



Jeudi 11 mai 2017, réalisation : Samuel Tribollet



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FRANCE - EUROPE

The
Washington
Post

Just how unusual is Macron's 24-year age gap with his wife anyway?

By Adam Taylor

Emmanuel Macron is 24 years younger than his wife, and the incoming French president is exasperated that people keep talking about it.

Discussing the assumptions and rumors about his relationship with his wife, Brigitte, Macron told *Le Parisien* newspaper this week that "if I had been 20 years older than my wife, nobody would have thought for a single second that I couldn't be."

It's a sentiment many French women seem to relate to. Speaking to *The Washington Post's* Mary Jordan ahead of the election, some suggested that the Macron's marriage was social "revenge" for years of powerful men seeking younger wives. But it raises the question: Just how unusual is Macron's May-December romance in French politics anyway?

When he takes office, Macron will be the only leader under France's

Fifth Republic to be younger than his partner; no surprise there. However, the Macrons also will have the largest age gap of any French first couple under the Fifth Republic. Charles de Gaulle and François Hollande were both close to a decade years older than their partners when they entered office, but those relationships are less than half the age gap the Macrons have.

The complicated love lives of some French leaders do make this comparison a little more tricky, however. To the delight of French tabloids, both Hollande and his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy, split from their respective partners during their time in the Élysée Palace. Hollande quickly entered a relationship with actress Julia Gayet, 18 years his junior, while Sarkozy married former model Carla Bruni, 13 years younger.

Another factor is the fact that many French presidents have conducted well-known extramarital affairs. François Mitterrand's lengthy but covert relationship with art

historian Anne Pingeot is now widely acknowledged and pretty much accepted — the couple had a daughter together, and Mitterrand would appear with her in public later in life. Pingeot was 27 years younger than Mitterrand.

Around the world, the picture gets even more complicated. If you look at the leaders of the world's 20 largest economies, at least three have age gaps with their partners that are at least as big as the Macrons': Jacob Zuma of South Africa, Michael Temer of Brazil and President Trump of the United States. However, there are complexities here, too, some resulting from societal differences. For example, Zuma may top the above list, but he is also a polygamist. His wives are of varying ages, and the chart above includes only the youngest, Nompumelelo Ntuli.

Little is known about the current wife of Saudi King Salman, so she is not included. Meanwhile, the age of Italian Prime Minister Paolo

Gentiloni's low-profile wife, Emanuela Mauro, is not publicly known. And Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is estranged from his wife, while Russian President Vladimir Putin split from his spouse in 2013 (although he has since been linked with a number of younger women).

However, it does seem clear that the leaders of the world's largest economies do tend to favor younger partners. There is only one who joins Macron in choosing an older spouse: Angela Merkel. The German chancellor's husband, Joachim Sauer, is five years older than her.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

THE HILL : France gets leader it needs, but foes of reform lurk everywhere

Desmond Lachman, opinion contributor

Emmanuel Macron's victory over Marine le Pen in Sunday's French presidential election is a cause for celebration in both France and the rest of Europe. It offers the prospect for much needed economic reform in France, and it holds out hope for deeper economic integration in the eurozone.

Before allowing oneself to get carried away by the election result, however, one needs to recognize how formidable are Macron's economic challenges and how tenuous is the political support for his reform agenda. One also needs to recognize how resistant Germany is likely to be toward the very idea of a more-integrated Eurozone.

There can be little doubt that the French economy needs major economic reform if it is ever to rival the German economy. Unlike Germany, France is yet to undertake meaningful labor-market reform. This has left France with a rigid labor market, as exemplified by the country still being stuck with a 35-

hour work week and by the many impediments to firing an employee.

At the same time, the state of France's public finances are immeasurably weaker than those of Germany and remain a major obstacle to the country getting itself onto a faster economic growth path. Public spending in France now amounts to a staggering 56 percent of GDP, while the country's public debt exceeds the level of its annual output.

As is the case with the eurozone's southern European countries, the French economy too could benefit from a more integrated Europe. In particular, it would help France if there were to be an early move toward a European banking union, if the eurozone were to have a minister of finance and if Germany would entertain the idea of a joint European bond issue.

It would also help if France were granted more flexibility in the timetable for meeting its budget deficit target and if Germany would use the fiscal room that it presently enjoys in order to boost overall demand in the eurozone. One of the

benefits of such a shift in relative budget policy positions would be that it would help facilitate the much-needed reduction in Germany's outsized external current account surplus, which presently amounts to around 8.5 percent of GDP.

France is fortunate to have elected a centrist and market-oriented president who will both push for economic reforms at home and a more-integrated Europe abroad. However, it remains an open question as to whether Macron will enjoy political support at home to implement his agenda. It is also far from clear that Germany will go along with his plans for more Europe.

In gauging Macron's prospects for achieving real reform, it is important to recall how narrow his political support appears to be. True, he did win 65 percent of the vote in the second round of the presidential election. However, this is to be seen less as a mandate for his policy agenda than as a repudiation of all that Marine Le Pen stood for.

In the first round of the presidential election, almost half of the French

electorate voted for left-wing and right-wing extremist candidates who were opposed to Macron's economic reforms and who questioned the benefits of France's continued EU membership. In addition, judging by the experience of past efforts to reform France's archaic labor laws, he must expect strong opposition on the streets led by the French trade union movement.

The relatively tepid reception that Macron's electoral victory received from the German political establishment does not bode well for his efforts to get real reform to the European project. In congratulating Macron, German politicians from both sides of the political spectrum seemed to go out of their way to indicate that they saw little reason to agree to the issue of joint European bonds or to modify the eurozone's fiscal rules as they apply to France.

One has to hope that, in the period ahead, political support for Macron's French and European reform agenda builds. Since, should he fail to implement his agenda, we should brace ourselves for the return of Le Pen and all that for which she

stands in France's next presidential election.

Desmond Lachman is a resident fellow at the

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Tom Fairless and
Todd Buell

European Central Bank President Mario Draghi clashed with Dutch lawmakers on Wednesday over the ECB's monetary stimulus, underscoring mounting pressure for a policy change from Frankfurt as the region's economy heats up.

Mr. Draghi's rare visit to The Hague comes at a sensitive time for the ECB, which is considering when to start winding down its €60 billion-a-month bond-purchase program, known as quantitative easing. The program is currently due to run at least through December.

Temps occasionally flared during a two-hour hearing in the Dutch parliament, as politicians probed Mr. Draghi on the ECB's record of transparency, and attacked policies they said subsidized southern European countries and harmed Dutch pensioners.

"You still believe this [QE program] is fully within [the ECB's] framework and you have not been doing any government financing, even though you [will have] bought €2.5 trillion of debt by the end of the year?" said Pieter Omtzigt, a member of the center-right Christian Democratic Appeal.

Mr. Draghi strongly defended the ECB's decisions,

American Enterprise Institute. He was formerly a deputy director in the International Monetary Fund's Policy Development and Review

Department and the chief emerging market economic strategist at Salomon Smith Barney.

Draghi Clashes With Dutch Lawmakers Over ECB's Monetary Stimulus

which he said had helped support households throughout the region, including in the Netherlands. He also brushed off calls for a swift exit from QE.

"It is too early to declare success," Mr. Draghi said. "Maintaining the current very substantial degree of monetary [stimulus] is still needed for underlying inflation pressures to build up."

The ECB is accountable to the European Parliament in Brussels, but Mr. Draghi occasionally travels to national capital cities to defend the bank's actions—most recently to Berlin, in late September. That trip helped to soothe German lawmakers as the ECB prepared to extend its stimulus again.

This year, the bloc's economic outlook looks far more rosy. Eurozone growth outpaced that in the U.S. during the first quarter, according to the European Union's statistics agency, while inflation has rebounded to 1.9%, within the ECB's target range.

Political risks have also faded, as anti-euro politicians in the Netherlands and France failed to make much headway in national elections.

As growth has picked up, Dutch and German politicians have been calling with increasing urgency for

the ECB to reverse course. The bank's balance sheet has already risen to an all-time high of €4.16 trillion as a result of its bond purchases, surpassing that of the Federal Reserve, which stands at around \$4.5 trillion.

Nevertheless, top ECB officials say their job isn't yet done. Underlying inflation remains weak, and the bloc's unemployment rate, at 9.5%, is far too high.

Mr. Draghi highlighted ECB research, published Wednesday, suggesting that up to 18% of eurozone workers are underemployed, meaning they would like to work more hours, or have temporarily left the labor force.

Some Dutch lawmakers weren't convinced. The ECB's stimulus might have made Mr. Draghi a hero in southern Europe, said one MP, but not in Holland.

"It's not my job to be a hero, just to pursue my mandate," Mr. Draghi responded. The ECB, he said, has done no more than other major central banks in the U.S., U.K. and Japan, which also launched major stimulus programs in recent years.

Mr. Draghi also highlighted the benefits of the ECB's policies for Dutch households. "As an export-oriented country, the Netherlands is currently benefiting from the

recovery in other euro area countries," he said.

"You look remarkably calm for someone who issues €2.5 trillion out of thin air, especially when your chief economist says there is no Plan B," commented Lammert van Raan, a member of the left-wing Party for the Animals.

Other parliamentarians asked about the likely repercussions of a breakup of the eurozone. Mr. Draghi refused to be drawn into that discussion. "The euro is irrevocable," he said. "We don't want to speculate on things that have no probability of happening."

"You're saying there's zero probability?" said Renske Leijten, representing the left-wing Socialist party.

"Our policy has created 4½ million jobs, that's the reality," retorted Mr. Draghi.

The Dutch lawmakers also had a parting gift for Mr. Draghi: a tulip, symbolizing the Dutch "tulip mania" of the 17th century that led to one of the first global financial crises.

**The
New York
Times**

Holocaust Survivors in Poland Find Restitution Claims 'Like a Carousel'

Nina Siegal

"In Poland, there was no official process for this: You have to go to the courts," she said in a phone interview from Stockholm. "We did go to the courts, but it was like a carousel: You go around and around and around and around. You have to produce the documents that they need, and then it's not enough. There are always more documents you need to provide."

Poland is the only European Union nation that has not established formal procedures to resolve claims made by people whose property was seized during the Holocaust, according to a new report by the European Shoah Legacy Institute, based in Prague.

The report, more than 1,200 pages, was based on three years of research in 47 countries that endorsed a 2009 pledge, known as the Terezin Declaration, to establish

a restitution process for "immovable property" like land, homes and businesses.

It found that Poland had only partly complied with an obligation to return communal Jewish property like synagogues and cemeteries.

The issue of restitution is especially fraught for Poland, which had Europe's largest Jewish community before the war. About three million Polish Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, along with at least 1.9 million other Polish civilians.

The report says that Holocaust victims across Europe — not only Jews, but also Roma, gays, disabled people and others — "had to navigate a frequently unclear path to recover their property from governments and neighbors who had failed to protect them, and often, who had been complicit in their persecution."

It added, "Law was not the survivors' ally; more often it was their enemy, providing impunity for thieves and those who held stolen property."

In Poland, the injustice was compounded because "comprehensive private property restitution legislation in the post-Communist era" was never enacted, according to the report.

Although the issue is longstanding, it has been complicated by the rise to power in 2015 of the right-wing Law and Justice Party. Party officials acknowledge the enormity of the Holocaust, but they emphasize that Poland was the victim of both German and Soviet oppression and that many minorities suffered; debates over remembrance have bedeviled projects like a new World War II museum in the seaside city of Gdansk.

"On what basis should Poland decide that those with Jewish

ancestors get compensated, whereas Belarussians, Poles, Ukrainians or Crimean Karaites, or Tatars and Germans — all of whom used to live here before the war — shouldn't be compensated?" Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the leader of the governing party, asked supporters last year. (The Karaites and Tatars are minority groups that speak Turkic languages.)

"Is Poland able to turn back time and compensate all those who suffered in those tragic events?" he asked. "Does it mean that the descendants of poor Poles are supposed to pay the descendants of those who were rich? This is what it comes down to."

There is also a morass of legal issues. Poland says it is not to blame for the crimes of Nazi Germany, and it points to a 1952 agreement in which West Germany agreed to pay Israel reparations for wartime crimes. Communist-era

governments also reached agreements with several countries, including the United States, to resolve wartime property claims, Polish officials say.

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, a historian who has written about restitution issues, said the report focused too narrowly on Jewish victims. While Polish Jews “faced the extraordinary terror of total extermination,” he said, Polish Christians “faced the ordinary terror of partial annihilation.”

Last year, Poland’s constitutional court upheld a 2015 law that significantly limits the restitution rights of those whose property in Warsaw was seized during the war.

“Polish law treats everyone equally,” the foreign minister, Witold Waszczykowski, said in Israel last year. “Any legal or natural person, or

their heir, is entitled to recover prewar property unlawfully seized by the Nazi German or the Soviet authorities, or the postwar Communist regime.”

However, Leslaw Piszewski, chairman of the board of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland, said current policies made it far too difficult for claimants — effectively denying justice by delaying it.

“Attitudes have not changed at all,” he said. “Courts issue negative decisions or prolong the process to the extent that the claimant resigns from the process.”

The new report was presented at a conference in Brussels organized by Holocaust survivors and groups that represent them, and hosted by the European Parliament.

The New York Times Pro-Nazi Soldiers in German Army Raise Alarm

Melissa Eddy

“Now it is glaringly obvious to everyone that this problem has existed for a long time and poses an immediate threat to people,” she added.

The revelations, in the middle of an election year, have set off sniping between the civilian and military authorities bordering on scandal. They have also added a disturbing new dimension to Germany’s effort to address a surge of extremist activity since the country took in nearly one million refugees in 2015.

With Europe facing a host of challenges — including populism and the propaganda machine of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia — the investigation has revived questions about whether Germany can step beyond the shadow of its Nazi past and become a “normal” country, one that assumes a fuller leadership role on the Continent, including a military one.

In particular, the widening scandal has revived concerns about Germany’s shift to a volunteer force, which began in 2011. That step, some have warned, could narrow the ranks to youths susceptible to Nazi nostalgia, or to other extremists looking for free training and access to guns and ammunition in a country with strict weapons laws.

Starting in July, all applicants seeking to join the military will have to undergo a security check aimed at weeding out potential extremists. But that raises questions about how to handle those currently serving, at a time when the military is struggling to attract recruits.

Last week, the inspector general ordered a search of all military installations for displays of souvenirs or images glorifying the Nazi-era military, the Wehrmacht.

Michael Wolffsohn, a professor of modern history at the University of the German Armed Forces in Munich, says the decision to scrap the draft had driven the military from the center of society.

“As soon as society in general retreats from the armed forces, it opens the way and the place for fringe groups on one hand, and highly motivated idealists on the other,” Mr. Wolffsohn said.

“We have to ask ourselves if we can afford to leave the way open for extremists, not only right-wingers, but also Islamic and maybe even left-wing extremists.”

After World War II, the reconstituted German Army was formed in 1955 in the former West Germany as a conscription force, with the aim of ensuring peace by defending the national borders.

Since its founding, the military has instituted measures to distance itself from, and stigmatize, its Nazi-era antecedent. Since 1982, a 30-point decree has stipulated which traditions and norms guide the forces, and which do not.

Yet many barracks were built in the 1930s. A few, like the Rommel Barracks in the western city of Lippe, still bear the names of Hitler’s generals.

The shadow of that past informs much of what the armed forces can and cannot do. The Constitution limits them from taking part in any conflict, with the exception of

Gideon Taylor, the operations chairman of one of the groups, the World Jewish Restitution Organization, said he hoped the conference would be a “rallying call” before time ran out for survivors, 72 years after the war’s end.

“We have a very narrow window of time, while survivors are still alive, to carry out some kind of symbolic justice, some kind of recognition of what has happened,” he said.

The issue is not just symbolic but also practical, said Mr. Piszewski, whose group represents nine officially recognized Jewish communities, with an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 members. (Precise figures are hard to come by.)

“Restitution is the only financial tool to maintain Jewish communities as well as the Jewish heritage,

including 1,200 cemeteries,” he said.

Ms. Rosenberg told her story at the conference, after much hesitation. The family that saved her has been recognized by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance center in Jerusalem, as being among the Righteous of the Nations, non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews. A house her father owned in Oswiecim has been given to the family.

“Maybe this conference will make a difference,” she said. “I really hope so. We have been trying on our own for 26 years. They say that maybe something will change in 20 years, but none of us has 20 years to wait.”

missions led by allies. Only in 1994 did the constitutional court issue a ruling allowing the military to take part in armed missions led by either NATO or the United Nations.

The investigation stemming from the terrorism case came as military officials released a report detailing episodes of some soldiers’ extremist sympathies.

One soldier attached a Nazi-era war flag to the hood of his car and drove past a refugee shelter, while drawing his hand across his throat. Another posted a photo of two soldiers in SS uniforms to a chat group. A handful of others were reported to have shouted “Sieg heil” and “Heil Hitler.”

The episodes are among several dozen displays of far-right extremism, xenophobia or anti-Semitism that military officials investigated last year at the request of the Left party, which has long insisted that far-right sympathies in the military were part of a wider societal problem.

The soldier who drove past the shelter was discharged before he had completed his service, but a soldier who gave a Nazi salute was only reprimanded, leading to criticism that the armed forces were not taking the threat of extremism seriously enough.

Last week, the defense minister, Ursula von der Leyen, rankled many soldiers when she said, “The German military has an attitude problem, and it appears there are weaknesses in the leadership we must address systematically.”

But she has also come under fire for failing to address the very problems that she was pointing out. Members

of the parliamentary opposition have questioned her connection to the troops she oversees and demanded an apology.

Ms. von der Leyen has since retreated from her statement, saying the majority of soldiers do an “outstanding job,” and Chancellor Angela Merkel has declared her “full support” for the minister.

The suspect in the terrorism case was arrested on April 27 after posing, improbably, as a Syrian refugee. He has been identified only as Franco A. in keeping with German privacy laws.

The day before his arrest, Ms. von der Leyen fired the military’s head of training after reports about hazing rituals and charges of sexual harassment from female recruits at several bases.

Last week, Ms. von der Leyen summoned 100 generals to Berlin for talks that resulted in a call to examine disciplinary measures and the hiring of an outside investigator.

On Wednesday, she testified about the affair before the defense committee in Parliament, vowing a thorough review and changes to disciplinary structures and how problems should be reported.

An initial investigation by the Defense Ministry found that Franco A.’s extreme-right sentiments had been known for years. As early as 2014, a master’s thesis he submitted at a French military academy where he studied drew the attention of his superiors for its nationalist, racist language.

Yet even after a review by the German authorities, who noted the “drastically extremist language” in

his thesis, no disciplinary action was taken.

On Tuesday, federal prosecutors said they had arrested a second soldier, identified as Maximilian T., whom they suspect of plotting the

attack with Franco A. They also said that the plot was aimed at prominent politicians, including former President Joachim Gauck, whom the suspects had derided as engaging in "failed" policies toward refugees.

Prosecutors said that the two soldiers, and a third suspect identified as a student from the western city of Offenbach who was also arrested last month, had intended "to contribute to the general sense of a threat" by staging

a terrorist attack that would appear to have been carried out by a registered asylum seeker.

**The
New York
Times**

Jim Mattis, in Lithuania, Reaffirms U.S. Commitment to NATO

Gardiner Harris

Colonel Huber and his soldiers have been the subjects of two recent cyberattacks: false claims of wrongdoing that officials believe were put in circulation by an increasingly aggressive Russian intelligence operation that is meant to sow doubts and resentment of NATO's growing presence in the Baltics.

The first attack came on Feb. 14. Emails sent to the president of the Lithuanian Parliament and various local news media outlets falsely claimed that German soldiers had raped a girl. The story rippled through the country before the police determined that it was untrue.

A few weeks later, another series of emails circulated with what seemed to be photos of Colonel Huber among a group of Russian partisans. The photos were faked.

Then, in early April, came a phony story about a supposed chemical assault on American troops in nearby Estonia, which appeared mysteriously on a popular Lithuanian news site.

How did it feel to be the target of these attacks? Colonel Huber shrugged.

"We don't know for sure who was behind it," he said, bundled up against an unseasonable spring snowfall that was blanketing the country. "But we take everything in the information environment quite seriously."

Darius Jauniskis, director general of Lithuania's intelligence agency, said that part of the country's response to the incidents had been to openly discuss Russia's efforts to

undermine the NATO mission in the country.

"We cannot remain silent and say everything's all right," Mr. Jauniskis said in an interview in a windowless conference room in his agency's headquarters in Vilnius, the capital. "We need to talk about that, so that the people and leaders know the threats are real."

Mr. Jauniskis and other Baltic leaders have been warning their counterparts in the West for several years about the growing menace they saw from Russia. Their warnings were often dismissed as alarmist. But after the apparent Russian efforts to influence elections in the United States, France and elsewhere, no one needs convincing any more.

"We can't be glad that we were right all along," said Raimundas Karoblis, the Lithuanian defense minister. "It's not always comfortable to remind people we've been telling them about the Russians for years."

Part of Mr. Mattis's reason for visiting the Baltic region was to reassure allies who were rattled when President Trump said the NATO alliance was "obsolete" and suggested that the United States might protect only countries that had "fulfilled their obligations to us."

Standing with President Dalia Grybauskaite of Lithuania at the presidential palace on Wednesday, Mr. Mattis said, "Have no doubt that we stand with you united in a common cause."

Ms. Grybauskaite described Mr. Mattis as "a good friend of Lithuania," saying that "he understands the threats facing us" and that "we can trust him."

During his Senate confirmation hearings, Mr. Mattis described the NATO alliance as essential. But he has also said since then that the amount of American support for the alliance could depend on whether other member countries meet their commitments on military spending. In that regard, the Baltic nations "rightly stand as an example for all NATO allies," Mr. Mattis said, because they have rapidly expanded their military budgets.

