum win and invited him to Washington.) Washington needs the PYD and its Arab allies to lead the attack on the Islamic State capital of Raqqa: in part because the United States will not commit ground troops itself, in part because the PYD fighters are among the region's best. Tactically, to eliminate the more immediate if less strategic threat — the Islamic State — a temporary alliance with the PYD makes sense. But the U.S. military further infuriates Turkey by asserting frequently that the PYD can be differentiated from the PKK (despite former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter's Senate testimony last April, and a detailed report from May 4 by the International Crisis Group documenting the PKK's domination of the PYD and the Syrian Democratic Forces, an umbrella rebel group). This feeds Turkish suspicion that, strategically, the United States plans to use the PYD

against Turkey — a long-standing if unsubstantiated Turkish concern.

But the Trump administration as a whole strengthens this concern by ignoring the stakes in the region beyond defeating the Islamic State. All of America's regional allies feels themselves under threat from Iran, while Turkey sees a second threat from Iran's possible ally, the PKK/PYD.

While the Trump administration — in contrast to President Barack Obama — recognizes in principle Tehran's threat to regional order, it clearly has not worked out a strategy to contain it. Such strategizing is hard, and particularly for the United States. In contrast, the military campaign against the Islamic State, fulfilling a Trump campaign pledge, is a "good war" with low casualties, high public support, and victory in sight. For good reason, it is the unchallenged priority.

But the Islamic State cannot upend Middle East order. Iran and its friends can.

But the Islamic State cannot upend Middle East order. Iran and its friends can. So, as is often the case, Washington is focusing on tactical feel-good wins while ignoring the messy day-after politics and thus risking long-term losses. Now, Trump faces a possible confrontation with NATO ally Turkey — economically and militarily the strongest state in the region, and irreplaceable in any strategy to contain Iran.

Erdogan's visit offers a chance to defuse this pending crisis. Nothing is certain with the increasingly unpredictable Turkish president. But if Trump convinces him, that he has a regional containment strategy against what Erdogan recently called "Persian expansionism"; that his administration's collaboration with the PYD is limited by time, mission, and quality; and that Turkey will have a role in liberating Raqqa — as the local tribes desire — then a crisis with Ankara might be avoided, and a common effort against the greater regional threat initiated.



A Syrian Plan Worth a Look

By The Editorial Board

After six years and with some 400,000 people killed, almost any plan to end or reduce the carnage in

Syria would be welcome. So the Trump administration would be derelict if it did not give serious

consideration to a plan for a cease-fire and safe zones brokered by

Russia, with the backing of Turkey and Iran.

The plan contains flaws, and President Trump could make the situation worse if he is too eager to make common cause with his erstwhile buddy, President Vladimir Putin of Russia, who cares most about securing his own legacy and Russian interests in the Middle East. Syria will be a main focus when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson meets Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, in Washington on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration announced on Tuesday that it would provide Syrian Kurds near the Turkish border with heavy weapons so they can help retake Raqqa from the Islamic State. Like Barack Obama before him, Mr. Trump has faced a choice between arming the Syrian Kurds — a move deeply opposed by Turkey — and not arming them and thus weakening the fight against ISIS. The Kurds have been among the most effective American allies in the

war against the Islamic State, but Turkey regards them as allies of Kurdish separatists inside Turkey.

It is not clear how the administration intends to avoid a backlash from Turkey, or whether its decision will in some way affect the cease-fire deal, which went into effect at midnight Friday. Under the deal, Russia, Turkey and Iran pledged to enforce a cease-fire between Syrian government and opposition forces in Idlib Province, part of Homs Province, the Ghouta suburbs of Damascus and parts of Syria's southern provinces.

The plan would allow displaced or embattled Syrians to relocate to the designated safe areas, still held by rebels unaffiliated with the Islamic State, and enable aid deliveries to some 4.5 million people at risk. It also calls for all parties to fight jihadists like the Islamic State and the Qaeda-linked group once known as the Nusra Front.

Previous cease-fires have been short-lived. The new deal has led to reduced fighting, but hardly a

cessation. On Sunday, the army of President Bashar al-Assad, whose government agreed to the cease-fire, seized control of the village of al-Zalakiyat north of Hama, a war monitor reported.

Syrian opposition groups, mostly Sunni Muslims, including some backed by the United States, rejected the deal because they have little faith that Russia and Iran can get Mr. Assad to fulfill his promise to halt the slaughter of civilians. And they object to the role of Iran, a Shiite Muslim nation that has a religious kinship with Mr. Assad's Alawite sect.

Insuring compliance is a big question. The Russian negotiator at the talks, Aleksandr Lavrentyev, reportedly told Russian news outlets that Moscow could "work more closely" with countries that back the rebels, including the United States and Saudi Arabia. Other reports suggested that Russia, Turkey and Iran could send armed forces to secure the zones.

In Copenhagen on Monday for a meeting of the anti-ISIS coalition, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said the United States owed it to the Syrian people to take a close look at the deal but emphasized the many questions, including whether it could be effective.

Although President Trump raised the idea of safe zones during the campaign, the Pentagon has long been opposed because they could lead to a new commitment of American forces in a messy civil war.

Dividing Syria into government and rebel sectors, even temporarily, as this agreement does, is not ideal. The last thing the region needs is another fractured state. But after years of fruitless attempts to end the killing and forge a comprehensive political solution that would replace Mr. Assad with a more inclusive government, it may be the only way to stop the bloodshed.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The World Didn't Agree to a Nuclear-Armed Iran, Even in 10 Years

By Max Singer

The U.S. and its allies can prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons, but only if they are clear about what the controversial 2015 nuclear deal actually says. Critics of the agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, often say the deal gives Iran permission to acquire nuclear weapons after 10 years. Yet the stated premise of the plan was that Iran would never build or acquire nuclear weapons—ever.

An item in the deal's general provisions states that the plan "will ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme." Another item reads: "Iran reaffirms that under no circumstances will Iran ever seek, develop, or acquire nuclear weapons."

The world powers that negotiated the deal agreed to lift the sanctions against Iran only on the stated assumption that Iran never had, and never would have, a nuclear-weapons program. Although it's unlikely any parties to the deal believed Iran's nuclear program was only for peaceful purposes, they all found it diplomatically convenient to assert that it was. This diplomatic prevarication means that any time evidence is found suggesting Iran is

trying to produce or acquire nuclear weapons, the U.S. may feign shock at being deceived. And without violating what it agreed to in the nuclear deal, the U.S. can announce that it will do whatever is necessary to ensure that Iran will not succeed in acquiring nuclear weapons.

Nothing in the agreement precludes the countries that signed the deal from acting to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Since Tehran had insisted that it did not have a nuclear-weapons program, the regime cannot claim that its pursuit of nuclear weapons was authorized by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The problem of stopping Iran is therefore not a legal one. The question is whether the U.S. and other powers have the tools to compel Iran to abort its nuclear-weapons program, and whether they have the will to use them. Are the great democracies determined enough to impose decisive economic sanctions or to encourage internal opposition to the Iranian revolutionary regime? What about military force?

The U.S., Germany, France and Britain no doubt have the power to end Iran's nuclear-weapons program. If they cut off all

communication with the country—flights, telephone, internet, banking—along with the countries that would follow their leadership, Iran would be compelled to yield regardless of what China and Russia might do. And Beijing and Moscow would not be enthusiastic about standing against the West's actions to defend Iran.

The democracies don't need to commit to changing the Iranian regime, or to collaborate actively with Iranian dissidents. Even moderate political and social support by the U.S. and Europe for Iran's internal opposition could scare the regime into postponing its efforts to get nuclear weapons.

No military attack, even by the U.S., could reliably destroy all of the Iranian weapons-production facilities, but complete destruction is not necessary. Partial elimination might be enough to convince the regime that rebuilding would not be worthwhile because they could be attacked again. And a successful attack could also undermine the Iranian security services' control of the population.

The decisive question is how strongly the U.S. and the other democracies are determined to prevent Iran from having nuclear

weapons. If they have the will to do so, they have the necessary power, and the nuclear deal is not an impediment.

This is not a defense of the Iran deal, which simply postponed a showdown for a decade or so. This delay ended the momentum of the sanctions regime against Iran that had been gradually built over years. And it means that when a confrontation with Iran finally comes, the regime will be much closer to producing numerous nuclear weapons than when the deal was made. On the other hand, the delay also gives more time for the mullahs to fall before they can obtain nuclear weapons—and more time for the democracies to build up courage and determination to prevent the regional nuclear arms race that would follow Iran's acquisition of the bomb.

President Trump does not have to solve the Iranian nuclear-weapon threat during his first term. The deadline for building the coalition with the strength and determination to stop Iran will come after 2020. But he would be wise to use the term to develop the American and international understanding and policies that can create the will and power to stop Iran.



Negotiating With Iran Could Pay Off for Trump

Amir Handjani

If there has been one consistent theme in Donald Trump's foreign policy since the early days of his campaign, it has been his insistence

that America has not benefited economically from the global order it

mostly protects. Yet when it comes to U.S. policy in the Middle East, he has been wildly inconsistent. During the presidential race, he talked about ripping up the nuclear deal reached between Iran and six world powers. He walked that pledge back shortly after taking office. Nor has he acted on his rhetoric of ramping up sanctions on Tehran.

So, here's a way the Trump administration could bring these foreign policy contradictions in accord: By confronting conventional Washington wisdom that isolating Iran is beneficial to America's strategic goals. Instead, the U.S. could try building on the nuclear pact in a way that would allow Tehran to gain more economic incentives by moderating, what Washington has long regarded, as its destabilizing behavior in the Middle East.

Over the last four decades, the U.S. has spent a great deal of blood and treasure countering Iranian expansion in the region. It has also maintained a robust sanctions program that most of its European allies and Asian partners find cumbersome and counterproductive. There is no denying Iran is pursuing a regional agenda often at odds with U.S. interests. There is also no denying that years of isolation and sanctions have now made reintegrating into the global economy one of Tehran's top goals.

In two weeks, President Hassan Rouhani will face voters in a referendum on not only his presidency but also the nuclear deal. That agreement was intended to usher in a new era of economic prosperity. The results have been mixed at best. Iran's economic development is still shackled by the numerous secondary sanctions

enforced by the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control -- for human rights abuses, state sponsorship of terrorism and its ballistic missile program.

To be sure, Tehran's economy has rebounded much faster than many economists anticipated when nuclear sanctions were removed 18 months ago. Its has improved from a negative growth of 6 percent in 2013 to 7 percent growth in 2016. The largest driver has been Iran's ability to sell its oil and petrochemicals back on the international market. Iran's exports have doubled in the last year. Inflation has also been tamed. Unofficially it was hovering around 40 percent in 2013 but has now declined to about 8 percent. Even tourism jumped last year by 11 percent, as Europeans and Asians traveled in droves to see this exotic and historic corner of the world

The International Monetary Fund recently affirmed Iran's economic recovery, but cautioned against major headwinds. Unemployment stands at 14 percent and youth unemployment at a staggering 31 percent. If anything, the signing of nuclear deal and the removal of nuclear related sanctions brought many of the structural issues that plague Iran's economy to the forefront. Chief among them is how much secondary U.S. sanctions will always hold it back from being an economic power.

While U.S. criticisms of Iran's behavior are not without merit, it does not go unnoticed by Iranians that their neighbors, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, engage in similar mischief. And yet both can go into international credit markets and raise billions of dollars with ease. Both have also received low marks on human rights. Saudi charities and

billionaires have provided seed funding for many of today's Jihadist terrorist groups. Turkey has abetted Islamic State's oil smuggling and is now bombing the U.S.'s Kurdish allies in Syria.

However, because the U.S. has not slapped broad-based sanctions on either country, their economies fare better than Iran's. Both are part of the G-20 and the World Trade Organization.

That said, what incentive would the Trump administration have to work with Iran on a roadmap that could end up removing secondary sanctions? The answer lies with themes that Trump's supporters enthusiastically endorsed: A smarter foreign policy and not spending so much treasure abroad when U.S. interests are not clearly defined.

From 1976 through 2010, Princeton University Professor Roger Stern calculates, the U.S. spent \$8 trillion protecting the flow of oil from the Middle East. Add that to that the money spent on two wars since 9/11. All that wealth has been consumed by a region where the U.S. has only received around 10 percent of its imported crude. It doesn't take a savvy New York real-estate tycoon to realize that the return on investment in the Persian Gulf hasn't been a success.

America's partners in the region have a vested interest in continuing the policy of isolating Iran and having the U.S. foot the bill. If, however, Trump were to engage Iran in substantive diplomacy and put the issues that matter most to the U.S. up for bargaining -- particularly, Iran's support for sectarian militias and its ballistic missile program in exchange for removal of the sanctions that prevent Tehran from accessing international financing and

investment -- he would be able to test the regime to see how far it would go. If the negotiations lead nowhere, then the U.S. wouldn't lose anything. Sanctions and robust U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf are in place for the foreseeable future.

Clear thinking from leading voices in business, economics, politics, foreign affairs, culture, and more.

Those skeptical that Iran would negotiate in good faith should consider how much Tehran has to gain from reaching such an accord. In 2016, Iran's economy absorbed an estimated \$9.5 billion in foreign investment, a tiny fraction of the stated goal of attracting between \$150 and \$200 billion by 2020 to revitalize its antiquated energy infrastructure. Tehran knows that so long as Washington maintains sanctions on large swaths of its economy it won't attract even a fraction of that. Already the energy giant Total SA is waiting to see what the Trump administration will do this month when certain nuclear-related sanction waivers are up for renewal.

For the last 40 years, the U.S. has made containment of Iran a foundation of its policy in the Middle East. Politically, this has largely failed, as Iran has more influence in the region today than it had under the Shah. Economically, however, the U.S. has managed to keep Iran out of the global economy. Without jobs and sustained economic growth, Iran's long term stability could be in doubt.

Both sides have ample reason to expand their negotiations beyond the nuclear deal. If anything, it makes good business sense. The alternative will be more trillions of dollars wasted, and down the road, a possible a military confrontation.

The New York Times

UNE - South Korea Elects Moon Jae-in, Who Backs Talks With North, as President

By Choe Sang-Hun

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea elected Moon Jae-in, a human rights lawyer who favors dialogue with North Korea, as president on Tuesday, returning the nation's liberals to power after nearly a decade in the political wilderness and setting up a potential rift with the United States over the North's nuclear weapons program.

His victory caps a remarkable national drama in which a corruption scandal, mass protests and impeachment forced a South Korean president from office for the first time in almost 60 years, leaving

the conservative establishment in disarray and its former leader in jail.

