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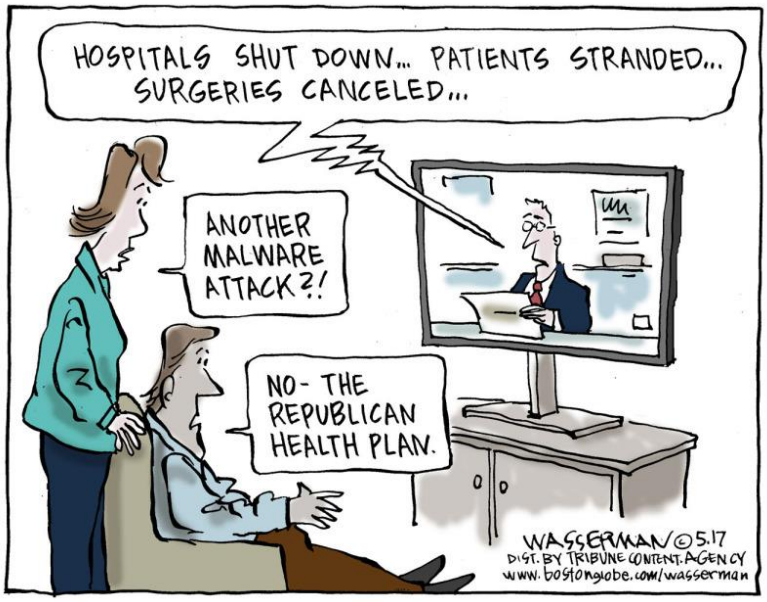

FRANCE - EUROPE

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Le Pen Wavers on Euro as Parliamentary Election Looms

William Horobin and Noemie Bisserbe

PARIS—Opposition to the euro is wavering inside France's far-right National Front party due to infighting over whether its signature policy is to blame for Marine Le Pen's failed presidential bid.

Ms. Le Pen's vow to withdraw France from the euro underpinned a presidential campaign that led her to the final runoff in the country's two-round election. Her stinging loss to Emmanuel Macron, who is unabashedly pro-European, has left party bosses pointing fingers. This week Ms. Le Pen waded into the debate, expressing concern that the anti-euro stance might hurt the National Front's chances going into legislative elections on June 11 and 18.

In an attempt to quell tensions ahead of the vote, Ms. Le Pen said the party would review its position on the European Union's common currency after the elections.

"This return to monetary sovereignty worries French people," Ms. Le Pen, who is running for a seat in the National Assembly, told French radio on Monday. "It will be a debate. We will have to open this discussion."

The party's soul-searching is a measure of how popular the euro remains in France despite searing criticism from economic nationalists and populists across Europe. Ms. Le Pen built her presidential campaign around the argument that the currency was stripping France of its economic independence, saddling the country with low growth and high unemployment.

Since the May 7 election, fissures within the party over the euro have risen to the surface.

Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, Ms. Le Pen's 27-year-old niece, said she was quitting politics two days after the vote. One of two National Front-affiliated lawmakers currently in Parliament, Ms. Maréchal-Le Pen had questioned the party's anti-euro stance. Her announcement, which cited reasons both political and personal, shocked many inside the party, who saw Ms. Maréchal-Le Pen as a future leader of the National Front.

"We need to listen to the fact that French people were not convinced by our arguments," said Nicolas Bay, the party's secretary general.

Other senior figures, however, say dropping the anti-euro policy would unravel the party's economic program of recovering full national sovereignty from the EU. National Front Vice President Florian Philippot, a leading euroskeptic voice, has said he would quit the party if it changed its stance. "National sovereignty isn't a salami," he said on French radio Tuesday. "You can't cut it into slices."

The conflict threatens to tear apart the party just as Ms. Le Pen is working to turn her showing in the presidential election into a springboard for the National Front to become France's main opposition party. Ms. Le Pen won 33.9% of the vote, the party's highest ever score in a presidential contest.

Opinion polls show the National Front is likely to fall far short of their parliamentary goal. According to a survey by pollster Opinionway, the National Front would win between 10 and 15 seats in the 577-seat National Assembly. While a jump from their current status, that would still only give the party marginal representation.

Mr. Macron's party, La République en Marche, is expected to take the largest share of seats, with between 280 and 300, the poll shows. The second largest group would be the center-right Républicains, with between 150 and 170 seats, with the Socialists in third, with between 40 and 50 seats.

Opposition to the euro was a central plank of Ms. Le Pen's careful rebuilding of the party, as she shifted the National Front toward antiglobalist economic policies and away from the xenophobic legacy of her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

During early campaigning, the stance helped Ms. Le Pen draw a line between her antiestablishment party and France's main parties, which embrace the euro. But as Ms. Le Pen sought to lure the support of rivals who had been knocked out in the first round of voting, that line was blurred.

After forging an alliance with nationalist candidate Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, Ms. Le Pen appeared to soften her opposition to the euro, saying leaving the currency was no longer a precondition for implementing her economic policies. Then, in a live television debate with Mr. Macron, she said she wanted to return to a national currency while keeping the euro for international transactions.

"We gave the impression French people would have two or three currencies in their wallets," said Mr. Philippot, "and that stressed everyone."

The Washington Post

En ligne - AP FACT CHECK: Did Trump really favor Macron in France?

By Bradley Klapper

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump told France's new president that he was "my guy" in the recent election, a French official said Thursday. The record shows only favorable words from Trump for centrist Emmanuel Macron's opponent, the defeated far-right candidate Marine Le Pen.

A look at Trump's views, before and now, on this month's French vote:

TRUMP to Macron at a lunch meeting in Brussels on Thursday, according to a French official: "You were my guy" in the French campaign. Trump also said he didn't endorse Le Pen, according to the official, who wasn't authorized to speak publicly on the matter and requested anonymity.

THE FACTS: Trump may never have explicitly endorsed any candidate in France's election, but he had only nice things to say about one candidate: Le Pen. Whatever views he may have expressed privately are unknown.

In an April 21 interview with The Associated Press, Trump said he believed an attack that week on police officers in Paris would help the National Front leader because the violence played to her strengths. "She's the strongest on borders, and she's the strongest on what's been going on in France," Trump said in the Oval Office interview. "Whoever is the toughest on radical Islamic terrorism, and whoever is the toughest at the borders, will do well in the election."

By contrast, Trump never spoke publicly about Macron before the vote. Former President Barack Obama endorsed Macron.

While Le Pen had echoed some of Trump's hardline rhetoric on immigration, the U.S. leader's words of support were surprising.

Le Pen had distanced herself from her father, National Front party founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, who has been convicted of crimes related to anti-Semitism and mocked the Holocaust as a "detail" of history. But she still drew criticism for denying during the campaign that the French state was responsible for the roundup of Jews during World War II, and maintained an inner circle of old friends from her student days that included members of a radical group known for violence and anti-Semitism.

Trump called Macron after his resounding victory. He also tweeted congratulations to the 39-year-old winner, saying he looked forward to working with him.

Emmanuel Macron's French Lessons for Donald Trump

By Evan Osnos

The first meeting between Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron, at what was billed as a "lengthy lunch," during the NATO summit in Brussels—complete with veal filet, chocolate mousse (though no reports yet on whether Trump demanded his usual double share of dessert), and a super-strong competitive handshake—is a reminder that the French Presidential election resembled its American counterpart in every way but one. Well, two, counting the result. In France, as in America, the election pitted an extreme right-wing nationalist against a moderate technocratic liberal, but in France the leaders of the "Republican" right recognized the extreme nationalist right as a threat to democratic values and, after one round of voting, supported Macron, a man of the center-left who had served in a Socialist government. In this country, the leaders of the Republican Party made the opposite choice.

That difference made all the difference. The space between François Fillon, the defeated right-wing candidate, and Macron is, in ideological terms, every bit as large as the space between, say, Marco Rubio and Hillary Clinton. But Fillon understood that a Marine Le Pen in power would be a threat to the nation's constitutional structure. The irony was that the French, with their (mostly unearned) reputation for craven surrender and opportunism, held fast to their deepest principles, while mainstream American rightists discarded theirs.

The reasons for this seem rooted, above all, in collective experience—in history. The French right has an institutional memory of the Vichy government, of the nineteen-forties, and of what collaboration between the honorable and the dishonorable right cost the country. It also understands the meaning of Charles de Gaulle's example. The right still knows him as the man who, despite belonging, ideologically, to the most reactionary part of the right, grasped the essential difference between patriotism and nationalism, and insisted that no decent Frenchman could collaborate with evil, even if that collaboration put him in league against many of his lifelong enemies. The notion, put forward by some American conservatives, that Le Pen was de Gaulle's heir is absurd: the French learned from Vichy that you can't make a deal with the devil, even if the deal that the devil promises is to keep some other devil out. In this country, a "French"-style unequivocal denunciation of Trump by Republicans would have had an essential effect in an election that was decided, after all, by a handful of votes in a few states, and was clearly won, in the popular vote, by moderates.

As it is, Trump's contempt for truth, law, democratic tradition, and what was once called "the good opinion of mankind" is on display every day. So much so that the one consolation has become the frequency of his scandals. Interfering with an F.B.I. investigation for personal political reasons is the sort of thing that led to Richard Nixon's fall, but we are so engulfed by each revelation that the last outrage hardly registers with its proper force. (So here we are, debating Trump's next choice to head the F.B.I., even when we should still be aghast at what he did to the last one.)

This week, though, no one should, under the pressure of Trumpism, sentimentalize Macron, or underrate his difficulties. It is wonderful to have a President who knows the opening lines of Molière plays by heart, but France has had erudite and literary leaders before, such as François Mitterrand, and brilliant technocratic centrists, too, such as Valéry Giscard D'Estaing, and they have not been wholly successful in solving the country's predicaments. Macron operates without a strong political base on the left or the right, and when, as is bound to happen, his policy proposals provoke demonstrations in the streets, he will somehow have to find more backbone to stand up for reform than any previous French President has found. At the same time, he has to stand up against the still-powerful right-wing nationalists. It's a tall order for a master politician, and so far Macron has shown himself only to be a lucky one.

Yet it's hard not to envy France a little, too. How bad can it be? That was, invariably, the question that reasonable conservatives asked before, and even just after, Trump's election. They believed that people were exaggerating Trump's personal flaws and underestimating the power of the Party and the constitutional structures to contain and moderate him. They also thought that he would at least help move the country toward what they happened to view as desirable goals: reshaping President Barack Obama's too-timid foreign policy, or confronting Islamist extremism more robustly, or simply treating government-controlled national health insurance as the abomination that conservatives honestly believe it to be. The other side insisted that people were wildly underestimating Trump's pathology, and failing to learn the lessons of how nationalist autocrats and tyrants take over countries.

The other side, the "alarmists" in this case, have proved to be right. Yet the challenge remains for the left to avoid falling prey to tribal habits, as the right did. You see this risk in the insistence, surprisingly widespread, that there is no real point in resisting Trump, since the Republicans in Congress are complicit in his program. Mike Pence would be more dangerous to liberal causes, this argument runs, because he shares the Republicans' beliefs and brings none of the chaos. Trump is almost better than Pence because he is more nakedly unfit for the office.

That is a Vichy-style mistake in itself. Democracies die when they can no longer distinguish between honest opponents of another ideological kind and toxic enemies who come from far outside all normal values. The Republican Party has functioned, by and large, within the constraints of liberal democracy. There are many obvious exceptions—the issue of the legality of government-sponsored torture, during the George W. Bush Administration, is but one key instance from recent years. But it's a legitimate reproach to liberals that, by maximizing Bush's violation of the norms, as substantial as they were, they helped make it difficult to distinguish adequately between the Bushes and the Trumps of the world. We can, perhaps, blame the Bushes, as well, for failing to distinguish themselves adequately from Trump. Muttering under your breath, "That was some weird shit," as George W. Bush is said to have done at the Inauguration, is not as significant as it would have been to say it before the election, when the weirdness and the darkness were already visible.

What's needed against Trump now is what has been found in France—not an ideologically narrow, politically focussed opposition but the widest possible coalition of people who genuinely value the tenets of democracy, meaning no more than the passionate desire to settle differences by debate and argument, rather than by power and cruelty and clan. Broadening the opposition may help return us to the saner side of life. It might be a lesson we can learn from the French, who learned their lesson from history.

All in the family? NATO newcomers Trump and Macron a study in contrasts.

The Christian Science Monitor

The "family photo" of leaders attending the NATO meeting in the Belgian capital Thursday included an unusually large number of first-timers to the transatlantic alliance's premier stage.

Among the newcomers pictured in the traditional summit souvenir was the president of tiny Montenegro, whose country only acceded to NATO membership in April.

Yet even that distinction paled in comparison to the attention accorded two other first-timers to a NATO leaders' gathering: US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron.

All eyes remained focused for the duration of what amounted to a brief mini-summit of the two leaders – both elective-office debutants as well – who seemed to arrive on the NATO stage from out of the blue.

More intriguing and irresistible still was how the two presidents – one a brash showman with populist tendencies and prone to dark statements about America's challenges, the other a prim technocrat with a global outlook and sunny disposition – encapsulated the opposing forces pushing and pulling on alliance countries and on the West more broadly.

"What's going to stand out about this [NATO meeting] is the family photo, it will be worth keeping a copy of this one," says James Townsend, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense for European and NATO policy. "There will be President

Trump and President Macron together on the same stage," adds Mr. Townsend, now a senior fellow in transatlantic security at the Center for a New American Security in Washington. "Who would have thought that photo was even possible just a few months ago?"

Beyond the lingering incredulity over the two leaders' unlikely rise is a fascination with how they were lifted to political power by seemingly opposite waves of public fervor.

Opposites

For as much as Mr. Trump has come to symbolize internationally a populism that would build walls, turn inward, and protect national identities and economies from global influences like trade and migration, Mr. Macron in a few short weeks has risen to represent the answer to the Trump backlash.

Where Trump is America First, Macron is a multilateralist. Trump is pro-Brexit, Macron is pro-European Union. Where Trump is a nationalist, Macron is an internationalist who would rather make globalization work better than resist it.

Moreover, Trump is perceived by many in Europe as harking back to a bygone era, whereas Macron is seen as innovative and focused on the future. And indeed, it's Macron's youthful can-do spirit – traditionally more often considered an American trait – that has given the French leader almost Obama-esque rock-star appeal and popularity beyond France's borders.

When presented with the distinct visions offered by the two leaders, Europeans largely favor Macron's, if polls are to be believed.

"I dare say in Europe the optimist Macron's view of the world carries the day, because it gives people something to believe in," says Sven Biscop, director of the Europe in the World program at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels. "Trump's view offers just despair and scapegoats."

Or as the Belgian daily Le Soir put it in a front-page commentary, the simultaneous international debuts of Trump and Macron revealed to other leaders and to the public "the negative star and the positive star" of the NATO meeting.

It's hardly surprising that Belgians in particular among Europeans would dislike Trump, given his derision during the presidential campaign of the EU and his indelicate description of Brussels – home to NATO, the EU's administrative headquarters, and the Belgian government – as a "hell hole."

But some here say that Europeans should remember that the same contrasting qualities they are seeing in Trump and Macron are present in their own countries. Macron's victory did not spell the end of nationalist populism in Europe, they say, any more than Trump's unpopularity in Europe means he does not appeal to a white working class that feels left behind by the world Macron touts.

"The tension we see in America between the nationalists and the more internationally oriented, between protectionism and globalization, or between those who support immigration and those who don't, we have the same happening in Europe," says Bruno Lété, transatlantic fellow for security and defense policy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Brussels.

Indeed, those same divisions have been on display in the Trump administration, Mr. Lété says. But he adds that Europeans who favor strong transatlantic relations are heartened by indications that the administration's internationalists are winning the debate in the White House.

"It looks to us like despite whatever he may have said, Trump is going with the people in his administration who are more supportive of multilateralism, more pro-alliance. That's the people like [Defense Secretary James] Mattis and [Secretary of State Rex] Tillerson," he says.

Liking Macron, needing Trump

And as for contrasting the leadership styles of Trump and Macron, Lété says that is not a preoccupation of transatlanticists since no French president – no European leader for that matter – replaces the key role of the American president and American leadership. "Macron is not going to define himself and his policies within NATO," he says. Trump, on the other hand, "is critical to the transatlantic relationship" because without America "there is no partnership."

What defines Macron is a mix of pragmatism and optimism that makes him attractive, Lété says. Those same qualities appear to be offering a new model of leadership to Europeans who see little to like in Trump but who at the same time understand the importance of forging a relationship with the American president.

Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel is one of those Europeans. The young leader with a shaved head and a trimmed beard wants to be like Macron, but he wants to be able to work with Trump.

"Macron is one of a number of European leaders I want to join who want to give people a new project, a new reason for hope," Mr. Michel told journalists he met with for an informal conversation Wednesday night. "We favor reform and want to encourage innovation."

Those words reflect the sense of relief and of renewed purpose that have pervaded much of Europe since Macron's victory – replacing the sense of doom that had settled in like a fog after July's Brexit victory.

As for Trump, Michel turned aside journalists' questions about the president's record of anti-European and anti-Belgian pronouncements, instead focusing on areas of common accord.

"I heard a different perspective from President Trump," the Belgian leader said just hours after meeting with him. "He wanted to talk about burden-sharing, and I agreed that Europe must do more" to pay for its own defense.

Trump's firm belief that America gets a raw deal from Europe on both security and trade is likely to carry over to the G7 summit he'll attend beginning Friday in Sicily. But in Brussels, according to the Belgian leader's summation of their meeting, the focus was on cooperation.