The actions of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia in Ukraine and elsewhere have left the Baltic nations deeply uneasy, prompting them to call on NATO to fortify its defenses against a possible Russian invasion. The alliance responded by stationing four additional battalions in the region, one in each of the three Baltic nations and one in Poland.

A parade of prominent Americans, including Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, have visited the Baltics in recent months to offer reassurances, but Mr. Mattis's visit was the most eagerly awaited.

"It's a historic visit," said Mr. Karoblis, the defense minister.

He and other Lithuanian officials said they were hoping for a promise from Mr. Mattis for a permanent American military presence and a Patriot missile battery to bolster the country's air and antimissile defenses.

The alliance is expected to conduct a large air defense exercise in Lithuania in July, and Pentagon officials have said that a Patriot battery could be moved into the region as part of that exercise, but that the deployment may be temporary.

Mr. Mattis was asked by a reporter about the Patriot missiles, but said only that "the specific systems that we bring are those that we determine are necessary," and that decisions would be made in consultation with the Lithuanian government. President Grybauskaite made clear that Lithuanians would welcome such a deployment. "We need all necessary means for defense and for deterrence," she said.

The Russians have been strengthening their own forces in the region, and recently deployed nuclear-capable Iskander ballistic missiles to Kaliningrad, a detached wedge of Russian territory between Lithuania and Poland.

Russian air and naval forces have aggressively patrolled the region in recent months, further rattling nerves. For some in the Baltics, Russia's annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in eastern Ukraine confirmed fears that Mr. Putin wants to re-establish Russian dominance in the Baltics; the online and propaganda efforts that preceded those Russian moves are seen as further proof.

The nightmare that keeps officials up at night in the Baltics is that Russia manages to disguise an invasion with a barrage of cyberattacks and fake news.

"Other countries now see Russia's cyberattacks as a problem, and that's good," said Eitvydas Bajarunas, a Lithuanian diplomat who coordinates the government's responses to what it calls "hybrid" threats. "But it's an existential threat for the Baltics."

INTERNATIONAL

**The
New York
Times**

After Trump Vows to Arm Syrian Kurds, the Next Move Is Erdogan's

Kingsley

Anne Barnard
and Patrick

another warning: that arming the Kurds could have "consequences" for the United States and a "negative result." He did not go into detail, promising only that Mr.

Erdogan would elaborate when he meets President Trump at the White House next week.

Mr. Erdogan also sharply criticized the Trump administration's decision

in remarks quoted by Turkish news media, and said he hoped it would be "reversed as soon as possible."

Analysts believe Mr. Erdogan could now seek a quid pro quo in return

for swallowing the American decision to work ever more closely with the Kurds in Syria.

In return, Mr. Erdogan could seek an American green light for a new forceful intervention against Turkey's Kurdish foes in Iraq, the P.K.K.

Experts said that would mostly consist of Turkey increasing its periodic bombing runs on the militants. But in the most extreme case, the Turks could coordinate a ground operation likely carried out by rival Kurdish forces friendly to Turkey, said Soner Cagaptay, a Turkey expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

For decades, the P.K.K. has fought an on-and-off insurgency inside Turkey, aided by its bases in northern Iraq. The group has been coordinating lately with Iraqi militias that are backed by Iran, another power that Turkey views as a threat.

"I tend to take the Turkish president at his word," said Aaron Stein, a Turkey specialist at the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank. "If he keeps telling everybody that he could do something in Iraq, I tend to think he could do something in Iraq."

Striking in Iraq would accomplish some Turkish goals, several analysts said. While it would do little to prevent the Kurdish autonomous areas inside northeast Syria from consolidating, it would isolate those cantons from Kurdish areas in Iraq. It could stop the Kurds from expanding their power in the region further and from possibly bolstering the Kurdish nationalist movement inside Turkey — Mr. Erdogan's

ultimate worry.

It would also make it harder for Iran, a rival for power in the region whose proxies are friendly with the P.K.K., to keep a continuous corridor of influence stretching from Tehran through Iraq and northern Syria to the Mediterranean.

Underscoring the complexity of alliances in the region, the P.K.K. is a parent organization of the Americans' newly official Syrian Kurdish partner. The Syrian group, known as the Y.P.G., has used the chaos of war to carve out de facto semiautonomous zones inside Syria.

Mr. Erdogan "can live with a Y.P.G. statelet in northern Syria," said James F. Jeffrey, a former American ambassador to Turkey. "He can't live with a Y.P.G. statelet that is supported by the U.S. and is linked with Iran."

Analysts say Turkey could move against the P.K.K. around Mount Sinjar in northern Iraq. Turkish officials worry that the group is trying to establish new headquarters there that could give it control of a strategic route between Syria and Iran. (The group's existing Iraqi headquarters are in the Qandil mountains, in another part of northern Iraq.)

Mr. Erdogan declared just last month that Turkey was obliged to keep attacking the P.K.K. on Mount Sinjar "until the last terrorist is eliminated."

"They will do everything they can do to take it out before it becomes P.K.K. headquarters No. 2," Mr. Cagaptay said.

"I think this could be the basis of the Trump-Erdogan deal," Mr. Cagaptay, who is Turkish, said after the Trump administration announcement about arming the Syrian Kurds. "Erdogan looking the other way as Trump moves to take Raqqa" with the Syrian Kurds, while Mr. Trump looks the other way, or even helps behind the scenes, as Mr. Erdogan strikes in Iraq.

A central contradiction now bedeviling United States-Turkey relations is that, while the United States agrees with Ankara that the P.K.K. is a terrorist group, American forces work with its Syrian affiliate so closely that the Kurdish fighters help call in U.S. airstrikes. And those Syrian militants will now receive heavy machine guns and armored vehicles from the Pentagon.

Turkey's foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, said on Wednesday that "every weapon" that goes to the Syrian Kurdish group is "a threat against Turkey."

Taking on the Syrian Kurds more forcefully would be difficult. Besides the militants' close relations with the United States, the Turkish Army is considered too weak, and Kurdish militias in Syria too strong.

Militarily, "the Turks are not in a position to take this on," said Naz Durakoglu, who helped develop Turkey policy at the State Department during the Obama administration.

After at least a dozen Turkish attacks on the Syrian Kurdish militants last month, the United States took emphatic steps to prevent further clashes, by moving

troops to the border in Humvees as a buffer between Turks and Syrian Kurds.

They even flew American flags, a symbolic and provocative move usually avoided in Middle Eastern interventions.

That leaves Iraq, where Turkey would face fewer obstacles. The P.K.K. there does not operate under the cover of Syrian Kurds and would therefore not be supported by Washington.

Mr. Erdogan could likely count on the backing of the dominant Kurdish faction in northern Iraq, which controls Iraqi Kurdistan and has a difficult relationship with the main Kurdish groups in Turkey and Syria.

But if Turkey did move on Mount Sinjar, easing one geopolitical headache for Washington in Syria, it would create new complications for another American partner, the Iraqi government in Baghdad.

In yet another indication of the complexity of the battlefield, the United States works indirectly with Iranian-backed Iraqi Shiite militias against the Islamic State.

The Iraqi government, which balances ties between the United States and Iran, relies heavily on those Iran-backed militias to assist its military. Baghdad would not look kindly on a Turkish incursion into its territory, which it would see as a provocative act and a disruption of its fight against ISIS.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

U.S. to Expand Intelligence Cooperation With Turkey

Gordon Lubold, Julian E. Barnes and Margaret Coker

The U.S. is beefing up joint intelligence efforts with Turkey to help that government better target terrorists in the region, according to U.S. officials, in an apparent bid to alleviate Turkish anxieties as the Pentagon implements a plan to arm Kurdish forces operating inside Syria.

The U.S. is increasing the capabilities of what is known as an "intelligence fusion center" in Ankara to help Turkish officials better identify and track the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a network that both the U.S. and Turkey have designated a terrorist group.

The plan, which isn't completed, could end up doubling the capacity of the fusion center, adding more U.S.-provided intelligence assets

such as drones and other capabilities, the U.S. officials said.

The expanded intelligence sharing would deliver on an important national security priority for Turkey, which has been fighting a decadeslong battle against the PKK and its goal of establishing a Kurdish autonomous zone that could include parts of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

Still, the U.S.-Turkey intelligence agreement highlights a deep contradiction in U.S. policy in the Middle East. The PKK has close ties to the Kurdish group in Syria that the U.S. will be arming, and Turkish officials say the groups are analogous.

Critics of U.S. policy, including Turks, question why the U.S. would arm one branch of the group in Syria while stepping up a war against

another branch of the group in Iraq and Turkey.

The U.S. doesn't publicly recognize the relationship among the various Kurdish groups, although many officials have privately acknowledged the ties.

U.S. officials for more than a year have discussed arming the Peoples' Protection Units, the Kurdish group in Syria known as the YPG, despite Turkey's concerns. President Donald Trump approved a Pentagon plan on Monday to provide small arms, ammunition and machine guns to the YPG to help those Kurdish fighters encircle Islamic State extremist group's de facto capital of Raqqa

That announcement comes just a week before Mr. Trump hosts his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in Washington. The White House formally announced Mr.

Erdogan's visit on Wednesday, saying the May 16 visit would allow the two leaders to "further strengthen our bilateral relationship and deepen our cooperation to confront terrorism in all its forms."

Turkish officials acknowledge they expected the U.S. decision on arming the YPG but are angry about its timing.

Initial Turkish reaction to the decision has been muted, and U.S. officials briefed on calls between Washington and Ankara say they believe the Turkish fury will pass.

Speaking to reporters in Lithuania, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said he wasn't worried about the relationship and that the U.S. and Turkey "will work out any concerns."

"We will work very closely with Turkey in support of their security on their southern border...and we will

stay closely connected," Mr. Mattis said. "We will work together."

Mr. Mattis didn't explicitly mention the increased intelligence cooperation, but his comments were consistent with the expansion of the fusion center and stepped up drone flights to help target the PKK.

Officials in Ankara are debating how the YPG decision will affect discussions with the White House on other national security issues key to Turkey, including its demand that the U.S. extradite the Pennsylvania-based Turkish cleric accused by Mr. Erdogan of trying to overthrow him. The officials are trying to calibrate their approach to the coming meetings, as they want to strengthen, not damage, what Mr. Erdogan sees as his most important strategic alliance.

Turkey's long fight against the PKK has cost tens of thousands of lives among Turkish civilians as well as its military. PKK-linked terror

offshoots routinely bomb and attack positions inside Turkey.

Fusion centers are used around the world to allow U.S. and host countries to cooperate on intelligence gathering. In Turkey, U.S. forces provide satellite and other intelligence to the Turkish military to allow their pursuit of PKK elements across the rugged, mountainous Turkish-Iraqi border. That cooperation has existed since 2007.

Improvements to the fusion center are coincidental, according to a U.S. official, and not directly related to the decision to arm the YPG. Instead, it is being done to show the U.S. is serious about terror threats to Turkey, while also showing Ankara the U.S. remains a strong ally. "It is the right thing to do," the official said.

The timing may be coincidental, but the intelligence expansion was part of the discussions the U.S. was having with the Turks, according to

former U.S. officials who were familiar with those talks.

Turkey argues that the PKK has honed its military tactics with the help of Kurdish fighters with experience in the Syrian war.

Some of those fighters have returned to Turkey with new tactics as well as weapons, Turkish military and intelligence officials claim.

Turkish assertions about how closely the YPG and PKK interact and operate are difficult to independently verify. However, Kurdish fighters from different nations, including Turkey, Iran and Iraq, have been given roles in the autonomous Syrian Kurdish regions that are under control by the YPG and its political arm, the PYD.

U.S. officials believe the campaign to retake the Syrian region of Raqqa, the de facto capital of Islamic State, will be enormously difficult, requiring as much on-the-ground firepower as the coalition can muster.

But Turkish officials believe it makes little sense to use Syrian Kurdish forces to liberate a predominantly Arab area.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Wednesday reiterated another longstanding Turkish view that the U.S. should minimize the role of the Syrian Kurdish forces in the Raqqa campaign in favor of local Arab forces, which are also being trained and armed by the Americans.

"Raqqa is a city that is 99% Sunni Arab. There is benefit in Arabs entering into Raqqa," he said. "We need to plan well the future of cities in Syria. If we are supporting the unity of Syria territory, we need to take lessons from mistakes in Iraq so we shouldn't take wrong steps."

—Yeliz Candemir contributed to this article.



Flying Iran's Friendly Skies to Victory

Naysan Rafati

Perched on the tails of Iran Air's aircraft is the mythical Persian bird known as the Homa. Versions of its legend describe how the Homa is periodically reborn, consuming itself in fire before rising reborn from the ashes. As Iran's aviation sector makes moves for an epic overhaul, the mascot seems particularly appropriate.

Since January 2016, when the nuclear agreement negotiated with the United States and its five partners went into effect, President Hassan Rouhani's government has tried to pull Iran's economy out of its sanctions-era doldrums. On the campaign trail and in the first two presidential debates leading up to elections on May 19, Rouhani's conservative rivals have focused their attacks on his record on this issue, rather than the deal itself. "The Iranian people should decide whether they want the current situation — which means unemployment, social harms, and recession — to continue, or they seek a change," argued Tehran mayor Mohammad Ghalibaf, one of Rouhani's most prominent challengers.

A key part of Rouhani's strategy — as well as his pitch for a second term in office — requires raising Iran's tourism numbers and bringing back major foreign players in areas like oil and finance. The government hopes that these steps can provide the revenues and investment needed to create jobs and drive growth. This push also involves

working with international companies on Iran's transportation sector. Automakers like Renault and Peugeot have signed agreements worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Iran is developing its railroad infrastructure, signing deals for freight wagons from Russia and locomotives from Germany.

But none of these has the pizzazz — and certainly not the price tag — of the administration's foray into aviation. And as the country heads to the polls later this month, Rouhani is relying on the promise of new planes to help make the case to Iranians that his signature diplomatic achievement is paying off.

Wheels up

Iran's civilian fleet has fallen on hard times since the heady days when the shah was testing out a Concorde in the skies over Tehran. It's been four decades since Iran last unveiled a new Boeing, and before last January it hadn't taken delivery of a fresh jet for more than 20 years. As one industry observer has noted, since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, a combination of post-revolutionary sanctions on planes and parts and internal bureaucratic wrangling was to blame for the increasingly outdated planes, as well as the aviation industry's worrying safety record and precarious corporate fortunes. By one recent tally, there have been more than 90 aviation accidents in Iran since the revolution, claiming almost 1,700 lives.

The text of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the deal is formally known, specifically includes a commitment by Washington to "Allow for the sale of commercial passenger aircraft and related parts and services to Iran." The resulting purchases, argued one Iranian official, are "among the most important achievements" of the entire agreement.

Tehran has moved quickly to make the most of this economic opening. To hear Iranian officials tell it, the country's airfields will be welcoming as many as 500 planes over the next 10 years — triple as many as it has working today. They have already gotten to work finalizing some major deals: During Rouhani's trip to Paris last year, Airbus inked an agreement for 118 aircraft, with an estimated list value of nearly \$27 billion (the order has since been pared down to 100). In December, Tehran followed up with a purchase from Boeing — another 80 jets for state carrier Iran Air, at a \$16.6 billion list price. Last month, Aseman Airlines reached its own \$3 billion deal with Boeing for at least 30 737 MAXs, with a possibility of doubling the order down the line. And these agreements with the two titans of global aviation don't even tell the full story of Iran's shopping spree: In the past several weeks, for example, Iran has also ordered more than half a billion dollars' worth of turboprop aircrafts from the European company ATR, in addition to confirming the purchase of at least a dozen Russian Sukhoi Superjet 100s.

Iran is also looking for \$3 billion in investments to upgrade more than half a dozen airports around the country. Just a few days ago, for example, it was reported that Vinci SA, a French construction firm, signed a \$400 million contract to modernize the facilities at Mashhad International Airport and Isfahan International Airport. At Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKIA) in Tehran, ambitions are to swell passenger numbers from 7.2 million in 2015 to as many as 30 million per year in half a decade.

To be sure, not everyone in Iran has been impressed by the outlay, seeing it as a costly splurge benefitting Iran's elite. They counter that resources would be better spent on Iran's domestic development, rather than providing a boost to Western companies. One official from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps lamented that by buying from Boeing, Rouhani "poured another \$16 billion in [Americans'] mouths." Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, too, has voiced concerns over the project, and whether it was a worthwhile allocation of resources. "This is a very important and necessary task," he noted last year. "But is it a priority?"

Last year, Rouhani hit back at the critiques by saying: "When the government wants to buy a plane, some individuals state that 'you should buy buses instead of planes.' ... If the government doesn't purchase planes, they say, 'What is the result of the JCPOA?' And if we

buy a plane, they say, "This plane is luxurious and brand-new."

Despite the criticisms, the fruits of Iran's buying spree have slowly begun to appear. A trio of new Airbuses have joined Iran Air's fleet since the start of this year. Meanwhile, images of what may be the first batch of 20 ordered ATR aircraft, decked out in Iran Air livery, are popping up on social media: "One ... two ... three ... FOUR! #Iran is waiting for you," the airline recently tweeted.

Turbulence ahead?

With the Airbus deliveries already in motion and ATRs due to follow imminently, the rest of Tehran's orders might seem a done deal. But there are a few issues that still need to be addressed before Iran's aviation sector can truly reach cruising altitude.

First of all, analysts have serious misgivings about the medium- to long-term viability of the project. Their concerns range from the corporate practices of Iran's airlines and the aviation sector more generally — every Iranian airport but one loses money — to whether there is passenger demand for such a substantial rise in capacity. Secondly, one of the recurring problems that the Islamic Republic has faced since the JCPOA is attracting international financing; as one official pointed out, cash isn't an option for such big-ticket items as airplanes. So Tehran seems to now be relying on leasing deals rather than straight purchases: Last November, Reuters reported that one such arrangement had been reached, possibly with an Emirati firm, for 17 Airbuses, and since then a few dozen more planes appear to be accounted for. Yet reports on Friday that an agreement to develop KIA had fallen apart over financing

problems only underscore the broader challenge (the Iranians have since blamed the French contractor and insist they have alternatives lined up).

Finally, there's Washington. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) has been steadily issuing the necessary licenses for Boeing, Airbus, and ATR to proceed with their Iran sales — even a Russian company like Sukhoi needs OFAC's blessings. Given President Donald Trump's critiques of the nuclear agreement reached under his predecessor, Boeing has emphasized how its sales to Iran "will support tens of thousands of U.S. jobs."

However, critics of the airplane sales on Capitol Hill and the think tank world argue that Iran uses its fleet for nefarious purposes, particularly to buttress Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Fingers have been pointed at Iran

Air as a possible contributor to these efforts. For the moment, however, both the airplane sales, and the JCPOA writ large, remain in effect.

For Rouhani's administration, the planes cannot come quickly enough. Aside from their functional value, each fresh arrival at Tehran's Mehrabad Airport is televised and feted by local dignitaries, affirming Iran's post-JCPOA reconnection, both economic and cultural, to the rest of the world. "More Than Just a Plane," Iran's *Financial Tribune* declared on the arrival of the first Airbus back in January. As his rivals on the campaign trail take exception to the president's overall economic record and post-deal achievements, the turboprops expected between now and election day will be four fortuitously timed aluminum feathers in Rouhani's cap.

The New York Times

Iran Leader Vows 'Slap in the Face' for Election Disruptions

Thomas Erdbrink

TEHRAN — Iran's highest leader said on Wednesday that any disrupters of national elections, which are less than two weeks away, would receive a "slap in the face," underscoring the political tensions lurking behind the vote.

The warning came in a widely publicized speech by the leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to graduating cadets of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the powerful paramilitary force, in which he emphasized that security was the most important issue in the May 19 election, when Iranians will choose a new president and city and village councils.

Ever since unprecedented antigovernment protests after the disputed 2009 presidential vote, elections have become delicate moments in Iran.

The political atmosphere before this year's election seems relatively free and open on the

surface, in part to ensure that many Iranians turn out to vote for a set of strictly vetted candidates.

But the candidates still provide significant choices compared with elections in many other Middle Eastern countries.

The incumbent president, Hassan Rouhani, promotes economic and social freedoms. His main opponent, Ebrahim Raisi, the head of the country's wealthiest religious foundation, opposes many such ideas and wants Iran to become more self-sufficient.

Televised debates this year have been held with new restrictions, in contrast to the live debates in 2009 that helped polarize the country. Campaigning is also controlled. Street rallies are not allowed. Instead, the candidates speak to their followers in stadiums and halls.

Ayatollah Khamenei used the speech on Wednesday to reinforce his determination that anyone "wanting to take any measure

against the country's security in the election will certainly receive a hard reaction and slap in the face."

In accounts of the speech reported by the Tasnim News Agency and other Iranian news outlets, including Ayatollah Khamenei's own website, he also accused George Soros, the multimillionaire Hungarian-American investor, of having tried to influence the elections of 2009.

That year, millions of Iranians took to the streets in protest, angered by what demonstrators said was fraud in the suspiciously lopsided re-election of the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

After a crackdown, a series of mass trials and the house arrest of leaders of what was known as the Green Revolution, Iran's establishment concluded that the entire episode had been plotted by foreigners.

"An evil American and rich Zionist said that he managed to turn everything upside down in Georgia with \$10 million," Ayatollah

Khamenei said, referring to Mr. Soros and his alleged role in the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia.

"In 2009, he was foolish enough to try to affect the Islamic republic, but he slammed against a strong wall of national will and determination," Ayatollah Khamenei said. "It is the same today."

Mr. Soros's representatives did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

Ayatollah Khamenei is not the only leader who has accused Mr. Soros of interference. Right-wing groups in the United States have also spoken out against him. In April, Hungary's government sought to close a university founded by Mr. Soros.

The Washington Post

On first day in office, South Korean president talks about going to North

SEOUL — South Korea's new

president said Wednesday that he would be willing to hold talks in Washington and Pyongyang in efforts to ease the North Korean nuclear crisis, wasting no time in embarking on a new approach to dealing with Kim Jong Un's regime.