Mr. Moon, 64, a son of North Korean refugees, faces the challenge of enacting changes to limit the power of big business and address the abuses uncovered in his predecessor's downfall. He must also make good on his promise of a new approach to North Korea while balancing relations with the United States and China.

His election immediately scrambles the geopolitics over North Korea's nuclear arsenal. Even as the Trump administration urges the world to step up pressure on Pyongyang, it now faces the prospect of a critical

ally — one with the most at stake in any conflict with the North — breaking ranks and adopting a more conciliatory approach.

Mr. Moon has argued that Washington's reliance on sanctions and pressure has been ineffective and that it is time to give engagement and dialogue with the North another chance, an approach favored by China. He has also called for a review of the Pentagon's deployment of an antimissile defense system in South Korea that the Chinese government has denounced.

In a nationally televised speech before cheering supporters, Mr.

Moon declared that he would "be a president for all the people." He said he would work with political rivals to create a country where "justice rules and common sense prevails."

With all ballots counted on Wednesday morning, Mr. Moon was in first place with 41 percent of the vote, according to the National Election Commission. He was followed by Hong Joon-pyo, a conservative who had pledged a tough stance against North Korea, with 24 percent, and Ahn Cheol-soo, a centrist, with 21 percent.

Unlike his predecessors, Mr. Moon does not have a two-month

transition period. He will take office on Wednesday.

Mr. Moon's position on North Korea is a sharp departure from that of his two immediate predecessors, conservatives who tended to view anything less than strict enforcement of sanctions against the North as ideologically suspect.

While he condemned "the ruthless dictatorial regime of North Korea" during his campaign, Mr. Moon also argued that South Korea must "embrace the North Korean people to achieve peaceful reunification one day."

"To do that, we must recognize Kim Jong-un as their ruler and as our dialogue partner," he said. "The goal of sanctions must be to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table."

David Straub, a former director of Korean affairs at the State Department and a senior fellow at the Sejong Institute, a think tank near Seoul, warned of "serious policy differences between the U.S. and South Korean presidents" over North Korea and related issues. He added that these differences could lead to "significantly increased popular dissatisfaction with the United States in South Korea."

China, on the other hand, is likely to welcome Mr. Moon's election, which may make it easier for it to deflect pressure from the United States to get tough on North Korea and strengthen its argument that Washington must address the North's concerns about security.

Some analysts say Mr. Moon's victory could lower the temperature of the North Korean standoff, prompting Washington and Pyongyang to pause and assess the effect of the new government in Seoul on their policies. Satellite images indicate that the North has been preparing to conduct a sixth nuclear test, and the Trump administration has engaged in a heated campaign of implied threats and military posturing to stop it.

Mr. Moon's view of North Korea echoes the approach of the two liberal presidents who held power from 1998 to 2008 and pursued a so-called sunshine policy toward the

North that included diplomatic talks, family reunions and joint economic projects, such as the Kaesong industrial park in North Korea, near the demilitarized zone.

But that era was punctuated by the North's first nuclear test, conducted in 2006, and much has changed on the Korean Peninsula since.

With four more tests under its belt, each more powerful than the last, and a rapidly advancing ballistic missile program, North Korea poses a greater threat to the South and appears to be closing in on nuclear arms capable of striking the United States. Mr. Moon also faces a mercurial adversary in Mr. Kim, 33, who took power in Pyongyang after the death of his father in late 2011.

Critics say any effort by Mr. Moon to revive the sunshine policy — perhaps by reopening Kaesong, which his disgraced predecessor, Park Geun-hye, shut last year — would give North Korea a lifeline it could use to reduce its economic dependence on China, weakening Beijing's leverage over it and strengthening Mr. Kim's hand.

The American missile defense system, known as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or Thaad, presents another test for Mr. Moon. It went into operation last week, and Mr. Moon has complained that its deployment was rushed to present him with a *fait accompli*. But if he tries to undo it, he could strain the alliance with Washington while leaving the impression of bowing to Chinese pressure.

That could be politically fatal in South Korea, where the public, across the political spectrum, is wary of the country appearing too deferential to big powers. Many South Koreans complained that the United States had foisted Thaad on their nation, but they also fumed about retaliatory economic measures taken by China in response to its deployment.

Acknowledging the complexity of the challenges he faces, Mr. Moon has been careful to say that when he promised to review the Thaad deployment, he did not necessarily mean he would reverse it.

And while he has said South Korea must "learn to say no" to Washington, he has emphasized that any diplomatic overture toward North Korea will be grounded in the South's alliance with the United States. He has also often expressed gratitude to the United States for protecting the South from Communism and supporting its transformation into a prosperous democracy.

Mr. Moon's parents fled Communist rule during the Korean War and were among tens of thousands evacuated from the North Korean port of Hungnam by retreating American Navy vessels in the winter of 1950. They often told him about the Christmas sweets that American troops handed out to those packed into the ships during the journey.

Mr. Moon was born in January 1953, after his parents had resettled in a refugee camp on an island off the southern coast of South Korea. His father was a handyman, and his mother peddled eggs, coal briquettes and black-market American relief goods.

Asked by the newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* what he would do with a crystal ball, Mr. Moon said last month that he would show his 90-year-old mother what her North Korean hometown looked like now and how her relatives there were faring. "If Korea reunifies, the first thing I would do is to take my mother's hand and visit her hometown," he said. "Perhaps I could retire there as a lawyer."

In the 1980s, Mr. Moon defended student and labor activists persecuted under military rule and forged a lifelong friendship with a fellow lawyer, Roh Moo-hyun. When Mr. Roh was elected president in 2002, declaring that he would be the first South Korean president not to "kowtow to the Americans," Mr. Moon served as his chief of staff.

Many of the misgivings that conservatives have about Mr. Moon stem from his association with Mr. Roh. But some former American officials who dealt with the Roh government recall Mr. Moon as

more practical and flexible than other officials. In his memoir, Mr. Moon defended Mr. Roh's decision to sign a trade agreement with the United States and dispatch troops to Iraq over the protests of Mr. Roh's liberal political base.

Mr. Roh completed his five-year term in 2008 and committed suicide the next year as prosecutors investigated corruption allegations against his family.

"It was the most painful day in my life," Mr. Moon wrote in his memoir, describing his friend's death as "tantamount to a political murder" and blaming a political vendetta by a new conservative government that wanted to discredit him.

Mr. Moon entered the 2012 presidential race vowing to finish Mr. Roh's work by fighting corruption, the influence of the country's family-owned conglomerates, and what he called "politically motivated prosecutors" — and by seeking peace with North Korea.

But he narrowly lost to Ms. Park, the daughter of the South Korean military strongman Park Chung-hee, and spent the next four years as a leader of the opposition.

In a recent interview, Mr. Moon recalled how he visited Mr. Roh's predecessor, Kim Dae-jung, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and architect of the sunshine policy, shortly before Mr. Kim died in 2009.

Mr. Kim was so feeble by then that he had to be fed by his wife, and he was heartbroken. He had devoted much of his career to building trust with North Korea through humanitarian and economic aid, and the conservatives in power were dismantling that legacy and embracing sanctions against the North.

"President Kim said he could not believe his eyes," Mr. Moon recalled. "In what I thought was his dying wish, he asked us to take the government back."

Jane Perlez contributed reporting from Beijing.



Bad Moon Rising

By Ethan Epstein

By Ethan

In the end, self-interest defeated collective interest. The South Korean presidential election, which concluded Tuesday, featured one strong left-wing candidate, Moon Jae-in, and three credible center-to-conservative contenders. (Notably, all three of the center-right

candidates professed hard lines on North Korea.) Had any two of the center to center-right candidates dropped out and thrown their weight behind the other, they could have defeated Moon. But it didn't happen: And so Moon Jae-in has won the South Korean presidential election, with only 41.4 percent of the vote. Right-wing candidate Hong Joon-pyo, who called himself a

"strongman" and had some, um, retrograde views on gender relations, took 23.3 percent. Centrist Ahn Cheol-soo grabbed 21.8 percent. The third was weaker, and managed only 6 percent. (Note: These numbers are shifting slightly as the returns come in.) You'll note that the votes for the top two center and center right candidates alone bested Moon Jae-in's winning tally.

So Moon has risen without much of a mandate. And his performance looks weaker still when one considers that the leading opposition party is in utter disgrace as a result of a corruption scandal that led to the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye. So while he'll have strong support for much of his domestic agenda—particularly taming the *chaebol*, the massive

conglomerates that dominate South Korea's economy—it's not clear that he will have much public support elsewhere.

That said, Moon has made it clear that he'll pursue a friendlier course towards North Korea than his immediate predecessors did. (Here's an ominous sign: The *Guardian* calls him a "pragmatist.") Moon has said he's eager to travel to Pyongyang to meet North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un—suggesting, at one point, he'd like to visit North Korea before the United States—and even re-

open the Kaesong joint industrial complex, a ridiculous facility where South Korean companies employ North Korean laborers to build products. Kaesong was a financial boon to the North Korean regime, and was shuttered by President Park. But Moon wants to re-open the spigot, flooding Pyongyang with cash to fund its missile and nuclear programs, and keep the gulag humming.

All of this sets up something of a conflict between South Korea and its stalwart ally, the United States. The Trump administration is pressuring

other countries to crack down on North Korea, just as South Korea has elected a president who wants to do just the opposite. And President Trump has not made many friends in Korea since his inauguration, particularly by suggesting that Seoul should foot the bill for THAAD, the U.S. missile defense system that was recently installed there. (Moon, for his part, has said he'd like to reevaluate THAAD's deployment, perhaps a rare agreement he can find with Trump.)

Meanwhile, expect North Korea to keep pushing. Several sources in the South Korean government suggested to me last month that the reason that Kim Jong-un did *not* test a nuclear weapon around the time of his grandfather's birthday in April—as was widely expected—was to help Moon's chances of taking the presidency. Now that that's happened, expect both fireworks at Moon's victory party—and, perhaps, fireworks of a different kind north of the 38th parallel.



South Korea's vote for a new business culture

Editorial Board

May 9, 2017—For much of Asia, South Korea has been a model for decades, a success in both its democracy and its high-tech, high-income economy. Now after Tuesday's election of a new president, it could become known for another aspect of progress. Its voters appeared to have rejected heredity as a claim of governance in both politics and business.

The election winner, Moon Jae-in, takes power following a popular revolt that brought down the previous president, Park Geun-hye, in March on corruption charges. Ms. Park is the daughter of a former strongman and a symbol of a fading nepotistic culture. But it is Mr. Moon's promise to challenge the dominance of the country's family-run conglomerates, known as *chaebols* (or "wealth clans"), that best represents a new mood among

South Koreans, especially the young.

If Moon succeeds in pushing merit over bloodlines in business, the country could set a high standard against old notions about dynastic organizations across Asia—including the three-generational rule over North Korea by the Kim family.

Genes and pedigree need not be destiny in societies that flourish on freedom and opportunity.

Previous presidents, such as Kim Dae-jung in the 1990s, tried to break the *chaebol* system. The industrial giants did help build the economy after the Korean War. And these companies—such as Samsung, LG, Hyundai, and Hanwha—are now global competitors. But reform has been slow. The country now dislikes the *chaebols* but finds it difficult to create a new economic model.

Lately, however, many of the third-generation owners have proved arrogant or corrupt. Samsung Electronics vice chairman Lee Jae-yong, for example, is in jail on charges of bribery related to Park's impeachment. Most of all, the *chaebols'* dominance—about 80 percent of the economy—has prevented the growth of start-ups, which the country needs to spur innovation and create jobs.

For decades, the ideal career path for young Koreans has been to join a *chaebol*. But the companies have been shedding jobs. Youth joblessness is near 10 percent. South Korea needs a culture shift in corporate governance away from hereditary succession to professional management. Innovation in any country requires that employees be able to question their superiors or to move up the ranks by their talent and creativity—not by kinship.

Moon promises to help wean the young off working at *chaebols* by creating 810,000 jobs in the public sector and 500,000 more in the private sector. He would, for example, pay the salary of 1 in every 3 workers at small companies for three years. In addition, he plans new rules over the companies that would make them more transparent and make it difficult for owners to pass the baton to the next generation.

In a book about his work under a previous president, Moon wrote that "public awareness of people's sovereignty took root" in the steady restoration of democracy since 1987. If he now uses his own presidential powers to erode a belief in biological heredity in business, Moon will have opened an added dimension of each individual's sovereignty.



What South Korea's election means for the U.S.

MOON JAE-IN, who easily won South Korea's presidential election Tuesday, was the beneficiary of another popular backlash against a ruling establishment perceived as corrupt and out of touch. Already unhappy with a slowing economy and shrinking opportunities for the young, South Koreans took to the streets by the hundreds of thousands last year when President Park Geun-hye was accused of conspiring with a friend to extort bribes from the country's big conglomerates. After Ms. Park was impeached and jailed, Mr. Moon, a leftist former human rights lawyer who lost to her in the last presidential election, was the obvious alternative. His promises to boost government hiring, tighten regulation of the big companies and conduct a more modest and open

presidency are a natural response to the mood of dissatisfaction.

Yet if Mr. Moon's ascent can be described as a triumph for South Korea's young democracy, it may pose a challenge to an already wobbly U.S. position in Asia. President Trump has made the denuclearization of North Korea a top priority of his new administration, pursuing—sometimes erratically—a strategy of sharply raising the pressure on the regime of Kim Jong Un while holding out the prospect of negotiations. Mr. Moon has advocated a more dovish approach—and he has expressed unhappiness with what looked like a U.S. race to put a new missile defense system, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), in place before the election took place.

The hurried deployment of the THAAD batteries last month, literally

in the middle of the night, "lacked democratic procedure," Mr. Moon complained in an interview last week with *The Post's* Anna Fifield and Yoonjung Seo. He has a point: Though the system is an important and needed counter to the growing missile threat from Pyongyang, the action looked like an attempt to circumvent Mr. Moon's expressed reservations by creating a fait accompli.

Mr. Moon also sounded unhappy with Mr. Trump's strategy of aggressively pursuing cooperation on North Korea with Chinese President Xi Jinping, saying South Korea should "take the lead on matters in the Korean Peninsula" rather than "take the back seat and watch discussions between the U.S. and China." The new president has long been an advocate of rapprochement between the two Koreas and has advocated

reopening two joint projects that provided North Korea with valuable streams of hard currency—a step that would run directly counter to Mr. Trump's strategy of tightening sanctions.