Michel said he cited the threats facing Europe, from Russia to the east and instability to the south, and from terrorism. He reported saying that addressing those challenges must proceed through the two sides of the Atlantic working together – and he said he got a rhetorical thumb's up in response.

"I asked him, and he said he agreed," Michel said, "that there must be unity between the United States and Europe."

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

French : Manchester Attack: Britain Needs Vengeance, Not Justice

Let me share with you some deeply flawed words from the editorial board of the *New York Times*. I do this not because the *Times* is alone in its sentiment but because the paragraph below is perfectly representative of the wrong approach to fighting terror. Reflecting on the Manchester bombing, the editors say this:

Meanwhile, as hard as it is amid the shock and the mourning, it is important to recognize this attack for what it is: an attempt to shake Britain — and, by extension, the rest of Europe and the West — to its core, and to provoke a thirst for vengeance and a desire for absolute safety so intense, it will sweep away the most cherished democratic values and the inclusiveness of diverse societies.

To the contrary, Britain *should* seek vengeance. And if terrorists want to provoke a climactic confrontation in the Middle East, then the West should give them the battle they crave. Why? Because they'll lose. Because they'll be slaughtered. Because they'll be exposed as the violent hucksters they are.

Underpinning the *Times*'s sentiment is the persistent, misguided belief that what we face isn't a true war but rather a particularly challenging law-enforcement operation, in which armies stay largely sidelined, the cops do their work, and societies cope with terrorism in much the same way that they cope with other forms of criminal violence.

For those who subscribe to this view, the fundamental response to terror — in addition to mourning the dead and expressing love and support for their families — is to find precisely the people responsible and punish them precisely with the penalties prescribed by law. If we achieve less, then police have failed. If our response sweeps beyond those responsible for the bad act, then we have committed our own injustices and thus perpetuated the cycle of hate and violence.

In war, the goal is different. In war, the goal is to meet an attack with an overwhelming response — to find and punish those responsible for discrete acts, kill their allies, and annihilate their military organization. This martial act of vengeance and wrath — yes, vengeance — should be carried out in accordance with the laws of war, but the laws of war are no impediment to decisive military force.

Vengeance by itself is not wrong. The manner of the vengeance and its object defines its morality and effectiveness. History is littered with examples of vengeance-motivated atrocities, but it is also full of cases where vengeance (or the threat of vengeance) motivated entire

societies to defeat mortal threats and deter even worse calamities.

Terrorists count on Western restraint.

The call for unconditional surrender in World War II was a departure from the norm in great-power conflicts, but it led to the ultimate defeat of Nazism and Japanese militarism, rather than to mere setbacks that would have allowed the Nazis and the Japanese to refit, re-arm, and try again. In multiple points throughout the Cold War, the threat of overwhelming retaliation kept conflicts limited, kept weapons of mass destruction off the field of battle, and helped the world avoid another catastrophic global conflict.

By contrast, terrorists count on Western restraint. They often presume that we'll be unwilling to do what it truly takes to destroy their safe havens or that we'll grow weary of conflict and ultimately acquiesce to their demands. And all too many voices in the West are eager to oblige. When law enforcement isn't enough to prevent attacks, and when carefully limited military strikes prove ineffective, they argue that we should look to address the "legitimate grievances" that are said to ultimately drive jihadist motivations.

That is when terrorists win.

There exists already a model for successful vengeance. Osama bin Laden wasn't prepared for massive American retaliation after 9/11. He didn't expect to lose his safe havens and the vast bulk of his fighters. He thought America would respond as it had before, with ineffective cruise-missile volleys or perhaps even the same timidity that followed the Battle of Mogadishu. In fact, he said as much, speaking of American weakness to Western reporters. But he was wrong: He met American strength, al-Qaeda was left in ruins, and the threat of terror eased for a time.

In fact, there's a consistent pattern to terrorist violence. When they obtain and maintain safe havens, jihadists are able to plan, train, inspire, and strike. When they are driven from their strongholds — pounded from the air and the ground — they lose much of their effectiveness and their appeal. Take your boot off their neck, and they rise again.

So, Britain, ignore the *New York Times*. Give in to your "thirst for vengeance." In a manner that is consistent with the laws of war and the great tradition of British arms, make an example of ISIS. Destroy terrorist safe havens with prompt, decisive force, pursue terrorists wherever they flee, and send a clear message. Terrorists have sown the wind. They will reap the whirlwind. Avenge your fallen.

The New York Times

Trump Condemns 'Alleged Leaks,' After Complaints From Britain

Michael D. Shear and Steven Erlanger

But two dimensions of the latest controversy are new: The disclosures in this case are about a terrorism investigation led by a foreign ally, and the British government has brought its complaints to a receptive audience.

In a statement, Mrs. May's office said she would bring up the matter at a NATO gathering in Brussels on Thursday evening and would "make clear to President Trump that intelligence that is shared between our law enforcement agencies must remain secure."

In what appears to be another effort to assuage British anger, Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson will go to London on Friday to meet with Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson "in an expression of U.K.-U.S. solidarity following the terrorist attack in Manchester earlier this week," the British Foreign Office announced. The two men "will write messages of condolence for the victims of the attack and hold talks on a range of foreign policy issues," the statement said.

Mrs. May's statement followed expressions of outrage by top law enforcement officials after The New York Times published images on Wednesday of the shrapnel, backpack and battery used by Salman Abedi, the 22-year-old bomber who killed 22 people and injured scores outside the Manchester Arena as a pop concert ended Monday night. The Times did not disclose the source of its information.

All of the information and photographs shared with The Times were marked "restricted circulation — official use only," a level of classification used for routine British government business and below the classifications of secret or top-secret.

The National Police Chiefs' Council in Britain called the leaks a breach of trust, adding, "This damage is even greater when it involves unauthorized disclosure of potential evidence in the middle of a major counterterrorism investigation." The disclosure of potential evidence "undermines our investigations and the confidence of victims, witnesses and their families," it added.

On Thursday, Manchester's top police official, Chief Constable Ian Hopkins, joined the chorus of criticism, saying that the disclosure "has caused much distress for families that are already suffering terribly with their loss."

Earlier in the day, the BBC reported that the Manchester police would no longer share details of the investigation with American counterparts. But on Thursday evening, after Mrs. May had new assurances from Mr. Trump, the police announced that intelligence sharing had resumed — if it had ever stopped in the first place.

Mark Rowley, an assistant commissioner in charge of counterterrorism at Scotland Yard and an officer on the Police Chiefs' Council, said in a statement issued later on Thursday that "while we do not usually comment on information-sharing arrangements with international law enforcement organizations, we want to emphasize that, having received fresh assurances, we are now working closely with our key partners around the world including all those in the 'Five Eyes' intelligence alliance." (Along with the United States and Britain, the other countries in the alliance are New Zealand, Australia and Canada.)

The Times said in a statement:

The images and information presented were neither graphic nor disrespectful of victims, and consistent with the common line of reporting on weapons used in horrific crimes, as The Times and other media outlets have done following terrorist acts around the world, from Boston to Paris to Baghdad, and many places in between.

Our mission is to cover news and inform our readers. We have strict guidelines on how and in what ways we cover sensitive stories. Our coverage of Monday's horrific attack has been both comprehensive and responsible.

We cover stories about terrorism from all angles. Not only stories about victims but also how terrorist groups work, their sources of funding, how they recruit. Acts of terrorism have tremendous impact on how we live, on how we are governed and how we interact as people, communities and nations. At times the process of reporting this coverage comes at personal risk to our reporters. We do it because it is core to our mission.

Mr. Trump has viewed leaks differently at different times depending on whether they helped or hurt him. During last year's presidential campaign, he not only capitalized on the disclosure of emails from the Democratic National Committee and from Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, he publicly called on Russian hackers to unearth and publicize even more of them. "I love WikiLeaks," he said at one point, praising the group that made public many of the emails.

But since taking office, Mr. Trump has been increasingly frustrated by information coming out of his own White House. Details of his conversation with Russian officials and of his telephone calls with the leaders of Mexico, Australia and, just this week, the Philippines have spilled into public view. Leaked information about a telephone call between Michael T. Flynn, his first national security adviser, and Russia's ambassador forced the president to fire Mr. Flynn.

Mr. Trump's own aides also routinely leak about one another in the latest palace intrigue.

In recent days, anonymously sourced articles about Mr. Trump's private conversations with and about James B. Comey, the F.B.I. director he fired, have fueled investigations into his associates' ties with Russia. After The Times reported that Mr. Trump had asked Mr. Comey to shut down an investigation into Mr. Flynn, the Justice Department felt compelled to appoint a special counsel to take over the Russia investigation.

The president's request for a Justice Department inquiry into the Manchester leaks was the latest example of Mr. Trump's crossing what other presidents have considered a bright line insulating the department from White House influence. Presidents do not normally call for or otherwise weigh in on criminal investigations, at the risk of being seen as trying to steer the impartial administration of justice.

The first disclosures in the Manchester case came on Tuesday, when American television networks, in particular NBC and CBS, revealed the name of the bomber, citing American officials. (The name had also been circulating on social media.)

Then, on Wednesday, The Times published crime scene photographs, including of a battery possibly used in the device, and the label of a backpack that may have concealed the bomb itself. The Times report

also pointed out precisely where the bomb had been placed. The Times did not cite its sources, but it attributed its account to "preliminary information gathered by British authorities."

American news organizations have not been alone in disclosing information that appears to have originated with British intelligence. France's interior minister, Gérard Collomb, said on Wednesday that Mr. Abedi had "most likely" traveled to Syria, and on Thursday, a German magazine, Focus, cited unidentified German officials as saying that Mr. Abedi had gotten paramilitary training there.

On Wednesday morning, before The Times published its disclosure, Home Secretary Amber Rudd told the BBC that she was irritated by the disclosure of the bomber's identity against the wishes of the British authorities.

Roy Greenslade, a former Fleet Street editor and a professor of journalism at City University in London, said that "the messenger is blamed for the message."

"Our business," he said, "is the business of disclosure." He added, "If facts exist in the public domain, especially over sensitive matters, then our job is to publish them."

The "first position of the authorities is always secrecy," Professor Greenslade said. "They oppose the disclosure of secret information, sometimes for operational reasons."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

UNE - Trump Calls for Probe After British Complaints of Manchester Investigation Leaks

President Donald Trump, already angry about leaks from U.S. intelligence agencies, has called for an investigation into how sensitive information the British shared with key allies on the Manchester terror bombing ended up in news reports.

Outraged British officials, from Prime Minister Theresa May down to local police, expressed dismay over their suspicions that the U.K.'s closest ally was the source of information for reporters from the earliest hours after Monday night's suicide bombing at a pop concert that killed 22 people and injured more than 100.

Mrs. May raised the issue of the leaks with Mr. Trump at Thursday's summit in Brussels of leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. A U.K. official said the prime minister "expressed the view that the intelligence-sharing relationship we have with the U.S. is hugely important and valuable, but that the information that we share should be kept secure." The White House had no immediate comment on the conversation.

Mr. Trump's administration has grappled with a series of leaks of classified and sensitive information, which White House officials say have come from intelligence officials set on undermining his presidency. The president said leaking sensitive information has been happening for a long time and vowed on Thursday to "get to the bottom of this."

For months, top White House officials and the president have wanted to formally look into government leaks, but it wasn't until the complaints from the U.K. that Mr. Trump decided to do so, a senior administration official said.

"It's something that we've been talking about for a while," the official said. "A lot of people have been really frustrated" with government leaks.

Some White House officials believe the British government's complaints give Mr. Trump an opening to shift the public focus from the content of leaked information onto those leaking it.

Before Thursday, Mr. Trump's efforts to spotlight how leaks of sensitive information threaten national security have gained little traction, in part because many of the leaks have pertained to the federal investigation into his presidential campaign's possible ties to Russia. The tension with the U.K. over intelligence sharing in the wake of a terrorist attack could shine a different light on the issue, one that doesn't make it seem personal to Mr. Trump.

"Leaks of sensitive information pose a grave threat to our national security," Mr. Trump said in a statement on Thursday from Brussels, as the White House moved to quell new tensions with a key U.S. ally. Mr. Trump called such disclosures "deeply troubling" and threatened to prosecute anyone responsible for them.

In Washington, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said the Justice Department "will make every effort to put an end" to unauthorized disclosures and had "already initiated appropriate steps to address the rampant leaks."

British police named Salman Abedi as the suspected suicide bomber behind the Manchester attack that left 22 people dead. Here are three things we know about him. Photo: AP

Mr. Sessions has recused himself from the probe into Russia's role in the Trump campaign, which is being run by a special counsel, former FBI Director Robert Mueller.

A Justice Department spokesman said he wouldn't comment on "the existence or nonexistence of investigations." In April, Mr. Sessions said the agency had stepped up efforts against leaks and would seek prosecutions. "Whenever a case can be made, we will seek to put some people in jail," he said then.

The U.K. has become increasingly angry over media reports revealing details of the investigation, with British police saying leaks by U.S. officials had eroded trust between the two partners.

In his statement, Mr. Trump stressed the special ties between the U.S. and U.K., saying there was no relationship the U.S. cherished more.

A focus of U.K. outrage over leaks was the publication by the New York Times on Wednesday of official police photographs taken at the entrance hall of Manchester Arena where Monday's blast occurred. The photos showed shrapnel and what the newspaper said were the remnants of a backpack, a switch and a battery that may have been used in the bombing.

Manchester police temporarily stopped sharing information on the attack with the U.S. out of concern over leaks, a U.K. official said. By Thursday evening, they resumed after receiving fresh assurances from the U.S., according to Mark Rowley, the U.K.'s top counterterrorism policeman.

Police in Manchester, as well as officials in London, said the unauthorized disclosure of information was dismaying to families of the dead and injured, and could hamper the investigation and compromise the prosecution of any accomplices to the suspected bomber, Salman Abedi.

Ian Hopkins, chief constable of the Greater Manchester Police, said the distress of victims' families about the leaks to the Times was "absolutely understandable."

The National Police Chiefs' Council, which coordinates national police operations, said, "This damage is even greater when it involves unauthorized disclosure of potential evidence in the middle of a major counterterrorism investigation."

Raffaello Pantucci, director of international security studies at the Royal United Services Institute, said leaks can make it harder for police to round up others who may have been part of the attacker's network and could hasten follow-up attacks, as was the case after the Brussels bombings last year. "The people trying to do us harm are watching and following the news in great detail," he said.

'The people trying to do us harm are watching and following the news in great detail.'

—Raffaello Pantucci of the Royal United Services Institute

The Times defended the publication of the photos and other information gathered by British authorities. saying "the images and information presented were neither graphic nor disrespectful of victims, and consistent with the common line of reporting on weapons used in horrific crimes.""Our mission is to cover news and inform our readers," the newspaper said in its statement, describing its attack coverage as "both comprehensive and responsible."

Intelligence-sharing in cases such as the Manchester bombing is fairly routine. According to a U.S. counterterrorism official, British authorities shared the photos and intelligence gathered at the site of the attack with law-enforcement agencies and demolition experts in the U.S. and Europe in hopes of gaining clues about the origin of the device used in the attack.

Many countries are eager to glean insights from experts working at an FBI laboratory in Alabama that analyzes improvised explosive devices collected across the globe. An FBI spokesman declined to comment on whether the British shared photographs or other information related to the attack with the agency.

The Times account on Wednesday followed earlier leaks on the investigation, including the name of the suspect's identity to a U.S. television outlet, CBS , which broadcast his name. Other media organizations followed.

The unauthorized disclosures led U.K. Home Secretary Amber Rudd to tell Mr. Sessions that the U.K. was strongly concerned about the leaks, the Justice Department said. Mr. Sessions said he understood

her concern and that leaks wouldn't be tolerated.

POLITICO Merkel meets popular US president … before seeing Trump

Janosch Delcker

BERLIN — Angela Merkel had meetings with not one but two American presidents in her calendar on Thursday — and both could help her win re-election, but for different reasons.

Before heading to Brussels for a meeting with fellow NATO leaders including U.S. President Donald Trump, the German chancellor sat down in Berlin for a public discussion with his predecessor, Barack Obama, against the backdrop of the Brandenburg Gate.

Obama didn't take long to offer a strong endorsement of Merkel's leadership — just the sort of signal her Christian Democrats had been hoping for. Unlike her visitor from the United States, Merkel still has another election to win and Obama remains highly popular in Germany.

"Not only do I love this city, but one of my favorite partners throughout my presidency is sitting next to me today," Obama said. "Chancellor Merkel has done outstanding work, not just here in Germany, but around the world."

In front of 70,000 people gathered for a church convention, Merkel and Obama spent 90 minutes on stage discussing a broad range of topics including U.S. health care reform, military drones and migration.

Asked about refugees, Merkel rejected criticism over her increasingly tough stance on the issue.

"I know that this doesn't win me popularity here," Merkel, a pastor's daughter who grew up in communist East Germany, said when asked about deportations to crisis-ridden countries such as Afghanistan. "But … we need to make sure that we [only] help those who need our help, of whom there are many in the world."

Obama backed Merkel's stance, adding that throughout the eight years of his presidency, he had constantly felt the dilemma of reconciling feelings of compassion with other responsibilities he held as U.S. president.

One of the key solutions, Obama said, was to improve living conditions for people in their countries of origin so they don't feel the need to leave their homes.

"We can't isolate ourselves. We can't hide behind a wall," Obama said.

The comment triggered applause from the Berlin crowd and was clearly understood as a rebuke to Trump, who put the idea of building a wall along the Mexican border at the center of his election campaign.

Unlike Obama, Trump isn't well-liked in Germany. According to an opinion poll conducted in January, only 12 percent of Germans thought it was a good thing he had become president.