The offer of shuttle diplomacy came shortly after Moon Jae-in was sworn in as president after winning a snap election triggered by the

impeachment of conservative leader Park Geun-hye.

Moon had vowed on the campaign trail to resume engagement with North Korea, a sharp change from the hard-line approach taken by South Korea's past two governments — and by the international community — in response to the North's nuclear tests and missile launches.

"I will endeavor to address the security crisis promptly," Moon said

at the National Assembly in Seoul. "If needed, I will immediately fly to Washington. I will also visit Beijing and Tokyo and even Pyongyang under the right circumstances."

Reinforcing his stance, Moon appointed two top aides with experience in dealing with North Korea.

He nominated Suh Hoon, a former intelligence official who arranged the two inter-Korean presidential

summits held in the 2000s, to lead the National Intelligence Service.

Suh lived in North Korea for two years beginning in 1997 to run an energy project that was part of a 1994 denuclearization deal with North Korea. He met Kim Jong Il, the North's leader at the time, during North-South summits in 2000 and 2007.

Moon also appointed as his chief of staff a former lawmaker who, as a student, went to North Korea to

meet the state's founder, Kim Il Sung.

[South Koreans elect liberal Moon Jae-in president after months of turmoil]

Moon's first words and actions as president show his determination to revive the South Korean "sunshine policy" of engaging North Korea rather than isolating it.

But this would put South Korea at odds with the United States, where President Trump has vowed to use "maximum pressure" to force the North to give up its nuclear weapons program, and with an international community that is largely supportive of tougher sanctions.

The sunshine policy was started in 1998 by Kim Dae-jung, a former pro-democracy activist who became South Korea's first liberal president.

The policy got its name from an Aesop fable in which the wind and the sun compete to make a traveler take off his coat. The sun gently warms the traveler and succeeds, the moral of the fable being that gentle persuasion works better than force.

Kim Dae-jung engaged Pyongyang by laying the groundwork for a tourism project at a mountain on the North Korean side of the border that South Koreans were allowed to visit. After his summit with Kim Jong Il, families who were separated when the peninsula was divided were allowed to meet for reunions. Kim won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000

for his efforts.

His successor, Roh Moo-hyun, continued the policy, opening a joint industrial park near the inter-Korean border where North Koreans would work in South Korean-owned factories, helping both sides. Roh went to Pyongyang for his own summit with Kim Jong Il near the end of his tenure in 2007.

Moon, who had started a law firm with Roh, served as his chief of staff in the presidential Blue House and was involved in North Korea policy during this time.

But the two conservative presidents who succeeded Kim and Roh abandoned the sunshine policy, instead promoting direct and multilateral sanctions to punish North Korea for its nuclear ambitions.

After North Korea's fourth nuclear test last year, Park closed the joint industrial park, declaring that the money was going directly to the North Korean regime. In the 12 years that the complex was in operation, North Korea had made a total of about \$560 million from the site, her government said.

During his campaign, Moon said he would seek to reopen the industrial park and tourism projects, and would be willing to meet Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang if necessary.

[South Korea's Moon reassures voters yearning for calm]

But reviving inter-Korean cooperation will be difficult, analysts say.

For starters, the world is a very different place now than it was in 1997.

Then, North Korea did not have a proven nuclear weapons program. Now, it has conducted five nuclear tests, and Kim Jong Un seems determined to develop missiles that can deliver nuclear warheads to the United States.

Plus, North Korean attacks on South Korea — including the sinking of the Cheonan naval corvette in 2010 and the shelling of a South Korean island, which together killed 50 people — have sapped South Korean goodwill toward the North.

Increasingly strict sanctions have been imposed through the United Nations in response to North Korea's nuclear tests and missile launches, and both the United States and South Korea have imposed direct prohibitions on dealing with North Korea.

If South Korea were to say that special considerations apply on the peninsula, the Moon administration would "bring South Korea into immediate diplomatic conflict with the U.S. and undercut China's already tepid willingness to implement sanctions," Marcus Noland and Kent Boydston of the Peterson Institute for International Economics wrote in an analysis.

Even raising the specter of a sunshine-policy approach will

complicate the international community's efforts to make North Korea give up its nuclear program, said David Straub, a former State Department official who worked on North Korea.

[South Korea's likely next president asks the U.S. to respect its democracy]

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"It's a real challenge to the American-led effort to put maximum pressure on North Korea," said Straub, who is now at the Sejong Institute, a think tank devoted to North Korea, outside Seoul.

Lee Jong-seok, who served as unification minister during the Roh administration, said a decade of sanctions has not worked. Moon realizes that pressure alone is not sufficient for resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and that the key is to pursue both dialogue and pressure, he said.

"President Moon will combine sanctions and dialogue, but which comes first will be decided after talking to relevant nations like the U.S. and China," Lee said. "South Korea can't unilaterally hold talks while everyone else is sanctioning North Korea."

Yoonjung Seo contributed to this report.

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : No Time for Friction With South Korea

Moon Jae-in was not president-elect for long. He won the South Korean election on Tuesday and was in office on Wednesday. Normally, he would have had a two-month transition period, but his impeached predecessor, Park Geun-hye, is in jail facing corruption charges. But then, it could be argued that no amount of time could fully prepare Mr. Moon for what lies ahead as he and his fellow liberals take charge after years of conservative rule.

The many South Koreans who took part in the street protests over the corrupt status quo that preceded Ms. Park's fall are impatient for thorough economic and political reforms. On the North Korean front, the steady escalation of tensions could become worse over potentially sharp differences on strategy between Mr. Moon and President

Trump, with his fast-shifting views on North Korea.

Mr. Moon's conservative predecessors generally shared America's approach to North Korea, which is basically to pressure the North through sanctions and other measures to abandon its nuclear program. Mr. Moon is closer in outlook to his late friend and ideological ally Roh Moo-hyun, who as president from 2003 to 2008 pursued a "sunshine policy" of seeking to engage North Korea through dialogue, aid and joint projects. Though much has changed since then — including the rise of Kim Jong-un, the third ruler of the Kim dynasty, and the relentless development of nuclear weapons in the North — the liberals Mr. Moon leads believe sanctions alone have failed to deter North Korea, and are wary of being drawn into a struggle between the United States and China.

An immediate source of friction with Washington is a potent antimissile system the United States has deployed in South Korea, which the liberals opposed. The opposition has been intensified by China's furious reaction, including a boycott of South Korean brands, and President Trump's statement last month — promptly pulled back — that Seoul should pay \$1 billion for the battery. Mr. Moon has said he will review the deployment, though he insists he will fully consult with the United States before making any decision on this or any other North Korean matter.

In general, Mr. Moon has tried hard to reassure Washington. In an interview with The Washington Post this month, he said the American-South Korean alliance "is the most important foundation for our diplomacy and national security." And while he argued that it was desirable for South Korea to take

the initiative in dealing with the North, and that he was prepared to meet with Mr. Kim if it might help, he said he believed that he and Mr. Trump were "on the same page." Indeed, Mr. Trump said this month that he'd be "honored" to meet with Mr. Kim if the conditions were right.

In the end, neither carrots nor sticks have diverted North Korea so far from its single-minded pursuit of a nuclear deterrent, and a rift among the United States, South Korea and China would only encourage the North to barrel ahead. Mr. Moon's openness to dialogue need not be at odds with a tough stance in Washington, if Mr. Moon and Mr. Trump meet and forge a clear and common overall strategy. The two leaders need to make sure this happens as quickly as possible. As with Mr. Moon's election, a transition period is a luxury the region cannot afford.

South Korea's New President Willing to Visit North Korea

Jonathan Cheng
and Min Sun Lee

SEOUL—South Korea's newly elected leader Moon Jae-in began his presidency by declaring his willingness to go to North Korea under the right circumstances, while appointing two top aides with long histories of interaction with Seoul's nuclear-armed neighbor.

At the same time, Mr. Moon appeared to soften his language on a U.S. missile-defense system whose deployment in South Korea he has criticized.

"Strong security is made possible with mighty defense capabilities," he said in a short inaugural address, adding that he would work to strengthen the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

Mr. Moon's first speech as president Wednesday followed a swearing-in ceremony at the National Assembly, inaugurating a single five-year term hours after the country's election committee certified his victory.

President Donald Trump on a phone call Wednesday congratulated Mr. Moon, who accepted an invitation to visit Washington "at an early date," the White House said. The two leaders discussed the U.S.-South Korean alliance, the White House said.

A White House statement on the call didn't mention North Korea, seen as a potential threat because of its advancing nuclear-weapons program. Trump administration policy relies on strenuous military pressure and diplomatic isolation, while Mr. Moon during his campaign called for engagement with the

North.

In his address, Mr. Moon drew a contrast with his scandal-dogged predecessor, the impeached Park Geun-hye, with a promise of a clean and just administration.

Mr. Moon's North Korea approach is also a contrast. The conservative Ms. Park took a hard line on Pyongyang and its nuclear and missile programs. Mr. Moon, a liberal, has called for a return to the "Sunshine Policy" of economic cooperation and humanitarian aid that was pursued under two liberal presidents but abandoned a decade ago.

"If needed, I will immediately fly to Washington. I will also visit Beijing and Tokyo and even Pyongyang under the right circumstances," Mr. Moon said. "I remain committed to doing all I can for the settlement of peace on the Korean Peninsula."

Mr. Moon on Wednesday nominated as head of the National Intelligence Service the man who helped arrange two inter-Korean summit meetings held in Pyongyang, in 2000 and 2007. Suh Hoon, a longtime South Korean intelligence agent who lived in North Korea for several years in the 1990s heading a multinational project under a since-scuttled nuclear deal, told a press briefing that another inter-Korean summit is necessary. Mr. Moon's pick for chief of staff, Im Jong-Seok, meantime, was jailed for organizing a high-profile unauthorized trip to North Korea in 1989.

But Mr. Moon also appeared to dial back some of the tougher campaign rhetoric he had aimed at the U.S.,

when he said that South Korea needed to learn to say "no" to Washington and criticized the process under which the deployment of the U.S. missile-defense system had been decided.

The U.S. says the system, called Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or Thaad, is purely defensive and aimed at deterring North Korean missiles. China says the system's powerful radar undermines its own national security. Mr. Moon had said that, if elected, he would review the decision-making process.

In his address Wednesday, Mr. Moon didn't mention a review of Thaad, and said that he would speak with both Washington and Beijing to resolve tensions over Thaad.

His campaign positions raised the prospect of a clash with the Trump administration, which has sought to exert greater pressure on Pyongyang in its first few months in power.

Mr. Moon's first-day actions appeared meant to underscore his spoken messages of security and unity. After a briefing from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a visit to the national cemetery, he stopped by the offices of the four major rival parties he defeated in the race.

"Opposition parties are partners in the administration of state affairs," said Mr. Moon, who needs to build a coalition to pass bills through the National Assembly. He pledged to meet frequently with them and to appoint people from outside his own party.

At an afternoon press briefing—his first since arriving at the presidential Blue House—Mr. Moon announced the nomination of former lawmaker and longtime journalist Lee Nak-yeon as prime minister, the No. 2 position in the country. Mr. Lee, from Mr. Moon's Democratic Party, is governor of a southwestern province that was a bastion of support for the president.

Mr. Suh, the spy-chief nominee, is expected to take the lead on North Korea. In his career in intelligence, he met frequently with the late North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, father of current leader Kim Jong Un, according to South Korea's quasiofficial Yonhap News Agency. The project he headed in North Korea, the construction of light-water reactors, was never completed under the terms of a 1994 agreement involving the U.S. and South Korea.

In addition to the North Korea portfolio, Mr. Suh will be assigned the overhaul of the intelligence service, another of Mr. Moon's campaign pledges. His supporters regard the NIS as conservative-leaning and accuse it of meddling in domestic politics, including helping Ms. Park defeat Mr. Moon in the 2012 presidential vote.

"From now on, I will cut off the NIS's involvement in internal politics and let the organization play its role in achieving peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula," Mr. Moon said Wednesday.

His nominations of Messrs Suh and Lee require confirmation by the National Assembly.

Editorial : China's vicious campaign against human rights lawyers deserves U.S. condemnation

PRESIDENT XI JINPING of China has been tireless in stamping out dissent. He has demanded that journalists, charities and university professors, among others, bow to the supremacy of the Communist Party. He told journalists for party organs that they must show absolute loyalty and "have the party as their family name." Mr. Xi seems particularly eager to keep a firm hand on the reins of power before this year's key meeting of the Chinese Communist Party to seal his second five-year term.

One of the most vicious campaigns has been the so-called war on law, using arrests, detentions and show trials to punish lawyers who have courageously defended human

rights victims in recent years. The crackdown was launched in July 2015, and more than 250 people were detained. Among them was Li Heping, a prominent lawyer who had defended Chen Guangcheng, the blind legal advocate and rights champion, as well as villagers evicted from their homes and practitioners of Falun Gong, a religious discipline banned by the Chinese authorities.

After nearly 22 months in prison during which he was reportedly tortured with electric shocks, Mr. Li was tried April 25 in the port city of Tianjin. The court announced April 28 that he had been convicted of "subversion of state power" for, among other things, using the

foreign media and his postings on social media to "smear and attack state organs and the legal system." He was given a three-year prison sentence, with a four-year reprieve, meaning he will have the convictions hanging over him.

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His wife, Wang Qiaoling, insisted on his innocence, saying the party-state had "turned an innocent man into a criminal, and then suspended the sentence so it seems really humanitarian. But this is absurd. I don't acknowledge it, and I don't recognize it." She added, "Screw your suspended sentence." When

Mr. Li was released May 9, his wife said he had "wasted away" in detention and added that Chinese security officers are shadowing him everywhere.

In Changsha, separately, a Chinese court on May 8 began the trial of prominent human rights lawyer Xie Yang, who was also taken into custody in July 2015. The proceeding began in true show-trial fashion, with the court releasing what appears to be a forced confession in which Mr. Xie admits to subversion, denies he was tortured and urges his fellow lawyers not to "smear the image of the nation's party organs" while representing cases. This is not rule of law.

Mr. Xie's relatives, including a daughter born in the United States, managed to flee China for Thailand, but were jailed there for entering the country illegally. Chinese agents

were lurking at the jail, hoping to repatriate them, when the United States intervened, literally sweeping the family out the back door of the jail to safety. This unusual example

of activism by the administration is to be welcomed. President Trump, who has described Mr. Xi as "a very good man," must also speak up for China's beleaguered lawyers and

others who have been cruelly silenced.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.S. to Boost Surveillance For Russian Exercise

Julian E. Barnes

VILNIUS, Lithuania—The U.S. will bolster its ability to observe Russia's military in the Baltic Sea region ahead of a major exercise by Moscow, U.S. defense officials said.

The officials said the Defense Department would enhance its surveillance ability, including by moving ships into the Baltic Sea and taking over North Atlantic Treaty Organization air-policing duties while the Russian exercises occur in September. The U.S. could temporarily deploy a Patriot missile-defense battery in the region, officials said.

Defense officials said the Russian drill, known as Zapad, or West, will showcase some of Russia's newest and most advanced weaponry, and will be a chance for the U.S. to gather fresh intelligence.

They said Russia could use the exercise to upgrade its military equipment in the area, leaving behind some of the advanced systems after the exercises conclude.

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, speaking to reporters Wednesday,

said U.S. support for Baltic air defenses would be discussed in Brussels at coming NATO meetings. "We will deploy whatever capability is necessary here," Mr. Mattis said, while visiting the Lithuanian training ground where the German-led NATO battle group is based.

Mr. Mattis visited with NATO troops and a U.S. tank company to highlight the steps being taken to deter any potential military moves by Russia on NATO's eastern flank.

"We are here in a purely defensive stance," Mr. Mattis said in an earlier appearance with Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė. "Everyone knows this is not an offensive capability. Anyone who says otherwise, I would just say I have too much respect for the Russian army to think they believe there is any offensive capability."

The visit to Russia's border also comes as questions swirl in Washington over whether the White House firing of FBI Director James Comey could hamper the investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia.

Ahead of the Russian exercise, which will take place in Belarus, the U.S. is considering moving a Patriot

missile defense battery into the Baltic states region as part of its own allied drills in July, defense officials said. The U.S. could keep the battery in the region longer, for the duration of the Zapad exercise, but officials have said they don't intend to place a Patriot unit there permanently.

Defense officials said they believe the Zapad exercise could involve between 70,000 and 100,000 troops. Russia has said there will be only a few thousand involved, below the number requiring international observers.

Russia conducts a large military exercise every year, but the drills are moved between military regions. The last large Zapad exercise was in 2013, before the annexation of Crimea. The return of the maneuvers to the Baltic region has put officials here on edge.

Allied officials have also been worried about Russia's move to upgrade its weaponry in the region, including the deployment of nuclear-capable Iskandar missile systems in Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave bordering Poland, in a move Western officials have criticized.

"Any kind of buildup like that is simply destabilizing," Mr. Mattis said.

The U.S. and NATO allies this year deployed roughly 4,000 troops to Poland and the Baltic states.

Mr. Mattis toured a display of tanks and greeted soldiers from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Lithuania and the U.S.

U.S. Army First Sgt. William Staun, a member of the tank brigade that is rotating to Europe, said despite the small size of the alliance forces, it should be clear that they can amount a real defense.

"Yeah, it is a small battle group, but when you combine it with two brigades of Lithuanians plus Lithuanian militias you are a much larger force," he said. "NATO's ability to move battle groups and mass forces is really where the strength and deterrence is."

Russian officials have repeatedly criticized the NATO buildup as misguided and having eroded regional security.

ETATS-UNIS



Editorial : James Comey is now a GOP problem

Just hours after the president fired the man leading an FBI investigation into links between Russia and the Trump campaign, a White House spokeswoman told the American public to "let that go" because "there's nothing there."

Really? James Comey's firing — ostensibly because, Trump said Wednesday, "he was not doing a good job" — comes at a sensitive time in the investigation.

Comey was seeking a significant increase in investigative resources. The first grand jury subpoenas were just issued, for the business records of fired national security adviser Michael Flynn's associates, according to CNN. Trump was growing increasingly angry about the focus on

Russia, *Politico* reported. And Comey told senators in a closed briefing that he had "substantial information," Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said Wednesday.

Even if there's more smoke than fire at this point, it's not for the White House to decide that it's time to move on.

Rather, this is a time for Republicans in Congress to stand up and be counted. Sure, plenty of Democrats are angry and upset about Trump's abrupt decision to dump Comey. But they alone can't prevent Trump from attempting to sideline a troublesome investigation. Leaders on both sides of the aisle owe Americans assurances that an impartial and independent inquiry will get to the bottom of any possible collusion

between Moscow and the Trump campaign.

There's no question the public is worried about all of this. Polling in March showed that two out of three Americans were concerned about Russian influence in the U.S. election and eager for an independent commission to examine the facts.

Whether senior Republican leaders will see fit to satisfy their concerns remains unclear. It was disappointing on Wednesday to see Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell defend Comey's ouster and dismiss calls for a new investigation.

But hopeful signs of dissent are emerging among other Senate Republicans. Sen. John McCain of

Arizona said the firing strengthens the case for creation of a select congressional committee to focus on the Russian issue. Also expressing unease with Comey's dismissal were Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr, Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker, and Sens. Ben Sasse of Nebraska and Jeff Flake of Arizona.

Their voices will be crucial in assuring the public that the truth about Russia and Trump will be uncovered, and that Trump's nominee to replace Comey will receive a thorough vetting.

There's important historical precedent for a bipartisan approach. Republican Sen. Howard Baker of Tennessee became a towering figure in political history when he

boldly asked, "What did the president know, and when did he know it?" while serving as vice chairman of a select committee to investigate Watergate and

President Nixon.

The public deserves to know why Trump, a relatively recent convert to the GOP, fired Comey and why he acted in such haste. In the end,

Republican lawmakers might well discover that acting in the interests of the American people is identical to acting in the long-term interest of their party.

POLITICO FBI agent groups dispute Trump's rationale for Comey firing

By Susan B. Glasser

'His support within the rank and file of the FBI is overwhelming.'

As the White House scrambled to explain President Donald Trump's sudden firing of FBI Director James Comey, one of the main reasons given was that the nation's top law enforcement agent had lost the support of his own rank and file.

At best, that assertion has little basis in reality, according to the two people in the best position to know. More likely, they said, available anecdotal evidence suggests that it's flat out wrong.

Story Continued Below

In interviews with POLITICO, the heads of the two associations representing current and retired FBI agents, analysts and other personnel said that by all available measures, Comey enjoys enormous support among the 35,000 people who worked for him, and the many thousands of others who have retired or left the bureau.

"His support within the rank and file of the FBI is overwhelming," said Thomas O'Connor, a working FBI special agent who is president of the FBI Agents Association.

Comey's firing "was described to me today by at least three agents as a gut punch to the organization," said O'Connor, a counterterrorism agent in the FBI's Washington, D.C., field office. He said neither agents, nor the association "saw this coming," and didn't think Comey did anything to deserve such treatment.

On Wednesday, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump's "termination" of Comey came after the President learned that the Justice Department and "bipartisan members of Congress" had lost confidence in the FBI director.

"Most importantly, the rank and file of the FBI had lost confidence in their director," Sanders said. "Accordingly, the president accepted the recommendation of his deputy attorney general to remove James Comey from his position."

O'Connor disputed Sanders' characterization: "I believe that that

is not the perception of the FBI at all."

Comey certainly had his detractors among some current and former FBI agents, especially for his decision not to prosecute Hillary Clinton after investigating her use of a homebrew server for work emails as Secretary of State, as well as allegations over misconduct at the Clinton Foundation.

Greg Roman, an intelligence analyst in the FBI's Kansas City field office, said Comey's handling of the email probe, and his public explanations for not filing charges, "politicized the FBI, and it shook my confidence in his leadership abilities."