It does not help that Mr. Trump recently trashed the "horrible" U.S.-South Korea free-trade agreement and suggested that South Korea should pay \$1 billion for THAAD, in contravention of a bilateral agreement. That played into the hands of Mr. Moon, who has written that South Korea should "learn to say no" to Washington. Should Mr. Trump persist in that line, he could quickly sabotage both his North Korea initiative and bilateral relations with a vital American ally.

The good news is that Mr. Moon is for now striking a conciliatory note. He told Ms. Fifield that "President

Trump is more reasonable than he is generally perceived" and that he agrees with the U.S. strategy of

"applying sanctions and pressure" to Pyongyang if it leads to negotiations. This is a relationship

that can be saved and even strengthened — if Mr. Trump handles it with care.



Why South Korea looks poised to keep trying with North

As the United States ratchets up pressure on North Korea over its accelerating missile and nuclear tests, South Korea has cast an emphatic vote for rapprochement with its isolated neighbor, electing its first pro-engagement president in nearly a decade.

Moon Jae-in, a former human rights lawyer and democracy activist, declared victory late Tuesday evening after his two main rivals conceded the election. Early Wednesday morning, with 80 percent of votes counted, Mr. Moon held the lead with about 40 percent of votes, according to the National Election Commission. The winner's dovish approach may put him at odds with US President Donald Trump's policy of squeezing Pyongyang through sanctions and the threat of military force.

That's not to say voters went to the polls determined to usher in an administration with friendlier views toward the North. In an opinion survey by RealMeter carried out before the election, just 18.5 percent of respondents said "national security and liberal democracy" was their top concern in selecting a candidate, while 27.5 percent named tackling corruption their first priority, and 24.5 percent named the economy. Mr. Moon's mandate likely has more to do with public antipathy toward conservative politicians after ex-President Park Geun-hye's scandal-ridden tenure than warmer attitudes towards the North, and his calls for engagement face plenty of opposition at home, as well.

But no matter where North Korea ranks on most South Korean voters' priorities, the winner's more conciliatory policies, with Seoul calling more of the shots, will likely complicate its longstanding alliance with Washington.

"President Trump is more interested in leveraging China to stop North Korea's nuclear ambition, and, if found ineffective, the second phase is putting maximum pressure on Pyongyang with military power to draw Kim Jong-un to an advantageous negotiation table," says Nam Chang-hee, an international relations professor at Inha University in Incheon, a port city about 20 miles west of Seoul. "In case a Moon administration fails to coordinate accordingly with the Trump policy, the alliance might go through difficult challenges."

South Korea has been one of Washington's closest allies since the 1950-1953 Korean War, during which they fought North Korea to an enduring stalemate, and currently hosts 28,500 US troops on its soil.

Reconsidering 'sunshine'

Moon, who replaces Ms. Park following her impeachment over a far-reaching corruption scandal, has floated a revival of the "sunshine policy" implemented by Nobel Peace Prize-winning President Kim Dae-jung and his successor, Roh Moo-hyun, the country's last liberal president and Moon's former boss.

The president-elect, who was the late Roh's chief of staff and a top aide, sees diplomacy and economic cooperation as a means to reduce cross-border tensions, induce Pyongyang to abandon its weapons programs and, ultimately, pave the way to Korean reunification.

"There will be a paradigmatic change from a policy of pressure and sanctions to that of engagement," says Chung-in Moon, who served as a top advisor to the Kim and Roh administrations, which governed between 1998 and 2008. "The Moon government will make every effort to improve ties with North Korea."

While supporting sanctions as one tool to rein in Pyongyang, the new occupant of Seoul's Blue House has pledged to restart the Kaesong Industrial Zone, a jointly operated industrial park situated just north of the border, and sightseeing tours to a scenic North Korean mountain, both of which were shut down by recent conservative administrations. If implemented, Moon's proposals could leave him open to charges of undermining US and UN sanctions designed to punish the regime, especially as Washington lobbies nations to cut off economic and diplomatic relations with Pyongyang.

Moon, the son of refugees who fled North Korea during the war, has also offered to meet Kim Jong-un, the Pyongyang strongman, under the right conditions, although Trump has expressed similar intentions. Presidents Roh and Kim both met with second-generation dictator Kim Jong-il.

Seoul in the driver's seat

"I do not see it as desirable for South Korea to take the back seat and watch discussions between the

US and China," Moon said in an interview with The Washington Post last week, outlining his belief that Seoul should take the lead on issues affecting the Korean Peninsula. "I believe South Korea taking the initiative would eventually strengthen our bilateral alliance with the US."

While acknowledging the importance of the US-Korea alliance, Moon has repeatedly argued for the South to assert greater independence from Washington, echoing his mentor, Roh, who won office in 2002 during a nadir in US relations, having pledged to be the first leader not to "kowtow to the Americans."

Prior to his election, Moon criticized the deployment on Korean soil of THAAD, an American missile defense system, arguing that its implementation was rushed to deprive the incoming administration of the chance to consider its merits. Many South Koreans are opposed to the defense system, citing concerns about China and Russia's opposition to it. In an opinion poll carried out by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in March, 38 percent of South Koreans said they disapproved of the missile shield, with 51 percent in favor.

Compounding the controversy, Trump enraged many Koreans by suggesting last month that Seoul should foot the bill for the \$1 billion system, although the administration quickly reaffirmed its commitment to paying for it. Trump's suggestion was the latest of several White House moves that alarmed Seoul. In mid-April, the president's comment that "Korea actually used to be a part of China" — made as he described his recent meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping — outraged South Koreans. The following week, when it was revealed that the "armada" Trump had said was on its way to Korean waters, the USS Carl Vinson, was actually sailing in the other direction at the time (although it has now arrived), some South Koreans were left doubting the US's commitment to their security.

"What [President Donald Trump] said was very important for the national security of South Korea. If that was a lie, then during Trump's term, South Korea will not trust whatever Trump says," South Korean presidential candidate Hong Joon-pyo, who came in a distant second to Moon, according to

Tuesday evening exit polls, told The Wall Street Journal.

A return to the past?

But Moon will also have to reckon with engagement's controversial legacy here, especially among conservative South Koreans. Pyongyang tested its first nuclear weapon in 2006, despite the extensive efforts of the Roh and Kim liberal administrations to improve ties, including providing the North with some \$4.5 billion in aid.

Since then, the Kim regime has carried out four more nuclear tests, and is expected to carry out its sixth soon.

In 2010, just days before the North shelled a South Korean island, killing four, Seoul's Unification Ministry released a report arguing that a decade of engagement had induced "no positive changes" in Pyongyang's behavior toward its neighbor or its own people. In a poll carried out by the Asan Institute of Policy Studies in March, South Koreans gave North Korea a favorability score of just over 2 when asked to place the country on a scale of 1-10.

"Many people are indignant about a return to the past because the money the South gave to North Korea became weapons for killing South Koreans," says Song Dae-sung, a national security analyst and former brigadier general in the Korean Air Force.

"Moon Jae-in and the supporters of 'sunshine' think of South Koreans and North Korea as one people, and believe North Korea's feelings of fraternity will stop it from ever using weapons of mass destruction on the South. But this is not the truth," Song adds.

For now, Moon's popularity likely has more to do with antipathy toward Park and her party than enthusiasm for his North Korea policies, according to Dr. Nam, the international relations professor. But, he says, the public could warm up to engagement in the likely scenario that under Moon, "Pyongyang will tone down their hostile stance toward Seoul, expecting leeway from beefed-up international pressure and sanctions."

Dr. Moon, the former presidential advisor, acknowledges that South Korea's new president is likely to face major obstacles to his agenda,

from US policy and domestic opinion to North Korean provocations. Still, he believes it's time for South Korea

to take a "proactive role in bringing peace on the Korean Peninsula."

"The sunshine policy deserves another try," he says.



South Korea Is More Worried About Donald Trump Than Kim Jong Un

Suki Kim

When I returned to the United States recently after a few weeks in Seoul, I was surprised to find Americans in a state of panic about North Korea. Some of this came, as usual, from Pyongyang's own dramatic language, designed to instill fear. But this time the warmongering was also coming from Washington. Back in South Korea, however, the public was more concerned with America's antics than with the North's. A once triangular relationship, where Seoul and Washington were joined together against Pyongyang, is degenerating into two antagonisms: the United States versus North Korea and the United States versus South Korea.

It's hard to be a midsized country stuck between great powers — a shrimp between whales, as Koreans sometimes call their nation. Historically, that meant dealing with the vast cultural and military weight of the Middle Kingdom and the imperial ambitions of the Mongols and the Japanese; in recent decades, it has meant a complicated positioning among China, Russia, and the biggest (if furthest away) leviathan yet, the United States. But one of the fiercest reactions has been the development of a keen sense of national pride. Koreans don't forget — or forgive — when it comes to hearing their country being put down.

That's why it came as such a bite when U.S. President Donald Trump, in a typically careless comment, claimed that he had learned from Chinese President Xi Jinping that "Korea actually used to be a part of China." The South Korean Foreign Ministry took about a week before officially correcting Trump's false claim, dismissing it as "not worthy of a response." Sino-Korean relations have ranged from amity to diplomatic submission to fierce wars of resistance, but Korea was never ruled by China. But Trump followed up his historical blunder by more present insults: a threat to terminate the free trade agreement with South Korea, which Trump called "horrible," and a demand that South Korea pay for THAAD, the American anti-ballistic

missile defense system, reversing the previous agreement.

The repeated snubs hit a raw spot during the South Korean presidential debates, counting down to the May 9 election.

Social media has been buzzing with outrage over America's *gapjil* (bossy bullying), which treats Koreans as a *hogu* (pushover).

Social media has been buzzing with outrage over America's *gapjil* (bossy bullying), which treats Koreans as a *hogu* (pushover). Trump's insults came on the heels of the past five months of protests that led to the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye. Park was the daughter of another former president and thus the closest thing to royalty in modern South Korea. Her fall was a revolt against bullying by the rich and powerful — like Trump.

But the distaste for Trump's bullying is compounded by long-standing anti-American feelings. South Koreans have always been deeply ambivalent about the U.S. troop presence in their country, and there are regular protests outside military bases. That can sometimes peak violently, as in 2002 when U.S. troops on maneuver accidentally ran over two 14-year-old girls and an American military court acquitted them of any wrongdoing. Between THAAD and Trump, another of these periods may be coming.

The first foreign dignitary to be invited by the Trump administration was Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, a country still loathed by many South Koreans for its brutal almost four-decade occupation of their homeland. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson added to the sense of insult during his first Asia tour in March, when he refused to eat dinner with South Korean officials but dined with his Japanese and Chinese counterparts; the snub made national headlines. Finally, the sudden threat to proffer a billion-dollar bill for THAAD, less than 10 days before the presidential election, was a slap in the face. Each of these dismissals is being remembered and collected — and eventually a moment will come when the collective emotion of anti-

Americanism explodes into protests that will shock Washington.

At the same time, the Trump administration's approach toward North Korea blunders ahead in swings and fits. Trump promised to "solve the North Korean problem" without China, then praised Xi, then bombed Syria and Afghanistan in an attempt — as Vice President Mike Pence confirmed on his trip to South Korea — to intimidate Pyongyang.

After North Korea's latest missile test, Trump tweeted that North Korea "disrespected" China and its "highly respected President."

After North Korea's latest missile test, Trump tweeted that North Korea "disrespected" China and its "highly respected President." That was then followed by him saying he'd be honored to meet North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un. The most noticeable feature of all this was how little regard it took of Seoul, which seemed to be at best an afterthought in the administration's Asia policy. A toll is already being taken on individuals: This past weekend, North Korea detained another American, a staff member at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, where I lived for six months.

And yet South Koreans also seem, on some level, to believe that the problems lie only between Pyongyang and Washington. In part, that's because the focus on domestic politics has been so intense of late. There is an air of jubilation and long-delayed justice across the country as the villains of the recent corruption scandals — including former President Park and Lee Jae-yong, the de facto head of Samsung — are now behind bars awaiting rulings. Samsung trials are ongoing; Park's is due to begin in a few weeks.

But there's also a blasé attitude toward the North's threats, in contrast to America's panicking. Since the 1953 armistice, South Korea has seen pretty much all there is to see when it comes to North Korea — which regularly threatens to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire." South Korea, where every young man has to serve at least 21 months as a conscript, takes the

threat of North Korea seriously. Yet it has learned not to react to each of Pyongyang's provocations, which they know can only temporarily be bought off through deals. For South Koreans, the recent events are status quo Kim Jong Un business. The ballistic missiles have been tested many times in the past, and nuclear threats are a way of survival for North Korea. Trump's erratic policies and contemptuous attitude, on the other hand, are new and catching far more attention from the South Korean public.

But there's a fourth player in all this: China. Beijing is deeply anti-THAAD and is also South Korea's largest trading partner. In Myeong-dong, a popular shopping district in Seoul, there is already a noticeable drop in Chinese tourists, and its effect on the economy is a concern for average South Koreans. South Korean firm Lotte has lost out on massive deals in China. As a result, likely presidential victor Moon Jae-in, who had vetoed THAAD deployment during his campaign, had said the anti-missile defense system is not a done deal.

But Koreans are not intrinsically any friendlier toward China than the United States. Before America, it was China that insulted, patronized, and frequently intervened on the peninsula. And Sino-Korean online fights over history and culture are as common as rants about America are.

There's no reason, or inevitability, for the Trump administration to make an enemy of South Korea. Given Moon's eagerness to engage with North Korea — he has said in the past that he would visit Pyongyang before he visits the United States — the new South Korean government will be willing to bring its expertise to negotiations with the North, which Trump himself has admitted will not be easy. Yet the newly elected South Korean president will also follow the will of the people, whose pride Trump has repeatedly stepped on. To heal this rapidly souring alliance, Trump has to stop the insults. That will only happen if the president realizes that both Koreas matter, not just a willful nuclear North.

South Korea Needs a United Front With the U.S.

By Editorial Board

His differences with U.S. President Donald Trump may have helped win Moon Jae-in the presidency of South Korea. Now he and Trump need to focus on what unites them.

During the campaign, Moon took issue with the U.S. administration's approach to North Korea. In the past, he's called for engaging economically with the North and restarting joint development projects, rather than seeking to isolate Kim Jong Un's regime. He opposed what he portrayed as the rushed deployment of a U.S. system designed to shoot down North Korean missiles, saying the decision should have been left to the new government. Meanwhile, Trump roiled the waning days of the campaign by threatening to scrap the bilateral free-trade agreement between the two allies and demanding that South Korea

pay the \$1 billion bill for the anti-missile system.