However, Merkel's event with Obama was not meant to provoke Trump, with whom the German chancellor also wants to establish good relations.

The event was scheduled before the NATO summit date had been set and Merkel made sure Trump was made aware of it weeks ago, according to German government officials and an Obama Foundation aide.

'Anchor of stability'

In September, Germany is electing a new parliament. In her bid to win a fourth term, Merkel has been pushing her image as a "safe pair of hands" during a politically tumultuous time in Europe, and big diplomatic events such as the NATO summit help burnish her credentials.

One of her great advantages over her election rival, former European Parliament President Martin Schulz, is that Schulz holds no major office apart from party chief of his Social Democrats – while Merkel can use her role as Germany's leader to burnish her reputation as a *Stabilitätsanker* (anchor of stability) in an unstable world, officials within her Christian Democrats (CDU) say.

For example, well-aware of the power of those images, Merkel recently pushed Saudi Arabia's King Salman on women's rights and used a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin to urge him to investigate reports of persecution of gay men in Chechnya.

Thursday's event at the Brandenburg Gate was followed by standing ovations, with people applauding until Obama and Merkel walked off the stage, side by side.

Expect different images from a meeting of G20 leaders in Hamburg in July, when Trump is set to pay his first official visit to Germany.

Officials are braced for riots and mass demonstrations.

The New York Times European Visits by Trump and Obama Are a Study in Contrasts

Alison Smale

It was also a demonstration, however coincidental, of the political shadow boxing that has found an unlikely arena in Europe, the new center of the contest between liberal democracy and far-right populism.

While Mr. Obama is the leader Europe prefers, Mr. Trump's sudden ascendance has been seen as a challenge to America's commitment to Europe, both its unity and its security, as well as the values that underpin the Western alliance.

The impression was underscored once again on Thursday when Mr. Trump demurred from explicitly endorsing America's commitment to NATO's principle of collective defense.

Neither president has remained aloof from Europe's politics as the stakes have mounted this year with critical elections that have so far beaten back the far-right populism that helped thrust Mr. Trump to power last year.

Each man has, in fact, made his preferences clear at important moments in a kind of political proxy war. Mr. Obama, who remains wildly popular in Europe, was not shy about weighing in on France's presidential race and endorsing the centrist reformer Emmanuel Macron, the winner.

Mr. Trump, on the other hand, lauded Mr. Macron's far-right opponent, Marine Le Pen, and posted a message on Twitter saying a terror attack in Paris in April would "have a big effect on presidential election!" Ultimately it did not.

For European leaders like Ms. Merkel, striking a balance between coaxing Mr. Trump into a deeper understanding with America's traditional allies, while remaining true to their own political principles, is proving to be tricky.

German government officials say Ms. Merkel telephoned Mr. Trump when it became clear she would meet both presidents on the same day, to dispel any impression of a slight.

But the coincidence of scheduling — Mr. Obama's invitation was issued a year ago, though accepted only last month — nonetheless presented Ms. Merkel with an opportunity for her to demonstrate that both sides need each other, and to show voters at home that she is a world leader as she campaigns for a fourth term.

"It is wonderful timing for her, a combination of good luck and good strategizing," said Jan Techau of the Richard Holbrooke Forum at the American Academy in Berlin.

She was with Mr. Obama, "the good American who everyone is already missing," and then with President Trump, "the other America which needs to be dealt with. And that is what is so crucial — of course she needs the relationship with Trump, but she can relativize that with pictures with Obama at the church meeting," Mr. Techau added.

Yet, in Brussels, there were no evident breakthroughs.

As for Mr. Obama, usually trips by ex-leaders generate little public interest and consist of collecting obscure awards, like the media prize Mr. Obama was due to accept in the German spa town of Baden-Baden later on Thursday.

But while Mr. Obama has generally avoided making overtly political statements during his travels, his every movement, gesture and word have become objects of scrutiny at a highly politicized time.

Mr. Obama took his first step back onto the world stage earlier this month, at a food and technology conference in Milan, where he sprinkled his political stardust on Matteo Renzi, the center-left former Italian prime minister who is hoping for a comeback.

The themes and settings of this week scarcely spelled neutrality, or reserve, analysts noted. "The entire week is more about symbolism than it is about substance," Mr. Techau said. "It is state theater at the highest level."

Mr. Obama did not mention Mr. Trump once during his 90-minute

appearance in Berlin. But he did take some veiled swipes, noting, for instance, that when dealing with migration, "we can't hide behind a wall," alluding to Mr. Trump's plan to build a wall along the Mexican border.

In Brussels, Ms. Merkel, was similarly discreet as she unveiled a piece of the Berlin Wall, whose fall in November 1989 marked NATO's triumph in the Cold War against the Soviets.

"To find convincing answers for the future," she said, "it is good to know what we achieved in the past."

Mr. Trump, the New Yorker, presented a large chunk of the North Tower of the World Trade Center where the first hijacked plane made impact on Sept. 11, 2001, leading NATO allies for the first time to invoke the collective defense clause, Article V, which European leaders were hoping Mr. Trump would endorse.

Instead, Mr. Trump wasted no time in reminding Europeans that most of them are not paying their way in defense, and that this is "not fair" to the American taxpayer.

While the atmosphere in Brussels was tense, in Berlin Germans and foreigners exulted in the chance to see and hear Mr. Obama live.

Austin Joseph, 27, a native of Atlanta, said he left the United States two days after Mr. Trump's election and swiftly settled in Berlin. "They talked to each other with decency and respect," he said after Mr. Obama's appearance with Ms. Merkel. "That is what we need more of nowadays."

The very different sentiments evoked by Mr. Trump are equally clear.

"Donald Trump is not capable of being President of the U.S.A.," wrote Klaus Brinkbäumer, the editor of Der Spiegel, in an extended editorial in the current issue.

The 45th president is neither intellectually nor morally equipped for the job, he wrote. "Trump must be removed from the White House. Fast. He is a danger for the world."

INTERNATIONAL

POLITICO

Trump makes forceful NATO debut – POLITICO

David M. Herszenhorn

He came, he saw, he harangued.

U.S. President Donald Trump capped his first official visit to Brussels with a commanding — and meandering — speech at NATO's new headquarters, in which he berated allies for not spending enough on defense, insisted that even NATO's goal of increasing annual military expenditures to 2 percent of GDP was insufficient and provocatively declared that some allies "owed" arrears for years of lagging contributions.

Trump's remarks were also notable for what he did not say: to the consternation of some allies, Trump once again did not explicitly endorse NATO's common defense principle — that an attack on one is an attack on all.

"NATO members must finally contribute their fair share and meet their financial obligations, for 23 of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defense," Trump said, standing outside NATO's gleaming new headquarters with fellow leaders of the alliance watching on uncomfortably

"This is not fair to the people and taxpayers of the United States. And many of these nations owe massive amounts of money from past years and not paying in those past years," said Trump, who also appeared to push his way to the front of the leaders' group as the opening ceremony for the new building began.

"Two percent is the bare minimum for confronting today's very real and very vicious threats" — *U.S. President Donald Trump*

"We should recognize that with these chronic underpayments and growing threats, even 2 percent of GDP is insufficient to close the gaps in modernizing, readiness, and the size of forces," Trump said. "We have to make up for the many years lost. Two percent is the bare minimum for confronting today's very real and very vicious threats."

Trump's insistence that certain allies "owe" has already chafed at some leaders, particularly German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who visited Washington and was told by Trump that her country owes "vast sums."

Germany is the wealthiest country not currently meeting the NATO spending goal, but officials in Berlin have reacted angrily to Trump's tone and his strict cash basis approach to measuring contributions to the alliance. German officials have noted with some annoyance that Trump seems not to grasp how NATO financing works, particularly that each nation is judged on the money it spends on its own military and that a 2014 pledge to move toward spending 2 percent of GDP in military spending was voluntary.

German officials have also noted that it is impossible to quantify the value to the United States or NATO of having American forces, weapons and equipment stationed on German soil as they have been for decades or the value of lives lost in NATO military operations such as the war in Afghanistan.

Dedication ceremony

Trump's speech, which he began by decrying the recent terror attack in Manchester and leading NATO leaders in a moment of silence for the victims, was unexpectedly long. It was part of a dedication ceremony for a memorial to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a twisted steel beam from the fallen World Trade Center site, which is intended as a reminder that the only time NATO invoked its collective defense clause was after that attack in the United States in September 2001.

And Trump began the ceremony to officially open the new NATO headquarters with an even more aggressive and unexpected move, appearing to physically shove Montenegro's Prime Minister Duško Marković out of the way to get to the front of the group and stand next to Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, often known as the tough man of Europe, seemed to react with a surprised smirk as Trump clapped Marković on the shoulder and muscled his way to the front of the group. The president then demonstratively squared his shoulders, puffed his chest and straightened his suit jacket.

Trump's tough remarks on military spending were widely expected, but there was an open question about the tone he would use, and whether he would couple his criticism with a strong endorsement of NATO's collective defense clause. His comments on spending were also expected to come at a closed-door leaders' dinner, rather than in a public speech during the memorial dedication ceremony.

Some of the leaders clearly seemed taken aback, and several smiled nervously when Trump punctuated his lecture on spending by declaring: "And I never asked once what the new NATO Headquarters cost. I refuse to do that. But it is beautiful."

If that was intended as a joke, it landed awkwardly. If not, it was a bizarre and striking display of an American president claiming magnanimity on the world stage. NATO's existing headquarters has lasted long past its intended use, with nearly 20 percent of the campus made up of portable structures. (Officials also insist that the new headquarters, with a final pricetag of €1.1 billion, cost slightly less than originally projected.)

While campaigning for office, Trump had raised doubts about his willingness as president to come to the aid of an ally under attack — unless allies made good on their financial commitments to NATO. Pressed on Trump's seeming unwillingness to commit to Article 5, the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, pushed back, telling reporters that doubts of Trump's commitment were "almost laughable" and that his visit was evidence of his support for NATO's core tenets.

Spicer also described the overall NATO meeting as a victory for Trump"It was a very positive reaction and affirmation of the president's priorities today," he told reporters traveling with the president.

But Trump's tirade about allies who "owe" debts left Stoltenberg in an uncomfortable and defensive position. At a news conference following the dinner, Stoltenberg insisted, under persistent questioning, that Trump's "blunt" message on spending was well-received by other leaders and that the focus of discussions was the 2014 pledge.

Stoltenberg did, however, suggest there was at least some dispute with Trump's framing of the

spending question. The secretary-general said the alliance would not just measure a country's commitment in cash. "The national plans will cover three major areas: cash, capabilities, and contributions," he said.

Manchester attack

While Trump's remarks at the public portion of the event went on longer than expected, his main themes — defense spending and terrorism — had been expected by everyone. What could not have been predicted was the attack in Manchester that killed 22 and injured dozens more, providing a grim backdrop for the president's push for NATO to take on more responsibility in fighting terror threats.

He initially directed his remarks at U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May, telling her "All of the nations here today grieve with you and stand with you." And he called for a moment of silence.

Then he began a tirade against terrorists, saying, "All people who cherish life must unite in finding, exposing, and removing these killers and extremists — and, yes, losers. They are losers. Wherever they exist in our societies, we must drive them out and never, ever let them back in."

He also claimed to have received a commitment from Middle Eastern leaders that they would fight radical ideologies.

The 2 percent goal is more complicated than Trump's remarks indicated.

"This call for driving out terrorism is a message I took to a historic gathering of Arab and Muslim leaders across the region, hosted by Saudi Arabia," he said, adding: "The leaders of the Middle East have agreed at this unprecedented meeting to stop funding the radical ideology that leads to this horrible terrorism all over the globe."

The Manchester attack also created another unexpected and, for Trump, deeply uncomfortable, sub-plot to the ceremony at NATO, with May expressing anger and dismay over leaks, apparently by U.S. officials of details about the attacker.

A senior U.K. government official said: "The prime minister raised the issue of the intelligence leaks with the president while they were waiting for the family photo to be taken. The prime minister expressed her view that the intelligence-sharing relationship with the U.S. is hugely important and valuable but obviously the intelligence needs to be kept secure."

The official would not characterize Trump's reaction, but there was no mistaking the weight of the apparent breach coming on the heels of Trump's own divulging of secret intelligence to senior Russian officials, in an apparent break with protocol and etiquette.

From his comments on Manchester, Trump moved on to his harangue on spending, which was forceful and unforgiving. "Over the last eight years, the United States spent more on defense than all other NATO countries combined," he said.

And, in a stinging rebuke to Stoltenberg who has worked hard to convince Trump that NATO is making good progress, the president insisted that even NATO's existing goals were insufficient.

"Two percent is the bare minimum for confronting today's very real and very vicious threats," Trump said.

The 2 percent goal is more complicated than Trump's remarks indicated. Agreed at a NATO summit in Wales in 2014, the pledge calls for allies to move voluntarily toward spending 2 percent of annual GDP on defense, and also for 20 percent of that spending to be investments in equipment. The second provision is a way of ensuring that the new money helps increase military capacity, rather than just going, for instance, to higher salaries for existing soldiers.

Stoltenberg had hoped to send Trump on to the G7 talks in Sicily with two clear victories: a commitment that each country falling short on spending would develop a plan by the end of this year show how they would meet the target, and efforts to beef up NATO's role in fighting terrorism.

"We will agree to establish a new terrorism intelligence cell here at NATO headquarters," Stoltenberg said Thursday morning. "Improving how we share intelligence, including on foreign fighters. And we will decide to appoint a coordinator to oversee NATO's efforts in the fight against terrorism."

The Washington Post

UNE - Trump chastises fellow NATO members, demands they meet payment obligations

BRUSSELS — President Trump exported the confrontational, -nationalist rhetoric of his campaign across the Atlantic on Thursday, scolding European leaders for not footing more of the bill for their own defense and lecturing them to stop taking advantage of U.S. taxpayers.

Speaking in front of a twisted shard of the World Trade Center at NATO's gleaming new headquarters in Brussels, Trump upbraided America's longtime allies for "not paying what they should be paying." He used a ceremony dedicating the memorial to NATO's resolve in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States as a platform to exhort leaders to "focus on terrorism and immigration" to ensure their security.

And he held back from the one pledge NATO leaders most wanted to hear: an unconditional embrace of the organization's solemn treaty commitment that an attack on a single alliance nation is an attack on all of them.

Instead, European leaders gazed unsmilingly at Trump while he said that "23 of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they are supposed to be paying," and that they owe "massive amounts" from past years — a misstatement of NATO's spending targets, which guide individual nations' own domestic spending decisions.

The harsh tone had a toll, as Trump was left largely on his own after the speech as leaders mingled and laughed with each other, leaving the U.S. president to stand silently on a stage ahead of a group photo.

The long day of gruff Brussels meetings was a contrast to his friendlier encounters in the Middle East, where Trump last weekend embraced the authoritarian Saudi monarchy and said he had been wowed by King Salman's wisdom.

In Brussels, Trump sat in a morning meeting with top European Union leaders where one emerged to say that his message to Trump was that the West should concentrate more on values such as human rights and less on "interests." The president lunched with French President Emmanuel Macron, an encounter in which the two leaders shook hands in a tense, white-knuckle embrace. And he sped across Brussels to NATO, where British Prime Minister Theresa May, the leader of Washington's closest ally, buttonholed him over intelligence leaks following Monday's terrorist attack in Manchester, England.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer, traveling with the president, played down the absence of Trump's formal commitment to security guarantees during the speech, saying that there was no question of U.S. support for NATO and all of the obligations that are entailed in membership.

"Having to reaffirm something by the very nature of being here and speaking at a ceremony about it is almost laughable," Spicer said after the speech.

In a news conference after the leaders had held a working dinner and Trump had departed for a meeting of the Group of Seven in Sicily, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, "We have seen that plain speaking of President Trump before."

Even if Trump did not say it, Stoltenberg said, he "has been clear on his commitment to NATO. But President Trump has also been clear in the message to all allies that we have to deliver on the pledge we made to increase defense spending. He was blunt on that message today."

Leaders offered modest applause at the end of a speech that Trump began by asking for a moment of silence in remembrance of the victims of Monday's terrorist attack in Manchester, which killed 22 and wounded many more.

Addressing the British, Trump said, "May all the nations here grieve with you and stand with you." The attack, he said, "demonstrates the depths of the evil we face with terrorism."

Trump did not refer to the British prime minister's irritation, expressed earlier in the day, over what officials in Britain have said was the leak to U.S. news media of intelligence information that Britain gathered in the investigation of the Manchester case and shared with the United States.

"We have strong relations with the United States, our closest partner," May told reporters as she entered NATO's $1.2 billion new headquarters for the ceremony, "and that is, of course, built on trust. Part of that is knowing intelligence can be shared confidently, and I will make clear to President Trump that intelligence shared with law

enforcement agencies must be secure."

May talked with Trump about the issue inside the closed meetings, a senior British government official said.

Trump is already under fire at home for allegedly violating intelligence agreements, following Washington Post reporting that he revealed sensitive information on the Islamic State, obtained from Israel, to the Russian foreign minister and the Russian ambassador to the United States.

In a presidential statement issued while Trump was at the ceremony, he called the Manchester leaks "deeply troubling," vowed to "get to the bottom" of them and called for a full investigation by U.S. agencies, one that could end with prosecutions, he said.

During last year's campaign, Trump called into question the U.S. commitment to NATO's security guarantees, saying he would check a member's defense commitment before coming to its aid. Since then, Cabinet officials have pledged to defend the alliance, but top officials of other NATO allies said that Trump's personal guarantee would eliminate any lingering doubts.