In an internal FBI employee survey in March 2017 that he provided to POLITICO, Roman wrote, "To say I was and am disappointed in Director Comey is an understatement, and I doubt I am hardly alone [in] saying this. ... I hope Director Comey can 'right the ship,' and I pray that he can do so."

But the two associations representing current and former FBI agents have been getting a steady flow of calls, emails and texts since Monday evening, virtually all of them lamenting Comey's firing, and seeking answers as to why.

The FBI Agents Association, which O'Connor said has 13,000 members, issued a statement Tuesday night urging caution in the naming of a new FBI director given the job's importance, and praising Comey for his "service, leadership, and support for Special Agents during his tenure."

"He understood the centrality of the Agent to the Bureau's mission, recognizing that Agents put their lives on the line every day," the statement said.

But since his firing, and in the months leading up to it, many agents contacted the association to urge it to do more to support Comey, O'Connor said.

"Most agents can't talk to the press," he said, but many were growing ever more agitated as Comey withstood withering criticism.

"They overwhelmingly want us to come out even stronger for Director Comey than we have, saying the

association should do more," O'Connor said. "Now they want to know the reason this happened. And what's going to happen to the FBI now that Comey is gone?"

Newly installed Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein argued that Comey overstepped his bounds in a letter to Attorney General Jeff Sessions outlining his reasons for why the FBI needed new leadership.

Sanders did as well during the White House news conference.

While agents and other FBI personnel clearly have divergent viewpoints on Comey's handling of particular investigations, most believed the director always acted in the best interests of the FBI, especially in trying to make sure politics didn't interfere with the bureau's investigations, O'Connor said.

"They believe in the guy, they follow his leadership," he said, "and they knew that when Director Comey told them something, that it was accurate, Constitutional and apolitical."

Nancy Savage, executive director of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, said many current and retired agents were hopping mad — not only about Comey's firing, but also over how it was handled, with the FBI director finding out via a TV monitor while delivering a speech to agents in Los Angeles.

"My friends who are on duty have been texting me and they are appalled," said Savage, a former FBI special agent who retired in 2011 after a long career in the criminal division. "People were upset about losing him, and how he was informed. That's appalling to our membership. He was a well-respected, well-liked director."

Savage, who was also the longtime head of the FBI Agents Association, said neither group conducts any kind of scientific survey to measure the popularity of FBI directors. Like O'Connor, she said she was basing her assessment on anecdotal input from the society's 8,500 retired FBI members and other factors, including events and field visits.

And like O'Connor, she said Comey's handling of the Clinton and

Trump investigations evoked strong feelings among current and former agents, and even some sharp criticism: "Certain disgruntled people are probably talking, and that will always happen in the agency."

During Savage's 34 years at the bureau, she worked under 10 directors or acting directors, including William Webster, William Sessions, Louis Freeh and Robert Mueller. Some of them, especially Mueller, "came in at a very difficult time, to a very difficult job and tried to make changes in an organization" that was often resistant to them.

As a result, she said, some of the other directors had a very mixed level of support among the rank and file. "I've heard negative things about other directors, but an overwhelmingly positive response on Comey. And that's not always the norm."

Savage was one of a small group of former agents who met last Friday with Comey at FBI headquarters to discuss some of his strategic initiatives for the bureau. As usual, she said, he was upbeat, and eager to explain his plans for upgrading information technology tools to better equip agents for fighting high-tech and cyber crime.

Wednesday evening, Comey finally commented publicly on his firing the day before. But instead of criticizing Trump's decision or defending his actions, he sent a note to bureau employees that conveyed that their affection for him was mutual.

"I have long believed that a President can fire an FBI director for any reason, or for no reason at all. I'm not going to spend time on the decision or the way it was executed," Comey wrote. "I hope you won't either. It is done, and I will be fine, although I will miss you and the mission deeply."

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Henninger : The James Comey Show

Daniel Henninger

If you read nothing else while fighting through the maelstrom around President Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey, read the full text of Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein's memorandum titled "Restoring Public Confidence in the FBI."

Mr. Rosenstein's memo makes meticulously clear the short version of this grandiose episode: Director Comey's behavior violated numerous standards of federal prosecutorial procedure and lines of authority inside the Department of Justice.

Specifically, writes Mr. Rosenstein, "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."

Mr. Rosenstein cites a useful analysis of the Comey saga, published in the Washington Post, by former deputy attorneys general Jamie Gorelick and Larry Thompson. Mr. Comey's conduct, they wrote, was "real-time, raw-take transparency taken to its illogical limit, a kind of reality TV of federal criminal investigation."

That is an apt metaphor—a kind of reality TV—for everything the dazed public is reading and hearing now about James Comey, the federal investigation into a Russian connection with the Trump campaign, and reveries about Watergate.

But I know where to begin: with the news in March 2015 that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton created a private email server in 2009.

Hillary's email server is the reason for James Comey's rise, and why he has fallen. One could populate a political graveyard with figures who by choice or chance have sailed into the Clintons' personal Bermuda Triangle.

Add to that graveyard former Attorney General Loretta Lynch, whose tarmac tête-à-tête with Bill Clinton about "grandchildren" amid the server scandal caused Mr. Comey to misbelieve, fatally, that he was thereby made independent of any authority.

Again, quoting Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein: "The FBI director is never empowered to supplant federal prosecutors and assume command of the Justice Department. There is a well-established process for other officials to step in when a conflict requires the recusal of the Attorney General."

But what about the infinity of words produced Wednesday by the press, quoting Democrats and even themselves, that Mr. Trump fired Mr. Comey to subvert the FBI's investigation of the president's Russia entanglements? We say "entanglements" because nowhere has it been made remotely clear what the Trump-Russia connection may have been. What we read, endlessly, is that some strand or crumb "suggests that . . ."

As with Hillary's server, there is a Rosetta Stone for the Russia story. It is the Barack Obama/Loretta Lynch decision in January to sign rules permitting the National Security Agency to disseminate "raw signals intelligence" to 16 other intelligence agencies without privacy protections for individuals.

Two months later, it was reported by the New York Times that Obama administration officials had done this to dispense information across the intelligence bureaucracies "about possible contacts between associates of President-elect Donald J. Trump and Russians."

Of course, those "contacts" leaked into the water-collection barrels of the entire Washington press—either from officials inside 17 U.S. intelligence agencies or from Obama officials themselves, such as it-wasn't-me Susan Rice.

The predictable tumult from the Obama-originated mass leaks then intimidated Congress into sending the House and Senate intelligence committees chasing after these "suggestions" of collusion.

Beyond Mike Flynn and Carter Page, why haven't we seen more leaks pushing past the original stories? Why have the leakers gone silent, unless they leaked everything they had? Indeed why hasn't there been a mega-dump into the press by now of all the original NSA "raw signals intelligence" à la the Pentagon Papers?

Instead, calls are now bubbling up from this swamp—what else can

you call it?—to appoint a special prosecutor, presumably to get to the bottom of the Russian collusion swamp, though without subpoena powers in Moscow.

No one outside Washington should be misled by the choruses calling for an "independent" prosecutor. This is special pleading.

For the political class it relieves them of responsibility for policing their own neighborhood. The media likes these prosecutors because they become Inspector Javerts, melodramatically chasing their targets for years, more often than not destroying reputations. The Justice Department's guidelines make clear these special prosecutors are accountable to virtually no one. They don't produce justice; they endanger it.

The "Trump is Nixon" narrative will rattle on, but it is a sideshow. The Trump White House can take care of itself (maybe). The serious issue revealed in all this—the server, the leaks, the investigations—is about institutional accountability, not just at the FBI, but across the intelligence bureaucracies, their masters in government, Congress and the media.

The American public deserves better than this endless Beltway spectacle. Rod Rosenstein deserves credit for saying that the road back to public seriousness had to start with firing James Comey.

Write henninger@wsj.com.

Editorial : Rod Rosenstein's Justice

Nixon. Watergate. Tuesday night massacre. Coup. Dictator. Impeachment. Those are the words political elites are throwing around after President Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey, and that's in the news stories. The meltdown reflects the temper of the times and hostility to Mr. Trump, but it also ignores the need to repair the damage that Mr. Comey has done to the Justice Department and FBI.

Most of the political class loathes this Administration, and so the natural default is that it must be lying about the reasons for Mr. Comey's dismissal. If you're invested in the Trump-Russia collusion theory of the 2016 election, you assume this is a cover-up. The references to Mr. Comey's handling of the Hillary

Clinton investigation are an excuse, a deception, a Big Con.

Not that the White House does much to rebut these claims. A terse 6 p.m. press release doesn't answer many questions. Neither Attorney General Jeff Sessions nor Deputy AG Rod Rosenstein held a press conference to explain their memos recommending dismissal. Mr. Trump managed to inject his ego even into his dismissal letter to Mr. Comey, saying that "I greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation."

And on Wednesday the White House descended into a leak-fest with aides depicting Mr. Trump as raging at Mr. Comey even as he was conflicted about firing him. This crowd couldn't sell gold bars to inflationists.

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Laurence H. Silberman writes that Justice Ginsburg's politicking and FBI Director James Comey's appropriation of prosecutorial authority likely did lasting damage.

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More Opinion: James Comey

Yet for those willing to take Mr. Rosenstein's memo seriously, there are good reasons for canning Mr. Comey that don't trade in conspiracy. And his arrival at Justice may also explain the timing of Mr. Comey's firing.

Mr. Rosenstein was confirmed by the Senate only two weeks ago, and one of his obvious first tasks was to dig into the Russia probe because Mr. Sessions has recused himself. Senate Democrats demanded this during the confirmation hearing as they pressed him to name a special counsel. This also meant contemplating the role and responsibility of Mr. Comey and the FBI in the Justice Department hierarchy.

One concern of longtime prosecutors and former Justice officials is that Mr. Comey became a force unto himself. He didn't tell Attorney General Loretta Lynch until the last minute that he would hold his July press event exonerating Mrs. Clinton. His excuse afterward was that Ms. Lynch was

compromised after meeting with Bill Clinton on an airport tarmac. But then what about Deputy AG Sally Yates? What was she, a potted plant?

Federal Judge and former Deputy AG Laurence Silberman laid out these and other concerns in these pages on Feb. 24. His conclusion—that Mr. Comey's "performance was so inappropriate for an FBI director that I doubt the bureau will ever completely recover"—resonated widely across the government.

And it must have resonated with Mr. Rosenstein, who quotes Mr. Silberman in his memo to Mr. Sessions. He also quotes a long list of former Justice officials from both parties who have been highly critical of Mr. Comey's violation of Justice Department standards. Mr. Rosenstein clearly understood he had to re-establish supervisory control over the FBI as a matter of accountable government.

This is one of the reasons we advised Mr. Sessions in January to seek Mr. Comey's resignation, and if he refused to recommend that Mr. Trump fire him. The timing would have been better with the change of Administrations. But Mr. Sessions

had to recuse himself from the Russia probe, and the scenario we recommended eventually took place when Mr. Rosenstein arrived.

Many will now believe that Mr. Rosenstein must also be part of the cover-up, but nothing about his career suggests that is how he'd behave. He was confirmed 94-6 even in this era of polarized politics because Democrats respected his record as a U.S. Attorney under Presidents Bush and Obama. Radical thought: Maybe Mr. Rosenstein really believes the FBI needs a director who isn't a political rogue.

Democrats are now demanding that someone other than Mr. Rosenstein name a special counsel for the Russia probe, but any decision should still be his and we hope he resists—again for the integrity of the Justice Department. Mr. Comey is again the best example to avoid.

As Deputy AG under George W. Bush, Mr. Comey named his pal Patrick Fitzgerald as a special counsel to investigate the Valerie Plame leak. Mr. Comey thus ducked personal responsibility while

garnering plaudits in the press and from Democrats. The case fizzled to a perjury rap against Scooter Libby that has been discredited by subsequent evidence.

There's no reason to think that Mr. Rosenstein can't honestly supervise the Russia probe with the help of a new FBI director with a reputation for independence. One strong candidate would be Stuart Levey, a lawyer now in private business who ran the Treasury's counterterrorism finance operations for Presidents Bush and Obama. He is highly respected, and Mr. Obama considered him for the FBI before his unfortunate choice of Mr. Comey.

Modern Washington wants to distill every dispute into a binary fight for power, every decision as a calculation about political gain. But sometimes there are other principles at stake, and not everyone is a partisan hack. It's always possible Mr. Rosenstein believes he was acting in the best interests of the FBI, the Justice Department, and the country.

**The
Washington
Post**

Editorial : How to clean up the Comey mess

IT'S FAIR to doubt that President Trump fired FBI Director James B. Comey because of his handling of the Hillary Clinton email investigation—a performance the president had previously praised. But whatever his motive, Mr. Trump has removed an independent official overseeing inquiries into Russia's intervention in last year's election, from which the president benefited, and Moscow's possible collaboration with elements of Mr. Trump's campaign. The firing has undermined the credibility of a vital national security investigation. The priority for Congress and the Justice Department must be to restore independence and credibility to that probe as quickly as possible.

First the country must have a full accounting of Mr. Comey's dismissal—before Congress confirms a new FBI director. Did, as some reports suggest, Mr. Trump

trigger a search for a pretext to dismiss the director because of his anger over Mr. Comey's statements about the Russia case? Did Rod J. Rosenstein, the heretofore reputable deputy attorney general, knowingly or unwittingly cooperate with such a charade? Before any nominee is confirmed, the White House must forswear any interference in the FBI investigation and promise to provide it with all needed resources. The New York Times reported Wednesday that Mr. Comey asked for more resources for the Russia investigation in the days leading up to his termination, suggesting the inquiry was far from over. A Justice Department spokesperson denied the report. Even so, Congress must ensure that the FBI gets the resources it requires.

But no White House pledge can repair the damage of Mr. Comey's firing, nor satisfy the preexisting need for a full understanding of the

foreign attack the U.S. democratic system endured last year. Any Trump FBI nominee would be tainted by association with the president, and the episode has also raised questions about the independence of the Justice Department's highest officials. These considerations have led Democrats to demand a special prosecutor to oversee the Russia investigation, chosen by a career Justice Department official, rather than Mr. Rosenstein or any other political appointee. That, along with the nomination of a qualified and politically independent new FBI director, would help reestablish credibility.

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Much of the burden for cleaning up this mess falls on Congress. Reactions from Republican

lawmakers to the Comey news ranged from appropriate alarm and concern to unsettling acceptance. The current House and Senate investigations of Russia have produced some valuable testimony, but many lawmakers have proved themselves incapable of separating politics from the important work their committees are supposed to be conducting. It's now obvious that Congress should empanel an independent commission to fully investigate Moscow's hacking attacks and any Russian links to Mr. Trump and his campaign. The goal should be not merely to determine if anyone should be charged with a crime, but also to develop a complete picture of Russian capabilities and intentions, as well as recommendations for mounting a defense of U.S. democracy.

Bloomberg

Sunstein : First He Came for the FBI. What's Next?

Taken by itself and out of context, President Donald Trump's decision to fire FBI Director James Comey was hardly unreasonable. Hillary Clinton might have done the same thing. No one should doubt that Comey is an honorable man. 1

But fairly or unfairly, he had lost the trust of the American people, largely because of his controversial choices with respect to the investigation of Clinton's emails and Russia's role in the presidential election. In a highly polarized period, when so many decisions are regarded

suspiciously, trust is an essential commodity, especially for the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In these circumstances, it is important to avoid hysteria or comparisons to President Richard

Nixon's disgraceful discharge of special prosecutor Archibald Cox during the Watergate affair. (Cox had not lost the nation's trust; his only sin was to threaten Nixon.) But for Americans of every political stripe, Trump's decision has to set off alarm bells, because of the

possibility that he will try to undermine some essential safeguards against the awesome power of the president -- and succeed in doing so.

By law, the FBI is not an independent entity. No less than the departments of State, Energy and Transportation, it is subject to the control of the president, in the sense that the director serves at his pleasure. But there is an important difference. By tradition, and in recognition of his unique role, the director's decisions are often free from White House oversight or direction.

The reason is simple. The director is in charge of investigating possible violations of the law, including those by federal officials. Political interference with such investigations poses multiple risks, including the reality or appearance of self-dealing, partisanship, protection of friends, punishment of enemies and even corruption. True, the FBI director is not a judge. But as Republican and Democratic presidents have recognized for decades, he must retain the ability to do his job with a high degree of independence from the political

concerns and self-interest of the White House.

In the aftermath of Comey's discharge, can the next FBI director have that independence? Any nominee will solemnly assure Congress and the American people that he can, but the real answer is that he cannot. He will know that if he displeases the president, he may well lose his job.

For an ordinary cabinet official, entrusted with executing the president's policies, that's fine. But for the FBI director, it's not. For one thing, he will be in charge of investigating possible connections between Russia and the Trump campaign. Over the coming years, it is highly likely that he will be investigating other matters that involve the Trump administration.

For American government to retain legitimacy, the incoming FBI director should not be perceived as, and should not be, a presidential lackey. But after Comey's discharge, it is going to be singularly difficult to avoid both of those things.

Trump may also put at risk other institutions that have enjoyed

independence from the president. One of the oldest is the Federal Reserve Board; one of the newest is the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. In a highly unusual move, the Trump administration attacked the independence of the CFPB on constitutional grounds. In conservative circles, there has been a strong movement to persuade Trump to fire its director, Richard Cordray.

Without judicial support, any attempted discharge would produce a legal mess, possibly a kind of crisis. But a challenge to the independence of the Federal Reserve Board would be unimaginably worse, because it could subject monetary policy to the political winds (and allow the White House to manipulate it to promote its own re-election prospects).

Sure, Trump can name new people to the board (three in fact), but that's a standard presidential prerogative. The real problem would be if he asserted, as his predecessors have not, the power to oversee and direct the content of the board's decisions about policy and regulation -- and we cannot

entirely rule out the possibility that he will try to do that.

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Again, let's avoid hysteria. To date, Trump's bark has been much worse than his bite. Comey was badly tarnished, and his firing may portend nothing at all. But coming from the position of the commander in chief, Trump's unrelenting demonization of the news media and undignified (and occasionally vicious) ridiculing of political opponents represent exercises in intimidation. Might they be a precursor to something far worse?

Cass R. Sunstein is a Bloomberg View columnist. He is the author of "The World According to Star Wars" and a co-author of "Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness."

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : An Open Letter to the Deputy Attorney General

Dear Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein:

It's rare that any single person has to bear as much responsibility for safeguarding American democracy as you find yourself carrying now. Even before President Trump's shocking decision on Tuesday to fire the F.B.I. director, James Comey, a dark cloud of suspicion surrounded this president, and the very integrity of the electoral process that put him in office. At this fraught moment you find yourself, improbably, to be the person with the most authority to dispel that cloud and restore Americans' confidence in their government. We sympathize; that's a lot of pressure.

Given the sterling reputation you brought into this post — including a 27-year career in the Justice Department under five administrations, and the distinction of being the longest-serving United States attorney in history — you no doubt feel a particular anguish, and obligation to act. As the author of the memo that the president cited in firing Mr. Comey, you are now deeply implicated in that decision.

It was a solid brief; Mr. Comey's misjudgments in his handling of the F.B.I. investigation of Hillary Clinton's private email server were indeed serious. Yet you must know that these fair criticisms were mere

pretext for Mr. Trump, who dumped Mr. Comey just as he was seeking more resources to investigate ties between the Trump campaign and the Russian government.

You must also know that in ordering you to write the memo, Mr. Trump exploited the integrity you have earned over nearly three decades in public service, spending down your credibility as selfishly as he has spent other people's money throughout his business career. We can only hope that your lack of an explicit recommendation to fire Mr. Comey reflects your own refusal to go as far as the president wanted you to.

In any case, the memo is yours, and that has compromised your ability to oversee any investigations into Russian meddling. But after Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from these matters, because of his own contacts during the campaign with the Russians, the power to launch a truly credible investigation has fallen to you, and you alone.

You have one choice: Appoint a special counsel who is independent of both the department and the White House. No one else would have the standing to assure the public it is getting the truth. While a handful of Republican senators and representatives expressed concern at Mr. Comey's firing, there is as yet

no sign that the congressional investigations into Russian interference will be properly staffed or competently run. And Americans can have little faith that the Justice Department, or an F.B.I. run by Mr. Trump's handpicked replacement, will get to the bottom of whether and how Russia helped steal the presidency for Mr. Trump.

In theory, no one should have a greater interest in a credible investigation than the president, who has repeatedly insisted the suspicions about his campaign are baseless. Yet rather than try to douse suspicions, he has shown he is more than willing to inflame them by impeding efforts to get to the truth.

Given your own reputation for probity, you must be troubled as well by the broader pattern of this president's behavior, including his contempt for ethical standards of past presidents. He has mixed his business interests with his public responsibilities. He has boasted that conflict-of-interest laws do not apply to him as president. And from the moment he took office, Mr. Trump has shown a despot's willingness to invent his own version of the truth and to weaponize the federal government to confirm that version, to serve his ego and to pursue vendettas large and small.

When Mrs. Clinton won the popular vote by nearly three million votes, for instance, he created a Voter Fraud Task Force to back up his claim that the margin resulted from noncitizens voting illegally (the task force has done nothing to date). When there was no evidence for his claim that President Barack Obama had wiretapped Trump Tower, Mr. Trump demanded that members of Congress put their work aside in order to dig up "facts" to support it.

Firing Mr. Comey — who, in addition to leading the Russia investigation, infuriated Mr. Trump by refusing to give any credence to his wiretapping accusation — is only the latest and most stunning example. The White House can't even get its own story straight about why Mr. Trump took this extraordinary step.

Few public servants have found themselves with a choice as weighty as yours, between following their conscience and obeying a leader trying to evade scrutiny — Elliot Richardson and William Ruckelshaus, who behaved nobly in Watergate, come to mind. You can add your name to this short, heroic list. Yes, it might cost you your job. But it would save your honor, and so much more besides.