Continued posturing would be counterproductive for both men. Moon's first task as president has to be to restore faith in South Korea's political and economic system. The corruption scandal that brought down his predecessor, Park Geun-hye, sparked public fury at ties between government officials and the corporate titans running Korea's sprawling industrial conglomerates, known as chaebol. Moon has backed reforms that would make the chaebol more transparent and lessen their grip on the economy. But he'll need help from opposition lawmakers to pass any substantive changes.

As for Trump, harping on supposed trade inequities and squeezing a valued partner for money it doesn't legally owe is shortsighted and futile. The fact is, the U.S. has benefited no less than South

Korea from their bilateral trade agreement, and any flaws in the deal can surely be addressed without calling into question the entire pact. Complaining about how much it costs to help defend South Korea only raises doubts about the U.S.'s reliability -- to no discernible end, as more responsible members of Trump's administration are inevitably forced to walk back his comments.

Most important, any daylight between the U.S. and South Korea undermines the goal of reining in North Korea's nuclear program. For one thing, disunity eases pressure on China to play a more responsible role on the Korean peninsula. Although Chinese leaders are making encouraging noises, it's unclear how far they're willing to go to pressure Kim. If they believe the new South Korean administration favors a more lenient approach,

they'll have every reason to slacken their efforts as well.

North Korea would exploit any divisions even more eagerly. The Pyongyang regime has survived and continued to expand its nuclear capabilities by skillfully taking advantage of gaps in the global sanctions net; even now, as relations with China fray, it's looking to expand ties with Russia.

Despite their rhetoric, the new U.S. and South Korean leaders really aren't that far apart in their approaches to Pyongyang. Both men say they're not looking to overthrow Kim. Both say they are open to negotiating with him, under the right conditions. The best chance of achieving those conditions -- and it's a slim one -- is to convince Kim that he faces a resolute and united international front. Trump and Moon should be doing everything in their power to build one.

The
New York
Times

Trump on Collision Course With South Korean Leader on Dealing With North

WASHINGTON — The last time an American president decided to squeeze North Korea hard to abandon its nuclear weapons program, cutting off a bank in Macau where its top leaders secretly stashed their cash, the effort worked brilliantly — until South Korea's president complained to George W. Bush that it had to stop.

That was a decade ago, when Moon Jae-in, who declared victory Tuesday in South Korea's presidential election, served as a high official in Seoul and embraced a "Sunshine Policy" of engagement with the North. Mr. Bush's response was that the South Korean government had "lost its nerve" and was paving the way for North Korea to become a small but significant nuclear weapons state.

Many nuclear and missile tests later, Mr. Bush's prophecy has come to pass. And now President Trump finds himself on a collision course with Mr. Moon, who has hinted at a "Sunshine II" approach that is in direct contradiction to the path Mr. Trump has set to fulfill his vow to "solve" the North Korean nuclear problem, one way or another.

Mr. Trump's strategy is to apply maximum pressure on North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un — financial cutoffs, the deployment of new missile defenses and warships off the North Korean coast, and

accelerated digital sabotage of its missile program — before turning to engagement. It is an approach drawn from Mr. Trump's real-estate experience: Inflict maximum pain first, then see if the other guy wants to talk.

Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson described the strategy to State Department officials last week as "a pressure campaign that has a knob on it," adding, "I'd say we're at about dial setting 5 or 6 right now." He described the next step as pressuring nations around the world "to fully implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding sanctions, because no one has ever fully implemented those."

Mr. Moon's strategy is the opposite: to offer an outstretched hand to the North Koreans first, in the hope of reducing tensions with the promise of economic integration. Just because that effort failed the last time it was tried, he argued during a hard-fought campaign, does not mean it will fail again as he deals with an erratic, 33-year-old leader in Pyongyang whose main interest is remaining in power.

At first glance, these are "completely divergent views on how to deal with Pyongyang," Duyeon Kim, a longtime North Korea scholar, wrote in Foreign Affairs on Monday.

Mr. Trump, she argued, helped bring about Mr. Moon's victory in South

Korea's election with his ill-timed insistence last week that South Korea would have to pay for the cost of installing a new American-built antimissile system, called Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or Thaad, that Mr. Moon has expressed deep reservations about. That only fueled the sense in South Korea that the country was again being pushed around by its longtime protector, whom it relies upon for defense but often resents.

What the South Korean public feared, Ms. Kim wrote, was that Mr. Trump's reliance on pressure and the vague threat of military action was leading the alliance to a cycle of miscalculation and escalation that could result in resumption of a war that was halted — with no peace treaty — in 1953.

With Mr. Moon's election, South Korea and China are now fundamentally on the same page about how to deal with the North: Do what it takes to maintain the status quo and avoid any situation that could result in hostilities that would throw East Asia into chaos, and perhaps set off a financial panic. The Chinese, while promising some tougher sanctions against the North, hope to freeze the North Korean nuclear and missile arsenals where they are and channel Mr. Trump into a new set of negotiations that would probably take years.

So far, Mr. Tillerson and Mr. Trump have been all over the map about

what they would require to open those talks. On a visit to Seoul during the presidential campaign, Mr. Tillerson insisted that the North would first have to give up its entire arsenal before talks began — even though dismantling that arsenal is the ultimate goal of those negotiations. He modified that view at the United Nations, suggesting that talks were possible once the North began moving toward disarmament, though he did not say how far. Then Mr. Trump said he would be "honored" to meet Mr. Kim, under the right conditions, which he did not define.

If this was meant to confuse allies and adversaries alike, it worked. No one seems clear what the administration's conditions for talks are, and White House officials say they do not want to be too specific.

Mr. Moon, meanwhile, has long experience playing good cop to Washington's bad cop. He was chief of staff to Roh Moo-hyun, his political mentor, whose approach to the North was viewed in Washington as just this side of capitulation. In fact, the move to lift the pressure on Banco Delta Asia, the small bank in Macau where Kim Jong-il, father of the current North Korean leader, kept the assets used to pay off the North Korean elite, came just months after the North's first nuclear test, in 2006. And it occurred about the same time that North Korea was secretly helping the Syrians build a

nuclear reactor, which the Israelis later destroyed in a surprise attack from the air.

During the campaign, Mr. Moon said sanctions had one goal: to bring the North Koreans back to the negotiating table. The Trump administration has said they have a different goal: to force the North to

give up its entire arsenal. That is a significant difference.

Mr. Moon has many reasons to seek de-escalation, and his victory on Tuesday proved that his view is, for now, popular in the South. He fundamentally believes that the "Sunshine Policy" is the only option to avert a renewed conflict. But he also wants to end a Chinese-led

boycott of some South Korean goods that was set off by the installation of the Thaad system, which Beijing says is aimed at countering its own nuclear arsenal.

So far, Mr. Moon has been careful not to threaten to dismantle the system — which the Pentagon rushed into preliminary operation last week ahead of the election —

until he completes a review of the issue. He appears to be leaving himself some flexibility.

Mr. Trump has a little time to try to bridge this divide, but not much. Mr. Moon will be sworn in Wednesday. North Korea will then have to decide how it will respond — with an offer to talk, a missile launch or a sixth nuclear test.



Will Election of S. Korea Leftist Derail Trump's N. Korea Policy?

South Koreans, in a high turn-out presidential contest, just gave an overwhelming victory to the "progressive" Moon Jae-in. The candidate of the Democratic Party of Korea won with 41.08 percent of Tuesday's vote according to the final tally of the National Election Commission. Two conservative and center-left figures trailed far behind.

Moon, the son of North Korean refugees, campaigned on engaging Pyongyang and reorienting his country away from the U.S. In coming months, therefore, Seoul may end up blocking President's Donald Trump's determined efforts to stop Pyongyang's weapons programs.

Moon, who took office Wednesday, has advocated a far softer approach to the North. He wants, for example, to initiate talks with Kim Jong Un, the North Korean leader.

Moon also campaigned on restoring economic links with the North, like reopening and expanding the Kaesong Industrial Complex, closed by his predecessor, Park Geun-hye, last February. The complex, just north of the Demilitarized Zone separating the two Koreas, once included 125 South Korean light-manufacturing operations and shoveled about \$120 million a year into the coffers of the Pyongyang regime.

Moon also has said he is against the basing of the American-built Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, designed to shoot down North Korean missiles. The caretaker government of Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn rushed the deployment of THAAD, as the defense system is called, prompting calls by Moon during the campaign to reconsider the action.

President Trump then announced in two separate

interviews that he expected S. Korea to pay \$1 billion for the system, which also helps to defend Americans. (When U.S. National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster told his counterpart that was not the case, Trump was furious, according to Bloomberg's Eli Lake.) None of this helped Moon's opponents.

Many think that Moon, in general, will resurrect the Sunshine Policy, the approach identified with two previous liberal-leaning presidents, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, who governed from 1998 to 2008. Moon was Roh's chief of staff.

That generous policy, essentially one of unconditional assistance to the North, would undercut the attempts of the Trump administration to tighten sanctions designed to deny Kim Jong Un the means to build more nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

Yet what is of great concern is not so much specific policies Moon may implement. It is his general approach to the U.S., the only nation pledged to defend his country.

Moon's signature line during the campaign was that South Korea should "learn to say no" to the U.S. "Which candidate can do a proud diplomacy, saying what we need to say to the Americans?" he asked during the final week of campaigning. That echoed the words of his mentor, President Roh, who often talked about South Korea untying itself from the United States in order to play a "balancing role" in North Asia.

Moreover, Moon during the campaign made statements that sounded inconsistent with the maintenance of his country's defense treaty with the U.S.

There are some reasons to think that, despite everything, Moon will not lurch into North Korea's camp as soon as he takes office. For one

thing, a large portion of the South Korean electorate is skeptical of the Kim regime, and the new president needs the support of that large conservative bloc. Moon, therefore, will have to tread lightly.

The new president understands that, although he is personally passionate about helping the Kimist state, he was not elected to change North Korea policy but to break the corrupt-looking links between the South Korean government and the chaebols, the conglomerates dominating the economy and politics.

After all, Park was impeached and later removed because of her apparent involvement in—or at least her tolerance of—these unsavory dealings. Moon needs the cooperation of the conservatives to restructure the links between the government and big business.

It's significant that Park, a hardliner when it came to North Korea, first tried to develop relations with Pyongyang with her "trustpolitik" policy. Why? She had to do that to not anger the progressive voters. Similarly, Moon cannot afford to drive away conservatives.

Yet Moon does not have to change radically Seoul's North Korea policies to do great damage to America's efforts to disarm "Fatty the Third," as the North Korean leader is sometimes called. By merely talking about a new approach to Pyongyang, Moon legitimizes Chinese efforts to support corpulent Kim.

Even though Trump has had some success in convincing China to scale back assistance, it's evident Beijing is reluctant to cut off North Korea. Yes, Beijing on February 18 announced it would not, for the remainder of the year, purchase coal from the North, but it did so in fact in February after the announcement and in both April and

May. And despite the announced coal-purchase ban, Beijing has helped Pyongyang in other ways to make up the shortfall in coal revenues. Two-way trade between China and North Korea appears to have been increasing this year.

So South Korea may give cover to Beijing to support its communist cousin in Pyongyang. In the past, during the Sunshine era, the Chinese repeatedly told American diplomats that it was okay for them to support the North because the South Koreans also were doing so.

And as Moon readjusts policy, Kim now has one more external party to manipulate. He can make China, Russia, and South Korea compete with one another for his favor.

Ultimately, Moon's action can result in a more aggressive China. Beijing worked hard to intimidate South Korea and prevent the basing of THAAD on its soil. The Chinese can be assured that, even if Moon does not remove the one already deployed THAAD battery, he will not allow additional THAAD sites.

Beijing will now not have to worry as much about the missile-defense system. Moon, therefore, has undercut a reason for China to cooperate with Washington.

Beijing, therefore, will see that its belligerence against South Korea in recent months worked. John Pomfret, writing in *The Washington Post*, thinks an emboldened China may now intensify intimidation of other states. "Success with the South Koreans," he writes, "could embolden China to try similar tactics with Japan, Vietnam, and perhaps even Australia."

It looks like Trump's to-do list in Asia just got a lot longer.



Trump's North Korea Policy Just Got More Complicated

Uri Friedman

The Trump administration claims it's considering all options, including military force, to restrict and reverse

North Korea's nuclear-weapons program. It has promised to apply "maximum pressure" on Kim Jong Un's government by, among other

things, ratcheting up sanctions, pressuring China to cut off economic support to the North, and rapidly installing the THAAD missile-

defense system in South Korea. One slight problem with this plan is that North Korea's neighbor, a U.S. ally for more than six decades, just

chose a leader who opposes much of it.

Much of it, but not all of it: Moon Jae In, the winner of South Korea's presidential election on Tuesday, agrees with the American president that North Korea's expanding nuclear arsenal constitutes a grave threat. Moon, like Donald Trump, believes sanctions on the North should be maintained. Like Trump, he's willing to talk directly with Kim Jong Un.

But they diverge on the sequencing. The Trump administration advocates isolating North Korean officials so that they'll be forced to make concessions ahead of negotiations. Moon, by contrast, favors outreach right away, so long as North Korea doesn't carry out major acts of aggression. As the chief of staff to former President Roh Moo Hyun, Moon helped implement the "Sunshine Policy," an effort from 1998 to 2008 to woo North Korea

with humanitarian assistance, diplomatic dialogue, cultural exchanges, and increased economic relations. Moon now wants to bring back the Sunshine Policy. He's proposed reopening an industrial park and tourist destination jointly run by North and South Korea, as a first step in the gradual economic and political "unification" of the peninsula.

Moon has also criticized the U.S. military's hurried installation of a missile-defense system in South Korea in recent weeks, scoffing at Trump's suggestion that the South Korean government pay \$1 billion for the system and calling for a thorough review of the deployment. (One of Moon's motivations here might be his desire for better relations with China, which suspects that THAAD could be used to undermine the Chinese military's capabilities. South Korea is caught between China, its most important

trading partner, and the United States, its most important military partner.)

And Moon has responded sharply to repeated hints by the Trump administration that it may launch military strikes against North Korea's nuclear program—strikes that could prompt the North to use artillery, chemical weapons, or even nuclear weapons against South Korea. "I want to say it sternly. Military action on the Korean peninsula cannot happen without Korea's consent," Moon wrote in April. He has argued that South Korea, as the country most squarely in North Korea's crosshairs, should "take the lead on matters in the Korean Peninsula," and that the United States and China should follow that lead.