In the Brussels speech, Trump gave no specific commitment to Article 5, the collective-security provision that has been invoked only once — after the 9/11 attacks.

A senior administration official said that "the intent was to deliver a direct message, which he's done before. He's been direct with them in rallies, in speeches. He wanted to give the same message that he's been giving when NATO leaders are present or are not present," the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to expand on Trump's remarks. "It's the same message he gave on the campaign trail, it's the same message he gives to the American people, and it's the same message he gives to leaders one-on-one."

Trump began his day in Brussels at a meeting with E.U. leaders Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker.

"Values and principles first, this is what we — Europe and America — should be saying," Tusk told reporters after the meeting. Tusk, who has previously expressed concern about the new U.S. administration, said he and Trump agreed on counterterrorism but did not see eye to eye on a number of other issues, including climate change, trade and Russia.

Europe has been concerned about Trump's relationship with Russia, particularly over sanctions imposed after its 2014 military involvement in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. Some U.S. lawmakers have proposed additional sanctions in response to what U.S. intelligence has said was Russia's interference in the U.S. presidential election last year.

National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn, who briefed reporters aboard Air Force One en route to the G-7 meeting, said the president is "looking" at sanctions against Russia. "Right now," he said, "we don't have a position."

At lunch with Trump, Macron repeated France's urging that the United States not pull out of the 2015 Paris climate accord, a decision at which Trump has hinted but which the administration says has not been made.

On this fourth and penultimate stop on Trump's nine-day trip, the first overseas travel of his presidency, Trump did not appear to find the near-adulation he experienced from Arab leaders in Saudi Arabia, and from the Israeli government in Jerusalem.

During those stops, the leaders agreed with Trump's call to concentrate on counterterrorism and economic growth, with no discussion, at least in public, of human and civil rights concerns that had dogged U.S.-Middle East relationships under President Barack Obama. Compared with his clear ebullience and declarations of personal friendship with leaders in the Middle East, Trump appeared standoffish and solitarily glum among his NATO colleagues.

NATO's leaders used the excuse of the vast new headquarters to invite the former real estate mogul for a ribbon-cutting, even though construction on the site — a former military airfield — has not been completed. Beyond its official purpose, however, the meeting was designed to allow Trump and NATO to take the measure of each other.

Some allies have felt the golden word of the president would finalize the message to Russia and others across the NATO border that the United States had their backs.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

"At the end of the day, all important decisions are made by the president. And usually the president has a few options on the table," Latvia's state secretary for foreign affairs, Andrejs Pildegovics, said ahead of the dinner meeting. Afterward, he said he still heard an endorsement of the relevance of NATO's traditional mission.

NATO pledged in 2014 that all members will reach the goal of spending at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense within 10 years. Stoltenberg noted Thursday morning that overall spending among members has been up for two years in a row, and he said he anticipated that increases would now speed up as the alliance addresses the terrorism threat.

He also said NATO was ready to join the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State — to which all individual members already belong. Among other increased contributions to counterterrorism — which Trump has urged — he said the alliance would step up support of NATO AWACS planes and intelligence-sharing, and provide refueling capabilities.

"We will now establish a new intelligence fusion cell at the headquarters addressing terrorism, including foreign fights," and appoint a special coordinator for NATO's counterterrorism efforts, Stoltenberg said. He called it a "strong political message" as well as a practical one.

Stoltenberg also said NATO would consider increasing its noncombat troop presence in Afghanistan. The Trump administration is reviewing the U.S. presence there, including possibly adding some 3,000 troops to the 8,400 already on the ground and expanding their role, which now consists of assisting Afghan government forces fighting both the Taliban and a local Islamic State presence.

THE DAILY BEAST

Daly : Trump Shamed Us All With His NATO Money Talk

President Trump might have at least praised his wife's tiny homeland of Slovenia for being among the many nations that sent troops to Afghanistan after 9/11 prompted the U.S. to invoke Article 5, as NATO's collective defense provision is known.

Trump also could have recognized Denmark, which by a measure first applied to this war by Steve Coll of *The New Yorker* has suffered a slightly higher per capita rate of combat casualties in Afghanistan than has even the United States.

Trump could have noted that Estonia has nearly the same fatality rate we do. He could have added that a number of the Estonian soldiers had fathers who had also served in Afghanistan—as draftees in the Soviet army before their own country even had one.

He could have also recognized Lithuania, Belgium, Slovakia, Latvia, Sweden, Hungary, Estonia, Norway, the Czech Republic, Greece, Turkey, Romania, the Netherlands. Georgia, Bulgaria, Portugal, Croatia, Spain, Denmark, Poland, Italy, Germany, France, Canada and the United Kingdom, all of which answered the call, almost all of which suffered fatalities.

That also includes little Montenegro, whose prime minister Trump smilingly pushed aside so he could get to front at the NATO gathering.

But Trump mentioned none of that as he stood beside a piece of World Trade Center steel known as "Article V Artifact," and delivered a speech at Thursday's dedication of the new NATO headquarters.

He did call for a moment of silence for the innocents who had been killed at Monday's bombing in Manchester. And he did thank the September 11 Memorial and Museum for providing "this twisted mass of steel." He spoke movingly of the artifact's meaning.

"We will never forget the lives that were lost," he said. "We will never forget the friends who stood by our side."

He said this without acknowledging the lives that were lost by the friends who stood by our side. And he saw no need to reaffirm America's commitment to Article 5 should our friends ever call on us as we called on them.

Instead, the man who once proudly declared himself the king of debt chose this moment to say they owed us money.

"NATO members must finally contribute their fair share and meet their financial obligations, for 23 of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying," he declared.

Never mind that all of those 23 sent troops to Afghanistan.

Rather than laud them, he dunned them.

"This is not fair to the people and taxpayers of the United States," said the man who stiffed countless people and taxpayers, failing to pay nearly 300 contractors on a single project even as he siphoned off millions.

Maybe those nations that responded so quickly and selflessly to aid us after 9/11 should consider Trump's prime strategy when faced with daunting debt.

The guy who failed to affirm NATO's collective defense pact while standing beside the Artifact of Article 5 is himself a living Artifact of Chapter 11.

He repeatedly used bankruptcy to dodge what he now so piously speaks of as "financial obligations" as part of a continuing scheme by which he became REALLY RICH.

Of course, Trump never even would have considered putting himself in harm's way. His three kids sure didn't, though they were all of military age in the aftermath of 9/11 and the attack was on their home city.

Donald Jr. and Eric did take up arms and leave our shores, but that was to go big game hunting in Africa thanks to a family fortune built with bankruptcy bucks.

While Danes and Estonians were risking—and too often losing—their lives taking on al Qaeda and the Taliban, Donald Jr. and Eric were shooting an elephant and a cheetah and other creatures who could not shoot back.

Not that the boys had much of an example in their father when it came to 9/11.

The future president spoke of seeing news footage nobody else saw of Muslims in Jersey City cheering the attack. He said he had lost "hundreds of friends," though he never named even one of them and was seen at none of the hundreds of funerals and memorials afterward. He bragged that with the two towers gone he now had the tallest building in Lower Manhattan.

While Rosie O'Donnell—the woman he loves to insult—reached in her pocket on 9/12 and committed $1 million of her own money to the victims' families, Trump pledged only $10,000 and apparently failed to make good even on that. He appears to have given next to nothing until he was running for president last year, when made his first ever visit to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum and presented it with $200,000. The check was drawn on his foundation, to which he had contributed nothing in eight years. He breezed past the pictures of the murdered innocents, including hundreds of his supposed friends, with less visible effect than when he strides through what he likes to call "the biggest Duane Reade in the world" in his building downtown.

But all that was already known on Election Day, and he still won.

And there he was, our president, at Thursday's event at NATO headquarters, deciding it was a time to speak of money owed rather than sacrifice beyond measure.

He shamed us all.

But we do not have to share his crass indifference.

Just as we did not need Donald Trump to honor those who died at the Twin Towers, we do not need him to honor those from so many other lands who nobly stepped forward in the years that followed.

As we approach our Memorial Day, consider these words from Daniel Henriken, a 22-year-old soldier from Denmark, which proportionately made a greater sacrifice than we did ourselves.

"Before we went on patrol, I always called my mother and told her that I love her," Henriken was quoted saying on a Danish website. "It was a kind of code meaning that I might be going on a patrol where it might get dangerous—without those words actually being said. I am proud of what we do, proud of being a Dane. I think that I have made a difference."

He closed by saying, "Hell yeah, I have done my part in making the world a better place to live."

Tak, Daniel.

Thank you.

THE DAILY BEAST

Trump Goes 'America First' Ugly at NATO Summit

Like a dad scolding a kid who has skipped his chores, President Donald Trump put NATO members on notice, bawling out the almost two dozen members who haven't spent enough on defense.

It was one of many ways in which Trump's debut at the world's most important military alliance was more like a campaign speech than a diplomatic address.

"Twenty-three of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defense," Trump said on Thursday to the assembled leaders, in his first visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels. "This is not fair to the people and taxpayers of the United States," he said, adding that the U.S. had spent more on defense over the last eight years than all other NATO countries combined.

It was a jarring lecture as NATO allies stood shoulder to shoulder after unveiling a plaque memorializing how they all responded to America's request for help after al Qaeda attacked New York and Washington.

Trump followed the dressing down with a slightly snarky aside saying, "I never asked once what the new NATO headquarters cost," referring to the gleaming new billion-dollar NATO headquarters he just helped open and hinting it probably cost too much. It was a rare flash of campaign trail Trump in the carefully choreographed official remarks during his whistle-stop overseas tour that has hopscotched from Saudi Arabia to Israel to Rome to Belgium and goes on to Sicily.

The trip, arranged by his son-in-law and one of his closest White House advisers, Jared Kushner, sketched out the foreign policy goals of his presidency: defeating the so-called Islamic State and al Qaeda; bringing peace to Israelis and Palestinians; and shoring up foreign alliances so the U.S. doesn't have to bear what the Trump administration considers an unfair burden of blood and treasure to police world instability.

For his base, calling on NATO members to pay up is a key tenet of his "America First" policy. Only four other NATO members, Britain, Estonia, Greece and Poland, invest two percent of their gross domestic product in defense and the rest have pledged to meet the requirement by 2024. But that's not fast enough for the Trump administration. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told the members two months ago that they should present a plan to meet that goal at this meeting.

They didn't, but NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said they would eventually. "We decided to develop annual national plans, setting out how allies intend to meet the defense investment pledge we made together in 2014," he said. The State Department declined to comment on the 23 nations' failure to deliver.

Trump telegraphed disdain for at least some members of NATO when he visibly shoved Prime Minister Duško Markovic of Montenegro out of the way to get closer to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, a video clip sure to become a meme of the ugliest expression of America First.

"I am somewhat perplexed when you're at a ceremony that is centered around Article 5," which he said shows U.S. commitment just by taking part. He called the criticism that the president didn't verbally affirm that commitment "almost laughable."

Trump did mention NATO's Article 5 in his remarks, which requires all allies to respond to any member under attack, by recognizing the first and only time it was triggered was by the U.S., asking for help after 9/11.

Some members had hoped Trump would go further and repudiate his campaign trail remarks in which he warned broadly that he might not come to the aid of countries who hadn't met their two percent investment target—a hope Trump's press secretary Sean Spicer derided in remarks to reporters after the event.

"I am somewhat perplexed when you're at a ceremony that is centered around Article 5," which he said shows U.S. commitment just by taking part. He called the criticism that the president didn't verbally affirm that commitment "almost laughable."

Instead, Trump used his reference to Article 5, combined with the suicide bomb attack in northern England on Monday, to pivot to his belief that NATO should turn its sights on militants as one of its primary missions.

"The recent attack on Manchester demonstrates the depths of the evil we face with terrorism," he said, referring to the suicide bombing that killed 22 people including children as they were leaving an Ariana Grande concert. "It was a barbaric and vicious attack on our civilization."

Trump has previously claimed credit for NATO counterterror programs that started before his campaign or presidency. After this visit, however, he'll be able to claim credit for pushing a proposal the NATO leaders approved Thursday to join the 69-member ISIS coalition. That gives Trump a deliverable for his base—albeit, somewhat limited, in that most NATO members are already part of the anti-ISIS coalition.

NATO chief Stoltenberg gave Trump one more deliverable Thursday, announcing the

establishment of a "terrorism intelligence cell within our new intelligence division," to improve information sharing on the foreign fighter threat.

Trump revisited his speech Sunday to Arab and Muslim leaders, calling on NATO members to help eject "these killers and extremists and yes, losers, they are losers."

Once again, there was no use of his one-time catchphrase on the subject, "radical Islamic terrorism," that apparently having been erased by the studious efforts of his national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who finds the phrase causes more harm than good, alienating the large majority of Muslims who the U.S. needs to cooperate to battle extremism.

So instead of slamming "radical Islamic" ideology in the NATO address, he said of the Saudi summit, "Leaders agreed to stop funding the radical ideology that leads to this horrible terrorism all over the globe."

Trump sprinkled the speech with incomplete phrases he'd used on the campaign, like signposts for his base that show he's still aiming at resolving the same issues though using more tempered language.

"You have thousands and thousands of people pouring into our various countries and spreading throughout, and in many cases, we have no idea who they are," he said, when calling on NATO to do more on immigration to fight terrorism. That line was a clear if unintended homage to his campaign trail press release "calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what's going on."

In another appeal to Trump voters who fear an influx of Mideast terrorists via refugee flows or Latin American fence-jumpers who would steal American jobs and commit crimes against its people, he deployed lines like this: "We must drive them out and never ever let them back in."

The White House pool reporter (Philip Rucker of *The Washington Post*) wrote that at times during the ceremony, "Trump crossed his arms and fidgeted slightly, looking around at the scene before him or staring down at his feet." When the meeting adjourned, and some of the other leaders stopped to mingle, Trump talked to no one and walked out alone.

UNE - In NATO Speech, Trump Is Vague About Mutual Defense Pledge

Michael D. Shear, Mark Landler and James Kanter

"Twenty-three of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defense," Mr. Trump declared, as the leaders shifted uncomfortably behind him, shooting one another sidelong glances.

"This is not fair to the people and taxpayers of the United States," he added. "And many of these nations owe massive amounts of money from past years and not paying in those past years."

Standing before a large piece of twisted wreckage from the World Trade Center that will serve as a memorial at the headquarters, Mr. Trump promised to "never forsake the friends that stood by our side" in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks — a pledge that White House officials later said was an affirmation of mutual defense.

But to European leaders, Mr. Trump's words fell far short of an explicit affirmation of NATO's Article 5 clause, the "one-for-all, all-for-one" principle that has been the foundation of the alliance since its establishment 68 years ago, after World War II.

"I think he was stingy with the U.S. commitment and very generous with his criticisms," said Fabrice Pothier, a former head of policy planning at NATO and a senior associate at Rasmussen Global, a political consulting firm.

White House officials said Mr. Trump's message on financial contributions had galvanized NATO to confront the issue. At a closed meeting after his speech, they said, the leaders unanimously approved a resolution on burden-sharing and on fighting terrorism.

Trump Tells NATO Members to Pay 'Fair Share'

In a statement at the NATO headquarters in Brussels, President Trump said that members of the alliance must "finally contribute" their fair share to defense spending and that it was "not fair to the people and taxpayers of the United States."

"To see unanimous support for the two main priorities of the president is a great way to start it off," said Sean Spicer, the press secretary. "When you have an entire meeting that is focused on the president's agenda, that shows the power of his message."

Publicly, though, the other leaders appeared less gratified than bewildered. During a photo-taking session, none of them spoke to Mr. Trump, except for the secretary general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg. Afterward, several surrounded Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, who has emerged as the strongest counterweight to the president.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Trump, a blunt critic of the European Union during his campaign, received a chilly reception from his European counterparts as they began meetings in Brussels.

His first meeting with the Continent's leaders began with officials from the United States and Europe saying nothing to each other. After being welcomed to Brussels, Mr. Trump said, "Thank you very much," but he was otherwise silent as he gazed at the cameras across the room.

Donald Tusk, who represents leaders of the bloc's 28 member states as president of the European Council, made it clear after the morning meeting that there had been several areas of disagreement.

"Some issues remained open, like climate and trade," Mr. Tusk said after the meeting at the European Union's lavish new headquarters. "And I am not 100 percent sure that we can say today — 'we' means Mr. President and myself — that we have a common position, common opinion, about Russia."

In the talks, Mr. Trump and Mr. Tusk differed over the intentions and policies of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, according to a person with direct knowledge of the meeting who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the talks were private. That reflects growing anxiety in Europe over what appear to be Russia's efforts to meddle in elections here and in the United States.

The subject of Russia did not come up in a broader meeting between American and European officials, said Michael Anton, a spokesman for the National Security Council. But Mr. Anton said he could not speak for a smaller meeting with Mr. Trump, Mr. Tusk and the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker.

The White House put a more positive spin on the day, saying the leaders had discussed ways to deepen cooperation in fighting the Islamic State and reaffirmed "the strong bond between the United States and Europe, anchored in shared values and longstanding friendship."

Climate change is another bone of contention, however. European leaders are turning up the pressure on Mr. Trump not to withdraw from the Paris climate accord that was ratified last year.

The campaign began on Wednesday at the Vatican, where Pope Francis gave Mr. Trump a copy of his influential encyclical on protecting the environment, and the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, urged the president not to withdraw from the accord.

Mr. Trump told Vatican officials that he had not made a final decision and that he was not likely to do so until after a Group of 7 meeting this weekend in Taormina, Sicily, according to Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson. The president's senior advisers have been deadlocked for months over whether the United States should withdraw.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada was among those who said he planned to press Mr. Trump on climate change.