Psaki: GOP Congress, don't just 'stand by your man'

Jen Psaki, a CNN political commentator and spring fellow at the Georgetown Institute of Politics and Public Service, served as the White House communications director and State Department spokeswoman during the Obama administration. She has worked as a consultant for Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Follow her: @jrpsaki. The opinions expressed in this commentary are hers.

(CNN)There is an old Tammy Wynette song -- a lament: "You'll have bad times. And he'll have good times. Doin' things that you don't understand. But if you love him you'll forgive him. Even though he's hard to understand."

That song may be about a woman scorned. But it may as well be printed on a palm card by Trump loyalists and handed out at Metro stations to members of Congress trying to figure out what on earth they should do from here.

As the dust settles from the shock of the Tuesday night firing of James Comey, three things are clear.

1. The White House spin -- that Donald Trump fired his FBI director because of his handling of the Clinton investigation, and not because there is an ongoing investigation into whether Vladimir Putin helped Trump's associates swing the election in Trump's favor - is laughable.

2. The deputy attorney general, Rod

Rosenstein, was used (my bet unwittingly) to provide political cover for the firing and to provide a justification for its timing. The question now is whether he can untangle himself from his current role as political pawn.

3. Republicans in Congress, many who did not support Trump, and who have expressed concerns about his ties to Russia, are in a pickle.

Now what?

Aside from a handful of heads-up calls

, most were shocked by the news of Comey's firing. And while some, like John McCain, responded appropriately by reiterating his call for an independent special prosecutor, the majority of Republicans have either defended the decision or offered milquetoast criticism -- like Tennessee

Sen. Bob Corker's statement of the obvious

: that Comey's "removal at this particular time will raise questions."

But they have another chance. The next few weeks will be a test of character and a test of leadership for congressional Republicans.

Indeed, the real question now is: Why would they stand by their man?

Even the Republican chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee

tweeted

Wednesday morning that, "His dismissal further confuses an already difficult investigation by the Committee."

The substance is pretty clear-cut. Either you believe that Russia meddled in the election, as was confirmed by every national security agency, or you don't. Either you believe that getting to the bottom of what happened is in America's national interest, or you don't.

If you believe these things, and additionally want to determine who was involved, and what the government should do to address it -- there is no reason you would not support an independent counsel.

Now, Democrats can't will this to happen by sheer number of retweets or by the activism of citizens. The attorney general -- or actually the deputy attorney general, given AG Jeff Sessions' recusal -- would need to appoint such a counsel.

Under current law, that person would report to the attorney general.

To change that

, Congress would need to renew the independent counsel law

, which expired in 1999. That is hard to do. But the recognition by statesmen and stateswomen of both parties that it is the better path forward makes it a lot more likely.

What else can Congress do?

They can ensure the Senate Committee, led by Senators Mark Warner and Richard Burr, is staffed to the gills with lawyers and intelligence experts who can quickly and accurately comb through interviews and transcripts and information provided.

They can also support an independent commission. Though if history

teaches us anything

, this type of commission can be stacked with White House and Republican appointees, given that each party, but also the White House, will be able to appoint members. It would still be a step in the right direction.

Leaders are not judged by whether they fight the hardest for the side they have always been on, but whether they have the courage to stand up for something bigger than party, bigger than the president. And getting to the bottom of the Russia's meddling in our democracy should rise to that level

But Donald Trump's firing of James Comey made that a lot more difficult. Now members of Congress will be tested: Will they use wisely the power of their branch of government? We will see who meets the moment.



Milbank : These Republicans could set the Comey disaster right

Baker, the late Republican senator from Tennessee and GOP Senate leader in the 1970s and 1980s, became a profile in courage when he put country above party during the Watergate investigation, famously asking, "What did the president know, and when did he know it?"

McConnell, who now occupies the high office Baker once held, had a chance Wednesday for his Baker moment. The night before, President Trump had fired FBI Director James Comey, the man overseeing the investigation into Russian interference in the election with potential Trump campaign collusion. Even many Republicans were aghast at the clumsy, Nixonian move that was plainly aimed at shutting down the probe.

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Forty-five of 48 Democrats were at their desks Wednesday morning on the Senate floor, which was gravely silent — a measure of the gravity of the moment. Several Republicans were there, too. McConnell rose — and spoke about "Honor Flights" for veterans. He then furnished more complaints about Obamacare. Then, by way of afterthought, he added a few words on the stunning events of Tuesday night.

"What we have now," he argued, is "our Democratic colleagues complaining about the removal of an FBI director whom they themselves repeatedly and sharply criticized." McConnell went on to argue that a new investigation "could only serve to impede the current work being done" to investigate the Russian interference.

(U.S. Senate)

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) criticized Democrats' outcry against President Trump's firing of former FBI director James Comey and opposed their call for an independent investigation on May 10, saying it "could only serve to impede the current work being done." Sen. Mitch McConnell criticized Democrats' outcry against the firing of former FBI director James Comey, and opposed their call for an independent investigation (U.S. Senate)

Right. So calls for a more vigorous investigation would . . . impede the investigation. And people who previously criticized Comey can't complain about the extremely suspicious manner in which he was fired. By that logic, those who criticized Abraham Lincoln's military strategy were hypocritical to

condemn John Wilkes Booth for shooting him.

McConnell's small-mindedness would be funny if the situation weren't so grave. This is a serious threat, not to Republicans but to America. A leading adversary successfully intervened in a presidential election — possibly with the collusion of the victor. And the man leading the investigation, who just last week asked for more resources for the probe, was instead fired by the man he asked (new deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein), quite likely on the president's instructions.

There have been reports that grand-jury subpoenas were ready to fly, and public testimony raised new suspicions of collusion. We also know that Trump refused to take action when told his national security adviser, Michael Flynn, was compromised with the Russians —

until the matter blew up publicly. We also know that the firing (and now replacement) of the FBI director is under the auspices of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who is supposed to be recused from the Russia probe because of his own Russia contacts.

And look at the man McConnell is protecting. Russophile Trump surrounded himself on the campaign with men tied to Russia: Paul Manafort, Carter Page, Roger Stone, Flynn. And on Wednesday morning, the day after firing Comey, Trump gave a new display of his Russia-friendly ways. He sat down in the Oval Office with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and banned the U.S. media from the session; the only "media" present,

apparently, was Tass, the Russian state-owned news agency, which published photos of the meeting. The White House issued a "readout" from the session saying Trump expressed his "desire to build a better relationship between the United States and Russia." By killing the probe into its help getting him elected?

During Watergate, there were many Republicans who bravely stood up to Nixon. Rep. Lawrence Hogan of Maryland, father of the current governor, Rep. M. Caldwell Butler of Virginia, Attorney General Elliot Richardson, Sens. Hugh Scott (Pa.) and Barry Goldwater (Ariz.) and others earned places of honor in history for that.

There are some who have the potential to play that role now. Sen. Richard Burr (N.C.), chairman of the Intelligence Committee, said the timing and reasoning of the firing don't make sense, and he invited Comey to testify. Sen. John McCain (Ariz.) has called for a select committee to investigate and Rep. Justin Amash (Mich.) for an independent commission. Sens. Jeff Flake (Ariz.), Marco Rubio (Fla.), Bob Corker (Tenn.) and James Lankford (Okla.), and a couple of others, have raised questions.

Will they, like their predecessors 40-odd years ago, be able to recognize that Trump's action Tuesday night and McConnell's mindless defense of it are more a danger to country than to party?

As Democrats thundered about the need for a special prosecutor, Republicans quietly expressed unease and White House officials fabricated facts to justify Trump's actions, the president took to Twitter. "When things calm down," he wrote, everybody "will be thanking me."

Sergei Lavrov and the Russians may thank Trump. But in America things won't "calm down" — they can't calm down — unless a few brave Republicans find the courage to set this right.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Rebecca Ballhaus

Trump Seeks to Mute Outcry from Firing of James Comey (UNE)

Michael C. Bender and

declined to fire Mr. Comey during the transition.

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump weighed in publicly for the first time on his firing of James Comey, saying on Wednesday that the FBI director "wasn't doing a good job."

His comments were part of an effort by the White House to explain and elaborate on the reason the president abruptly fired Mr. Comey on Tuesday, a move that has prompted the president's critics to claim he is seeking to interfere in a probe Mr. Comey was leading into possible collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign.

Democrats on Wednesday called for the appointment of a special prosecutor in that investigation, and in protest sought to slow the workings of Congress, while some senior Republicans also expressed unease with the timing of the action.

After an evening when the White House communications apparatus appeared caught off guard, officials gave more details into the President's rationale and the timeline of events.

But the explanations offered by officials at times didn't emphasize the same triggers that set off a decision that has rocked Washington.

The stated reason given to Mr. Comey himself: his conduct during the investigation into Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server while at the State Department, which ended without charges.

Other officials focused on Mr. Trump's increasing frustration after he had initially considered then

The president's move marked the second time that the White House injected itself into the Russia probes. An inquiry from the House Intelligence Committee was sidetracked in April, with its chairman, Rep. Devin Nunes (R., Calif.), stepping down in part because of concerns that he has become too close to the administration.

A review from the Senate Intelligence Committee continues, with a hearing scheduled for Thursday that will feature Mr. Comey's successor, acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe.

The Senate committee's chairman, Sen. Richard Burr (R., N.C.), on Wednesday expressed concern over Mr. Trump's dismissal of Mr. Comey. "The timing and reasoning incites people to believe that something is being covered up," Mr. Burr said.

Mr. Trump's decision puts him and his allies in a perilous position, warned Kevin Madden, who served as an adviser to Republican Mitt Romney's 2008 campaign.

Now, they are charged with "essentially litigating the whole Russia question of interference in this election on an entire new level," he said. "It has the potential to suck up a lot of oxygen if it's not handled properly from here on out. And I think everybody would admit the last 24 hours have been problematic."

From the campaign trail, Mr. Trump had lavished praise on Mr. Comey at one point for his handling of the Clinton investigation.

Early in his administration, Mr. Trump's top advisers were split over what to do about Mr. Comey.

In the White House, there is often only room for one person in the media spotlight, and the director's demonstrative performance in a series of congressional hearings, combined with his refusal to clear Mr. Trump's campaign of any wrongdoing, put the president over the edge, a senior administration official said.

By the time Mr. Comey testified last week before a Senate panel about his handling of the Clinton email probe, saying he would make the same choices again even though it made him "mildly nauseous" to think he might have affected the election result, Mr. Trump was "strongly inclined to remove him," a White House official said.

Then, on Monday, Rod Rosenstein and other Justice Department officials visited the White House on business unrelated to Mr. Comey, White House deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said.

On the job for less than two weeks, the deputy attorney general raised the issue of the director's performance with White House officials, she said. Soon, Mr. Rosenstein was in front of the president.

Ms. Sanders said the president didn't ask for the meeting. Once Mr. Rosenstein laid out his view, Mr. Trump asked him to put his recommendation in writing, which was delivered to the Oval Office the next day.

Wary of leaks, the president wanted to make a decision quickly, a senior administration official said.

Mr. Trump huddled with a small circle of advisers that included Jared Kushner, his son-in-law and senior adviser; Reince Priebus, his chief of staff; Vice President Mike Pence; and Don McGahn, the White House counsel, a person familiar with the meeting said.

Unlike during the transition, whatever dissent toward firing Mr. Comey that had existed among this small pool of advisers dissolved quickly, three people familiar with the meeting said.

The letter informing him of the decision was left for Mr. Comey at FBI headquarters while he was speaking to staff in California—raising questions for some about why the president felt such urgency to act.

"The abruptness of this tells me that there must be something else here," said one confidante who speaks regularly with Mr. Trump. "Everybody is wondering what happened."

Mr. Trump didn't inform his communications team—press secretary Sean Spicer and communications director Mike Dubke—about Mr. Comey's firing until after he had made his final decision, a White House official said.

The action was taken after Tuesday's briefing, where Mr. Spicer told reporters he had no reason to believe the president had lost confidence in his FBI director.

Once the news broke, Mr. Spicer called members of the press office to a meeting to craft a plan for the rollout—which the official likened to dealing with a "firehose."

At 5:45 p.m., roughly an hour after the press office had declared a

"lid"—a signal that the president won't have further activity that day—Mr. Spicer emailed a statement to reporters delivering the news. But the press shop's lack of preparation time showed: It was hours until surrogates took to television to defend the president's decision.

Later that evening, Mr. Spicer, after giving an interview to Fox Business News, reluctantly emerged from the bushes along the White House driveway to answer reporters' questions, on the condition he not

be filmed.

On Wednesday, as Capitol Hill absorbed the news, Mr. Trump stoked Democratic fury by meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian diplomat Sergei Kislyak at the White House.

It was an undisclosed conversation with Mr. Kislyak last year that led the White House to force the ouster of former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn. A private meeting with the ambassador last summer forced now-Attorney General Jeff

Sessions to recuse himself from matters related to a probe.

The White House said the presidential election and Russia's alleged role in tampering with it wasn't discussed during their meeting. The U.S. media was prevented from covering the event, while the Russian state media took photographs during it.

Senate Republicans seemed to share a private resignation that the Russia controversy isn't going away and could imperil their legislative agenda.

"The sense up here is that the president just made Russia the left's Benghazi," one senior GOP Senate staffer said.

"There is enough fuel to keep the engine of controversy running, but not enough to do anything about it. It will go on forever with no identifiable end state other than political carnage."

—Eli Stokols contributed to this article.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Comey's Firing Came as Investigators Stepped Up Russia Probe (UNE)

Shane Harris and Carol E. Lee

Pence about his contacts with Russian officials.

WASHINGTON—In the weeks before President Donald Trump fired FBI Director James Comey, a federal investigation into potential collusion between Trump associates and the Russian government was heating up, as Mr. Comey became increasingly occupied with the probe.

Mr. Comey started receiving daily instead of weekly updates on the investigation, beginning at least three weeks ago, according to people with knowledge of the matter and the progress of the Federal Bureau of Investigation probe. Mr. Comey was concerned by information showing possible evidence of collusion, according to these people.

White House officials said Wednesday that Mr. Trump had for months been contemplating the possibility of removing Mr. Comey, and that the dismissal this week wasn't connected to the Russian probe.

Meanwhile, a congressional investigation into Russian meddling picked up steam as the Senate Intelligence Committee issued a subpoena Wednesday for the president's former national security adviser, Mike Flynn, to produce documents relevant to the investigation. And a federal grand jury in Northern Virginia has issued subpoenas for records tied to Mr. Flynn, according to a person familiar with the matter.

FBI and Senate investigations into Mr. Flynn, which had been looking into the nature of his contacts with Russia before he joined the White House, expanded in recent weeks to include an examination of Mr. Flynn's tenure as Mr. Trump's chief security adviser, people familiar with the probe said.

Mr. Flynn was forced to resign as national security adviser for misleading Vice President Mike

The Senate Intelligence Committee also has asked a Treasury Department office that investigates financial crimes for information related to Trump associates or people related to his campaign, said Sen. Mark Warner (D., Va.), the vice chairman of the committee.

Investigators are interested in companies that have done business with Mr. Trump or have connections with him, said people familiar with the matter. That could include businesses associated with members of Mr. Trump's family, such as Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law turned aide who was formerly the CEO of his family's real-estate business, Kushner Cos., one person said.

With his concerns mounting, Mr. Comey last week sought more resources to support the bureau's investigation, which began last July. He requested additional personnel from Rod Rosenstein, who had been recently installed as the deputy attorney general, overseeing the FBI, people familiar with the discussions said.

Justice Department spokeswoman Sarah Isgur Flores said Mr. Comey and Mr. Rosenstein had their last meeting on May 1, with each man accompanied by a staff member. There was no discussion of resources or funds related to the Russia investigation at that meeting, Ms. Flores said.

On Monday, Mr. Comey briefed lawmakers on his request to boost the investigation, people familiar with the discussions said. The lawmakers, who have been running their own probe of alleged meddling in the U.S. election by Russia, and possible Trump campaign links with it, asked Mr. Comey if he could accelerate the FBI investigation, said a person with knowledge of the conversations.

Mr. Comey had been providing updates to top members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which has taken the lead on Capitol Hill in the Russia probe, the person with knowledge of the conversations said.

On Tuesday, Mr. Trump informed Mr. Comey in writing that he was removing him as the head of the nation's top law enforcement agency.

Mr. Comey's dismissal prompted concerns among Democrats and Republicans that Mr. Trump's White House was interfering with the FBI probe.

"That's a big investigation the FBI is doing, and they are well into it," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, the top-ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee. "As you know now, subpoenas are being requested."

Sen. Richard Burr (R., N.C.), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Tuesday he was "troubled by the timing and reasoning of Director Comey's termination."

Mr. Trump was asked during an Oval Office appearance Wednesday why he fired Mr. Comey. "Because he wasn't doing a good job," he said.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said the White House wants the investigations to continue.

Senate Intelligence Committee investigators have grown alarmed as they reviewed intelligence reports, according to people familiar with the investigation.

Some Republican lawmakers have said they have seen nothing to substantiate inappropriate connections between Trump associates and Russia. Rep. Devin Nunes (R., Calif.), the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, has said he has seen "no evidence of collusion."

"We are confident that when these inquiries are complete, there will be no evidence to support any collusion between the campaign and Russia," a White House spokesman said in a statement.

To date, the inquiry has produced no "smoking gun," these people said, but some investigators are persuaded that the evidence will show more than just casual contacts. One area of particular interest for the committee is Mr. Trump's business dealings. The Senate Intelligence Committee has asked for information from the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, or FinCEN, a division of the Treasury Department.

The goal of the financial inquiry is to understand the nature of any financial ties Mr. Trump may have to foreign interests, including Russia, and to determine to what extent, if at all, Mr. Trump or his associates have investments that may be tied to the Russian government, people with knowledge of the inquiry said.

There currently are 11 congressional staff working on the Senate probe, a number that some lawmakers have said publicly isn't enough to handle the voluminous intelligence reporting and leads that have been generated by the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency.

Those reports comprised the bulk of information used to craft a public report earlier this year blaming the Russian government for hacks against the Democratic National Committee, Hillary Clinton's campaign manager, and other political organizations. Russia has denied involvement in the hacking.

The committee's review, which could take from 18 to 24 months to complete, is focused on several tranches of information, according to people with knowledge of the investigation.

Investigators and committee members have examined intelligence reports, including those from the NSA and the CIA, and committee staff have interviewed

the analysts who helped craft the public document attributing the campaign-season hacking to Russia.

—Paul Sonne, Byron Tau, Del Quentin Wilber and Kristina Peterson contributed to this article.

The New York Times 'Enough Was Enough': How Festering Anger at Comey Ended in His Firing (UNE)

Maggie Haberman, Glenn Thrush, Michael S. Schmidt and Peter Baker

"He'd lost confidence in Director Comey and, frankly, he'd been considering letting Director Comey go since the day he was elected," Ms. Huckabee Sanders said.

Mr. Comey's fate was sealed by his latest testimony about the bureau's investigation into Russia's efforts to sway the 2016 election and the Clinton email inquiry. Mr. Trump burned as he watched, convinced that Mr. Comey was grandstanding. He was particularly irked when Mr. Comey said he was "mildly nauseous" to think that his handling of the email case had influenced the election, which Mr. Trump took to demean his own role in history.

At that point, Mr. Trump began talking about firing him. He and his aides thought they had an opening because Mr. Comey gave an incorrect account of how Huma Abedin, a top adviser to Mrs. Clinton, transferred emails to her husband's laptop, an account the F.B.I. later corrected.

At first, Mr. Trump, who is fond of vetting his decisions with a wide circle of staff members, advisers and friends, kept his thinking to a small circle, venting his anger to Vice President Mike Pence; the White House counsel, Donald F. McGahn II; and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who all told him they generally backed dismissing Mr. Comey.

Another early sounding board was Keith Schiller, Mr. Trump's longtime director of security and now a member of the White House staff, who would later be tasked with delivering the manila envelope containing Mr. Comey's letter of dismissal to F.B.I. headquarters, an indication of just how personal the matter was to the president.

The chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon, who has been sharply critical of the F.B.I., questioned whether the time was right to dismiss Mr. Comey, arguing that doing it later would lessen the backlash, and urged him to delay, according to two people familiar with his thinking. Reince Priebus, the White House chief of staff, at one point mulled similar concerns, but was supportive of the move to the president.

The Justice Department began working on Mr. Comey's dismissal. Attorney General Jeff Sessions instructed his deputies to come up with reasons to fire Mr. Comey, according to a senior American official. On Monday, Mr. Trump met with Mr. Sessions and Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein. White House officials insisted Mr. Sessions and Mr. Rosenstein were the ones who raised concerns about Mr. Comey with the president and that he told them to put their recommendations in writing.

At the same time, he signaled his thinking on Twitter, essentially calling for the investigation into the Russian meddling to be halted. "The Russia-Trump collusion story is a total hoax, when will this taxpayer funded charade end?" he wrote on Monday afternoon.

Early Tuesday, he made his final decision, keeping many aides in the dark until news of the firing leaked out late in the afternoon. About an hour before the news broke, an administration official joked that the relatively news-free events of Monday and Tuesday represented the start of a much-needed weeklong respite from the staff's nonstop work over the past few months.

Trump Fires Comey: Key Moments in a Public Scuffle

President Trump often publicly pushed back against the now-fired director of the F.B.I., James Comey, including over Hillary Clinton's emails and Russia links. Here's a closer look.

By SUSAN JOAN ARCHER, ROBIN LINDSAY and DAVE HORN on May 10, 2017. Photo by Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

As the announcement was imminent, Mr. Trump called several congressional leaders from both parties to let them know. He caught Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, on his mobile phone as the lawmaker was walking home after a vote. Mr. Graham told him that a fresh start was good for the F.B.I.

But Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader who had been harshly critical of Mr. Comey for his conduct during last

year's election, told Mr. Trump it would be a mistake. Mr. Trump seemed surprised by the reaction, possibly assuming that Democrats would be happy to remove the F.B.I. director some blamed for Mrs. Clinton's loss.