These differences probably won't upend U.S.-South Korean cooperation on North Korea. The alliance has weathered previous

disagreements between the White House and the Blue House, including a period when George W. Bush pursued policies that resemble Trump's and two South Korean presidents (one of them was Moon's former boss) supported policies that mirror Moon's.

But Moon's election probably will constrain Trump's options on North Korea, making the use of military force and the wholesale economic and diplomatic isolation of Pyongyang less likely. Trump may be boxed into the lengthy nuclear negotiations with North Korea that the Chinese government and South Korea's new leader prefer.

Trump's defense secretary, James Mattis, likes to say that war isn't really over until the enemy says it's over—that "the enemy gets a vote." What Mattis and Trump might learn in the coming months is that allies get a vote too.

**NATIONAL
REVIEW
ONLINE**

Trump's Foreign Policy Confusion -- Kushner, McMaster & Haley Take Reins

Michael Dougherty

For the first two months of her job, Nikki Haley was blazing her own trail as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Sounding more like Trump's defeated GOP primary opponents than Trump himself, she announced that sanctions against Russia would not end until Crimea was returned to an independent Ukraine. She was asked if she was on the same page as the president. "Look, he's the president," she said. "He can say what he wants whenever he wants, but the direction we've gotten is to do our jobs, make sure that the United States is strong, and that's what we'll do." "I'm following the spirit, not the letter" is a deft excuse, but eventually the secretary of state informed Haley that from here on out she'd need to defend Trump's policies on big issues, not announce her own.

Ten days ago, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that National Security Adviser General H. R. McMaster went behind the president's back to reassure America's South Korean allies that the United States would pay for a new missile-defense system that

Trump had previously threatened to cancel if South Korea didn't pay up.

Then on Monday, a reporter for Canada's *National Post* relayed that White House officials had called Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to encourage him to reach out to their boss and convince him to not withdraw the United States from NAFTA. This strange gambit has been credited by *Breitbart* financial reporter John Carneyo to Mr. Ivanka herself, Jared Kushner. Although now other theories circulate, holding out hope that Kushner was merely facilitating communication between allies that would have happened anyway. After all, Canada is part of Kushner's portfolio, just after bringing peace to the Middle East, managing relations in the Pacific, and selling America on \$1 trillion of infrastructure spending.

In the cases of Haley and McMaster, Trump or administration sources have aired their grievances. Trump joked that Haley was easily replaceable. And Trump allies told *Bloomberg's* Eli Lake that the boss was fuming about McMaster. Perhaps discount the Kushner-saves-NAFTA story until Trump jokes about demoting him from Ivanka's husband to Tiffany's.

Trump was always going to have trouble taking possession of the executive branch upon his election. Doing so requires hiring thousands of people and top officials who are committed to your vision. As a populist outsider who did not command deep loyalty from his own party, Trump was never going to have that kind of bench. Foreign policy in particular was going to be a challenge when dozens of Republican-leaning foreign-policy scholars and wonks signed an open letter denouncing Trump during his campaign.

I know what you're thinking. You'd rather have Haley, McMaster, and (gulp) Jared Kushner than Trump leading on these matters. Fair enough. But some clarity about U.S. intentions is going to matter. This week, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of U.S. ally Turkey, is picking a rhetorical fight with U.S. ally Israel. If those allies get into a larger fight, do you want American policy to turn on whether or not hotel investors from Istanbul or Ramat Gan have the right phone number for Ivanka? Until the Trump administration effectively sets priorities and finishes hiring cabinet under-secretaries, it just might.

The confusion and chaos is a reflection of the man himself. America's prosperity and power depends on its having a self-governing people. But now it doesn't even have a self-governing president. Trump veers from one policy stance to another, seemingly when the mood strikes him. He hires personnel based not on policy affinity or competence, but on whether they look the part.

In the absence of presidential leadership, what else can we expect but for subordinates to rush in to fill the void? Haley speaks first to commit the United States and her party to America's moral leadership in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, often plainly contradicting the campaign promises of Trump. Kushner dashes in to make sure that Trump doesn't blow up a trade arrangement in which two of America's closest allies have invested so much. McMaster rushes to reassure longstanding allies that the U.S. is still committed to their security. One fears that in the end, we'll all be rushing to pick up the pieces.

UNE - Before James Comey's Dismissal, a Growing Frustration at White House

WASHINGTON—The more James Comey showed up on television discussing the FBI's investigation into possible ties between the Trump campaign and Russia, the more the White House bristled, according to aides to President Donald Trump.

Frustration was growing among top associates of the president that Mr. Comey, in a series of appearances before a Senate panel, wouldn't publicly tamp down questions about possible collusion with Russian interference in the 2016 presidential race. A person with knowledge of recent conversations said they wanted Mr. Comey to "say those three little words: 'There's no ties.'"

In the months before his decision to dismiss Mr. Comey as head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mr. Trump grew unhappy that the media spotlight kept shining on the director. He viewed Mr. Comey as eager to step in front of TV cameras and questioned whether his expanding media profile was warping his view of the Russia investigation, the officials said.

One White House aide, speaking after Mr. Comey's dismissal, described him as a show horse.

"Oh, and there's James—he's become more famous than me," Mr. Trump said as Mr. Comey crossed the room to greet him at a Jan. 22 reception for law enforcement.

In firing Mr. Comey, Mr. Trump said he relied on recommendations by his top two Justice Department officials that the FBI needed new leadership. But he made a point of thanking the director for "informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation."

That purported detail about the FBI's investigation into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia hadn't previously been disclosed. The FBI declined to comment.

The culmination of those frustrations came with Mr. Comey's summary dismissal, by letter to FBI headquarters, when Mr. Comey was in Los Angeles to meet with FBI agents and attend a job fair. It

marked the dramatic end of a rocky relationship between the two that saw Mr. Trump oscillate between effusive praise for and accusations of wrongdoing against Mr. Comey.

His focus on the FBI director began last July, when Mr. Comey, in an extraordinary press conference, said that while Democrat Hillary Clinton had been "extremely careless" in her handling of classified information while secretary of state, the FBI wouldn't recommend criminal charges against her. Mr. Trump, at a rally later that day, said the system was "rigged" in Mrs. Clinton's favor and suggested that she had tried to bribe the Justice Department.

When Mr. Comey in late October—weeks before the election—informing congressional leaders that the FBI had new evidence in the Clinton email probe, effectively reopening the investigation, Mr. Trump praised the move. "What he did, he brought his reputation—he brought it back," Mr. Trump said at a rally that month. "He's got to hang tough because a lot of people want him to do the wrong thing. He did the right thing."

Mr. Trump reversed course again when Mr. Comey, just two days before the election, told Congress that the new information in the Clinton probe didn't change the FBI's determination not to prosecute.

At a rally in Michigan that evening, Mr. Trump accused Mr. Comey again of rigging the system to protect Mrs. Clinton. "You can't review 650,000 new emails in eight days—you just can't do it, folks," he said. "Hillary Clinton is guilty."

Since his election victory, Mr. Trump appeared at times to warm to Mr. Comey, whom Mrs. Clinton has credited with Mr. Trump's victory. The two hugged at an event shortly after his inauguration, and the president in April defended Mr. Comey's handling of the email investigation, telling Fox Business Network that the FBI director wanted to "give everybody a good, fair chance."

Critics of Mr. Trump have pointed to his previous statements about Mr.

Comey—including his praise for the FBI's handling of the Clinton email probe—as proof that the president's decision to fire him wasn't motivated by the reason cited in his dismissal: mistakes made over the handling of the investigation into Mrs. Clinton's email server.

Instead, they suggest that Mr. Trump was seeking to short-circuit the FBI's investigation into his own associates, noting that as a candidate Mr. Trump criticized Mr. Comey only when he made decisions that adversely affected his campaign.

Senior White House adviser Kellyanne Conway, in a CNN interview late Tuesday, said Mr. Trump's praise for Mr. Comey's handling of the email probe during the campaign was irrelevant to his decision to dismiss the FBI director. "You're looking at the wrong set of facts. You're going back to the campaign," she said. "This man is the president of the United States."

Since Mr. Trump's inauguration, a frosty relationship has persisted between him and the FBI director. Associates of Mr. Comey said the director respected the office of the presidency and understood he served at the pleasure of the president. He regularly briefed Mr. Trump on national security matters and had discussions with the president about policy issues, ranging from gang violence to the encryption of communications and devices that is bedeviling law enforcement.

He was careful not to release information to the president about the ongoing probe into Russia's alleged meddling in the U.S. election, however, because Mr. Comey believed doing so would cross ethical and legal boundaries, according to the associates. Mr. Comey told associates before the election and in December that he knew he could be fired but wouldn't let such fears affect his decision making. He also urged agents investigating Russia's meddling in the election not to worry about politics or how their probe might affect those in power, an associate said.

Mr. Comey was irked when Mr. Trump alleged in early March without any evidence that the Obama administration had tapped the phones of Trump Tower, fearing that what he described to associates as reckless tweets could damage the reputation of the FBI. The agency can only obtain such wiretaps with court approval. He made a point of telling members of Congress later that month at a hearing he had "no information" to support Mr. Trump's assertions.

Last week, ahead of Mr. Comey's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee—where he said he feels "mildly nauseous" over the possibility that his actions influenced the election—Mr. Trump tweeted: "FBI Director Comey was the best thing that ever happened to Hillary Clinton in that he gave her a free pass for many bad deeds!"

On Tuesday, an FBI official sent a letter to the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee acknowledging that Mr. Comey had overstated evidence stemming from the investigation into Mrs. Clinton's email use. People familiar with the matter said the mistake sealed Mr. Comey's fate. Keith Schiller, Mr. Trump's longtime bodyguard who is director of Oval Office Operations, delivered the letter to FBI headquarters. One person familiar with the matter said Mr. Comey was giving a presentation to field agents when one agent in the presentation got a news alert on his mobile and told the director the report said he was fired.

Mr. Comey was in the FBI's Los Angeles headquarters when he learned of his firing, according to a law-enforcement official. Before he left the office, he addressed hundreds of employees and offered encouragement to them, this official said, adding that the mood was "somber." News channels later showed a white private jet, reportedly carrying Mr. Comey, taxiing at the airport en route back to Washington.

POLITICO Behind Comey's firing: An enraged Trump, fuming about Russia

May. 10th, 2017

Josh Meyer, Tara Palmeri and Annie Karni

President Donald Trump weighed firing his FBI director for more than a week. When he finally pulled the trigger Tuesday afternoon, he didn't call James Comey. He sent his longtime private security guard to deliver the termination letter in a manila folder to FBI headquarters.

He had grown enraged by the Russia investigation, two advisers said, frustrated by his inability to control the mushrooming narrative around Russia. He repeatedly asked aides why the Russia investigation wouldn't disappear and demanded they speak out for him. He would sometimes scream at television clips about the probe, one adviser said.

Trump's firing of the high-profile FBI director on the 110th day since taking office marked another sudden turn for an administration that has fired its acting attorney general, national security adviser and now its FBI director, who Trump had praised until recent weeks and even blew a kiss to during a January appearance.

The news stunned Comey, who saw his dismissal on TV while speaking inside the FBI office in Los Angeles. It startled all but the uppermost ring of White House advisers, who said grumbling about Comey hadn't dominated their own morning senior staff meetings. Other top officials learned just before it happened and were unaware he was considering firing Comey. "Nobody really knew," one senior White House official said. "Our phones all buzzed and people said, What?"

By ousting the FBI director investigating his campaign and associates, Trump may have added more fuel to the fire he is furiously trying to contain — and he was quickly criticized by a chorus of Republicans and Democrats. "The timing of this firing was very troubling," said Sen. Ben Sasse, a Nebraska Republican.

Trump had grown angry with the Russia investigation — particularly Comey admitting in front of the Senate that the FBI was investigating his campaign — and that the FBI director wouldn't support his claims that President Barack Obama had tapped his phones in Trump Tower.

Bipartisan criticism of Comey had mounted since last summer after his lengthy statement outlining why he was closing the investigation into Clinton's private email server.

But the fallout seemed to take the White House by surprise. Trump made a round of calls around 5 p.m., asking for support from senators. White House officials believed it would be a "win-win" because Republicans and Democrats alike have problems with the FBI director, one person briefed on their deliberations said.

Instead, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer told him he was making a big mistake — and Trump seemed "taken aback," according to a person familiar with the call.

By Tuesday evening, the president was watching the coverage of his decision and frustrated no one was on TV defending him, a White House official said. He wanted surrogates out there beating the drum.

Instead, advisers were attacking each other for not realizing the gravity of the situation as events blew up. "How are you not defending your position for three solid hours on TV?" the White House aide said.

Two White House officials said there was little communications strategy in handling the firing, and that staffers were given talking points late Tuesday for hastily arranged media appearances. Aides soon circulated previous quotes from Schumer hitting Comey. After Schumer called for a special prosecutor, the White House huddled in press secretary Sean Spicer's office to devise a strategy

and sent "fresh faces" to TV, one White House official said.

By Tuesday night, aides were using TV appearances to spin the firing as a simple bureaucratic matter and call for an end to the investigation. "It's time to move on," Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the deputy press secretary, said on Fox News.

In his letter dismissing Comey, Trump said the FBI director had given him three private assurances that he wasn't under investigation. The White House declined to say when those conversations happened — or why Comey would volunteer such information. It is not the first time Trump has publicly commented on an ongoing investigation — typically a no-no for presidents. He said earlier this month that Comey had done Clinton a favor by letting her off easy.

Trump received letters from Rod Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general, and Jeff Sessions, the attorney general, calling for Comey's dismissal, on Tuesday, a spokesman said. The president then decided to fire him based on the recommendations and moved quickly. The spokesman said Trump did not ask for the letters in advance, and that White House officials had no idea they were coming.

But several other people familiar with the events said Trump had talked about the firing for over a week, and the letters were written to give him rationale to fire Comey.

The decision marked a turnabout for Trump. On the campaign trail, the candidate led chants of "Lock her up!" and praised Comey's "guts" in October for reopening the probe into her email server. He joked openly with Comey at the White House two days after the inauguration.

Trump, as one White House official noted, believed Comey was too soft on Clinton — not too unfair, as Rosenstein's letter Tuesday indicated.

At FBI headquarters, one senior official said the bureau was essentially in lockdown, not answering calls flooding in and referring all questions to the Justice Department. "I got nothing for you. Sorry," said the official. "We were caught totally off guard. But we are not commenting in any kind of way, and referring calls to DOJ."

Comey had flown on an FBI plane to Los Angeles for a "diversity and recruiting" event. Trump's director of Oval Office operations, longtime security aide Keith Schiller, hand-delivered the dismissal letter to FBI headquarters.