"One of the things that we understand in Canada is that investing in clean energy and investing in fighting against climate change is going to help us," Mr. Trudeau said, citing efforts by governments and businesses to find ways to avoid polluting the planet.

Mr. Trump's handling of Article 5 epitomizes the gulf between him and other leaders. His steadfast refusal to endorse it as a candidate, and later as president, has raised fears among NATO allies about whether the United States would come to their defense in the event of an attack.

Other American officials have offered reassurances. Mr. Tillerson told reporters traveling on Air Force One this week, "Of course we support Article 5." But until Mr. Trump speaks those words, leaders of other NATO nations seem bound to remain concerned.

Instead, Mr. Trump criticized the other leaders for not contributing 2 percent of their countries' gross domestic product to their defense, as they have agreed to do but have often fallen short of. He even took a shot at the new headquarters, a vast glass-and-steel edifice that

looks like a series of interconnected airplane hangars.

"I never asked once what the new NATO headquarters cost," Mr. Trump said. "I refuse to do so. But it looks beautiful."

In 2014, NATO members agreed to increase their defense spending gradually to meet the 2 percent of G.D.P. goal, with 20 percent of that spending on military equipment. Those commitments have not changed, and after remaining flat in 2015, spending increased last year among non-American alliance members.

The alarm in Europe over Mr. Trump's presidency has diminished since the days immediately after his election, in part because emissaries like Mr. Tillerson and Vice President Mike Pence have reaffirmed American support for NATO and the European Union.

But Mr. Trump, who once described Brussels as a "hellhole" overrun with radicals, remains an object of deep suspicion in the city. For some of the European leaders, testing Mr. Trump seemed to be as important as finding common ground with him.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump, EU Leaders Air Competing Visions in Brussels Meeting

Laurence Norman and William Horobin

BRUSSELS—U.S. President Donald Trump held his first meetings with French President Emmanuel Macron and senior European Union leaders on Thursday here, the capital of a bloc whose future he has questioned and whose opponents he has feted.

The Brussels meetings bring together champions of two competing world visions and leaders who have used each other as foils to build domestic support. After the meetings, it was clear many critical differences remained.

"There are subjects we don't have the same reading of, but we were able to speak in a very direct way," Mr. Macron said after he and Mr. Trump had lunch together.

Before their lunch, the French and U.S. leaders engaged in a long handshake, which saw Mr. Macron keep a grip on Mr. Trump's hand as the latter apparently tried to pull away. Later, it was Mr. Trump's turn to take control, pulling Mr. Macron in close to him when the two shook hands at a North Atlantic Treaty Organization gathering.

Mr. Trump was a vocal supporter of Britain's decision to leave the EU in June 2016, seeing in it the kind of antiestablishment, nationalist revival he was tapping into for his own presidential bid.

Shortly before taking office, he said the EU was largely a "vehicle for Germany." While he stayed officially neutral in the recent French presidential election, he hailed Mr. Macron's rival, nationalist leader Marine Le Pen, as the strongest on borders and security.

Europe's leaders have responded in kind. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker threatened to campaign for the independence of Ohio if Mr. Trump continued supporting the EU's breakup. Mr. Macron challenged the U.S. president's stance on immigration, trade and climate change during his campaign.

Yet officials on both sides said they were looking to bolster trust. Failure to do so could have repercussions across many issues, including the Paris climate accord, the Iranian nuclear deal and the fight against terrorism.

European officials said that after pro-EU candidates won elections in France and the Netherlands in recent months, the EU's leaders came into Thursday's meeting with renewed confidence, no longer fearful of the bloc's survival. They saw the very fact of Mr. Trump's meeting with them as evidence the new president now takes the bloc seriously.

There are also fewer major foreign policy differences with Mr. Trump than appeared likely in January. U.S. policy on Ukraine has barely shifted and Mr. Trump's promised thaw with Moscow hasn't materialized. The U.S. military response to the chemical weapons attack in early April has lined Washington up with the EU's stance that the Assad regime cannot be part of Syria's future.

After the meeting with Mr. Trump, EU officials said the two sides had agreed to tighten coordination on trade issues, including responding to unfair practices by third countries, such as China.

And at his meeting with Mr. Macron, Mr. Trump denied backing Ms. Le Pen during the French election campaign, according to a French official present. At one moment, the U.S. president told Mr. Macron "you were my guy," the French official said.

Yet there was little effort to mask continued differences. In a short statement to reporters, European Council President Donald Tusk said while there was agreement on many questions, "some issues remain open, like climate and trade."

"And I am not 100% sure that we can say today—we, meaning Mr. President Trump and myself—that we have a common position, a common opinion about Russia," he said.

Mr. Juncker described the meeting with Mr. Trump as cordial and constructive. But he also seemed a little wary of the U.S. leader. Asked at a press conference about his impressions of Mr. Trump, Mr. Juncker said, "I hope he hasn't sent a tweet about me yet."

Mr. Trump's lunch with Mr. Macron was "extremely frank and direct," the French leader said, covering a broad range of subjects including Thursday afternoon's NATO summit and the weekend meeting of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations.

The 39-year-old Mr. Macron pledged during the presidential campaign to ramp up France's military spending to reach the NATO target of 2% of economic output by 2025, a demand Mr. Trump called a bare minimum later Thursday.

The future of the Paris climate agreement was another issue on which Mr. Macron and Mr. Trump locked horns. Mr. Trump has previously threatened to jettison U.S. adherence to the deal. At lunch with Mr. Macron, he said the U.S. and France have "differences but not disagreement," on the subject, French officials said.

Mr. Macron told Mr. Trump the agreement was crucial for the international community and economic development but said he respected Mr. Trump's decision to review it, according to French officials.

"My wish is for the U.S. not to take a precipitous decision," Mr. Macron said.

Despite the bumpy meetings between Mr. Trump and his European counterparts on Thursday, the U.S. president's team said they felt Mr. Trump had made good progress this week in building firmer ties.

"The relationships continue to grow stronger and stronger," said White House spokesman Sean Spicer. "Today was another great day in terms of the relationships that have been made and continue to be built."

POLITICO

Trump still hasn't given allied leaders what they want

By Tara Palmeri

SICILY — Despite a day of pitches from European leaders, President Donald Trump has yet to give them what they want — a commitment to the Paris climate accord ahead of the G7 summit.

Trump departed late Thursday from Brussels, where he met with his fellow NATO heads of state, and headed to Sicily, where he embarks Friday on his first meeting with leaders of the G7.

Trump's national economic advisor Gary Cohn set the bar low for any strong commitments from the U.S. at the global summit, where Trump will meet with his Canadian, French, German, Italian, Japanese and British counterparts.

"The G7 is set up to be more of an ad-hoc session where the leaders get together and they listen and talk to each other," Cohn told U.S. reporters on the way to Italy.

"The president has told you that he's going to ultimately make a decision on Paris and climate when he gets back," Cohn added. "He's interested to hear what the G7 leaders have to say about climate. It will be a fairly robust discussion on that."

That position is a departure from standard practice for international summits, at which policy commitments are typically agreed in advance.

Diplomats from other nations said their top priority was keeping Trump in the Paris accord, a 2015 agreement intended to limit global warming.

Trump has argued that the regulations imposed hamper domestic economic growth but has

said he would consider some pollution limits.

"This time there's going to be a substantive negotiation that can last late into the night Friday into Saturday on a final communiqué," warned a French official. "We want the most ambitious agreement possible, and we don't want the United States to leave."

While the EU leaders described the meeting as "cordial" and "friendly," it was clear that the new and unpredictable American president had not offered reassurances on some core areas of concern for Brussels.

European Council President Donald Tusk said they had found common ground on fighting terrorism, and appeared to be "on the same line" about the conflict in Ukraine. But Tusk said there were unresolved questions on trade and climate change – two topics that will be addressed at the G7 summit.

"Some issues remained open like climate and trade," EU Council President Donald Tusk told reporters shortly after a meeting at EU headquarters in Brussels on Thursday morning.

He reserved his most pointed remarks for the U.S. position on Russia though. "I am not sure that we can say 100 percent today that we have a common position, common opinion about Russia," Tusk said.

Sanctions on Russia were also raised at the NATO summit, but Trump has not taken a position either way. "I think the president is looking at it. Right now, we don't have a position," Cohn said.

There is one point Trump has been clear on -- the fight against terrorism. Trump will continue his discussion from the middle east portion of his trip about raising funding to fight terrorism. His goal is to get the G7 and them G20 involved. Cyber security will also be a major topic.

"Terrorism is going to be a very big topic," Cohn said. "It's going to lead off."

He suggested that Trump may give more clues on his trade policy on Friday in Sicily.

"We are going to continue to fight for what we believe is right, which is free, open and fair trade, which the president has been very clear on what that means," he said.

"We will have a very robust discussion on trade and we will be talking about what the president means by free and open is, we will treat you the way you treat us, meaning if you don't have barriers to trade or you don't have tariffs, we won't have tariffs."

Editorial Board : President Trump Fails NATO

President Trump's first NATO meeting was the moment to show that he would honor the example of his predecessors in leading a strong and unified alliance that has been and should remain the anchor of Western security. He failed.

Instead of explicitly endorsing the mutual defense pledge at the heart of the alliance, Mr. Trump lectured the members for falling short on pledges to spend 2 percent of their gross domestic products on the military, much as he had hectored them on this subject during his presidential campaign. There were signs, too, that Mr. Trump and the allies remain at odds over Russia, which is deeply unsettling given mounting questions about Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

Mr. Trump has a point when he says the allies should increase their military budgets, which they have started to do, partly in response to Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine. But his obsession with the matter has reinforced the impression that he sees NATO as essentially a transactional arrangement, not as an indisputably important alliance that has kept the peace for 70 years and whose value cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Against this history, Mr. Trump's repeated scolds are not just condescending but embarrassing.

What possesses him to treat America's allies so badly? The NATO nations are mostly democracies with vibrant free markets that have helped America keep enemies at bay, including in Afghanistan. The question is made all the more pressing in view of Mr. Trump's enthusiastic embrace of countless autocrats, among them Vladimir Putin of Russia and King Salman of Saudi Arabia, where he just paid a deferential visit and assured Sunni Arab leaders that "we are not here to lecture" despite their abominable records on human rights.

This perplexing dichotomy has been vividly captured in video and photographs — Mr. Trump laughing comfortably with Russia's foreign minister and ambassador to Washington during a recent Oval Office meeting, while refusing to shake the hand of Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany when she came to town. There was more of the same in Brussels, with Mr. Trump shoving aside the prime minister of Montenegro, which recently defied Russia to join NATO, on his way to a front row spot for a photograph.

The allies had hoped to hear a robust endorsement of the NATO Treaty's Article 5, which commits them to a "one-for-all, all-for-one" principle that has been the foundation of the alliance since it was established. What they got instead was a vague promise to "never forsake the friends who stood by our side" after the Sept. 11 attacks, and assurances from Sean Spicer, the press secretary, of a "100 percent commitment to Article 5." This would have been more persuasive coming from Mr. Trump, since he and not Mr. Spicer had denigrated NATO as "obsolete" and suggested darkly that the United States might not defend allies under attack if they did not contribute more to the alliance.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has been no more credible than Mr. Spicer. "Of course we support Article 5," he told reporters earlier this week, presumably assuming that the president would say much the same thing in Brussels. That Mr. Trump did not reinforces the common perception that Mr. Tillerson has no more influence over his thinking than do Jim Mattis, the defense secretary, and Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, the national security adviser, on whom many had counted to put Mr. Trump's foreign policy on a more responsible path.

That Mr. Trump and the allies were unable to agree on a common approach toward Russia was also worrisome. Moscow has become increasingly aggressive as Mr. Putin annexed Crimea, waged war in eastern Ukraine, meddled in the American and European elections and intervened militarily in Syria. The most that emerged from a meeting between Mr. Trump and Donald Tusk, president of the European Council, was that the two shared the "same line" on Ukraine.

All told, Mr. Trump's commitment to NATO and America's tradition of leadership remain very much up in the air. Should the president abdicate both, no one would be happier than Vladimir Putin.

How Trump and Europe rebonded

The Christian Science Monitor

May 25, 2017 —During his first official trip to Europe this week, President Trump was politely asked to back the defining glue of the Continent and the transatlantic partnership. Both the European Union and NATO – the core of what is called "the West" – have enough issues without the uncertainties of Mr. Trump's "America First" theme of the past year. The West, advised European Council President Donald Tusk, needs to focus on "values ... not just interests."

Both the EU and NATO are too often defined by what they are against, such as Russian aggression, trade protectionism, terrorism, and anti-democratic forces. This approach alone can lead to splits over the nature of the threats or how to respond to them. Britain, for example, is leaving the EU because of differences over risks such as refugees. Yet safety and prosperity for any alliance of nations are best assured through a higher and collective practice of shared ideals.

"Values and principles first, this is what we – Europe and America – should be saying," Mr. Tusk said. He listed a few of the values as freedom, human rights, and respect for human dignity.

A values-first approach helps Europe and the United States make the necessary sacrifices for a greater good. After some initial waffling, for example, the Trump administration has lately reaffirmed a US commitment to NATO's mutual defense pledge, known as Article 5. That will be comforting to Poland and the Baltic States, which border Russia. And since 2014, after the Russian taking of Ukrainian territory, most NATO members have responded to a US

concern and are steadily raising military spending to 2 percent of their gross domestic product by 2024. NATO has also promised to assist the US more in the struggle against Islamic State and may do more in Afghanistan.

The EU also seems to be avoiding any further drift toward hard-right nationalism. The May election of centrist Emmanuel Macron as French president, as well as the expected reelection of Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany this fall, show that the core nations of Europe remain committed to the Union's promise of continental peace and economic openness.

Just as hopeful is the continuing desire of a few more former Soviet-bloc states to join the EU or NATO. The tiny Balkan nation of Montenegro, for example, is set to join NATO next month while Ukraine and others are on track to join the EU.

The idealism of both the EU and NATO – and not just the nationalist "interests" they might fulfill in membership – remains a big draw. Both are no longer merely regional or transatlantic bodies. By standing for universal values, they have become a global force for good. No matter what new threats or issues come along, their "glue" holds them together.

Boot : NATO and Saudi Arabia bookend Donald Trump's hypocrisy tour

At the beginning of his first overseas trip, President Trump spoke in Riyadh on May 21. Four days later, on May 25, he spoke in Brussels. The difference in tone between the two speeches is striking for what it says about his evolving foreign policy — and who he regards as America's true friends.

Saudi Arabia has been a difficult ally for the United States. It is one of the most repressive regimes in the world. It sent its armed forces to repress protesters in Bahrain and to bomb the Houthis in Yemen with scant regard for civilian casualties. It promotes a fundamentalist strain of Islam — Wahhabism — that has inspired countless terrorists. It is the homeland of 15 of the 19 9/11 hijackers. There is no suggestion that the Saudi government sanctioned the attack, and the Saudis have done much to crack down on terrorism in the years since, but wealthy Saudis are still suspected of supporting extremist groups such as Al Qaeda.

Trump has previously lashed out at the Saudis in intemperate language. "Saudi Arabia and many of the countries that gave vast amounts of money to the Clinton Foundation want women as slaves and to kill gays," he wrote in a Facebook post in June 2016. "Hillary must return all money from such countries!" In a presidential debate, he again attacked Hillary Clinton for taking money from "people that kill women and treat women horribly." He also suggested on the campaign trail that "very secret" documents would prove that the Saudis were behind the 9/11 attacks.

Yet in his Riyadh speech there was not a hint of criticism of Saudi Arabia — for anything. Trump began with a tribute to the Saudi-U.S. alliance, offered a fulsome tribute to King Salman for his "strong demonstration of leadership," and pointedly promised not to preach about human rights abuses: "We are not here to lecture — we are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship. Instead, we are here to offer partnership — based on shared interests and values — to pursue a better future for us all."

These soothing words were accompanied by pictures of Trump and his entourage partying with the Saudi royal family. Contrast this with the images emanating from Trump's meetings with European leaders in Brussels. From his test-of-wills handshake with France's new president, Emmanuel Macron, to his shoving aside the prime minister of Montenegro, Milo Dukanović, to get into the front of a photograph, there was a notable lack of warmth in Trump's interactions with his fellow democratic leaders.

Trump has been critical of America's NATO partners in the past, suggesting that the alliance may be "obsolete" and complaining that the other nations weren't paying their fair share for defense. And in Brussels, unlike in Riyadh, he did not bury old antagonisms.

"NATO members must finally contribute their fair share and meet their financial obligations, for 23 of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defense," Trump lectured, while allied heads-of-state squirmed in discomfort. "This is not fair to the people and taxpayers of the United States. And many of these nations owe massive amounts of money from past years."

There were no tributes to shared trans-Atlantic values, no remarks on the history of the trans-Atlantic alliance, which has been the most important in history. Trump did not even affirm, as expected, Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty, the bedrock of NATO, which says than an attack on one member is an attack on all. Instead Trump delivered an undiplomatic demand in public for more money.

Should NATO allies spend more for defense? Sure. But, as noted on Twitter by Ivo Daalder, a former ambassador to NATO, "23 countries increased defense spending last year. 8 countries will spend 2% on military next year. All allies committed in 2014 to spend at least 2% on defense by 2024." Trump did not acknowledge this progress, nor did he thank the allies for sending troops to fight and die alongside American forces in Afghanistan. He even added a bizarre demand for back-payment of defense dollars. We should be grateful that he did not present Macron with a bill for D-Day. If *Der Spiegel* is to be believed, however, Trump did call Germany "bad, very bad" (or, depending on your translation, "evil, very evil") for running a trade surplus with the United States.