Another Democrat he reached was Senator Dianne Feinstein of California. "When I talked to the president last night," she recalled, "he said: 'The department's a mess. I asked Rosenstein and Sessions to look into it. Rosenstein sent me a memo. I accepted the recommendation to fire him.'"

Mrs. Feinstein noted that Mr. Rosenstein had just been confirmed by the Senate. "I mean, my goodness. This is a man who's been there for two weeks. So I'm a bit turned off on Mr. Rosenstein."

In letters released Tuesday evening, Mr. Trump explained the firing by citing Mr. Comey's handling of the investigation into Mrs. Clinton's use of a private email server — a justification that was rich in irony, White House officials acknowledged, considering that as recently as two weeks ago, the president appeared at a rally where he was serenaded with chants of "Lock her up!"

On Wednesday, the president and his staff added to their criticism of Mr. Comey's conduct on the Clinton inquiry to include a wider denunciation of his performance. "He wasn't doing a good job," Mr. Trump said.

Yet even in his letter to Mr. Comey, the president mentioned the Russia inquiry, writing that "I greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation." And that reflected, White House aides said, what they conceded had been his obsession over the investigation Mr. Trump believes is threatening his larger agenda.

The White House was rocked by the backlash to the announcement. Three senior White House officials conceded that its public explanation was an unmitigated mess, blaming the communications shop, with one describing it as the "weakest" element of the West Wing.

Looking back, the two men may have been destined to clash. Five days after Mr. Trump was elected,

he said in an interview on CBS's "60 Minutes" that he had not made up his mind about keeping Mr. Comey. But during the transition, Mr. Trump and his aides asked Mr. Comey to remain on as director.

Despite Mr. Trump's apparent endorsement, Mr. Comey remained skeptical about his future. He believed his unwillingness to put loyalty to Mr. Trump over his role as F.B.I. director could ultimately lead to his ouster.

"With a president who seems to prize personal loyalty above all else and a director with absolute commitment to the Constitution and pursuing investigations wherever the evidence led, a collision was bound to happen," Daniel C. Richman, a close Comey adviser and former federal prosecutor, said on Wednesday.

Still, according to associates, Mr. Comey thought the president was unlikely to get rid of him because that might be interpreted as a conclusion that the F.B.I. director was wrong to announce shortly before the election that he was re-examining the email case, which would call into question the legitimacy of Mr. Trump's victory.

While Mr. Trump publicly insisted that he had confidence in Mr. Comey, the hostility toward the F.B.I. director in the West Wing in recent weeks was palpable, aides said, with advisers describing an almost ritualistic need to criticize the Russia investigation to assuage an anxious and angry president.

Roger J. Stone Jr., a longtime informal adviser to Mr. Trump who has been under F.B.I. scrutiny as part of the Russia inquiry, was among those who urged the president to fire Mr. Comey, people briefed on the discussions said.

Mr. Trump denied on Twitter on Wednesday morning that he had spoken to Mr. Stone about the F.B.I. director, and Mr. Stone declined to describe his interactions with the president in an interview. But two longtime Trump associates with knowledge of the matter said the two had recently discussed their dissatisfaction with Mr. Comey and his inquiry.

Whatever the specifics, Mr. Stone ultimately reflected the president's view of Mr. Comey. As Mr. Stone

put it shortly after the dismissal became public on Tuesday, "There was a sense in the White House, I

believe, that enough was enough when it came to this guy."

The New York Times Days Before Firing, Comey Asked for More Resources for Russia Inquiry (UNE)

Matthew Rosenberg and Matt Apuzzo

Senator Richard M. Burr of North Carolina, the Republican chairman of the Intelligence Committee, and Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, the Democratic vice chairman, also invited Mr. Comey to testify in a closed session — a setting that would allow Mr. Comey to discuss classified information and any meetings he held with superiors at the Justice Department or with Mr. Trump. Mr. Comey has not yet said whether he will attend.

The Senate's rush to press forward with its investigation set up a potential showdown with the Trump administration over the future of the F.B.I. investigation. While it appears unlikely that the Justice Department or the White House would move to shutter the investigation outright, the president and other administration officials have called for it to end, sowing concerns at the F.B.I. and among some in Congress that it could be starved of needed resources.

Still, the White House insists that Mr. Comey's dismissal had nothing to do with the Russia investigations, and Sarah Isgur Flores, the Justice Department spokeswoman, said that "the idea that he asked for more funding" for the Russia inquiry was "totally false." She did not elaborate.

But Democrats were unconvinced, and Mr. Comey's firing was quickly taken up as Exhibit A in the case for the Justice Department to appoint a special prosecutor to take over the case.

Trump Fires Comey: Key Moments in a Public Scuffle

President Trump often publicly pushed back against the now-fired director of the F.B.I., James Comey, including over Hillary Clinton's emails and Russia links. Here's a

closer look.

By SUSAN JOAN ARCHER, ROBIN LINDSAY and DAVE HORN on May 10, 2017. Photo by Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

"I'm told that as soon as Rosenstein arrived, there was a request for additional resources for the investigation, and that a few days afterward, he was sacked," said Senator Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois. "I think the Comey operation was breathing down the neck of the Trump campaign and their operatives, and this was an effort to slow down the investigation."

According to the congressional officials, the Senate Intelligence Committee learned of Mr. Comey's request on Monday when Senators Burr and Warner asked the F.B.I. director to meet with them. They wanted him to accelerate the bureau's investigation so they could press forward with theirs. Congressional investigators do not have the authority to collect intelligence that agencies like the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. possess.

Mr. Rosenstein is the most senior law enforcement official supervising the Russia investigation. Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself because of his close ties to the Trump campaign and his undisclosed meetings with Russia's ambassador to the United States.

At the meeting with the senators, Mr. Comey said he had made the request because he believed the Justice Department had not dedicated enough resources to the investigation, a fact partly stemming from the unusual situation under which the inquiry was being run. Until two weeks ago, when Mr. Rosenstein took over as deputy attorney general, the investigation was being overseen by Dana

Boente, who was acting as the deputy and had limited power.

As recently as last week, Mr. Comey said he hoped he would find a supportive boss in Mr. Rosenstein. In congressional testimony last week, Mr. Comey called Mr. Rosenstein "a very independent-minded, career-oriented person" and said he had briefed Mr. Rosenstein on the Russia investigation on his first day in office.

To a president who puts a premium on loyalty, Mr. Comey represented a fiercely independent official who wielded enormous power. But if the White House was hoping Mr. Comey's firing would provide relief from the pressure of the Russia investigations, the Senate Intelligence Committee appeared eager to fill any temporary void.

Late last month, it asked a number of high-profile Trump campaign associates to hand over emails and other records of dealings with Russians, and the committee's subpoena of Mr. Flynn on Wednesday made good on its threat to legally compel anyone who failed to voluntarily comply with its request.

Russia's efforts to meddle in the presidential election are also likely to be a focus of the Senate Intelligence Committee's annual hearing on worldwide threats on Thursday, which is ordinarily a wider-ranging and policy-focused event.

Also on Wednesday, Mr. Burr and Mr. Warner asked the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network for financial information on Mr. Trump and some of his associates that was relevant to the Russia investigation.

Both Mr. Warner and Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon — the ranking Democrat on the Finance

Committee with jurisdiction over the Treasury Department and also a member of the Intelligence Committee — have said they will block the confirmation of Sigal Mandelker, Mr. Trump's nominee to be the top Treasury official for terrorism and financial crimes, until the network delivers the information.

"I have stated repeatedly that we have to follow the money if we are going to get to the bottom of how Russia has attacked our democracy," Mr. Wyden said on Wednesday. "That means thoroughly review any information that relates to financial connections between Russia and President Trump and his associates, whether direct or laundered through hidden or illicit transactions."

The little-known bureau, which operates out of a toilet bowl-shaped building in the suburbs of Washington, serves as the financial intelligence network of the United States, gathering and maintaining a vast collection of data on transactions and suspicious financial activity that can yield valuable leads and help expose hard-to-find networks.

The financial crimes network would not confirm its participation in the inquiry, in line with its policy not to comment on investigations or even confirm that they exist, said Steve Hudak, a spokesman.

But financial intelligence experts, including several former employees of the bureau, said its database, which contains more than 200 million records, can be a treasure trove of information about financial ties between individuals and companies for law enforcement agencies pursuing complex investigations.

The New York Times Sense of Crisis Deepens as Trump Defends F.B.I. Firing (UNE)

Michael D. Shear, Jennifer Steinhauer and Matt Flegenheimer

Stunned by the sudden loss of their leader, agents at the F.B.I. struggled throughout the day to absorb the meaning of Mr. Comey's dismissal, which the White House announced Tuesday evening. Veteran agents and other F.B.I.

employees described a dark mood throughout the bureau, where morale was already low from months of being pummeled over dueling investigations surrounding the 2016 presidential election.

Mr. Trump is weighing going to the F.B.I. headquarters in Washington on Friday as a show of his commitment to the bureau, an

official said, though he is not expected to discuss the Russia investigation.

The president and his allies expressed no regrets over Mr. Comey's removal, insisting that F.B.I. agents had been clamoring for it. Mr. Trump's decision, they said, was unrelated to Mr. Comey's oversight of the investigation into

Russian meddling and possible connections to Trump advisers.

In an email to F.B.I. agents on Wednesday, Mr. Comey said he would not dwell on the reasons for his firing or how it was carried out.

"I have long believed that a president can fire an F.B.I. director for any reason, or for no reason at all," he wrote in the email, which a

law enforcement official read to The New York Times on the condition of anonymity.

"I have said to you before that, in times of turbulence, the American people should see the F.B.I. as a rock of competence, honesty and independence," Mr. Comey wrote. He added, "It is very hard to leave a group of people who are committed only to doing the right thing."

Top Justice Department officials were hurrying to install an interim director to run the F.B.I. while a permanent replacement for Mr. Comey is chosen. Among those under consideration for the temporary role were several career law enforcement officials, including Andrew G. McCabe, who was named acting director upon Mr. Comey's firing.

White House officials refused to comment on reports that, days before he was fired, Mr. Comey had asked the Justice Department for a significant increase in resources for the Russia investigation. Democrats cited the news of Mr. Comey's request as added reason to be suspicious about the president's motive for firing him.

"Was this really about something else?" Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader, asked in remarks on the Senate floor.

"Nothing less is at stake than the American people's faith in our criminal justice

system and the integrity of the executive branch of our government," he said.

The outrage over Mr. Comey's firing was a political turnabout for many Democrats, who had previously expressed anger and frustration at his handling of the investigation into Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server when she was secretary of state. It was that investigation that Mr. Trump cited as the reason for dismissing Mr. Comey.

James Comey Is Fired. Then the Flip-Flopping Begins.

After President Trump fired James B. Comey, politicians on both sides of the aisle changed their attitudes toward the ousted F.B.I. director.

By SHANE O'NEILL and MARK SCHEFFLER on May 10, 2017. Photo by Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

Days before last fall's election, Mr. Comey announced that the F.B.I. was examining newly found emails potentially related to the investigation. "I do not have confidence in him any longer," Mr. Schumer said at the time.

"I am asking that he step down," Representative Steve Cohen, Democrat of Tennessee, said.

Many Democrats, including Mrs. Clinton, have since placed much of the blame for her loss on Mr. Comey's actions.

On Wednesday, in a series of visceral posts on Twitter, Mr. Trump seized on those earlier comments to highlight Mr. Comey's "scandals." He also suggested that Senator Richard Blumenthal, Democrat of Connecticut, be investigated, moments after Mr. Blumenthal appeared on television to condemn the president's action.

"Watching Senator Richard Blumenthal speak of Comey is a joke," Mr. Trump wrote. "Richie" devised one of the greatest military frauds in U.S. history."

For years, "as a pol in Connecticut, Blumenthal would talk of his great bravery and conquests in Vietnam — except he was never there," Mr. Trump added. When "caught, he cried like a baby and begged for forgiveness ... and now he is judge & jury. He should be the one who is investigated for his acts."

The president was referring to a 2010 article in The Times that said Mr. Blumenthal had presented himself as a Vietnam veteran during his first Senate campaign, when he had actually served in the Marine Reserves at home and never gone to war. The story did not say that Mr. Blumenthal had boasted of bravery or conquests.

Republican leaders echoed Mr. Trump's Twitter attacks on Democrats throughout the day. At one point, the president wrote that his adversaries were pretending to be aggrieved by Mr. Comey's firing.



Four Big Questions in Wake of Comey's Firing

Dan De Luce, President Donald Trump's sacking of FBI Director James Comey has set up a crucial test of the United States' democratic institutions, and the response will determine whether the country's system of checks and balances can operate effectively in a moment of constitutional crisis.

Trump's dismissal of Comey on Tuesday stunned lawmakers from both parties, former prosecutors, FBI agents, and foreign governments, signaling that the president was out to stifle an investigation into whether he or his aides colluded with Russia during the presidential campaign. The decision drew immediate comparisons to the Watergate scandal, when President Richard Nixon in 1973 fired a special prosecutor delving into his administration's cover-up of a break-in at Democratic Party headquarters.

What comes next? Here are four key questions in the wake of Comey's departure:

Will Republicans in Congress turn against Trump and call for an independent inquiry?

While Democrats uniformly condemned Trump's decision and demanded an independent investigation, the public reaction among the Republican majority in Congress was more mixed — and cautious. Until now, most Republicans have rejected the idea of an independent commission or special prosecutor to investigate the potential links between Trump's campaign and Russia. Much will depend on whether Republicans in Congress are finally ready to confront the Trump White House over the Russia imbroglio, and whether voters in their districts will demand a tougher response.

Trump's move shocked and dismayed members on both sides of the aisle, and raised the possibility that more Republicans could back an independent probe, though for now the GOP leadership in the Senate seems to be digging in its heels. Congressional aides, bleary-eyed and exhausted after having

worked through most of the night, told Foreign Policy that at least four Democratic members of the Senate Intelligence Committee and one Republican, Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), were not informed by the White House in advance of the decision.

The usually taciturn and reserved Republican chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee — and Trump ally during the campaign — Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.), said he was "troubled by the timing and reasoning of Director Comey's termination," and called Comey's dismissal "a loss for the Bureau and the nation." Burr's committee has already requested documents from Trump's associates to examine possible connections to Russia, a signal that the panel could be prepared to issue subpoenas to get ahold of those documents.

The committee also has asked the Treasury Department's foreign intelligence unit for any relevant documents related to Trump and his team, including any indications of possible money laundering. Sen.

"Phony hypocrites!" Mr. Trump wrote, signaling the growing frustration inside the White House about the backlash.

Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky — who, as majority leader, wields vast power over the focus of the Senate — defended the decision. Many other top Republicans agreed.

Senator Richard M. Burr, Republican of North Carolina and chairman of the Intelligence Committee, stopped short of directly criticizing the president. But his committee announced that it had issued its first subpoena to demand records from Michael T. Flynn, Mr. Trump's former national security adviser, in connection with his emails, phone calls, meetings and financial dealings with Russians. It was an aggressive new tack for what had been a slow-moving inquiry.

The maelstrom is sure to sap the Senate's time and energy, detracting from a Republican agenda that includes a budget, health care, a tax overhaul and infrastructure.

"Today, we'll no doubt hear calls for a new investigation," Mr. McConnell said on the Senate floor as most Democrats looked on. He predicted that such a move could "only serve to impede the current work being done."

John McCain (R-Ariz.) said he was "disappointed" at Comey's firing, Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) called the timing of the firing "very troubling," and Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) said Tuesday evening: "I've spent the last several hours trying to find an acceptable rationale for the timing of Comey's firing. I just can't do it."

Still, most Republicans held their fire. They accused Democrats of hypocrisy, as they had previously blasted Comey over his handling of Hillary Clinton's emails during the campaign, before the FBI chief ever confirmed that Trump's Russia ties had been under investigation since last summer. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) defended Comey's firing and dismissed demands for an independent investigation beyond the twin congressional probes already underway.

Will the FBI and the Justice Department investigate or capitulate?

Comey was reportedly fired just days after requesting more

resources and manpower for the Russia investigation. The question now is whether the next FBI director whom Trump appoints will provide the resources needed for a rigorous, independent inquiry, or whether the new director will curry favor with the White House by seeking to undercut the investigation.

The same question applies more broadly to the civil servants and prosecutors at the Justice Department carrying out the counterintelligence probe, and whether they will follow the facts wherever they lead despite political pressure from the White House. The president has sent a clear signal to back off and has repeatedly castigated the inquiry as a waste of time and money, repeatedly dismissing the consensus findings of the U.S. intelligence community as “fake news.” By tradition and by law, the FBI and the Justice Department are supposed to operate above and apart from partisan political influence, and to conduct investigations without fear or favor. Nixon tried but ultimately failed to block investigations into his administration.

Who will run the FBI?

With Comey out, the logical choice to lead the FBI until a permanent director is selected would be Andrew McCabe, the current deputy director. But the administration indicated Wednesday it has other plans, underscoring how the White House wants to maintain tighter control of the bureau. Officials are reportedly reviewing choices other than McCabe for the interim director job.

As for a permanent director, some names have popped up as possible candidates for the job. Speculation focused on Ray Kelly, the former New York City police commissioner who managed the force following the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and Rep. Trey Gowdy (R.-S.C.), a former federal prosecutor who criticized Comey for failing to recommend an indictment against Hillary Clinton for her use of a private email server while secretary of state. (Gowdy held a series of exhaustive hearings into Clinton’s role in the death of Americans at a diplomatic compound in Libya in 2012, but ultimately found no evidence of any wrongdoing by the former secretary of state.) Whoever gets the nomination, the Senate confirmation hearings will be highly charged and hard-fought.

Comey is the first FBI director to be fired since 1993, when President Bill Clinton sacked William Sessions, who the Justice Department’s inspector general found had committed numerous ethical violations.

Now that he is out of office, Comey will also face a decision on whether to speak out publicly about what he knows, and whether he believes the White House is trying to squelch the Russia investigation. Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.), the ranking member on the Senate Intelligence Committee, told reporters Wednesday that he had invited Comey to appear in a closed-door session before the committee next Tuesday.

“I think Jim Comey has got to have — if not his day in court, at least his day on the Hill,” Warner said.

Will Flynn “flip” against the Trump Team?

Comey’s dismissal came just as the investigation into Russia’s ties to Trump aides appeared to be gaining momentum. Federal prosecutors have issued grand jury subpoenas to associates of former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, requesting business records, CNN reported on Tuesday. The subpoenas from the U.S. Attorney’s

office in Alexandria, Virginia, targeted associates who worked with Flynn on contracts after he was forced out as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency in 2014. (Flynn, fired this year as national security advisor after less than a month in the job for lying about his pre-inauguration contacts with Russian officials, also worked as an agent for the Turkish government during the campaign without registering as such with the Justice Department.)

Legal experts have speculated that Flynn, who faces potential prosecution if he is found to have lied to FBI investigators, could at some point “flip” and offer prosecutors damaging evidence against Trump’s team in a potential deal to lessen any prison sentence. Sally Yates, the former acting attorney general sacked by Trump earlier this year, told Congress Monday that she discussed possible charges against Flynn with the White House counsel. But it’s still unclear if Flynn will ultimately be charged.

FP reporters Jenna McLaughlin and Robbie Gramer contributed to this article.

POLITICO Trump fires Comey: 'He got tired of him'

By Josh Dawsey

Telling Congress that he was “mildly nauseous” at the thought of having influenced the presidential election may have won former FBI director James Comey plaudits among Democrats and within the bureau. But his choice of words may have doomed him with President Donald Trump.

He found the testimony last week infuriating and griped about it extensively for at least two days, several associates and advisers said. “He was basically defending Hillary Clinton,” said one adviser, explaining Trump’s interpretation of Comey’s testimony. Another person said: “He couldn’t figure out why Comey would go out and say that.”

Story Continued Below

The firing — which shocked much of Washington, including many of Trump’s senior aides — came days after Comey asked Congress for more resources to pursue the investigation, which had stalled, according to officials briefed on the matter.

But senior aides and other associates who know the president say the firing was triggered not by any one event but rather by the president’s growing frustration with

the Russia investigation, negative media coverage and the growing feeling that he couldn’t control Comey, who was a near-constant presence on television in recent days.

Trump did not appreciate that Comey declared his campaign to be under investigation on live TV, said two people who know the president well. He didn’t like that Comey contradicted his unsubstantiated accusation that President Barack Obama tapped his phone line at Trump Tower. And Trump was displeased that the FBI seemed uninterested in pursuing investigations into the leaks he believes are weakening his administration.

“He got tired of him,” one White House official said. “I think that’s how you would explain it. He got really tired of him.”

Publicly, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump made the Comey decision after meeting with top Department of Justice officials at the White House on Monday. Sanders said that Trump was offered a memo outlining a case for firing Comey — which largely hinged on the idea that Comey was too tough on Hillary Clinton, a

position at odds with Trump’s many public statements about the investigation into Clinton’s private email server.

In the Sanders account, Trump changed his mind on Comey once he became the president: “I think you’re looking at two very different positions. The president was wearing a different hat at that time. He was a candidate — not the president. Those circumstances certainly change when you become the president.”

Sanders said she was not aware of Trump learning about the request for more funding but had lost confidence in Comey “over several months.” She said Comey had told the president on three occasions that he wasn’t the subject of an investigation, but she refused to say when, where or why the FBI director would do it.

Democrats and Republicans alike didn’t back Comey, she said.

Sanders told reporters that DOJ officials, including Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and Attorney General Jeff Sessions were at the White House Monday on “other business” when the topic of Comey came up. They asked to

speak to the president about the issue, Sanders said.

She said Trump asked them to put in writing what they told him about Comey and that, as far as she knew, neither Sessions nor Rosenstein had previously spoken to Trump about possibly removing the FBI director.

Others who know Trump say the dynamics were more complicated. He griped about Comey for several days, including in late-night calls from the White House residence. He was looking for a reason to fire the FBI director — and the memo was written in part to suit his desire, according to one adviser and one White House official.