By Tuesday evening, the shock that had spread throughout the ranks of current and former FBI officials was mixed with a growing sense of anger among the many Comey loyalists, and demands for answers as to why the director had been fired — and why now.

"We just have no idea why this happened. No idea," said one recently retired top FBI official who worked closely with Comey on many high-profile investigations. "No one knew this was coming. Everyone is just shocked that this happened."

There was no immediate front-runner for the job, one White House official said. "If there's a list, I haven't seen it," said one senior White House official.

While shock dominated much of the FBI and the White House, the mood was more elated at Roger Stone's house in Florida. Several Stone allies and friends said Stone, who has been frequently mentioned in the investigation, encouraged the president to fire Comey in conversations in recent weeks.

On Twitter, Stone signaled praise for the move by posting an image of Trump from *The Apprentice* saying "You're fired."

Stone declined to comment Tuesday night but said he was enjoying a fine cigar.

the Atlantic This Is Not a Drill

David Frum

Who can sincerely believe that President Trump fired FBI Director James Comey for any reason other than to thwart an investigation of serious crimes? Which crimes—and how serious—we can only guess.

The suggestion that Comey was fired to punish him for overzealously mishandling the Clinton email

investigation appears laughable: Just this morning, Trump's social media director Dan Scavino gleefully proposed to release video of Hillary Clinton's concession call in order to hurt and humiliate her—and top Trump aide Kellyanne Conway laughed along with him.

No, this appears to be an attack on the integrity—not just of law

enforcement—but of our defense against a foreign cyberattack on the processes of American democracy. The FBI was investigating the Trump campaign's collusion with Russian espionage. Trump's firing of Comey is an apparent attempt to shut that investigation down.

Whether that exactly counts as a confession of wrongdoing is a

question that still deserves some withholding of judgment. Trump is impulsive and arrogant. His narcissistic ego needs to believe he won a great electoral victory by his own exertions, not that he was tipped into office by a lucky foreign espionage operation. He could well resent the search for truth, even without being particularly guilty of anything heinously bad. But we all

now must take seriously the heightened possibility of guilt, either personal or on the part of people near him—and of guilt of some of the very worst imaginable crimes in the political lexicon.

Now comes the hour of testing. Will the American system resist? Or will it be suborned?

The question has to be asked searchingly of the Republican members of Congress: Will you allow a president of your party to

attack the integrity of the FBI? You impeached Bill Clinton for lying about sex. Will you now condone and protect a Republican administration lying about espionage?

Where are you? Who are you?

The question has to be asked of every Trump law-enforcement appointee: In 1974, Elliot Richardson resigned rather than fire the investigator of presidential wrongdoing. Why are you still on

your job? Where are your resignations?

The question has to be asked of every national-security official: It's a lot more probable today than it was yesterday that the chain of command is compromised and beholden in some way to a hostile foreign power. If you know more of the truth than the rest of us, why are you keeping it secret? Your oath is to the Constitution, not the person of this compromised president.

The question has to be asked of all the rest of us: Perhaps the worst fears for the integrity of the U.S. government and U.S. institutions are being fulfilled. If this firing stands—and if Trump dares to announce a pliable replacement—the rule of law begins to shake and break. The law will answer to the president, not the president to the law.

Will you accept that?

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

James Comey Firing: Rod Rosenstein Memo Gives Bipartisan Rationale

Andrew McCarthy

Jim Comey has been a good friend to me over the years. I have disagreed strenuously with a number of decisions he made in connection with the Hillary Clinton investigation — with his rationales and with the fact that he was presuming to exercise authority that was not his to exercise. The independence of law enforcement is critical, but at times he seemed to redefine “independent” as beholden to only those institutional guidelines he subjectively judged worthy of following. Still, I personally know him to be a good man. I know that he loves the country and the FBI, and that every decision he made — regardless of whether it was right or wrong — was made in what he sincerely believed was the best interests of both.

Last week, he testified that he was made “mildly nauseous” by the thought that his decisions had an impact on the outcome of the election. I know what he means: It describes how I've felt in criticizing someone I've been fond of since we started out as young prosecutors three decades ago — except I'd have omitted the “mildly.” The only solace I take in it is that I know Jim did what he understood his job required — and he knows he is not the only one who goes about things that way.

The memorandum issued by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to explain Comey's dismissal Tuesday is well crafted and will make it very difficult for

Democrats to attack President Trump's decision. Rosenstein bases the decision not merely on Comey's much discussed missteps in the Clinton e-mails investigation — viz, usurping the authority of the attorney general to close the case without prosecution; failing to avail himself of the normal procedures for raising concerns about Attorney General Lynch's conflict of interest. He goes on specifically to rebuke Comey's “gratuitous” release of “derogatory information about the subject of a declined criminal prosecution.” That “subject,” of course, would be Mrs. Clinton.

This (as I noted in a recent column) is exactly the line of attack Democrats have adopted since Clinton lost the election: Conveniently forget how ecstatic they were over Comey's confident public assessment that the case was not worth charging, and remember only his scathing public description of the evidence — even though both were improper. Significantly, Rosenstein avoids any suggestion that Comey was wrong in concluding Clinton should not be indicted; nor does he in any way imply that Comey's errors made it impossible to bring a wrongdoer to justice. That is, Rosenstein leaves unstated the partisan Republican critique of Comey. Instead, Clinton is portrayed as a victim. This will appeal to Democrats — especially since it will keep alive the fiction that Comey, rather than Clinton herself, is responsible for the Democrats' stunning electoral defeat.

Rosenstein leaves unstated the partisan Republican critique of Comey.

Moreover, Rosenstein makes a point of quoting condemnations of Comey by Democrats prominent in law enforcement: former Obama attorney general Eric Holder and Clinton deputy attorney general Jamie Gorelick. Recall that Comey endorsed Holder for AG. This was an important seal of approval at a time when critics (like yours truly) were arguing that Holder's key participation in the Marc Rich pardon scandal was disqualifying: Comey had not only been a respected deputy attorney general in a Republican administration; he had for a time inherited the Marc Rich investigation as a prosecutor in New York, when Rich was among the FBI's most wanted fugitives. Yet, Holder has blasted Comey for breaking with “fundamental principles” of the Justice Department, and thus undermining “public trust in both the Justice Department and the FBI” (in a way, I suppose, that Holder's own citation for contempt of Congress did not).

In any event, given that Rosenstein's reasoning in calling for Comey's termination echoes Holder's judgment about the damage done — Rosenstein's memo is titled, “Restoring Public Confidence in the Federal Bureau of Investigation” — it will be tough for Democrats to argue convincingly that Trump fired Comey for any other reason.

Or at least it should be tough. Trump being Trump, he could not resist saying, in his letter to Comey, “I greatly appreciate you [sic] informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation.” On the off chance that the former director's memory does not jibe with the president's, Trump's statement invites Comey to respond that this is not what happened. If Comey seizes on the invitation, the press angle would write itself: Comey, it would be said, was fired because he was trying to conduct the investigation of Trump-Russia ties about which he recently testified, not because of the bipartisan consensus that is described in Rosenstein's memorandum.

But that is a story for another day.

Although it is impossible at this moment to think of Comey's tenure as involving anything other than the Hillary Clinton investigation, there is a lot more to the job of FBI director than a single case, even a defining case. By even his detractors' accounts, Comey has been an exemplary director in these remaining, extensive aspects of the job, particularly in protecting American national security and speaking out about the challenges faced by the nation's police in a toxic anti-police environment. Even in disagreeing with him, Jim Comey's admirers can hope that history will be kinder to him than this moment is.



James Comey firing was inevitable

The surprise is it took so long.

Is anyone surprised that President Trump fired FBI Director James Comey? Well, yes — some are surprised he did it, and others are surprised it took so long.

How the mighty have fallen. In March, Comey was hailed as “the most powerful person in Washington.” But those who are tagged “most powerful” have a funny way of quickly being shown up, particularly when they serve at the pleasure of the president. In Comey's case, his power

supposedly was based on his ongoing investigation into Russian influence on the 2016 presidential election, an investigation that has turned up nothing of great importance, certainly nothing to substantiate charges of Russia “hacking the election.”

In fact, Comey had been a dead man walking for some time. He was a director without a constituency. He had tried to strike a balance in a sharply divided political environment and wound up alienating both sides. He had to go.

Democrats blame him for Hillary Clinton's election loss. Just last

week Hillary Clinton said that if the election were held Oct. 27, she would have been the president — that is, the day before Comey's dramatic note to Congress that he had reopened the FBI's investigation into her alleged mishandling of classified information through her bootleg email server.

Then two days before Election Day, Comey said "never mind." The FBI had hastily reviewed the 49,000 potentially relevant emails it had found on a laptop owned by disgraced former congressman Anthony Weiner, and nothing there changed its conclusions from the previous July when he had called out Clinton for lying but did not recommend prosecution.

Whether this roller coaster ride had an impact on the election is one

question, but Comey's seemingly erratic behavior so close to an election was quite another. I was at a meeting with some senior members of the law enforcement community when Comey backed off the investigation and they expressed utter bewilderment at what he was doing. It went beyond how this would affect Comey's career or his reputation; he was potentially tarnishing the bureau itself. And for all this, Comey said he had no regrets.

Republicans have never bought into the story line that Comey cost Clinton the election. And they fault him for not recommending criminal prosecution of Clinton for her alleged misdeeds. But their main complaint was that he gave the Russia story more weight than it deserved. In March, Comey

revealed that there had been an active counterintelligence investigation on "the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government, and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia's efforts."

This was an unprecedented admission, and it might have been an attempt on Comey's part to make it politically difficult to fire him. Clearly, not difficult enough. And while Comey said he had "no information that supports" the idea that President Trump had been "wiretapped," the full nature of the surveillance that Trump's campaign and administration have been subjected to has yet to be revealed.

The bottom line was that Comey repeatedly made himself the issue.

His mandate was to enforce the law fairly and impartially. Instead, he appeared time and again to be gaming the system. A March poll showed that only 17% of Americans had a favorable opinion of Comey.

In Trump's letter firing Comey, he said the FBI needed new leadership "that restores public trust and confidence in its vital law enforcement mission." Fortunately, Comey's poor approval did not rub off on the FBI itself. A February poll showed public trust in the FBI at 80%, making it one of the most trusted institutions in the country.

With James Comey gone, the FBI can find a director more worthy of the title.



The Curious Case for Firing Comey

By Michael

Warren

Tuesday at the White House began with an almost unusual stillness, with President Trump having no public appearances on his schedule. Trump met with aides, received his daily intelligence briefing, and tweeted a series of criticisms of his former acting attorney general. A normal morning, really.

But by the end of the day, the embattled former national security advisor Michael Flynn's business associates had been subpoenaed by a federal grand jury. White House aides were being deployed all over primetime cable news once again to dismiss allegations of Russian collusion with the Trump campaign. The president was revealed to have hired a private law firm to respond to an inquiry by a Republican senator about any possible business dealings between Trump's company and Russian interests. Oh, and the federal law enforcement officer charged with investigating all of it? He ended his day out of a job.

What first broke up Tuesday's quiet proceedings was late-afternoon news that President Trump, on the recommendations of Attorney General Jeff Sessions and deputy AG Rod Rosenstein, had fired FBI director James Comey, effective immediately. The official reason the

administration offered came from a memo signed by Rosenstein, who said Comey's decision to deliver a public statement back in July recommending against prosecuting former secretary of state Hillary Clinton was inappropriate.

"The Director was wrong to usurp the Attorney General's authority on July 5, 2016, and announce his conclusion that the case should be closed without prosecution. It is not the function of the Director to make such an announcement," wrote Rosenstein.

It's a curious, even dubious reason. Comey's appearance in July was marked by his statement that Clinton was "extremely careless" in handling sensitive government material through her private email server. Comey laid out plenty of evidence for Clinton's carelessness, which ended up proving politically damaging to the Democratic presidential candidate. And Trump, then a candidate himself, criticized the Comey recommendation by saying the "system is rigged" and "very, very unfair" and that Comey exhibited "bad judgment."

But he reversed that judgment when Comey, just days before the election, wrote a letter to members of Congress saying that the FBI would be continuing to investigate newly acquired information concerning Clinton's email server. At the time, Trump hailed Comey for

the eleventh-hour bombshell. Sessions, then a U.S. senator and ardent Trump supporter, praised Comey on TV for "doing the right thing." The letter, released to the public, is credited by some with hurting Clinton in the final stretch of the campaign and helping win the election for Trump.

All of this information was known to Trump when he decided to keep Comey in his job at the beginning of the president's term—making his decision to fire Comey in May all the more confusing.

Less confusing if the *New York Times's* reporting is to be believed. Here's *Times* reporter Michael S. Schmidt, a reliable journalist who broke the initial story more than two years ago that Clinton had set up a private email server while working in the Obama administration: "Senior White House and Justice Department officials had been working on building a case against Mr. Comey since at least last week, according to administration officials. Attorney General Jeff Sessions had been charged with coming up with reasons to fire him, the officials said."

So what's changed since January—or since last week? In March, Comey had revealed in testimony before the House Intelligence committee that the FBI had an open investigation into whether or not the

Trump campaign had colluded with Russian officials or persons. And last week, Comey testified before the Senate Judiciary committee about, among other things, Russian interference in the election.

But if the Russian investigation—Comey's public statements stating that Russian is still trying to influence American politics through cyberattacks or other means—had to do with Trump's decision to sack the FBI director six years before Comey's term expired, the White House isn't saying. Asked by Tucker Carlson of Fox News if firing Comey is meant to affect either the FBI investigation, deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders denied the suggestion. "I don't think it affects it at all," she said.

Then, Sanders lit into the idea of investigating Russian involvement at all. "Frankly, it's kind of getting absurd. There's nothing there," she said. "It's time to move on."

But Comey's firing, and the whole host of developments, won't quell questions or suspicions—making it hard for investigators, members of Congress, and the media to simply "move on." The story, unfortunately for the Trump White House, doesn't seem to be going anywhere.



Absolutely nothing about James Comey's firing passes the smell test

Editorial Board

In some other universe, Americans might be able to take at face value the Trump

administration's explanation for the abrupt firing of James B. Comey less than four years into his 10-year term as director of the FBI — that Comey had mishandled the investigation

into Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server as secretary of State.

But in the real universe, that explanation seems far-fetched. After all, Comey is the official who has

been supervising an investigation into possible links between Russia and the campaign of the very president who just fired him. That president, by the way, tweeted this on Monday: "The Russia-Trump

collusion story is a total hoax, when will this taxpayer funded charade end?" Americans can be excused for wondering if Trump hopes that Comey's departure from the scene is the answer to his question.