While berating our NATO allies, Trump had next to nothing to say about the threat from Russia; he argued that NATO must focus on "terrorism and immigration" instead. European Council President Donald Trusk emerged from his meeting with Trump to say there is no "common position" on Russia, because Trump is much softer on Vladimir Putin than Russia's neighbors would like. Apparently Trump is less offended by Russia's invasion of Ukraine than by Germany's sale of luxury cars to Americans.

This is very revealing, and not in a good way. Trump clearly prefers autocrats to democrats. He views the Saudis as truer friends than the Europeans. And he doesn't see Russia as a threat. In his first foray abroad, Trump displayed a worldview radically at odds with those of his predecessors going back decades.

Zakaria : How Saudi Arabia played Donald Trump

This week's bombing in Manchester, England, was another gruesome reminder that the threat from radical Islamist terrorism is ongoing. And President Trump's journey to the Middle East illustrated yet again how the country central to the spread of this terrorism, Saudi Arabia, has managed to evade and deflect any responsibility for it. In fact, Trump has given Saudi Arabia a free pass and a free hand in the region.

The facts are well-known. For five decades, Saudi Arabia has spread its narrow, puritanical and intolerant version of Islam — originally practiced almost nowhere else — across the Muslim world. Osama bin Laden was Saudi, as were 15 of the 19 9/11 terrorists.

And we know, via a leaked email from former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, in recent years the Saudi government, along with Qatar, has been "providing clandestine financial and logistic support to [the Islamic State] and other radical Sunni groups in the region." Saudi nationals make up the second-largest group of foreign fighters in the Islamic State and, by some accounts, the largest in the terrorist group's Iraqi operations. The kingdom is in a tacit alliance with al-Qaeda in Yemen.

The Islamic State draws its beliefs from Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi version of Islam. As the former imam of the kingdom's Grand Mosque said last year, the Islamic State "exploited our own principles, that can be found in our books. . . . We follow the same thought but apply it in a refined way." Until the Islamic State could write its own textbooks for its schools, it adopted the Saudi curriculum as its own.

Saudi money is now transforming European Islam. Leaked German intelligence reports show that charities "closely connected with government offices" of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait are funding mosques, schools and imams to disseminate a fundamentalist, intolerant version of Islam throughout Germany.

In Kosovo, the New York Times' Carlotta Gall describes the process by which a 500-year-old tradition of moderate Islam is being destroyed. "From their bases, the Saudi-trained imams propagated Wahhabism's tenets: the supremacy of Shariah law as well as ideas of violent jihad and takfirism, which authorizes the killing of Muslims considered heretics for not following its interpretation of Islam. . . . Charitable assistance often had conditions attached. Families were given monthly stipends on the condition that they attended sermons in the mosque and that women and girls wore the veil."

Saudi Arabia's government has begun to slow many of its most egregious practices. It is now being run, de facto, by a young, intelligent reformer, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who appears to be refreshingly pragmatic, in the style of Dubai's visionary leader, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum. But so far the Saudi reforms have mostly translated into better economic policy for the kingdom, not a break with its powerful religious establishment.

Trump's speech on Islam was nuanced and showed empathy for the Muslim victims of jihadist terrorism (who make up as much as 95 percent of the total, by one estimate). He seemed to zero in on the problem when he said, "No discussion of stamping out this threat would be complete without mentioning the government that gives terrorists . . . safe harbor, financial backing and the social standing needed for recruitment."

But Trump was talking not of his host, Saudi Arabia, but rather of Iran. Now, to be clear, Iran is a destabilizing force in the Middle East and supports some very bad actors. But it is wildly inaccurate to describe it as the source of jihadist terror. According to an analysis of the Global Terrorism Database by Leif Wenar of King's College London, more than 94 percent of deaths caused by Islamic terrorism since 2001 were perpetrated by the Islamic State, al-Qaeda and other Sunni jihadists. Iran is fighting those groups, not fueling them. Almost every terrorist attack in the West has had some connection to Saudi Arabia. Virtually none has been linked to Iran.

Trump has adopted the Saudi line on terrorism, which deflects any blame from the kingdom and redirects it toward Iran. The Saudis showered Trump's inexperienced negotiators with attention, arms deals and donations to a World Bank fund that Ivanka Trump is championing. (Candidate Trump wrote in a Facebook post in 2016, "Saudi Arabia and many of the countries that gave vast amounts of money to the Clinton Foundation want women as slaves and to kill gays. Hillary must return all money from such countries!") In short, the Saudis played Trump. (Jamie Tarabay makes the same point.)

The United States has now signed up for Saudi Arabia's foreign policy — a relentless series of battles against Shiites and their allies throughout the Middle East. That will enmesh Washington in a never-ending sectarian struggle, fuel regional instability and complicate its ties with countries such as Iraq that want good relations with both sides. But most important, it will do nothing to address the direct and ongoing threat to Americans — jihadist terrorism. I thought that Trump's foreign policy was going to put America first, not Saudi Arabia.

Krauthammer : Why Middle East peace starts in Saudi Arabia

The quixotic American pursuit of Middle East peace is a perennial. It invariably fails, yet every administration feels compelled to give it a try. The Trump administration is no different.

It will fail as well. To be sure, no great harm has, as yet, come from President Trump's enthusiasm for what would be "the ultimate deal." It will, however, distract and detract from remarkable progress being made elsewhere in the Middle East.

That progress began with Trump's trip to Saudi Arabia, the first of his presidency — an unmistakable declaration of a radical reorientation of U.S. policy in the region. Message: The appeasement of Iran is over.

Barack Obama's tilt toward Iran in the great Muslim civil war between Shiite Iran and Sunni Arabs led by Saudi Arabia was his reach for Nixon-to-China glory. It ended ignominiously.

The idea that the nuclear deal would make Iran more moderate has proved spectacularly wrong, as demonstrated by its defiant ballistic-missile launches, its indispensable support for the genocidal Assad regime in Syria, its backing of the Houthi insurgency in Yemen, its worldwide support for terrorism, its relentless anti-Americanism and commitment to the annihilation of Israel.

These aggressions were supposed to abate. They didn't. On the contrary, the cash payments and the lifting of economic sanctions — Tehran's reward for the nuclear deal — have only given its geopolitical thrusts more power and reach.

The reversal has now begun. The first act was Trump's Riyadh address to about 50 Muslim states (the overwhelming majority of them Sunni), signaling a wide Islamic alliance committed to resisting Iran and willing to cast its lot with the American side.

That was objective No.1. The other was to turn the Sunni powers against Sunni terrorism. The Islamic State is Sunni. Al-Qaeda is Sunni. Fifteen of the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi. And the spread of Saudi-funded madrassas around the world has for decades inculcated a poisonous Wahhabism that has fueled Islamist terrorism.

Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states publicly declaring war on their bastard terrorist child is significant. As is their pledge not to tolerate any semiofficial support or private donations. And their opening during the summit of an anti-terrorism center in Riyadh.

After eight years of U.S. policy hovering between neglect and betrayal, the Sunni Arabs are relieved to have America back. A salutary side effect is the possibility of a detente with Israel.

Making the Israel–Palestinian issue central, rather than peripheral, to the epic Sunni–Shiite war shaking the Middle East today is a serious tactical mistake.

That would suggest an outside-in approach to Arab–Israeli peace: a rapprochement between the Sunni state and Israel (the outside) would put pressure on the Palestinians to come to terms (the inside). It's a long-shot strategy but it's better than all the others. Unfortunately, Trump muddied the waters a bit in Israel by at times reverting to the opposite strategy — the inside-out — by saying that an Israeli–Palestinian deal would "begin a process of peace all throughout the Middle East."

That is well-worn nonsense. Imagine if Israel disappeared tomorrow in an earthquake. Does that end the civil war in Syria? The instability in Iraq? The fighting in Yemen? Does it change anything of consequence amid the intra-Arab chaos? Of course not.

And apart from being delusional, the inside-out strategy is at present impossible. Palestinian leadership is both hopelessly weak and irredeemably rejectionist. Until it is prepared to accept the legitimacy of the Jewish state — which it has never done in the 100 years since the Balfour Declaration committed Britain to a Jewish homeland in Palestine — there will be no peace.

It may come one day. But not now. Which is why making the Israel–Palestinian issue central, rather than peripheral, to the epic Sunni–Shiite war shaking the Middle East today is a serious tactical mistake. It subjects any now-possible reconciliation between Israel and the Arab states to a Palestinian veto.

Ironically, the Iranian threat that grew under Obama offers a unique opportunity for U.S.–Arab and even Israeli–Arab cooperation. Over time, such cooperation could gradually acclimate Arab peoples to a nonbelligerent stance toward Israel. Which might in turn help persuade the Palestinians to make some concessions before their fellow Arabs finally tire of the Palestinians' century of rejectionism.

Perhaps that will require a peace process of sorts. No great harm, as long as we remember that any such Israeli–Palestinian talks are for show — until conditions are one day ripe for peace.

In the meantime, the real action is on the anti-Iranian and anti-terror fronts. Don't let Oslo-like mirages get in the way.

Zarif : 'Beautiful Military Equipment' Can't Buy Middle East Peace

Mohammad Javad Zarif

In Yemen, Saudi Arabia is attacking the Ansar Allah group, the one force that has proved adept at beating back Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the most lethal of the global terrorist network's franchises. The Saudi-led coalition's Western backers explain their motive as support for "democracy," even though the concept finds little favor either in Riyadh or among other Arab allies of the United States.

The absurdities of the tragedy in Yemen are sadly echoed in Syria. There, the forces fighting Wahhabi extremists on the front lines also face perils from Western counterterrorism policy, which is often arbitrary in its distinctions between allies and enemies.

Let me be clear: What President Trump called "lots of beautiful military equipment" won't drain the swamps in which terrorism and extremist militancy fester. Neither will golden chains or glowing orbs provide a magical solution to the socioeconomic and political challenges that drive radicalization. What will work is a genuine effort to forge inclusive engagement among the regional powers based on a policy of coexistence and acceptance that military solutions are futile.

While Saudi Arabia spends countless millions promoting fear of Iran to distract from its global export of Wahhabism — which inspires the extremist ideology of Al Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State and many other terrorist groups wreaking havoc from Karachi to Manchester — Iran has been aiding the victims of extremism in Iraq and Syria. By helping to prevent the Islamic State from seizing Baghdad and Damascus, Iran is actively promoting a political solution to the conflicts in both countries.

In 2013, Iran proposed an immediate cease-fire and a plan to end the war in Syria. For over two years, Saudi Arabia categorically rejected the premise that the Syrian conflict had no military solution, clinging to the illusion that its extremist proxies would achieve victory on the battlefield by dragging the United States into the war. Innumerable lives later, in 2015, our Syria plan became the basis for United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.

More recently, the dialogue initiative led by Iran, Turkey and Russia, while far from perfect, has also proved effective as a de-escalation mechanism. The twin-track diplomacy on Syria, where fighting has abated and counterterrorist efforts have made progress, provides a credible formula for conflict resolution elsewhere in the region.

In Yemen, since the first days of hostilities over two years ago, Iran has proposed a four-point plan to end the war, which Saudi Arabia boasted would be over in two weeks. The proposal entails securing an immediate cease-fire, dispatching emergency humanitarian aid, promoting dialogue among Yemeni groups and helping them to establish an inclusive government of national unity with the support of neighbors.

With seven million Yemenis on the brink of a man-made famine and virtually half of Syria's population displaced, the crises are too urgent to waste time pointing the finger of blame at the parties responsible. Rather, to find a long-overdue end to these calamities, the regional powers must recognize and address the underlying issues that fan violent extremism.

In this vein, the United States and its allies face two choices. They can continue to lend moral and material support, and encourage the perpetrators to intensify their war efforts, though this has proved futile and only brings more death and destruction and further complicates the path to a lasting solution. Or, as Iran has stated from the start, these governments can focus on helping to forge inclusive political solutions with the participation of all the political groups involved.

Back in 1990, when I was a young diplomat, I witnessed how, in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's decision to turn against his Arab financiers and invade Kuwait, the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies failed to respond to their Iranian counterpart's offer to explore an inclusive arrangement for regional security. With billions of dollars wasted on arms, and after years of bloodshed, we are back to square one.

If we don't break this cycle, we will leave only the same momentous task to our children and grandchildren. We must be the generation that learns from history rather than be condemned to repeat it.

U.S. Confirms March Airstrike Killed Civilians in Mosul

Yasmeen Serhan

A U.S. airstrike conducted March 17 killed more than 100 Iraqi civilians in Mosul, the Pentagon confirmed Thursday, noting the strike inadvertently set off explosives planted in the building by the Islamic State.

"The investigation determined that ISIS emplaced a large amount of explosive material in a structure containing a significant number of civilians and then attacked Iraqi forces from the structure," the Pentagon said in a statement.

The airstrike was conducted as part of the Iraqi government's continued efforts to expel ISIS from western Mosul, the country's second-largest city. The Pentagon said the Iraqis requested the airstrike, which aimed to destroy the top floor of a building that held two ISIS snipers. The blast prompted the "detonation of a large amount of explosive material," which caused the building to collapse, the statement said.

The investigation followed criticism that the U.S.-led coalition did not take adequate precautions to protect civilians. The inquiry concluded that at least 105 people were killed during the blast, marking the greatest loss of civilian life since the U.S. began targeting ISIS in Iraq and Syria in 2014. The Pentagon reaffirmed neither the U.S.-led coalition nor its Iraqi counterparts knew civilians were in the building, and that they were unaware explosives had been placed inside it.

"The coalition takes every feasible measure to protect civilians from harm," Maj. Gen. Joe Martin, the commander of ground forces for the U.S.-led coalition, said in a statement. "The best way to protect civilians is to defeat ISIS."

More than 350 civilians have been killed in U.S.-led airstrikes against ISIS since 2014, according to the Pentagon, though other monitors say the estimate is far higher.

UNE - Pentagon Inquiry Blames ISIS for Civilian Deaths in Mosul Strike

Michael R. Gordon

The investigation concluded that 105 civilians were killed: 101 in the building that was bombed, which was owned by a respected elder who invited people in the neighborhood to shelter there, and four in an adjacent structure. Thirty-six civilians who were believed to have been in the area have not been accounted for.

The toll is one of the highest in the American-led campaign against the Islamic State, though the investigation asserts that jihadists' explosives were mainly at fault.

The battle for Mosul has been daunting for Iraqi forces, who have had about 980 troops killed and more than 6,000 wounded in the seven-month operation. The current challenge for the Iraqi forces is to defeat militants who appear to be determined to fight to the death in western Mosul, known for its narrow streets and difficult terrain. It is home to hundreds of thousands of civilians.

To make headway in taking the city, Iraqi forces have appealed for quicker airstrikes from coalition warplanes to protect them when they come under fire. Last year, the American-led command obliged by giving American advisers in the field the authority to call in bombing attacks without obtaining the approval of a brigadier general or ranking officer in a command center in Erbil, Iraq.

The March 17 strike, however, was approved by the Erbil-based command center, according to an unclassified summary of the investigation.

Though that additional authority for calling in airstrikes was granted under the Obama administration, the stepped-up pace of military operations under President Trump, which carries the potential for more rapid gains on the battlefield as well as increased risk of civilian casualties, has also drawn attention.

According to the investigation, the March episode began that morning when two Islamic State snipers in the city's Mosul Jidideh section began firing at troops from Iraq's Counterterrorism Service, which was fighting its way into western Mosul.

An Iraqi forward air controller called for the strike, which was approved by more senior Iraqi officers and coalition advisers. In Erbil, coalition officers evaluated the situation and decided to send an American plane to drop a single GBU-38 munition,

which carries nearly 200 pounds of explosives.

The aim was to produce a blast by using a bomb with a delayed fuse that would damage only the top floor and front of the building, which was described as a well-built, two-story concrete structure, and kill the snipers. The bomb that was dropped, General Isler said, was not strong enough to have taken down the building.

But the blast, shortly before 8:30 a.m., set off the explosive material that Islamic State fighters had placed in on the second floor of the structure, causing it to collapse. Analysis of the debris found residue of explosive materials, including nitroglycerin, that Islamic State fighters are known to use but that are not used in the GBU-38.

General Isler said in a briefing for reporters that his assessment was that the Islamic State deliberately created a situation in which the United States would strike the building and set off the explosives, which he said were four times as powerful as the bomb that was dropped.

Neither the American-led coalition nor Iraqi forces were aware that civilians and explosives were in the building, the investigation concluded.

According to accounts from neighbors, the civilians went to the building voluntarily because it had thick walls and was one of the best constructed in the area; they took refuge in the basement and on the first floor to get away from the fighting.

The American-led coalition was not aware that civilians had gone there, perhaps because bad weather interfered with reconnaissance in the two days leading up to the strike. Nor did Iraqi forces always have a clear view of the area around the building.

The general said it was possible that civilians in the building were held against their will after they took sanctuary, though there was no proof of that. According to General Isler, residents of the adjacent building were warned by Islamic State fighters not to leave their home.

Amnesty International urged the American-led coalition to show much greater restraint in using firepower inside Mosul. In addition to using airstrikes, American forces have been firing artillery and surface-to-surface Himars rockets at targets in the city.

"We are curious to know whether any lessons were learned and what steps were taken to ensure such horrors do not occur again," Amnesty International said in a statement. "As long as the conflict in Iraq is still raging, we call on Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition forces to desist from using explosive weapons with wide area effects, including artillery and mortars in crowded residential areas and to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian casualties."