Trump was warned about the firing by Reince Priebus, who believed the fallout could become problematic for the White House, according to two people close to the president. White House press secretary Sean Spicer robustly denied that in a late-night call Tuesday, saying the decision was made only on Tuesday.

Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and prized adviser, supported the move.

Internally, most advisers and aides didn’t know about the looming firing

and were taken aback when it became public. "I learned about it on TV," another administration official said Wednesday.

And the White House was unprepared for the firestorm that followed the firing. Within hours, Trump ordered Sanders and Kellyanne Conway to go on TV to defend him and later praised their performance.

**The
Washington
Post**

Why Trump's efforts to shake his Russia problem only make it worse (UNE)

Once again, Donald Trump has tried to lift Moscow's shadow off his presidency — and once again, he has done the opposite.

New questions are arising in the wake of his sudden decision to can FBI Director James B. Comey, along with revived calls for the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the question of Russian influence in last year's election and the Kremlin's connections to Trump's presidential campaign.

"The only thing that is guaranteed right now is that the sense of chaos will continue, not only in law enforcement but also in Congress," said GOP strategist Kevin Madden, a veteran of Capitol Hill and the Justice Department. "Every single lawmaker in the House and Senate is going to be pressured to take a stance."

Of course, the surest way to end the controversy would be through a credible investigation that comes to a definite conclusion about the methods and extent of Russian meddling in the 2016 election and whether it involved improper dealings with people close to Trump.

"There will be no normalcy to his presidency if there is no independent investigation," said Ron Klain, who was chief of staff in the Justice Department during the Clinton administration. "There is something absolutely essential about it but nothing inevitable about it."

When Trump fired an FBI director who was investigating his presidential campaign, "I was shocked last night, and I thought I couldn't be shocked by anything anymore," Madden said Wednesday. "Absent some sense of finality, members of Congress and law enforcement will have this hanging over them."

But every out-of-the-ordinary turn seems to weaken confidence that

By Wednesday, White House officials had lined up outside surrogates, including ones who often don't do interviews.

"I thought the president made the right decision, and I think that it's obvious that he made the right decision because once he received the report from the deputy attorney general that said that Comey had violated all these rules, he had no choice but to do it," said Trump

the existing inquiries — both within the Justice Department and by the two intelligence committees on Capitol Hill — will actually be capable of producing a result widely accepted as untainted and convincing.

White House officials maintain that Comey's firing had nothing to do with his agency's Russia investigation but, rather, with his handling of the probe into Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton's emails.

Yet Trump's letter terminating Comey alluded to the questions surrounding his own administration ("While I greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation ...") and made no mention of the FBI director's much-criticized decisions involving Clinton.

White House deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders declined to say when and under what circumstances Comey gave assurances to the president that he was not under investigation.

Nor were the day-after optics conducive to tamping down the controversy. The only event on Trump's publicly announced schedule was a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The session was closed to the media — with the apparent exception of a photographer from Russia's state-run news agency Tass, which lit up the Internet with its photos.

Then came another surreal turn: When reporters were summoned to the Oval Office for a brief opportunity to ask Trump questions, they found the president sitting not with Lavrov but with another visitor, former secretary of state Henry Kissinger.

With Comey's dismissal, the Russia investigation will soon be run by Trump allies

The inopportune presence of a Watergate-era figure punctuated

adviser and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

By the end of the evening, a Senate committee had subpoenaed documents from former national security adviser Michael Flynn — and Rep. Jason Chaffetz, chair of the House Oversight Committee, had asked for a probe into the Comey firing.

After Sanders finished her briefing Wednesday, top aides huddled in

comparisons of Trump's actions with Richard Nixon's "Saturday Night Massacre" of the special prosecutor looking into the scandal that ultimately forced Nixon's resignation.

For Republicans, the frustration and perplexity surrounding Trump's decision to fire Comey is compounded by the fact that it comes just days after his biggest legislative victory so far: the House passage last week of legislation to begin making good on the GOP's promise to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

Reviving the Russia controversy is likely to distract not only from the Senate's efforts to pass its own health-care legislation but also from other ambitious items on the GOP agenda, including overhauling the tax code.

"Comprehensive tax reform just got an awful lot harder, as did nearly every other challenge facing the nation, both foreign and domestic: infrastructure, health care, immigration, trade and others," former New York mayor Michael R. Bloomberg wrote Wednesday in a column published by Bloomberg News.

In that sense, the timing is reminiscent of another episode earlier in the Trump presidency.

Four days after giving a widely praised address to Congress on Feb. 28, the president tweeted a false claim that President Barack Obama had tapped Trump's phones "during the very sacred election process. This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!"

That, too, was a reference to the investigation into links between Trump associates and the Russian government, and it exasperated Republicans who had been hopeful that the speech to Congress marked a new, more presidential turn on Trump's part.

The debate over whether there is a need for a special prosecutor reflects doubts that the Justice

Trump's office. After that meeting, one White House official described the past 24 hours inside the Trump White House like this: "Total chaos — even by our standards."

Eliana Johnson, Annie Karni and Ali Watkins contributed to this report.

Department is capable of doing its work in this highly charged political environment.

Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein, who wrote the memo recommending Comey's dismissal, is highly respected by both parties on Capitol Hill, though some now say he cannot continue to oversee the probe, given his role in removing the lead investigator.

"Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein now has no choice but to appoint a special counsel," Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.), a senior Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said in a statement. "His integrity, and the integrity of the entire Justice Department, are at stake."

Others disagree.

"I look at Rod J. Rosenstein, and I think who better than Rod J. Rosenstein to conduct an investigation," said Mark Corallo, who directed public affairs at the Justice Department during the George W. Bush administration. "There are enough people at the department who can do a credible investigation. The politics of this are going to be the usual Sturm und Drang of Washington."

It remains to be seen how the furor in Washington over Comey's firing resonates with voters across the country.

"There aren't a lot of great options, but making noise is the only thing that is going to bring about change," said Richard Ben-Veniste, who was a special prosecutor during Watergate and later served on the independent commission investigating the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. "The 'Saturday Night Massacre' really woke up the American public to the fact that something was going on, though the extent was not understood."

But most Americans probably had barely heard of the FBI chief before recent months, when news reports have been filled with criticism of his decisions during the presidential

campaign and since. Comey's reputation has been so badly battered that many Americans may agree with Trump that his firing was amply justified, even amid his investigation of the Russia matter.

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Breaking news about local government in D.C., Md., Va.

**The
Washington
Post**

Why Trump expected only applause when he told Comey, 'You're fired.' (UNE)

Donald Trump has always acted in the moment, with little regard for the past and proud contempt for the way things are usually done.

For half a century, he has believed that by refusing to be weighed down by precedent or procedure, he is liberated to come across as the brash truth-teller that the public craves. He has long said that he doesn't care whether people believe he is dumb, ill-informed or a nasty rule-breaker; if his actions built up his bottom line, they were justified, he'd say.

Trump appears to have expected that his sudden and dramatic sacking of FBI Director James B. Comey on Tuesday might be greeted the way audiences relished his ritual firings of job applicants on his hit TV show, "The Apprentice" — as a sign of power serving truth, and in this case as a politically incorrect roundhouse punch that Republicans and Democrats alike would welcome.

[Trump liked Comey. Then he didn't. Then he did. Then he didn't. Then he fired him.]

If the president didn't see that his precipitous firing of the man in charge of investigating the Trump campaign's connections with the Russian regime might instead alienate some of his allies and outrage much of the public, that's no anomaly. Rather, it's an illustration of several of the president's core character traits — a belief that the past doesn't matter, a penchant to act swiftly and unilaterally, and a conviction that even the most unpopular actions can help build his brand.

No one on either side of the aisle in Congress seemed to take seriously the administration's argument that the president, who through much of last year led crowds in chants of "Lock her up," was now suddenly sympathetic to the idea that Comey had inappropriately torpedoed Hillary Clinton's campaign.

But while TV and social media immediately hauled out not-

So it appears far from certain — or even likely — that lawmakers and administration officials will open new avenues of investigation.

And Trump's unpopularity may actually reinforce his administration's resistance to additional measures, such as appointing a special prosecutor. The polls, which give Trump a

so-old clips of Trump singing Comey's praises for reviving the investigation into Clinton's improper use of an email server, the president insisted Wednesday that he'd fired Comey "very simply [because] he was not doing a good job."

[Flashback to Nixon's Saturday Night Massacre]

Trump has professed the belief that the public cares only about right now, and that only news reporters and his political opponents are bothered by ping-pong statements that take him from blasting Comey for going easy on Clinton, to praising him for getting tough on her, and on to firing him for having treated her unfairly.

"I think it's startling that Democrats aren't celebrating," White House deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Wednesday. She dismissed recitations of Trump's praise for Comey last fall as irrelevant because he said those things last fall: "The president was wearing a different hat at that time," Sanders said. He "was a candidate, not the president."

Confronted with his past statements that stand in direct conflict with his current positions, Trump has always reacted not with remorse or embarrassment. Rather, a look of almost innocent surprise sweeps over his face and he says, as he has to reporters who remind him that he once promised to release his tax returns but then decided that he never would, "Nobody cares about this except you."

"I'm just not interested in the past," Trump has said. "I'm interested in the present."

With Comey's dismissal, the Russia investigation will soon be run by Trump allies

So when federal judges repeatedly reject Trump's travel ban because of his campaign statements calling for a prohibition on Muslims coming into the United States, the president sounds angry but also flummoxed,

record-low approval rating for a president this early in his first term, indicate that his supporters will stick with him, while the majority in the country seems hardened against him.

"In some weird ways, having a 40 percent approval rating means never having to say you're sorry," Klain said. "No one's going to walk

as if those past statements don't matter because they were said in the past.

[In travel-ban case, Trump's lawyers are pressed to explain campaign statements.]

Similarly, Trump has a long history of viewing larger issues through the prism of how they affect him. His letter to Comey dismissing the director made only one reference to a reason for the decision, a sentence that questioned Comey's ability to lead the bureau but noted that "I greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation."

Trump's persistent focus on himself, which he has characterized as "narcissism," a trait he believes is vital for success in the business world, was an enduring source of humor and eye-rolling through his decades as a celebrity entrepreneur. But during his campaign, Trump said that as president he would turn the focus from himself to the American people.

Conceding that many of his vendors, employees and bankers suffered considerable losses when his businesses went through six corporate bankruptcies, Trump said that "for myself, these were all good deals. I wasn't representing the country. I wasn't representing the banks. I was representing Donald Trump. So for myself, they were all good deals. . . . When I was representing myself, even deals that didn't work out were great deals because I got tremendous tax advantages. . . . I would walk away."

As president, Trump promised, he would flip his priorities and represent the people. How would he make that pivot? "I'll just do it," he said.

Now, Trump faces a crisis in which Republicans and Democrats alike are questioning whether he is seeking the best possible management of the FBI or is instead trying to protect himself and

into the Oval Office and say, 'Your approval ratings are down,' because his approval ratings are already down. When you're in the basement, the fear of falling is very, very limited."

his campaign staff from the prying eyes of investigators.

Almost by reflex, the language of Watergate resurged into Washington parlance after the Comey firing: Starting with comparisons to Richard M. Nixon's "Saturday Night Massacre" — his firing of the special prosecutor who had been appointed to look into the Watergate scandal — the catchphrases of a four-decade-old scandal found new purchase: "What did the president know and when did he know it?" "The coverup is worse than the crime."

[Is the Comey firing Nixonian or uniquely Trumpian?]

In moments of crisis, presidents tend to revert to the traits that got them to the pinnacle. Nixon, stubborn and righteous, dug in as the Watergate morass deepened. "Stonewalling," it was called, and he repeatedly refused to give up the tapes and documents that investigators and the public demanded.

In 1973, at his first news conference after the Saturday Night Massacre, Nixon reflected on the media frenzy sparked by his decision. "It is true that to be under a constant barrage, 12 to 15 minutes a night on each of the three major networks for four months, tends to raise some questions in the people's minds with regard to the president," he said. "But now we must move on from Watergate to the business of the people."

Echoes of that strategy resounded right after the Comey firing as the president's aides tried to brush aside concerns about the Russia investigation.

"It's time to move on," Sanders said late Tuesday. "Frankly, it's time to focus on the things the American people care about."

Bill Clinton faced his crises by flitting from anger and denial to deeply personal confessionals — going on TV to concede "terrible moral error," admitting to "causing pain in my marriage."

That's never been Trump's style. Throughout his business career, and now in the presidency, he has proudly lived by simple mottos: Never look back. No regrets. When you're hit, hit back 100 times harder.

Often, he would try to position a defeat as a victory, or he'd argue that he lost because he wasn't really trying to win. In the last phase of his business career, Trump rented his name

**The
Washington
Post**

The furor over President Trump's abrupt firing of FBI Director James B. Comey grew Wednesday with the revelation that Comey had sought more resources for an investigation into possible coordination between the Trump campaign and the Russian government shortly before he was dismissed.

Republicans and Democrats alike expressed dismay Wednesday over Comey's firing the day before, which several said will frustrate bipartisan efforts to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 election and any possible ties between the Kremlin and Trump associates. Many Democrats called for a special prosecutor to take on the investigation, and a handful of Republicans said they were open to the idea.

For some, the news of the request provided further evidence that Trump's stated reason for firing Comey — that the director had botched the bureau's investigation of Hillary Clinton's private email server — was untrue. The likelier and more troubling reason, critics said, was to quash the Russia investigation and the threat it poses to the Trump White House.

"This really smacks of impropriety," said Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.), who said he believes the president is "using Hillary and the server as an excuse to say, 'We're getting rid of this guy because he's getting too close to us.'"

Although several Democrats confirmed that Comey had informed lawmakers of the request he made last week in a meeting with Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein, the Justice Department denied those reports.

Where GOP senators stand on a special prosecutor

Several influential Republicans, including Sens. John McCain (Ariz.) and Bob Corker (Tenn.), declined to say whether they accepted the reasons given for Comey's firing,

to products such as steaks, bottled water and mortgages. When some of those ventures went under, Trump said he bore no responsibility for any mismanagement.

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

"The mortgage business is not a business I particularly liked or

which were laid out in a memo written by Rosenstein.

But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) dismissed concerns and rapped Democrats for complaining about the ouster of an FBI director they had "repeatedly and sharply criticized." McConnell also made clear his plans for the coming days: to keep the chamber's focus on the GOP's policy agenda, including passage of a health-care overhaul and tax reform.

Others were more pessimistic that the emergence of yet another Trump-related controversy would slow the Senate's work. Comey's firing is expected to consume Capitol Hill's attention until the weekend and potentially through Tuesday, when the former FBI director has been invited to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee.

The panel's chairman, who met with Comey on Monday, said the director's dismissal makes the committee's work harder.

[President Trump fires FBI Director Comey]

"It creates challenges for the committee," Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) told reporters. "An interruption in any of the access we have to the documents or the personnel would be harmful to our investigation."

The chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), sent a letter Wednesday to Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz asking him to look into the Comey firing.

Republican and Democratic Senators weigh in from Capitol Hill on President Trump's decision to fire FBI Director James Comey on May 9. Republican and Democratic Senators weigh in from Capitol Hill on President Trump's decision to fire FBI Director James Comey on May 9. (Elyse Samuels/The Washington Post)

wanted to be part of in a very big way," he said after Trump Mortgage closed in 2007, leaving some bills unpaid.

At his darkest moments, such as when Trump faced financial ruin and a very public battle over his divorce, some business associates wondered how he managed to come to work each morning. But Trump showed no signs of distress: He "showed up every morning at 8 a.m.," one of his top executives

(Elyse Samuels/The Washington Post)

Also Wednesday, the Senate Intelligence Committee issued a subpoena for documents related to former national security adviser Michael Flynn and his ties to Russia. In an announcement, Burr and the ranking Democratic member, Sen. Mark R. Warner (Va.), said Flynn had declined to cooperate with their first request.

Burr and Warner met Monday with Comey, according to several individuals familiar with the meeting. Later, at a regular meeting of Democrats on the Senate Intelligence Committee, Warner informed them that Comey had briefed the two committee chiefs about his request for more resources, according to two officials, who were not authorized to speak publicly about the matter.

Adding to the drama Wednesday was Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's visit to Washington — including a closed event at the White House that U.S. news organizations were barred from witnessing even though a photographer from the state-run Russian news service Tass was permitted.

Lavrov fended off questions about Russian interference in the presidential election. And during a visit with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Lavrov professed mock surprise when asked whether Comey's firing had cast a shadow over his visit.

"Was he fired?" Lavrov said, arching his eyebrows. "You're kidding! You're kidding!"

Capitol Hill Democrats and a few Republicans, meanwhile, demanded the launch of an independent investigation into Russia's interference in the election. To increase pressure, Senate Democrats invoked an obscure rule that prevented committee hearings from continuing past midday.

said, "tie tied, suit pressed, focused and moving forward."

His family coat of arms, a regal symbol featuring a lion and a knight's helmet, carries this Latin motto: "Numquam Concedere."

"Never Concede."

Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said the Justice Department's highest-ranking career civil servant, rather than Rosenstein, should appoint a special prosecutor to lead the Russia investigation.

A Trump appointee who assumed office just 10 days ago, Rosenstein wrote the memo that was used to justify Comey's firing. The document, issued Tuesday, laid out the director's missteps in handling the FBI investigation into Hillary Clinton's private email server.

Schumer also called for both Rosenstein and Attorney General Jeff Sessions to brief the entire Senate on the events that led to Comey's firing — and he urged Comey to accept the invitation to testify next week.

Comey was scheduled to testify Thursday before the Intelligence Committee about national security threats to the United States. Acting FBI director Andrew McCabe is set to appear in his place, along with a slew of other security and intelligence officials.

[Comey's removal sparks fears about future of Russia probe]

"There are so many unanswered questions that only Mr. Comey can answer. We Democrats hope and expect that he will still come before the Senate in some capacity," Schumer said.

To press for the special prosecutor, Senate Democrats may also try to slow down the process of confirming lower-level nominees. Such a move would probably hamper executive-branch agencies that now lack political leadership, including dozens already in the confirmation pipeline.

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) took a step down that path Wednesday, when he said he was putting a hold on Sigal Mandelker, Trump's nominee to a key Treasury Department post. Wyden said he would maintain the hold until the

agency provides lawmakers with more documents related to Russia and its dealings with Trump and his associates. However, the procedural tactic can be easily overridden.

Some Democrats said they wanted to give Republicans time to form their own response before deciding on the next steps.

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) recommended that Democrats reach out to Republicans, noting that a small but powerful bloc of GOP senators has voiced concerns about the Comey firing.

Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) agreed: "This is 12 hours old. I think we have to give a little time for Republicans to have a conversation and perhaps rise to the occasion."

Among Senate Republicans, only McCain, a longtime Trump foil, has called for an independent investigation separate from ongoing probes by the House and Senate intelligence panels.

Other members of the GOP cast doubt on the decision to fire Comey but remained circumspect about the idea of a special prosecutor.

"Let us finish our work," Burr said. "It's moving forward. We're finally making some significant progress. Let us issue a report."

**The
Washington
Post**

Inside Trump's anger and impatience — and his sudden decision to fire Comey (UNE)

Every time FBI Director James B. Comey appeared in public, an ever-watchful President Trump grew increasingly agitated that the topic was the one that he was most desperate to avoid: Russia.

Trump had long questioned Comey's loyalty and judgment, and was infuriated by what he viewed as the director's lack of action in recent weeks on leaks from within the federal government. By last weekend, he had made up his mind: Comey had to go.

At his golf course in Bedminster, N.J., Trump groused over Comey's latest congressional testimony, which he thought was "strange," and grew impatient with what he viewed as his sanctimony, according to White House officials. Comey, Trump figured, was using the Russia probe to become a martyr.

Back at work Monday morning in Washington, Trump told Vice President Pence and several senior aides — Reince Priebus, Stephen K. Bannon and Donald McGahn, among others — that he was ready

"I do have questions about why he was dismissed at this time," said Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), a member of the Intelligence Committee.

"[But] if you were to appoint a special prosecutor today on that or any issue," he added, "it would probably shut down our ability to do our work, because a significant amount of information would now be denied."

Corker, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called on Trump to appoint an FBI director who is "beyond reproach."

"I think the White House, after multiple conversations with many people over the last 12 to 14 hours, understand that they created a really difficult situation for themselves," he said. "To move beyond this in a way that gives the American people faith and Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate faith in future efforts is going to be a really tough and narrow path for them to follow."

House lawmakers, away on a week-long recess, were not in Washington on Wednesday. House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) shot down the idea of a special prosecutor during an evening interview with Fox News.

to move on Comey. First, though, he wanted to talk with Attorney General Jeff Sessions, his trusted confidant, and Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein, to whom Comey reported directly. Trump summoned the two of them to the White House for a meeting, according to a person close to the White House.

The president already had decided to fire Comey, according to this person. But in the meeting, several White House officials said Trump gave Sessions and Rosenstein a directive: to explain in writing the case against Comey.

The pair quickly fulfilled the boss's orders, and the next day Trump fired Comey — a breathtaking move that thrust a White House already accustomed to chaos into a new level of tumult, one that has legal as well as political consequences.

[Flashback to Nixon's Saturday Night Massacre]

Rosenstein threatened to resign after the narrative emerging from the White House on Tuesday evening cast him as a prime mover of the decision to fire Comey and

"I don't think that's a good idea," he said. "The intelligence committees are the ones that should do this. . . . Let's see them through. Let's see where the facts may lead."

Ryan did not express a personal view of Comey's firing.

"He had basically lost the confidence of a lot of Republicans and a lot of Democrats," Ryan said. "It is entirely within the president's role and authority to relieve him and that's what he did."

Some Republicans tried to steer the conversation away from the topic of Russia throughout the day.

During a visit to Capitol Hill, Vice President Pence repeated Trump's claim that Comey informed him several times that he was "not under investigation." The White House has not substantiated that claim.