Besides, most of the conduct that supposedly led to Comey's dismissal — detailed in a memo by Deputy Atty. Gen. Rod J. Rosenstein that was released Tuesday by the administration — has been a matter of public discussion for months and was known to Trump and Atty. Gen. Jeff Sessions when they took office.

You can be critical of some of Comey's actions in connection with the Clinton email investigation and still be alarmed by the way he has been removed.

That includes Comey's decision last July to hold a news conference to announce that he wasn't recommending that Clinton be charged criminally for mishandling classified information, his characterization of her conduct as "extremely careless" and his sending of a letter to Congress 11 days before the election — which

quickly became public — saying that the FBI had "learned of the existence of emails that appear to be pertinent to the investigation" into Clinton's private email server. (Two days before the election, Comey said that the new emails hadn't changed the FBI's earlier conclusion.)

Even though all that information was well-known at the time, Trump told Comey in late January that he would be kept on as FBI director. So why the sudden decision to fire him now?

It's true that in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee last week, Comey offered a combative defense of his actions, including a claim that when he learned of possibly relevant emails on a laptop owned by Anthony Weiner, husband of Clinton aide Huma Abedin, he faced a choice between speaking and concealing. But that argument wasn't new either. In his memo, Rosenstein lacerates Comey for making this same argument in a letter to Congress last October.

You can be critical of some of Comey's actions in connection with

the Clinton email investigation — as this page was — and still be alarmed by the way he has been removed by a president who has his own reasons for wanting to see Comey gone.

Nor does the timing of the dismissal seem to be explained by the fact that Rosenstein, a respected career prosecutor, only recently joined the Justice Department, having been confirmed on April 25. The department has other officials responsible for investigating misconduct, including an inspector general who was investigating Comey's actions in connection with the Clinton investigation. There was no mention of any findings by the inspector general in the White House or Justice Department announcements.

Frankly, the Comey firing is deeply troubling, reminiscent of Richard Nixon's forcing out of special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox in 1973. Like Comey, Cox was investigating the president. That infamous series of moves is known as the Saturday Night Massacre.

Now that Comey is gone there are two urgent priorities that Congress must insist on in its oversight role.

One is to preserve the integrity of the Justice Department investigation into Russian meddling in the presidential election and the possibility of collusion between Russia and members of the Trump campaign. Because Sessions has recused himself from involvement in that matter, it's up to Rosenstein to decide whether to appoint a special counsel to direct that investigation; he should do so immediately. The integrity of the investigation is in peril. Comey had a reputation for independence, and unlike Rosenstein or Sessions, he was not appointed by Trump.

Second, it is imperative that Comey's replacement be a professional law enforcement official with an impeccable reputation, familiarity with federal law enforcement, no taint of partisanship and no political, personal or business connection to Trump. The Senate should refuse to confirm anyone who falls short of that ideal.



In firing Comey, Trump is playing with fire

Paul Callan

(CNN)Historians may one day remember May 9, 2017 as a fateful day in American history. In firing FBI director James Comey, the 45th President of the United States may well have set in motion a series of events that could lead to more controversy and potentially even his impeachment less than a year after being sworn into office.

President Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions set these events in motion by dispatching the highly respected former Acting Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to craft a rationale to fire Comey.

In a three-page memorandum, the best Rosenstein could do was to invoke what is now ancient political history -- Comey's alleged violation of Department of Justice policies in the handling of the Hillary Clinton email investigation. The alleged transgressions related to this investigation occurred months before Trump's Inauguration.

Of course, all of this was widely known and publicly discussed well before Trump made the decision to keep Comey in the position of FBI director.

The FBI director was obviously fired yesterday for something other than being too nice to Hillary Clinton by ignoring Department of Justice regulations.

Hints as to the real reason for the director's shocking termination can be found in a series of answers Comey gave when Senator Richard Blumenthal, D-Connecticut, interrogated him during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on May 3.

SEN. RICHARD BLUMENTHAL: Thank you, Director Comey, for being here, and thank you to you and the men and women who work with you at the FBI for their extraordinary service to our country, much of it unappreciated as you've wrote so powerfully in your opening statement. You have confirmed, I believe, that the FBI is investigating potential ties between Trump associates and the Russian interference in the 2016 campaign, correct?

COMEY: Yes.

BLUMENTHAL: And you have not, to my knowledge, ruled out anyone in the Trump campaign as potentially a target of that criminal investigation, correct?

COMEY: Well, I haven't said anything publicly about who we've opened investigations on, I briefed the chair and ranking on who those people are. And so I can't -- I can't go beyond that in this setting.

BLUMENTHAL: Have you ruled out anyone in the campaign that you can disclose?

COMEY: I don't feel comfortable answering that, Senator, because I think it puts me on a slope to talking about who we're investigating.

BLUMENTHAL: Have you -- have you ruled out the President of the United States?

COMEY: I don't -- I don't want people to over-interpret this answer, I'm not going to comment on anyone in particular, because that puts me down a slope of -- because if I say no to that then I have to answer succeeding questions. So what we've done is brief the chair and ranking on who the US persons are that we've opened investigations on. And that's -- that's as far as we're going to go, at this point.

BLUMENTHAL: But as a former prosecutor, you know that when there's an investigation into several potentially culpable individuals, the evidence from those individuals and the investigation can lead to others, correct?

COMEY: Correct. We're always open-minded about -- and we follow the evidence wherever it takes us.

BLUMENTHAL: So potentially, the President of the United States could be a target of your ongoing investigation into the Trump campaign's involvement with Russian interference in our election, correct?

COMEY: I just worry -- I don't want to answer that -- that -- that seems to be unfair speculation. We will follow the evidence, we'll try and find as much as we can and we'll follow the evidence wherever it leads.

This was obviously not the answer that the President expected to hear from his FBI director as he testified under oath before Congress and the American people. President Trump no doubt fully expected his director to say with utmost clarity and sincerity, "The President is not under investigation."

These words Comey refused to speak -- but it's clear from the bizarre language of Trump's letter terminating the director that the President wanted Comey to say them. "While I greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation, I nevertheless concur with the judgment of the Department of Justice that you are not able to effectively lead the Bureau."

Why would the President insert this phrase? He did so because the real reason Comey was being fired was his egregious violation of the Trumpian principle of absolute and unquestioning loyalty to President Trump.

By refusing to unequivocally deny even the possibility that Trump was being investigated, Comey

demonstrated that he could not be trusted in the troubled times ahead.

Trump could have removed Comey from office at the start of his Presidential term, but he made a calculated judgement that Comey would owe the President for the substantial favor of allowing the director to remain in office.

After all, the director's public comments about the pending Hillary Clinton email investigation had clearly violated long-standing Department of

Justice policy requiring no comment, particularly during election periods. They warranted Comey's dismissal even before Trump was sworn in. Comey was also a bit of a loose cannon, but he was generally thought to be scrupulously honest.

By keeping Comey on when he took office, what better card could Trump hold than a favor owed by the director of the FBI as investigators zeroed in on the Russian hacking of the presidential election of 2016.

All of this puts Trump in the first mile of the Richard Nixon road to impeachment. It took Nixon, a skilled and experienced hand at manipulating the levers of power, almost two full terms in office before his abuse of power was detected and effectively prosecuted.

Trump's clumsy manipulation of the very same levers has resulted in his own version of the Saturday Night Massacre after less than five months in office.

Public opinion will compel the appointment of a special prosecutor and the talk of impeachment may soon follow. The sweetest sound that many Republicans could hope to hear would be Vice President Mike Pence taking the presidential oath.

It's always the cover-up that destroys those who abuse the power of high office and the trust of the American people. The nation is in for a rough ride in the months ahead.



Trump puts his interests before the national interest

Michael D'Antonio

(CNN) True to form, Donald Trump put himself first -- this time ahead of the national interest -- as he suddenly fired Federal Bureau of Investigation director James Comey on Tuesday. The action evoked memories of Richard Nixon's firing of Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox, which led to a constitutional crisis and Nixon's eventual resignation.

Trump justified his risky and indefensible action with an effort at misdirection worthy of the three-card monte dealers who still fleece yokels on the sidewalks of Manhattan.

According to the White House, the President removed Comey because of his mishandling of the FBI's investigation of Hillary Clinton's emails when she was Secretary of State.

Though Trump had initially been critical of the investigation when Comey concluded it in July 2016, he changed his tune several months later. Days before he defeated Clinton in the 2016 election, Trump praised Comey, saying "what he did was the right thing," and that the director had ultimately salvaged his reputation by alerting Congress to the discovery of evidence that might be related to the probe.

What has changed in the months since Trump felt so positively about Comey? The main thing is that the FBI has pursued a wide-ranging investigation into Russian interference with the US election. Trump campaign figures including Paul Manafort, Carter Page and Roger Stone have been in the spotlight. And the President's first national security advisor, Michael Flynn, resigned after lying about meeting with the Russian ambassador to the United States.

With the White House and both houses of Congress under Republican control, the only independent investigator of the Russia controversy was Comey. The national interest required his continued service if only to reassure that public that someone untainted by political influence was in charge.

We don't know the details of what the FBI is finding in its investigation, but it is logical to wonder if the reason for Comey's firing is that the Bureau was getting too close for Trump's comfort. If you doubt this is the case, consider the strange wording of the letter informing Comey of his termination.

"While I greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation, I nevertheless must concur with the Department of

Justice that you are not able to effectively lead the Bureau."

The first part of the sentence, which references the "three separate occasions" when Comey supposedly informed Trump he is "not under investigation," is loaded with meaning.

First, it implies that Comey was a toady who eagerly informed his boss that there was nothing for him to worry about. There is nothing in Comey's record to suggest he's this kind of bootlicker. Second, Trump seeks to pre-empt those who would say that he fired Comey because the investigation was getting too close.

But the truth is, Trump would absolutely lie about his rationale for firing Comey. From the days of the presidential campaign when he repeatedly insisted his opponents were dishonest, to the early months of his presidency when he has harped repeatedly on the problem he terms "fake news," Trump has been the pot calling the kettle black.

And as the President who falsely claimed millions of people voted fraudulently and that his inauguration crowd was biggest ever, Trump himself has been a prime peddler of fake news.

Indeed, the real purpose of his continuous complaints about the

news media has been to erode public confidence in the press and promote himself as the one and only arbiter of truth.

But counting on Trump for the truth is equivalent to relying on a ravenous lion to guide you out of the jungle. Like the lion, Trump has a well-deserved reputation as a predator. This is the man who pressured little old ladies to give up their homes and ran the dubious venture known as Trump University so he could make money. Trump also has no record of sacrificing himself for the greater good. He won the White House, after all, with the meanest campaign rhetoric in modern American history.

Near the end of Trump's letter to Comey, he offers the argument that by firing the FBI director, he is seeking higher ground on behalf of the American people. "It is essential that we find new leadership for the FBI that restores public trust and confidence in its vital law enforcement mission," he writes. By connecting that noble sentiment to the cynical firing of Comey, Trump is insisting that we all accept what the President says -- and not what our common sense tells us.

If you believe him, I suggest you stay out of the jungle.



With Comey firing, Trump drags America deeper into crisis

Gabriel Schoenfeld

The larger question is whether we are officially turning into a banana republic.

President Trump is always transparent in his peculiar way. Even as he lies baldly, he reveals what is on the forefront of his mind. So it is in the brutal letter he had a top personal aide hand deliver to the FBI, firing director James Comey: "While I greatly appreciate you informing me on three separate

occasions that I am not under investigation, I nevertheless concur with the judgment of the Department of Justice that you are not able to effectively lead the bureau."

Of course, we do not know if Trump is or is not under investigation. We certainly cannot take Trump's word for it. We do know for a fact that the FBI is looking into Russian meddling in the 2016 election and possible involvement — links, coordination, collusion — by Trump aides and associates. By pushing

Comey out the door, and doing so on the preposterous pretext that the FBI director mishandled the investigation of Hillary Clinton's email server last July 5, Trump has plunged the country into nothing less than a constitutional crisis. How it is resolved will have profound implications for our future.

An obvious and key question is whether by getting rid of Comey, Trump will succeed in slowing or bringing to a halt the investigative machinery presently in motion. On its face, that seems unlikely. If the

workings of the FBI are always a black box, that is especially so for a leaderless bureau, run by a toothless acting director. It is conceivable that Trump's replacement for Comey, whomever he appoints, will manage to pour sand into the gears. But even if that happens, the bureau is not the only game in town.

The House and Senate investigations have significant limitations. They do not have adequate investigative resources and they have been periodically

hamstrung by partisanship. But if the White House is seen to be engaged, as now appears, in a full-throated cover-up, will Republicans let Trump get away with it?

GOP elected officials have been remarkably craven up to this juncture, tolerating behavior in the White House that would have been inconceivable in any previous administration. Will they wake up now, or are they in too deep? Having revealed themselves, with some notable exceptions, to be devoid of principles, the one safe prediction we can make is that they will approach this question not with reference to right and wrong, and not by putting country ahead of party, but by studying the polls.

The larger question raised by the Comey firing is whether the United States is now officially turning into a

banana republic. As more and more dots are connected, they are forming an ugly picture. The abrupt firing of U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara on March 11 is one such dot. Bharara had been told by Trump in November that he could stay in office. But of course his investigative bailiwick in the Southern District of New York encompassed a location that, as the months went by and as the Russia investigation proceeded, became increasingly sensitive: Trump Tower. Without explanation, Bharara was sacked.

A second is the bizarre White House interference in the House Intelligence Committee investigation, with Chairman Devin Nunes secretly invited to the White House to receive information which he then briefed to President Trump as if he obtained it from

somewhere else. That escapade discredited the committee's work and set it back for weeks. Then we have the efforts of the White House, over several months, to try to block former Acting Attorney General Sally Yates from testifying before Congress on the grounds that it would violate "client confidences."

The stage-managed firing of Comey is the biggest blow of all to the rule of law thus far. Multiple news outlets are reporting that Trump decided to fire Comey sometime last week. He then asked his Attorney General Jeff Sessions to come up with a rationale for such a step. Never mind that this entailed putting the cart before the horse. And never mind that Sessions himself had formally recused himself from matters concerning the Russia investigation that Comey was heading up. This is the same

Sessions who lied to the Senate about his own meetings with Russian ambassador Sergei Kislyak, and it is the same Sessions who recommended that the Trump campaign bring on board as a foreign policy adviser Carter Page, who is also under FBI investigation for his ties to Russian officials.