General Isler said the American-led coalition had adjusted its tactics now that it had concluded the Islamic State was prepared to bait the coalition into attacking civilians.

"We look for ISIS moving civilians and creating entrapment of civilians," he said. But he would not detail how the tactics had been adjusted, saying the changes were being kept classified so the Islamic State would not know them.

America's Allies Conceal Their Civilian Casualties in Iraq and Syria

Samuel Oakford

The United States' coalition partners in the war against the Islamic State are responsible for at least 80 confirmed civilian deaths from airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, according to U.S. military officials. Yet none of their 12 allies will publicly concede any role in those casualties.

These dozen partner nations have launched more than 4,000 airstrikes combined, the vast majority of which were undertaken by the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Belgium, and the Netherlands. However, they have so far claimed a perfect record in avoiding civilian casualties. An *Airwars* investigation for Foreign Policy has now uncovered evidence that disproves that assertion.

These confirmed deaths caused by non-U.S. airstrikes came to light in the most recent coalition civilian casualty report, released April 30. The report quietly referred to 80 new deaths referenced only as "attributable to coalition strikes to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria from August 2014 to present [that] had not been previously announced."

Three U.S. Central Command officials confirmed to Airwars and Foreign Policy that the 80 deaths occurred in incidents that U.S. investigators concluded were the responsibility of partner nations. But allies pressured the United States and the coalition against releasing details of the strikes in question.

"In reference to the 80," said one Centcom official, "those do reference non-U.S. strikes."

Coalition spokesman Col. Joseph Scrocca said that Centcom officials had arrived at the tally of 80 civilian deaths caused by airstrikes not launched by the United States prior to handing over investigations to the alliance in late 2016.

For over a year, some senior U.S. officials have been frustrated that their allies have not stepped forward to admit their own errors. U.S. forces first admitted their own civilian casualties in May 2015, and have so far confirmed their responsibility for 377 civilian deaths — including 105 killed in a single incident in Mosul in March.

U.S. officials' efforts to release information about casualties caused by their partner nations, however, came at a cost. As the result of a deal struck among the coalition partners, civilian casualty incidents included in monthly reporting will not be tied to specific countries. That means the United States will in the future no longer confirm its own responsibility for specific civilian casualty incidents either — a move toward greater secrecy that could deprive victims' families of any avenue to seek justice or compensation for these deaths.

Deny, Deny, Deny

Yet even when confronted with this confirmed evidence of civilian deaths, no coalition partner would publicly admit any responsibility.

Airwars and FP reached out to all 12 non-U.S. members of the coalition to ask which were responsible for the 80 deaths. The responses ranged from outright denials of involvement (Australia, Canada, Denmark, and Britain); to no response (Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates); to several ambiguously worded statements.

Despite these statements, Airwars and FP confirmed that every coalition member identified as responsible for any of the 80 deaths were informed by U.S. officials of their assessed involvement.

Airwars and FP confirmed that every coalition member identified as responsible for any of the 80 deaths were informed by U.S. officials of their assessed involvement. The allies have known for months if not longer of these findings, according to U.S. officials — but those nations responsible chose not to admit it when questioned by Airwars and FP.

Britain is the most active member of the coalition after the United States, having carried out more than 1,300 airstrikes since October 2014. The British government has boasted of zero civilian casualties, despite the high tempo of the campaign and the fact that most strikes now take place on Iraqi and Syrian cities and towns.

For 2016 alone, Airwars flagged 120 incidents to the British Ministry of Defense where Royal Air Force aircraft might have been involved in civilian casualty events in Iraq and Syria. Nearly all of these cases were investigated and dismissed, according to the Defense Ministry. For 11 incidents, however, a senior British official noted that "we cannot make any definitive assessment of possible UK presence from the evidence … provided, but I can confirm that there was no indication of any civilian casualties in our own detailed assessments of the impact of each of our strikes over the period concerned."

Asked whether Britain had been responsible for any of the 80 non-U.S. deaths reported by the coalition, a spokesman pointed to a March 25 Defense Ministry statement asserting, "we have not seen evidence that we have been responsible for civilian casualties so far."

Other partner nations were not so willing to give a straight answer. Asked whether its own forces had caused civilian casualties, France twice evaded the question, noting only that "no comment is made on the 80 additional cases recognized by the Coalition."

The Netherlands — which claims it is still investigating one possible civilian casualty event that occurred in 2014, and a second unknown case — failed to respond to 11 queries on the 80 civilian deaths from Airwars and FP, including a May 9 letter sent to Defense Minister Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert.

Belgium's ministry of defense, responsible for several hundred airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, informed Airwars and FP that it would only "share the information about our operations in the appropriate [closed session] parliamentary committee." The Belgians directed further inquiries to Centcom, which in turn said it would not officially identify any partner nations.

"Without mentioning details, I can say that [Belgian defense officials] have looked at the list of incidents in the Coalition report and that they have come to the conclusion that

there is still no reason to believe that Belgium has caused civilians casualties," one Belgian political official told Airwars and FP. "Though they do admit that it was 'close' a few times, not by negligence or carelessness by the Belgian army, but just by bad luck."

Hiding Behind the Alliance

The coalition campaign against the Islamic State, now nearing the end of its third year, has produced reams of firing and targeting data. The number of munitions used and targets attacked are all publicly available. But that has not translated into transparency from many individual members. Though aggregate data is publicly available for overall coalition strikes, the alliance does not confirm which countries carry out specific raids.

"This is just the unfortunate evolution of the dynamic of coalition operations," said Christopher Jenks, a professor of law at Southern Methodist University who served in the U.S. military for two decades. "Because of coalition dynamics you can't get into the real substantive details of the core issues: whether we believe that an air strike was piloted by a Canadian or French pilot."

From the start of coalition operations through May 22, the coalition says that 4,011 airstrikes in Iraq and 404 in Syria were performed by non-U.S. forces. France and Britain accounted for more than half of these attacks, while partners such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, and Australia made up the bulk of the remaining non-U.S. actions. Additional countries like Germany provide aerial reconnaissance, but do not conduct airstrikes.

The coalition's regional partners — Jordan, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Turkey — have been responsible for an estimated 150 strikes among them, or less than 1 percent of all actions. None of those countries responded to questions on the 80 confirmed deaths put to their NATO missions or to their embassies in Washington.

Less Sunlight in the War Against the Islamic State

One consequence of the new coalition protocol for admitting civilian casualties is that U.S. transparency in the war against the Islamic State may now be jeopardized.

U.S. officials had wanted to release the information about the 80 additional civilians' deaths for many months. That finally occurred on April 30 — but it came at a cost. Neither the coalition nor Centcom would provide a breakdown of the events that led to those deaths, such as when or where they occurred or how many civilians had died in each incident. These facts had always been provided in the monthly reports when they referred only to U.S. civilian casualties — but not this time.

U.S. officials said the inclusion of the 80 civilian deaths was the product of a compromise among coalition members — they could be released, but only attributed as "coalition" strikes.

Going forward, a total tally of coalition strikes that resulted in civilian casualties will always be included in reports. However, the United States will no longer identify the strikes that were carried out by its own forces. This is due to a concern that allies responsible for civilian deaths could be identified by a process of elimination.

"We will just say 'Coalition,' and we won't say if it was U.S. or not,' confirmed Centcom Director of Public Affairs Col. John Thomas. Thomas described the change as an effort to decrease the number of open cases of alleged civilian casualties. "By not specifying which national was flying at the time of an incident we'll be able to more quickly say when a case is adjudicated under our methods and closed," he said.

The move, however, will also set a precedent for more opacity in coalition operations. There are also serious concerns for victims' families: If they do not know which country is responsible for a casualty event, it will be impossible for them to pursue *solatia*, or compensation payments, from individual nations, and exceedingly difficult to request information about the incidents in question from national governments. (In the United States, this would include Freedom of Information Act requests.)

"This would be exactly the wrong move on the part of the United States, which is already not doing enough to provide transparency about civilians killed," said Hina Shamsi, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's national security project. "Generally, in the last decade there has been more transparency about strikes in the context of recognized armed conflict than lethal strikes outside of it, and this seems to be a step in the wrong direction."

Though the coalition's under-resourced civilian casualty unit has over time increased the number of cases it considers and investigates, the obfuscation over the countries that launched the strikes follows a pattern that began early in the campaign. In October 2014, under pressure from European allies, Centcom ceased identifying the coalition members that took part in particular strikes.

"At the end of the day, implicit in the way the U.S. and CENTCOM is handling this is placing the coalition dynamic ahead of accountability and transparency," said Jenks.

Rising toll

The coalition has so far admitted to killing 352 civilians since 2014, including the 80 or more non-combatants slain by U.S. allies. However, this may just by the tip of the iceberg: That figure is still roughly 10 times lower than Airwars's own minimum estimate of 3,500 civilian fatalities in the air campaign. That tally is the result of monitoring carried out by our team of researchers, and does not include incidents that are contested or are currently backed by weak evidence.

Recent months have seen record civilian death tolls from airstrikes in both Iraq and Syria.

Recent months have seen record civilian death tolls from airstrikes in both Iraq and Syria. In April alone, Airwars researchers assessed that between 283 and 366 civilians were likely killed by the coalition. Yet despite the continuing bloody battle in Mosul, almost none of those deaths were included, as in most events there it remains unclear whether coalition or Iraqi ground or air actions, or Islamic State attacks, were responsible for casualties. High fatalities have also been reported for some months around Raqqa, despite little media coverage.

As the war against the Islamic State centers on the group's last remaining urban areas, there is little doubt that the fight is resulting in significant civilian casualties. Yet for families who have lost a loved one, their ability to know which country is bombing them — or who might be liable — is slowly going up in smoke.

The Washington Post

Ignatius : How the world can prepare for the 'day after' the Islamic State

The Manchester terrorist attack by an alleged Islamic State "soldier" will accelerate the push by the United States and its allies to capture the terrorist group's strongholds in Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqa, Syria. But it should also focus some urgent discussions about a post-Islamic State strategy for stabilizing the two countries.

For all of President Trump's bombast about obliterating the Islamic State, the Raqqa campaign has been delayed for months while U.S. policymakers debated the wisdom of relying on a Syrian Kurdish militia known as the YPG that Turkey regards as a terrorist group. That group and allied Sunni fighters have been poised less than 10 miles from Raqqa, waiting for a decision.

All the while, the clock has been ticking on terrorist plots hatched by the Islamic State and directed from Raqqa. U.S. officials told me a few weeks ago that they were aware of at least five Islamic State operations directed against targets in Europe. European allies have been urging the United States to finish the job in Raqqa as soon as possible.

The horrific bombing in Manchester, England, is a reminder of the difficulty of containing the plots hatched by the Islamic State — and the cost of waiting to strike the final blows. The Islamic State is battered and in retreat, and its caliphate is nearly destroyed on the ground. But a virtual caliphate survives in the network that spawned Salman Abedi, the alleged Manchester bomber, and others who seek to avenge the group's slow eradication.

The Raqqa assault should move ahead quickly, now that the Trump administration has rejected Turkish protests and opted to back the YPG as the backbone of a broader coalition known as the Syrian Democratic Forces. These are committed, well-led fighters, as I saw during a visit to a special forces training camp in northern Syria a year ago.

The Trump administration listened patiently to Turkish arguments for an alternative force backed by Ankara. But the Pentagon concluded that this force didn't have a significant battlefield presence and that the real choice was either relying on the Kurdish-led coalition to clear Raqqa or sending in thousands of U.S. troops to do the job.

The White House rightly opted for the first approach several weeks ago. To ease Ankara's worries, the United States is offering assurances that the Kurdish military presence will be contained and that newly recruited Sunni tribal forces will help manage security in Raqqa and nearby Deir al-Zour.

The endgame is near in Mosul, too. Commanders say only about 6 percent of the city remains to be captured, with 500 to 700 Islamic State fighters hunkered down in the old city west of the Tigris River.

Once Raqqa and Mosul are cleared, the challenge will be rebuilding the Sunni areas of Syria and Iraq — with real governance and security — so that follow-on extremist groups don't quickly emerge. This idea of preparing for the "day after" the Islamic State has gotten lip service from U.S. policymakers for three years but very little serious planning or funding. It should be an urgent priority for the United States and its key Sunni partners, such as Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Intelligence services from several key allies are said to have met in recent weeks with Sunni leaders from Iraq to form a core leadership that can take the initiative. But so far, this effort is said to have produced more internal bickering than clear strategy — a depressing rewind of failed efforts to build a coherent Sunni opposition in Syria.

CIA Director Mike Pompeo told me and several other journalists in an interview Tuesday that he plans to move the agency to a more aggressive, risk-taking stance. Here's a place to start.

The Kurds are the wild cards in both Iraq and Syria. The Syrian Kurds are already governing the ethnic enclave they call "Rojava." That should be an incentive for Syria's Sunnis to develop similar strong government in their liberated areas. Meanwhile, Iraqi Kurds have told U.S. officials that they plan to hold a referendum on Kurdish independence soon, perhaps as early as September.

U.S. officials feel a deep gratitude toward Iraqi Kurds, who have been reliable allies since the early 1990s. But the independence referendum is a potential flash point, and U.S. officials may try to defer the Kurdish question until well after Iraqi provincial elections scheduled in September.

Iraq and Syria need to be reimagined as looser, better-governed, more inclusive confederal states that give minorities room to breathe. The trick for policymakers is to make the post-Islamic State transition a pathway toward progress, rather than a continuation of the sectarian catastrophe that has befallen both nations.

Here's How Trump Can Win America's Longest War

Emily Tamkin

The war in Afghanistan is vitally important and President Donald Trump can still win it. Despite the Trump administration's other preoccupations, it has the opportunity to avoid its predecessors' mistakes and bring the war to a long-delayed yet successful conclusion. But this would take more than the small additional deployment of troops that the administration is considering.

The war is important because al Qaeda has not been defeated and is still a threat to U.S. national security. Americans are understandably concerned about the Islamic State and the war in Syria, which has come to overshadow al Qaeda and the war in Afghanistan since 2014. But the rise of the former does not make the latter less dangerous. Al Qaeda and its affiliates remain dedicated to attacking U.S. interests and the United States.

In fact, al Qaeda almost certainly has better long-term prospects than the Islamic State. In its few years of existence, the Islamic State has managed to make enemies of Iran, Russia, and the United States, a singularly inept diplomatic performance that all but guarantees its eventual defeat. Al Qaeda, by contrast, has managed to survive, metastasize, and spawn new movements and copycats for 25 years.

Additionally, the war in Afghanistan is an important test of U.S. leadership, reliability, and resolve. The United States signed two strategic partnership agreements with the Afghans — in 2005 and 2012 — and a bilateral security agreement in 2013 envisioning a ten-year security partnership. American statesmen from both parties have spent over 15 years promising to stand by the Afghans in their fight.

If the United States leaves Afghanistan precipitously, if U.S. troops withdraw before Afghan security forces can fight independently, and if the Taliban subsequently regains control of all or part of the country — it will give renewed safe havens to al Qaeda and other jihadists. Furthermore, it will damage the credibility of America's other alliances and its deterrent posture. This would result in damage the world can't afford, while Russian President Vladimir Putin appears intent on testing U.S. resolve in Europe and exploiting divisions in the NATO alliance.

The war can still be won — in the sense that the United States can still meet its most important strategic objectives. The high aspirations for Afghanistan that prevailed from 2001 to 2004 are out of reach because the United States never lost an opportunity to make a mistake. Former President George W. Bush erred by insisting on a light-footprint approach that inadvertently created a vacuum of governance and security. The vacuum of power in rural Afghanistan subsequently allowed the Taliban to regroup and begin its insurgency in 2005.

Former President Barack Obama built on changes Bush made in his last two years in office and rightly increased U.S. military presence and civilian reconstruction assistance in the region. But he undermined his own policy by announcing the withdrawal of U.S. troops on a preset timetable. His withdrawal signaled to the Taliban that it could simply wait the Americans out — which it has done. That approach also gave Afghan officials an incentive to hedge their bets, with damaging consequences for Kabul's state-building efforts.

The Trump administration has inherited the longest war in U.S. history, and one that the American people have largely tuned out. It has gone on so long that few foreign-policy experts have tracked the war consistently for its entire duration. As a result, few have the adequate historical background or perspective to assess the war's progress or prospects. Critics sometimes assert that if the United States hasn't managed to win the war by now, it must be unwinnable. What has the United States not tried over the past 16 years that it could plausibly try today?

The United States has not given adequate military assistance, civilian assistance, or the time and patience required for them to take hold. Bush was willing to give the war all the time and patience it needed, but not enough troops or reconstruction money; Obama did the reverse. Trump now has the opportunity to give both.

Fortunately, the war does not require the 100,000 U.S. troops that were deployed in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2012. The United States has succeeded in training and building an Afghan security force of some 350,000 soldiers and policeman. Keeping those troops in the field will require some $6 to 8 billion of U.S. assistance per year for the indefinite future — cheap compared to the cost of deploying U.S. troops halfway around the world, and a low price tag for the national security interests at stake.

Those Afghan troops still require U.S. trainers and enablers to provide key capabilities such as logistics, intelligence, air support, medical evacuations, and communications. How many U.S. troops need to be in Afghanistan? That depends on their mission. General John Allen told the Senate Armed Service Committee in February that he needed "a few thousand more" than the 8,400 troops currently deployed. If U.S. troops are limited — as they are at present — to training Afghan security forces and conducting counterterrorism operations, something in the neighborhood of 10,000 to 15,000 may be appropriate. That appears to be what the Trump administration is currently considering.