"The simple fact is, Director Comey had lost the confidence of the American people," Pence said, defending Trump's decision.

Senate Republican Whip John Cornyn (Tex.) dismissed the notion that Trump fired Comey to impede the FBI's Russia probe, calling it a "phony narrative."

"If you assume that, this strikes me as a lousy way to do it," he told

reporters. "All it does is heighten the attention given to the issue."

[The shocking firing of James B. Comey puts new pressure on Trump and his team]

While Democrats discussed strategy, Republicans were trying to move on — a sign of how unwelcome these developments are for their agenda.

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

At a Wednesday lunch attended by Senate Republicans, Comey barely came up in the group discussion, according to attendees.

"We were focused on health care and there might have been 120 seconds devoted to it," Corker said.

"No talk when I was there," Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) said.

Karoun Demirjian, Kelsey Snell, Tom Hamburger, James Hohmann and Ashley Parker contributed to this report.

that the president acted only on his recommendation, said the person close to the White House, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Justice Department officials declined to comment.

The stated rationale for Comey's firing delivered Wednesday by principal deputy White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders was that he had committed "atrocities" in overseeing the FBI's probe into Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server as secretary of state, hurting morale in the bureau and compromising public trust.

"He wasn't doing a good job," Trump told reporters Wednesday. "Very simple. He wasn't doing a good job."

With Comey's dismissal, the Russia investigation will soon be run by Trump allies

But the private accounts of more than 30 officials at the White House, the Justice Department, the FBI and on Capitol Hill, as well as Trump confidants and other senior

Republicans, paint a conflicting narrative centered on the president's brewing personal animus toward Comey. Many of those interviewed spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to candidly discuss internal deliberations.

Trump was angry that Comey would not support his baseless claim that President Barack Obama had his campaign offices wiretapped. Trump was frustrated when Comey revealed in Senate testimony the breadth of the counterintelligence investigation into Russia's effort to sway the 2016 U.S. presidential election. And he fumed that Comey was giving too much attention to the Russia probe and not enough to investigating leaks to journalists.

The known actions that led to Comey's dismissal raise as many questions as answers. Why was Sessions involved in discussions about the fate of the man leading the FBI's Russia investigation, after having recused himself from the probe because he had falsely denied under oath his own past communications with the Russian ambassador?

Why had Trump discussed the Russia probe with the FBI director three times, as he claimed in his letter dismissing Comey, which could have been a violation of Justice Department policies that ongoing investigations generally are not to be discussed with White House officials?

And how much was the timing of Trump's decision shaped by events spiraling out of his control — such as Monday's testimony about Russian interference by former acting attorney general Sally Yates, or the fact that Comey last week requested more resources from the Justice Department to expand the FBI's Russia probe?

In the weeks leading up to Comey's firing, Trump administration officials had repeatedly urged the FBI to more aggressively pursue leak investigations, according to people familiar with the discussions. Administration officials sometimes sought to push the FBI to prioritize leak probes over the Russia interference case, and at other times urged the bureau to investigate disclosures of information that was not classified or highly sensitive and therefore did not constitute crimes, these people said.

Over time, administration officials grew increasingly dissatisfied with the FBI's actions on that front. Comey's appearances at congressional hearings caused even more tension between the White House and FBI, as Trump administration officials were angered that the director's statements increased, rather than diminished, public attention on the Russia probe, officials said.

In his Tuesday letter dismissing Comey, Trump wrote: "I greatly appreciate you informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation." People familiar with the matter said that statement is not accurate, although they would not say how it was inaccurate. FBI officials declined to comment on the statement, and a White House official refused to discuss conversations between Trump and Comey.

'Essentially declared war'

Within the Justice Department and the FBI, the firing of Comey has left raw anger, and some fear, according to multiple officials. Thomas O'Connor, the president of the FBI Agents Association, called Comey's firing "a gut punch. We didn't see it coming, and we don't think Director Comey did anything that would lead to this."

Many employees said they were furious about the firing, saying the

circumstances of his dismissal did more damage to the FBI's independence than anything Comey did in his three-plus years in the job.

One intelligence official who works on Russian espionage matters said they were more determined than ever to pursue such cases. Another said Comey's firing and the subsequent comments from the White House are attacks that won't soon be forgotten. Trump had "essentially declared war on a lot of people at the FBI," one official said. "I think there will be a concerted effort to respond over time in kind."

While Trump and his aides sought to justify Comey's firing, the now-canceled FBI director, back from a work trip to Los Angeles, kept a low profile. He was observed putting in his yard at his home in Northern Virginia on Wednesday.

In a message to FBI staff late Wednesday, Comey wrote: "I have long believed that a President can fire an FBI Director for any reason, or for no reason at all. I'm not going to spend time on the decision or the way it was executed. I hope you won't either. It is done, and I will be fine, although I will miss you and the mission deeply."

He added that "in times of turbulence, the American people should see the FBI as a rock of competence, honesty, and independence."

Sam Nunberg, a former political adviser to Trump, said the FBI director misunderstood the president: "James Comey made the mistake of thinking that just because he announced the FBI was investigating possible collusion between the Russian government and the Trump campaign, he had unfettered job security. In my opinion, the president should have fired Comey the day he was sworn in."

George Lombardi, a friend of the president and a frequent guest at his Mar-a-Lago Club, said: "This was a long time coming. There had been a lot of arguments back and forth in the White House and during the campaign, a lot of talk about what side of the fence [Comey] was on or if he was above political dirty tricks."

Dating to the campaign, several men personally close to Trump deeply distrusted Comey and helped feed the candidate-turned-president's suspicions of the FBI director, who declined to recommend charges against Clinton for what they all agreed was a criminal offense, according to several people familiar with the dynamic.

The men influencing Trump include Roger J. Stone, a self-proclaimed dirty trickster and longtime Trump confidant who himself has been linked to the FBI's Russia investigation; former New York mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, a Comey critic who has been known to kibitz about the ousted FBI director with like-minded law enforcement figures; and Keith Schiller, a former New York police officer who functioned as Trump's chief bodyguard and works in the West Wing as director of Oval Office operations.

"What Comey did to Hillary was disgraceful," Stone said. "I'm glad Trump fired him over it."

In fact, it was Schiller whom Trump tasked with hand-delivering a manila envelope containing the president's termination letter to Comey's office at FBI headquarters Tuesday afternoon. Trump's aides did not appear to know that Comey would be out of the office, traveling on a recruiting trip in California, according to a White House official.

A chaotic response

Within the West Wing, there was little apparent dissent over the president's decision to fire Comey, according to the accounts of several White House officials. McGahn, the White House counsel, and Priebus, the chief of staff, walked Trump through how the dismissal would work, with McGahn's legal team taking the lead and coordinating with the Justice Department.

Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter, and her husband, Jared Kushner — both of whom work in the White House — have frequently tried to blunt Trump's riskier impulses but did not intervene to try to persuade him against firing Comey, according to two senior officials.

Trump kept a close hold on the process. White House press secretary Sean Spicer and communications director Michael Dubke were brought into the Oval Office and informed of the Comey decision just an hour before the news was announced. Other staffers in the West Wing found out about the FBI director's firing when their cellphones buzzed with news alerts beginning around 5:40 p.m.

The media explosion was immediate and the political backlash was swift, with criticism pouring in not only from Democrats, but also from some Republicans. Trump and some of his advisers did not fully anticipate the ferocious reaction — in fact, some wrongly assumed many Democrats would support the move because they had been critical of Comey in the past — and

were unprepared to contain the fallout.

When asked Tuesday night for an update on the unfolding situation, one top White House aide simply texted a reporter two fireworks emoji.

"I think the surprise of a great many in the White House was that as soon as this became a Trump decision, all of the Democrats who had long been calling for Comey's ouster decided that this was now an awful decision," Dubke said. "So there was a surprise at the politicization of Democrats on this so immediately and so universally."

Trump's team did not have a full-fledged communications strategy for how to announce and then explain the decision. As Trump, who had retired to the residence to eat dinner, sat in front of a television watching cable news coverage of Comey's firing, he noticed another flaw: Nobody was defending him.

The president was irate, according to White House officials. Trump pinned much of the blame on Spicer and Dubke's communications operation, wondering how there could be so many press staffers yet such negative coverage on cable news — although he, Priebus and others had afforded them almost no time to prepare.

"This is probably the most egregious example of press and communications incompetence since we've been here," one West Wing official said. "It was an absolute disaster. And the president watched it unfold firsthand. He could see it."

Former House speaker Newt Gingrich said Trump bears some responsibility for the turmoil because he kept the decision secret from some key aides.

"You can't be the quarterback of the team if the rest of the team is not in the huddle," Gingrich said. "The president has to learn to go a couple steps slower so that everyone can organize around him. When you don't loop people in, you deprive yourself of all of the opportunities available to a president of the United States."

For more than two hours after the news broke, Trump had no official spokesman, as his army of communications aides scrambled to craft a plan. By nightfall, Trump had ordered his talkers to talk; one adviser said the president wanted "his people" on the airwaves.

Counselor Kellyanne Conway ventured into what White House aides call "the lions' den," appearing on CNN both Tuesday night and Wednesday morning for combative

interviews. “Especially on your network, you always want to talk about Russia, Russia, Russia,” Conway told CNN’s Chris Cuomo on Wednesday.

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

**NATIONAL
REVIEW
ONLINE**

Trump Changes Republican Politics & May Remodel the Party

The Republican-party establishment is caught in an existential paradox.

Without Donald Trump’s populist and nationalist 2016 campaign, the GOP probably would not have won the presidency. Nor would Republicans now enjoy such lopsided control of state legislatures and governorships, as well as majorities in the House and Senate, and likely control of the Supreme Court for a generation.

So are conservatives angry at the apostate Trump or indebted to him for helping them politically when they were not able to help themselves?

For a similar sense of the paradox, imagine if a novice outsider such as billionaire entrepreneur Mark Cuban had captured the Democratic nomination and then won the presidency — but did not run on either Bernie Sanders’s progressive redistributionism, Barack Obama’s identity politics, or Hillary Clinton’s high taxes and increased regulation. Would liberals be happy, conflicted, or seething?

For now, most Republicans are overlooking Trump’s bothersome character excesses — without conceding that his impulsiveness and bluntness may well have contributed to his success after Republican sobriety and traditionalism failed.

Republicans concentrate on what they like in the Trump agenda — military spending increases, energy expansion, deterrence abroad, tax and regulatory reform, and the repeal and replacement of the

Sanders went Tuesday night to the friendly confines of Fox News Channel, but Wednesday parried questions from the more adversarial hosts of MSNBC’s “Morning Joe.”

Spicer, meanwhile, threw together an impromptu news conference with reporters in the White House driveway, a few minutes before he taped a series of short television

Affordable Care Act — and they ignore the inherent contradictions between Trumpism and their own political creed.

But there are many fault lines that will loom large in the next few years.

Doctrinaire conservatives believe that unfettered free trade is essential, even if it is sometimes not fair or reciprocal.

Establishment Republicans (privately) argue that cheap imports into the U.S. at least kept inflation low. If our trade partners dump state-subsidized products into the U.S., it is to their long-term disadvantage, not ours.

If there are to be sacrificial lambs in world trade, for Trump it is better that they reside in China, South Korea, and Germany.

In this mainstream Republican view, the role of a superpower is to endure trade deficits to help its less powerful allies and keep the global order prosperous and stable.

But Trump’s idea of “fair” trade trumps “free” trade.

Trump is not willing to accept a permanent Midwest Rust Belt as the price of globalization. If there are to be sacrificial lambs in world trade, for Trump it is better that they reside in China, South Korea, and Germany, nations that for a change can try finding any upside to running huge trade deficits.

Unlike doctrinaire Republicans, Trump believes that illegal immigration is a big — and bad — deal.

interviews inside the West Wing, where the lighting was better for the cameras. The press secretary stood alongside tall hedges in near darkness and agreed to answer questions with the cameras shuttered.

“Just turn the lights off,” Spicer ordered. “Turn the lights off. We’ll take care of this.”

The Republican establishment’s employer argument is that illegal immigration ensures that the sort of work “Americans won’t do” is actually done. Or, some establishment Republicans believe that undocumented migrants who cross the southern border will one day become conservative, “family values” voters.

Not so Trumpism. It seeks to help the working class by stopping the importation of cheap labor. It believes that secure borders will restore the sanctity of law, and that the end of illegal immigration will lead to greater integration and assimilation of Latino minority groups.

In the long run, Mexico will be a better neighbor by not counting on impoverished expatriates to prop up an often corrupt government in Mexico City and by addressing the plight of its impoverished rather than exporting its poor.

Trumpism views the world abroad largely in terms of realist deterrence.

Outside the West, the world is a mess, and it will probably not change — and cannot be forced to change — because of American blood and treasure spent on trying to replicate America abroad. Instead, Trumpism seems to want to deter rivals to ensure a calm global order.

Trumpism has no illusions that there will ever be a world of liberal democracies. It seeks instead only to make sure enemies understand that any future aggression will not be worth the anticipated benefits.

Devlin Barrett, Jenna Johnson, Damian Paletta and Matt Zapotosky contributed to this report.

As for dictators such as those in the Philippines or Egypt, Trumpism argues that it makes little sense to snub autocratic friends while cutting deals with autocratic enemies like those in Iran or Cuba.

On matters of identity politics, Republicans have often sought to play down but not actively oppose racial, ethnic, and gender pressure groups. The strategy has been to not antagonize the ethnic and race industries in hopes of receiving a greater share of the minority vote.

Trump is politically incorrect. He sees a person’s pocketbook, not his outward appearance, as the key to his allegiance. Through deregulation, tax reform, immigration reform, and fair trade, Trump hopes to help the economy grow by 3 percent each year.

Such economic growth has not happened in over a decade. But if Trumpism works, then prosperity will supposedly unite Americans more than identity politics can divide them.

In other words, Trump apparently believes that if he achieves 3 percent GDP growth and avoids a major war abroad, his brand of economic nationalism, realist deterrence, and America-first chauvinism will replace mainstream Republicanism.

If he stalls the economy or gets into a quagmire abroad, then Trump will end up like most other American populist mavericks — as an interesting footnote.

**The
Washington
Post**

An atomic town revels in its plutonium past as tunnel collapse raises contamination concerns (UNE)

This town at the edge of the Hanford nuclear site long ago made its peace with the facility’s history of producing plutonium for nuclear bombs.

Bomber’s Drive-Thru sells milkshakes and burgers. The Richland High School mascot is the Bomber, and a mushroom cloud is painted on the gymnasium floor.

There’s Atomic Bowl, Atomic Foods, Atomic Auto Body, Atomic Scuba.

The Atomic Ale Brewpub & Eatery’s menu highlights a “Reactor Core pizza” with “nuclear butter” and sells house-made beers such as “Half-Life Hefeweizen” and “Oppenheimer Oatmeal Stout.”

Hours after the collapse of a 20-foot portion of a Hanford tunnel full of highly contaminated equipment, Adrian Martens was sitting at the bar having a pint after his Tuesday shift. He said people here aren’t afraid of Hanford — or adopting the atomic iconography as kitsch. “It’s a fun retro thing,” he said. He thinks the news media’s panic about the

tunnel collapse “might be overblown.”

[*Tunnel collapses at Hanford nuclear site in Washington state*]

What isn’t overblown is the \$6.1 billion annual cost of cleaning up the highly dangerous material at Hanford and the nation’s other former nuclear weapons sites,

vestiges of the Cold War-era arms race. The Energy Department has cleaned up 91 of these sites but is still working on 16 others, including complexes at Oak Ridge in Tennessee and Savannah River in South Carolina.

Hanford is the biggest. The cleanup there started in 1989, and federal and state officials recently agreed to push back the deadline for finishing the job. The Hanford effort alone will cost \$2.3 billion this year, and as much as \$105 billion in the future, according to a 2016 life-cycle report.

Some nuclear experts said that the collapse of the tunnel Tuesday morning was evidence of faltering infrastructure at the sprawling 580-square-mile Hanford site as the federal government battles to clean up nuclear material, in both solid and liquid forms, that remains there. The tunnel, built a half-century ago with Douglas fir timbers and sealed shut years ago, did not stay closed, exposing contaminated rail cars and other debris to the open air.

"Hanford overall is the most contaminated site in North America, and the facility near where the tunnel collapsed today is one of the most contaminated facilities at Hanford," said Dan Serres, conservation director of the Columbia Riverkeeper.

(Gillian Brockell/The Washington Post)

The clean-up operation of Hanford's nine nuclear reactors has been underway since 1989. Video: What you need to know about the Hanford nuclear waste site (Gillian Brockell/The Washington Post)

News from the Hanford site Wednesday was limited. The Energy Department said that no contamination has been detected following the cave-in. But it also ordered nonessential employees in part of the site to stay home.

Crews worked through the night to construct a gravel road, and workers wearing protective suits and breathing masks started filling the gaping hole with about 50 truckloads of soil.

Edwin Lyman, a senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said that if there were a significant release, the radioactivity in the tunnels would make it extremely difficult for workers to continue to

monitor the site and carry out cleanup efforts.

Gerry Pollet, executive director of Heart of America Northwest, a watchdog group for the Hanford cleanup, said the site is vulnerable to natural disasters and that the collapse this week is worrisome because it could mean there are other weaknesses: "If you have a partial collapse right now, obviously the integrity of the tunnel is in question for more than just the part that collapsed."

The Hanford nuclear site, half the size of Rhode Island, was placed in a far-flung, desolate southeast corner of Washington state, a far cry from the lush green forests and mountains that define the northwestern United States. It's dry and hot here: a patchwork desert that gets little rain but that commands its own unique beauty. When the sun sets here, it boils under a flat black horizon, painting the wide sky in oranges and greens.

The city of Richland largely popped out of the desert during World War II to house the influx of scientists and workers employed at the Manhattan Project site. The plutonium produced at Hanford filled the Fat Man nuclear bomb, which was dropped over Nagasaki, Japan, killing tens of thousands of people.

Today, Richland, Kennewick and Pasco — known as the Tri-Cities — still have a bit of a children's pop-up book feel: identical-looking houses with bright green lawns and gleaming white fences that sprout out of the desert landscape suddenly and harshly.

Libby Horton, who now lives in Boulder, Colo., was back in her home town of Richland eating pizza at Atomic Ale this week. She shakes her head at the idea of being afraid of a nuclear disaster at Hanford. Her parents both worked there.

"People are more educated here about what goes on at the site," she said, noting that she's not bothered by Tuesday's tunnel collapse. "My friends on Facebook are laughing about it."

Tracy Lugo, a second-grade teacher, said his school did more drills and training in preparation for a potential leak at the Umatilla Chemical Depot, south of the Tri-Cities in Hermiston, Ore., where the U.S. Army stored chemical

weapons until 2011. He doesn't fear a meltdown or leak at Hanford.

"I'm more concerned about Kim Jong-Un dropping a nuclear bomb on us in the next couple of years," he said. Lugo's 13-year-old daughter, Celia, piped up on a point of pride about living in Richland: It's easier to earn the Girl Scouts' "Get to Know Nuclear" merit badge, which allows scouts to visit a nuclear plant.

"You learn about how nuclear energy works," Celia said. "And wear hazmat suits."

Some academic experts agree that risks related to Hanford are small because any radiation leak from the site would dissipate before it affected nearby towns.

"The risk, if people are exposed at low levels, is primarily radiation-induced cancer at some point in the future," said David Brenner, director of the Center for Radiological Research at Columbia University. "But at the levels we're talking about here, which are negligible, I don't think we're talking about any risks."

For others, Hanford symbolizes fear, illness and betrayal. Some call themselves "Hanford Downwinders" because they and their families live downwind of the facility and say they or relatives have become ill from or died of exposure to radioactive materials. Trisha Pritikin, who was raised in the Hanford area, moved away and has been vocal about the diseases her family and friends have. She called Tuesday's emergency declaration "both alarming and indicative of the continuing elevated levels of danger to the public from the Hanford facility."

Lonnie Rouse, 55, worked at Hanford as a nuclear process operator for more than two decades. Rouse suffers from toxic encephalopathy and has been denied workers' compensation.

Despite Hanford officials insisting there was no radiation leak from the tunnel collapse, on Tuesday night Rouse was certain that is a lie. He's familiar with the tunnel that collapsed. Constructed to carry spent fuel in rail cars to a reprocessing plant that extracted plutonium, that tunnel and another like it were filled with hazardous debris, including the rail cars.

"People don't go in there," Rouse said. And he's skeptical of how long

it took for surveillance workers to discover the collapsed tunnel. "When that thing opens up, it's going to come out of the hole. If there's any kind of a breeze, it's going to go everywhere."

Union pipe fitter Scott Brown, 41, said he was on emergency lockdown at Hanford for four hours on Tuesday just east of the collapsed tunnel, something he said had never happened while he's worked there. He said he was told not to report to work Wednesday but that it raised no concerns for him because the site takes precautions.

"Everybody thinks it's so scary," Brown said. "It's still the safest, cleanest form of energy. We need more nukes."

If anywhere is a hub of what's happening in Richland, it's the Spudnut Shop — a small doughnut shop with brown leather booths. At a table in the corner sat a group of retirees sipping coffee and eating the signature potato-flour doughnuts.

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"We all glow in the dark," joked Bill O'Rell, a 94-year-old war veteran. Next to him, Gary Horton, 76, who worked at Hanford, says that people here don't worry about the place. "You have more radiation in Seattle than we have here," he said. At Hanford, Horton said, "You can't go into a building without being measured."

Maurice Horton, Gary's 68-year-old brother who worked as a parachevist at the lab, joined the group and echoed what his brother said: "A lot of people across the mountain, they blow everything up into a major thing. Our biggest problem here is the government would like to put a fence around this place."

He says cleanup efforts here have to continue and can't be derailed by infrastructure issues: "The government caused this problem, and they should take care of it until it's safe for everybody."

Mufson and Bever reported from Washington. Kristine Phillips in Washington contributed to this report.