No one knows what will come next. But the degree of tumult, dishonesty and corruption is breathtaking. As the Trump administration, in the name of making America great again, drags the country ever deeper into crisis, one can make two safe predictions. First, many more utterly unpredictable things are bound to happen. And second, it will not end well either for Trump or for the country.



Comey's Firing Is a Crisis of American Rule of Law

By Noah Feldman

It's not a constitutional crisis. Technically, President Donald Trump was within his constitutional rights Tuesday when he fired FBI Director James Comey. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is part of the executive branch, not an independent agency. But the firing did violate a powerful unwritten norm: that the director serves a 10-year, nonrenewable term and is fired only for good cause.

Only one director has ever been removed from office involuntarily: President Bill Clinton fired Director William Sessions in 1993 after an internal report found that he had committed significant ethics violations.

There is therefore reason to be deeply concerned about Comey's firing, which has the effect of politicizing law enforcement -- a risky precedent in a rule-of-law democracy. And the fact that the FBI is investigating the Trump administration makes that politicization look like pure presidential self-interest.

Practice regarding FBI directors doesn't go back all that far, because J. Edgar Hoover ran the department from 1924 to 1972, ultimately dying in office. Hoover was too powerful and knew too much to be fired.

In reaction, Congress adopted a law in 1976 that limited the director to a 10-year term. The law doesn't place any limits on presidential power to fire the director. Arguably, law enforcement is so central to the core constitutional power of the executive that it would violate the separation of powers if Congress tried to take away the president's authority to remove the chief federal law enforcement officer.

At the same time, however, it's anomalous in a rule-of-law system for law enforcement to be too responsive to the political whims of the elected executive. It's just very risky to allow a country's most powerful elected official to control the appointment of key law enforcement officers -- in part because of conflicts of interest like the one raised by the Comey firing. As a result, the vast majority of well-functioning democracies professionalize the investigative role, rather than politicizing it.

That's been the unwritten norm in the U.S. -- one might almost say, a part of our unwritten, small-c constitution, though not of the written, big-C Constitution. Of the four Senate-confirmed directors before Comey, all served under presidents of both parties. Three served until their terms ended or they voluntarily retired. One, Robert Mueller, got a special two-year extension.

The exception was William Sessions. Sessions, initially appointed by President Ronald Reagan, was fired by Clinton after an investigation by the Office of Professional Responsibility of the Department of Justice found that he'd used FBI planes to visit friends and relatives. Clinton tried to get Sessions to resign in order not to have to break precedent and fire him. But Sessions refused, and Clinton pulled the trigger and fired him anyway.

Trump alluded indirectly to the Sessions firing in his message to Comey when he said "you are not able to effectively lead the bureau." This echoed Clinton's language when he said that Sessions could "no longer effectively lead the bureau."

By implication, Trump was saying that he has as much right to fire Comey as Clinton did to fire Sessions. In practice, there's a big difference between Sessions's ethics violations, which were documented by George H.W. Bush's Department of Justice, and Comey's admittedly highly problematic management of the investigation of Hillary Clinton.

Comey may arguably have acted unethically by announcing the reopening of the Clinton email investigation shortly before November's election -- but Trump didn't say so, and surely he's the

last person in the world who would make that claim. The firing of Comey is blatantly political. The bottom line is presumably that the Trump administration knows it can't control Comey, and so it doesn't trust him.

It seems to me, for what it's worth, that Comey should have resigned after Trump's election to avoid the appearance that he had politicized his position to the benefit of the candidate who won. I'm not writing to mourn his tenure.

Yet Comey's act of politicization doesn't justify Trump's decision to make the firing of the FBI director into a political act. It's a classic case of two wrongs not making a right.

And it's profoundly troubling that a president whose administration is already under investigation on multiple fronts would take such an action. Whoever is appointed to run the FBI permanently will be seen as beholden to the president who appointed him or her. That will make any decision not to pursue investigations into the president look politically motivated and illegitimate.

The erosion of the independence of law enforcement is thus a blow to the unwritten constitutional norm of political neutrality. It doesn't violate the separation of powers. But it violates a norm that in its own way is almost as important.



UNE - In Trump's Firing of James Comey, Echoes of Watergate

By Peter Baker

WASHINGTON — In dramatically casting aside James B. Comey,

President Trump fired the man who may have helped make him president — and the man who

potentially most threatened the future of his presidency.

Not since Watergate has a president dismissed the person leading an investigation bearing on him, and Mr. Trump's decision late

Tuesday afternoon drew instant comparisons to the "Saturday Night Massacre" in October 1973, when President Richard M. Nixon ordered the firing of Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor looking into the so-called third-rate burglary that would eventually bring Nixon down.

In his letter firing Mr. Comey, the F.B.I. director, Mr. Trump made a point of noting that Mr. Comey had three times told the president that he was not under investigation, Mr. Trump's way of pre-emptively denying that his action was self-interested. But in fact, he had plenty at stake, given that Mr. Comey had said publicly that the bureau was investigating Russia's meddling in last year's presidential election and whether any associates of Mr. Trump's campaign were coordinating with Moscow.

The decision stunned members of both parties, who saw it as a brazen act sure to inflame an already politically explosive investigation. For all his unconventional actions in his nearly four months as president, Mr. Trump still has the capacity to shock, and the notion of firing an F.B.I. director in the middle of such an investigation crossed all the normal lines.

Mr. Trump may have assumed that Democrats so loathed Mr. Comey because of his actions last year in the investigation of Hillary Clinton's private email server that they would support or at least acquiesce to the dismissal. But if so, he miscalculated, as Democrats rushed to condemn the move and demand that a special counsel be appointed to ensure that the Russia investigation be independent of the president.

The move exposed Mr. Trump to the suspicion that he has something to hide and could strain his relations with fellow Republicans who may be wary of defending him when they do not have all the facts. Many Republicans issued cautious statements on Tuesday, but a few expressed misgivings about Mr. Comey's dismissal and called for a special congressional investigation

or independent commission to take over from the House and Senate Intelligence Committees now looking into the Russia episode.

The appointment of a successor to Mr. Comey could touch off a furious fight since anyone Mr. Trump would choose would automatically come under suspicion. A confirmation fight could easily distract Mr. Trump's White House at a time when it wants the Senate to focus on passing legislation to repeal former President Barack Obama's health care law.

Mr. Trump did little to help his case by arguing that he was dismissing Mr. Comey over his handling of the investigation into Mrs. Clinton's email, given that he vowed as a candidate to throw her in prison if he won. Few found it plausible that the president was truly bothered by Mr. Comey's decision to publicly announce days before the election that he was reopening the case, a move Mrs. Clinton and other Democrats have said tilted the election toward Mr. Trump.

"It's beyond credulity to think that Donald Trump fired Jim Comey because of the way he handled Hillary Clinton's emails," John D. Podesta, who was Mrs. Clinton's campaign chairman, said in an interview. "Now more than ever, it's time for an independent investigation."

Mr. Podesta noted that Attorney General Jeff Sessions had recommended the dismissal. "The attorney general who said he recused himself on all the Russia matters recommended the firing of the F.B.I. director in charge of investigating the Russia matters," he said.

Defenders said Mr. Trump's action would not circumvent the F.B.I. investigation, which would go forward with career agents. "This doesn't stop anything," Ken Cuccinelli, a former Virginia attorney general and ally of Mr. Trump's, said on CNN. "The notion that this is going to stop the investigations going on is ludicrous."

While Mr. Trump said he acted at the urging of Mr. Sessions, he had left little doubt about his personal feelings toward Mr. Comey or the Russia investigation in recent days. "The Russia-Trump collusion story is a total hoax, when will this taxpayer funded charade end?" he wrote on Twitter on Monday.

The Watergate comparison was unavoidable. When Mr. Cox, the special prosecutor, subpoenaed Nixon for copies of White House tapes, the president ordered that he be fired. Both Attorney General Elliot Richardson and his deputy, William Ruckelshaus, refused and resigned instead. The third-ranking Justice Department official, Solicitor General Robert H. Bork, complied with Mr. Nixon's order and fired Mr. Cox.

Democrats saw parallels. "This is Nixonian," Senator Bob Casey, Democrat of Pennsylvania, said in a statement.

"Not since Watergate have our legal systems been so threatened and our faith in the independence and integrity of those systems so shaken," added Senator Richard Blumenthal, Democrat of Connecticut.

Even a longstanding ally of Mr. Trump's, Roger J. Stone Jr., drew a connection as he defended the president. "Somewhere Dick Nixon is smiling," Mr. Stone, who worked for Nixon and is among the Trump associates facing F.B.I. scrutiny, said in an interview. "Comey's credibility was shot. The irony is that Trump watched him talk about bumbling the Hillary investigation, not the Russia investigation — and decided it was time to get rid of him."

At least one Twitter user made the argument that Mr. Trump had gone where even Nixon had not. The Nixon presidential library posted a picture of Nixon on the telephone with the message: "FUN FACT: President Nixon never fired the Director of the FBI #FBI Director #notNixonian."

Ever since Watergate, presidents have been reluctant to take on F.B.I. directors, no matter how frustrated they were. The only exception was President Bill Clinton, who fired William S. Sessions in 1993 after ethical issues were raised against Mr. Sessions, and was accused of acting politically. The successor he appointed, Louis J. Freeh, became even more of a headache for Mr. Clinton as he helped an independent counsel, Kenneth W. Starr, investigate the president. But Mr. Clinton never risked the backlash that would have come had he dismissed Mr. Freeh.

Robert S. Mueller III threatened to resign as F.B.I. director during President George W. Bush's administration if a secret surveillance program he considered illegal were reauthorized, and Mr. Bush backed down rather than risk a scandal. Joining Mr. Mueller in that threat, as it happened, was a deputy attorney general named James Comey. Mr. Bush ultimately revised the legal justification in a way that passed muster with Mr. Mueller and Mr. Comey and allowed the surveillance to go forward.

Timothy Naftali, a former director of the Nixon library, said Mr. Trump's action was not a direct parallel to the Saturday Night Massacre because Mr. Comey was not appointed specifically to investigate the 2016 campaign.

"With or without Mr. Comey, the F.B.I. will continue to investigate the 2016 campaign as it relates to Russian intervention," Mr. Naftali said. "This is another kind of mistake. Unless Attorney General Sessions can prove malfeasance or gross negligence by Comey, the timing of this action further deepens suspicions that President Trump is covering up something."

Glenn Thrush contributed reporting from Washington, and Maggie Haberman from New York.



'Smell of Watergate' Hits Trump's White House

Firing the FBI director leading the investigation into his campaign's possible collusion with an adversarial foreign power is big stuff, the biggest shock President Donald Trump has delivered in his short, shock-filled presidency.

"It really does have the smell of Watergate," says historian Robert Dallek. "It just raises suspicion this is a Nixonian president trying to cut

off this investigation or at least delay it."

The potential is there to find evidence of collusion that could be termed traitorous, says Dallek. "If he were so clean and without any kind of compromise in this situation, he'd let the investigation go forward and urge a special prosecutor to take over. Instead, he's giving every sign of a coverup."

The letter Trump sent to FBI Director James Comey said, in effect, "thanks for exonerating me" three times (like so many Trump claims, the only sign it's so is that Trump said it)—and then fired him. But Trump can't abolish the position, and whoever he appoints will have to be vetted and confirmed by the Senate.

Maybe Trump and his coterie of yes-men ignorant of history think he can name a loyalist. "Then the

question is will the Senate bend a knee to him?" says Dallek. Democrats will resist, and already some Republicans, including Jeff Flake and Lindsey Graham, indicated that they too would resist the wrong pick.

Most strange is the Trump administration's reaction to the firestorm set off by the firing—it took hours for the White House to even dispatch surrogates, after first insisting that the letters from

Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the deputy attorney general, Rod J. Rosenstein, calling for Comey's ouster spoke for themselves—that revealed their tone-deafness and their ignorance of history.

"This is not fake news, this is real news, and it evokes historical memories in a lot of people in Washington who remember what happened in 1974," says Dallek. "That's not 200 years ago."

Actually it was October of 1973 when Nixon fired two attorney generals, one after the other, first Elliot Richardson and then his deputy William French Smith, when they refused to fire Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, who was looking into Watergate. They finally found someone who would do it, then-Solicitor General Robert Bork, who would gain fame in the '80s for his failed Supreme Court nomination.

Nixon speechwriter and adviser Patrick J. Buchanan was in the Oval Office with Nixon when a deal was struck for Richardson to accept

summaries of the incriminating tapes Nixon had made, as opposed to the tapes themselves. But Cox wouldn't accept the deal, and Richardson wouldn't fire him—so Nixon did, setting off what was dubbed the Saturday Night Massacre.

When I reached Buchanan on the phone, he said, "Déjà vu all over again," deeming Trump's firing of Comey the Tuesday Night Massacre. He was in New York launching his new book on the Nixon White House with a full chapter on the original Saturday night one. That was such an enormous firestorm that by Monday the Office of the Special Counsel was reconstituted and Leon Jaworski named to the position. He prosecuted the case that forced Nixon's resignation in August 1974.

While nodding to the similarities, Buchanan judged that "this is not comparable at all," making the point that no evidence of collusion has thus far been found, and that a new attorney general will take over.

"This too shall pass," he said, unlike October 1973, when he says, "I knew in my bones," that it was over. He told friends that same night that Articles of Impeachment would be introduced in the House the following Tuesday, and he was right.

For those dizzied by the events in the Trump presidency, Buchanan notes that earlier in the month of the Saturday Night Massacre, Vice President Spiro Agnew had resigned and Gerald Ford had been named to the presidency. And the Yom Kippur war was raging.

"We weren't sure the republic would survive," says Democratic political strategist Les Francis, who was working then for a teachers union in California. "We didn't know what Nixon would do if he was pushed to the wall."

Defense Secretary James Schlesinger alerted people in the Pentagon they shouldn't necessarily obey the president. Buchanan reconstitutes in his book the commentary of the times. NBC's

John Chancellor called it America's greatest constitutional crisis—neglecting to include the Civil War. Others speculated the Army would be coming out, though they weren't sure which side it would be on. There's a whiff of Gestapo in the air, opined another.

Forty years later, the Nixon Library has remodeled its exhibits to put the president in a better place for new generations. They remind young people Nixon was more than Watergate. He created the EPA, for example, and the library is keeping their social media current. They want us to stop comparing Trump to Nixon, tweeting after Comey's firing this "Fun Fact: President Nixon never fired the Director of the FBI."

President Nixon never starred in a reality show where he could fire anyone he wanted. President Trump, still in his first four months, is testing the limits of his contract with the American people.