It is probably not enough. U.S. troops should be given a third mission: providing support to the Afghans' rural counterinsurgency efforts. Without such efforts, the war will remain in stalemate. With such efforts, such as the Village Stability Operations program and other rural security and policing programs that the U.S. military has tried in past years, the Afghans made demonstrable progress against the Taliban. General David Barno, who commanded U.S. troops in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005, estimated that a long-term, stay-behind force of some 25,000 to 35,000 troops would enable the United States to conduct the full range of missions required not only to stabilize the war but also to help the Afghans eventually win it.

Finally, the Trump administration needs to significantly increase U.S. civilian assistance to state-building efforts in Afghanistan. A stable government is an essential prerequisite for a U.S. withdrawal. Leaving behind a weak, corrupt Afghan state is a recipe for perennial instability and political violence, and it simply perpetuates the governance vacuum that enabled the Taliban insurgency to arise in the first place. Although critics inevitably warn about the fabled dangers of nation building, it is unclear what path to victory and withdrawal exists that does not include a stable Afghan government.

Most casual observers can be forgiven for believing the United States has poured limitless money down a sinkhole in Afghanistan to no effect. It does not help that media outlets repeat the misleading figure that the U.S. has spent over a trillion dollars on the war. Nearly all that

money has been spent on ongoing military operations, which is normal in wartime and does not contribute directly to state building.

A much smaller amount — about $117 billion — has been spent on foreign assistance. That money has been spent over 16 years. On a per capita, per year basis, Afghanistan ranks as an average or below-average reconstruction and stabilization mission compared with similar operations, like Bosnia or Kosovo. And about two-thirds of that money was spent on building the army and police. Of the relatively small amount of money devoted to governance and development, most has gone towards large-dollar, high-profile activities, like national elections, counter-narcotics operations, and the ring road.

Donors prefer to spend money on large, flashy projects. The slow, tedious, and unglamorous work of training bureaucrats, reengineering policymaking procedures, investing in basic literacy, organizing land records, and paying judges is the real stuff of state building. Despite 16 years of promises, donor conferences, and policy plans to do this kind of work, the international community has actually spent very little money on any of it. It is no wonder the Afghan government is still one of the least capable and most incompetent in the world.

The Trump administration's move toward increasing the U.S. troops presence in Afghanistan is a welcome sign. Trump should go further. The United States needs to change the mission of U.S. troops to include support for the Afghans' counterinsurgency efforts, deploy enough force to break the stalemate with the Taliban, spend the money required to keep the Afghan army in the field, and mount a serious state-building effort in Kabul.

None of these policy options are politically infeasible or fiscally onerous. The war is key to a number of America's national-security interests in South Asia, the Middle East, and around the world. And, to be blunt, winning a war is more popular than losing one. For an administration grappling with scandal and low approval ratings, putting a win on the board should be an easy call.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Beijing Protests U.S. Patrol in South China Sea

Jeremy Page

BEIJING—China vowed to further build up military capabilities after a U.S. Navy destroyer sailed near a Chinese-built artificial island in the South China Sea, the first such patrol under President Donald Trump.

Col. Ren Guoqiang, a Defense Ministry spokesman, on Thursday said Beijing had lodged a formal protest with the U.S. over the patrol, which U.S. officials said brought the ship within 12 nautical miles of Mischief Reef, one of a chain of disputed reefs and rocks in the Spratly archipelago.

Col. Ren said two Chinese missile frigates identified the U.S. ship and warned it to leave the area.

"The erroneous conduct of the U.S. military will only provoke the Chinese military to further strengthen its capacity building and firmly defend national sovereignty and security," he said at a routine media briefing.

Wednesday's patrol by the USS Dewey, a guided-missile destroyer, was a so-called freedom-of-navigation operation intended to challenge excessive maritime claims, U.S. officials said. It was the first in the area since October and the first since Mr. Trump came into office. The president has tried to forge a working relationship with Beijing to resolve trade frictions and deal with North Korea's missile and nuclear threats.

Col. Ren didn't specify the legal grounds on which China objected to the patrol. He repeated Beijing's longstanding, yet legally vague, claim to sovereignty over all South China Sea islands and their adjacent waters.

He said the U.S. patrol had disrupted recent efforts by China and its Southeast Asian neighbors to reduce tensions over the South China Sea.

The patrol, he said, was "a show of force that encouraged regional militarization and could easily lead to accidents at sea or in the air."

Tensions over the South China Sea have spiked over the past three years as Beijing built seven artificial islands on rocks and reefs in the Spratlys, where China's claims are contested by Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei and the Philippines, a U.S. ally.

The U.S. says it doesn't take sides in the territorial dispute but is concerned that China could use the artificial islands—some of which have airstrips and antiaircraft weapons—to enforce its claims and limit freedom of navigation along one of the world's busiest shipping routes.

The U.S. has conducted freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea for years. Patrols around the Spratlys became contentious within the U.S. government in the past two years out of concern about damaging other areas of relations with China. U.S. officials debated how often to do them, how close to come to China's outposts, and whether to announce them publicly.

As many as three requests to conduct freedom-of-navigation operations since Mr. Trump took office were rejected by government officials as Mr. Trump cultivated ties with China, according to U.S. officials.

U.S. officials didn't specify exactly what Chinese claim the USS Dewey was challenging, or how it did so, although they said the U.S. ship came within 12 nautical miles of Mischief Reef.

The 12-nautical mile band is recognized in international law as the limit for territorial waters. An international tribunal ruled last year that Beijing's historical claim to most of the South China Sea had no basis in international law and that Mischief Reef isn't entitled to territorial waters as it was originally a reef submerged at high tide. China rejected that ruling, saying the tribunal had no jurisdiction.

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

US patrol sends signal to Beijing's claims in South China Sea – but how strong?

The Christian Science Monitor

Beijing—Fifteen years ago, when China and the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations committed to establishing a code of conduct to govern actions in the South China Sea, the Paracel Islands were little more than a collection of rocks 138 miles off the coast of Vietnam.

They're now home to Chinese harbors, helipads, and an air base. Last year, Beijing deployed anti-aircraft missiles to the archipelago. And satellite images released earlier this year by Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington show that more work is being done in likely preparation for further construction.

China's militarization of the South China Sea, a vast waterway through which more than $5 trillion in trade passes each year, faced sharp criticism from the Obama administration, which regularly ordered freedom-of-navigation patrols to challenge Beijing's territorial claims in the area.

Having criticized former President Obama for not doing enough to counter China, Donald Trump took over the White House seeming eager to up the pressure. For the first four months his presidency, however, it looked as if the US had decided to back off, perhaps seeking Beijing's cooperation on North Korea or other concessions on issues such as trade. That appeared to change on Wednesday, when a US Navy destroyer sailed within 12 miles of one of China's man-made islands in Mischief Reef, in the Spratly Islands.

The patrol, the first of its kind since October, marks the Trump administration's first public foray into the South China Sea dispute. But analysts say it's far from enough to alleviate concerns among US allies that the White House is unwilling to confront China on the issue – or diminish Beijing's efforts to expand its influence in the region.

"The operation sends a long overdue signal in the South China Sea that the United States does not recognize China's spurious claims to water and air space around its artificial islands," says Mira Rapp-Hooper, a senior fellow in the Asia-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security in Washington. "But this administration is going to have to do more than just conduct a single passage with one naval vessel to convince Southeast Asian nations that it's invested in freedom of navigation over the long haul."

New code of conduct

For now, Dr. Rapp-Hooper says, China will keep arming its artificial

islands while pushing ahead on the diplomatic front. The country's latest diplomatic breakthrough came last Thursday, when it reached an agreement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on a draft code of conduct in the disputed waterway. Details of the draft weren't disclosed, but the framework agreement came as a sign of progress after 15 years of stalled negotiations. It will next be presented to Chinese and ASEAN foreign ministers in August for consideration.

Rapp-Hooper says the code of conduct is far from a done deal and that there is likely much left to negotiate. Still, she says the timing of last week's announcement signals China's push to reinforce its position in the South China Sea at a time when US policy for the region remains unclear.

"China is basically now in a position to consolidate its gain," Rapp-Hooper says. "It's built what it wanted to build. Now it can use the code of conduct to say to the other South China Sea claimants, 'We know it's been a rough few years, but we're willing to play ball now.' "

Analysts say Beijing's ultimate goal is to pull Southeast Asian nations closer into its orbit, disrupting the post-World War II order that paved the way for the US to become a dominant power in Asia. In the short term, Beijing wants to prevent Washington from influencing its negotiations with other countries that border the South China Sea. China claims virtually the entire sea, while the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, and Taiwan claim parts.

Last July, a court at The Hague, the Netherlands concluded that China's claims to wide-reaching sovereignty over the sea had no legal basis, although Beijing boycotted the court proceedings and rejected the ruling. The case was brought by the Philippines under former President Benigno Aquino III, but his successor, President Rodrigo Duterte, has downplayed the ruling, as he pursues stronger ties with China.

"History and facts have proven that countries in the region are fully capable of handling the South China Sea issue themselves," Xinhua, China's state news agency, said in a commentary on Monday. "Any outside noise should be drowned out."

Balancing act

Much to the delight of Beijing, the Trump administration hadn't made much noise until Wednesday. Previously, the administration's strongest criticism came during Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's confirmation hearing, when he suggested that China should be denied access to the islands it built. Despite his harsh words, the Pentagon later turned down three requests from the US Pacific Command to conduct freedom-of-navigation patrols (FONOPS), The New York Times reports.

A statement from Pentagon spokesman Maj. Jamie Davis gave no details of recent patrols, but said that "US forces operate in the Asia-Pacific region on a daily basis, including in the South China Sea. All operations are conducted in accordance with international law and demonstrate that the United States will fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows."

"FONOPS are not about any one country, nor are they about making political statements."

Carlyle Thayer, an emeritus professor at the University of New South Wales in Australia, says the prolonged suspension of freedom-of-navigation operations fueled concerns that the US would stop trying to counter China's growing influence in the region. Without support from the US, smaller countries could begin to see China as the region's most dependable power. Regional dynamics are already shifting, such as Mr. Duterte's pivot toward China while distancing the Philippines from the US, a longtime ally.

"China's line is that the US should not interfere [or] disrupt China-ASEAN diplomacy," Dr. Thayer says in an email. And with the Trump administration's protracted show of deference toward Beijing, he adds, it was "going along quite well."

After this week's patrol, however, Chinese officials said they had lodged a complaint.

"We urge the US to correct this mistake and stop taking further actions so as to avoid hurting peace and security in the region and long-term cooperation between the two countries," said Lu Kang, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry.

China is a long way from displacing the US from the South China Sea or Southeast Asia, says Tiffany Ma, senior director of political and security affairs at the National Bureau of Asian Research in Washington. For one thing, the US still maintains a large military presence in the region. In January, the Philippine defense ministry announced the US would upgrade facilities at military bases across the country this year, although Duterte had previously called for some US troops to leave.

"This is a balancing act countries in Southeast Asia have been walking for a long time," Ms. Ma says. "The broader question is whether the US is committed to maintaining the post-World War II order that has come to define the region."

In the South China Sea, the U.S. is Struggling to Halt Beijing's Advance

For the first time since President Donald Trump took office, a U.S. warship has sailed near a Chinese-controlled island in the disputed South China Sea, signaling an attempt to project a more assertive American stance against Beijing just before a major regional defense summit.

The mission, a passage by the guided missile destroyer USS *Dewey* on Wednesday within twelve nautical miles of Mischief Reef, in the Spratly island chain, was long anticipated and delayed. The last such operation took place in October, and U.S. commanders who had already chafed under Barack Obama's tight leash had hoped to get a freer hand and to carry out more patrols under Trump.

Instead, the new administration has declined several requests from the military to carry out naval patrols in the disputed waterway. Eager to secure China's help in pressuring North Korea over its nuclear weapons program, the White House has moved cautiously and chosen not to confront Beijing over the South China Sea, officials and congressional aides told Foreign Policy.

But with defense ministers and senior military officers from across Asia due to meet in Singapore next month, including U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis, the administration needed to show it was willing to back up its words with some action and demonstrate that it would uphold the principle of freedom of navigation, experts said.

"This was a good, albeit overdue, move by the Trump Administration," said Ely Ratner, formerly deputy national security adviser to Joe Biden and now at the Council on Foreign Relations.

It was the first time a U.S. warship had sailed within the twelve-mile limit of any Chinese-held feature — a way to show that Washington doesn't buy Beijing's claims that rocks generate a territorial sea, and so push back against China's expansionist claims. "This was the big one folks were waiting for," he said.

And while those so-called freedom of navigation operations, or FONOPS, by themselves don't amount to a U.S. strategy to deal with the South China Sea, he said, the first step is to make sure that China can't unilaterally fence off bits of international waters. "FONOPs are an essential part of that," Ratner said.

During the campaign and early days of the administration, Trump and his deputies staked out a tough line on China. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested in his confirmation hearings that U.S. forces would actually try to expel China from disputed waters and islets it now claims.

But North Korea and its rapidly-expanding missile and nuclear weapons program have grabbed the attention of the Trump administration, pushing the disputes over the Chinese land grab in the South China Sea — and Beijing's open militarization of many islets and atolls — to the back burner. Trump has toned down his rhetoric on trade disputes and other spats with China specifically to secure Beijing's cooperation in defusing the North Korea crisis.

"The president and his advisers have calculated that if we are to get China's help on North Korea, better to take the foot off the gas on more contentious issues," said Mira Rapp-Hooper, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

Even though as a candidate Trump portrayed former president Barack Obama as a weak president in his dealings with China and other adversaries, his administration's cautious diplomacy bears some resemblance to Obama's policies, as the previous White House concluded that more could be gained from Beijing by avoiding a full-blown confrontation over the South China Sea or other disputes.

Much to the consternation of U.S. allies in Asia, the Trump White House has yet to fill senior positions at the State Department and the Pentagon handling Asia policy, and has said little about the South China Sea issue publicly. The uncertainty over the administration's policy on China has alarmed America's

partners and weakened the resolve of some governments in Southeast Asia, who fear Washington will no longer back them up if they try to take on Beijing in the South China Sea.

At a meeting last month in Manila of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, government ministers from the region backed off of references to "land reclamation and militarization" after lobbying from China.

The Pentagon sought to downplay the significance of the operation, which it described as routine. Adm. John Richardson, the chief of naval operations, described the passage at an event in Washington Thursday as "not confrontational," and said that the so-called freedom of navigation operations by U.S. ships receive exaggerated scrutiny for the supposed diplomatic messages they convey.

"They sure get a lot of attention when they happen," he said, but the operations are routinely conducted all over the world without the fanfare associated with the South China Sea missions.

The operations sure get a lot of attention in China.

The *Dewey's* patrol "undermined China's sovereignty and security interests and is highly likely to cause untoward incidents in the waters and airspace," a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Thursday.

Citing China's "indisputable sovereignty" over those islets and surrounding waters, he added: "We strongly urge the U.S. side to correct its wrongdoing and stop any provocative actions detrimental to China's sovereignty and security interests so as to avoid any further damage to China-US cooperation and regional peace and stability."

And such operations are also closely watched in Washington, rightly or wrongly, as a barometer of the administration's willingness to push back against China. Amid growing concern in Congress that the Trump administration is making strategic concessions to China in hopes of persuading Beijing to shift its stance on North Korea, several senators from both sides of the aisle wrote a letter earlier this month urging the administration to show resolve in the South China Sea and conduct more frequent naval patrols in the waterway.

The first real test of the effect of Wednesday's naval mission will come in early June at the Shangri-La dialogue, a large annual gathering in Singapore that serves as a venue for high-level talks on crucial matters of Asian security.

Many maritime experts view the focus on freedom of navigation operations, and how they are publicly presented, as misplaced.

"In my view, the publicity around the FONOPs is problematic. Many observers now view it as an indicator of U.S. resolve, which it is not," said M. Taylor Fravel, an expert on Chinese maritime issues at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Such missions are merely meant to uphold traditional rights to navigation in international waters for all countries, he said. What's more, they can give Beijing an excuse to ramp up its own provocative behavior, feeling as if its claims of sovereignty are being challenged.

"They were never intended to do more, such as deterring China's broader ambitions in places like the South China Sea."

Ultimately, and despite the belated U.S. mission near Mischief Reef, Washington has few tools at its disposal to convince China to retreat from its years-long acquisition and garrisoning of a spate of tiny reefs and atolls in the South China Sea, one of the world's busiest waterways. Some experts and lawmakers have urged imposing economic sanctions on Chinese companies taking part in the vast island-building project, but the Trump administration has shown no sign it is ready to consider such a move.

Since it began dredging sand from the seafloor to vastly expand the size of those pinpricks of coral in 2014, China has built airfields, deep harbors and air defense systems on many features and deployed advanced fighter jets, despite promises to stop militarizing the area.

The bid to extend its reach in the waterway is part of China's much broader effort — backed up with an arsenal of missiles — to push out its defensive perimeter from the Chinese coast and keep potential rivals at arm's length in the event of a conflict.

"The United States does not have great options in the South China Sea," Fravel said. "China will not vacate the features it occupies and the United States will not forcibly remove them. "

China's project has moved at a brisk pace, with reports of new military installations appearing every few weeks. Earlier this month, a state-run Chinese paper said that Beijing had installed 155 mm rocket launchers on Fiery Cross reef in the Spratlys, purportedly to deter combat divers from Vietnam, which has been at loggerheads with China over territorial claims in the South China Sea.

"They basically succeeded in their construction projects, and are now well on their way to having floating bases out in the Spratly Islands, and there's been really very little pushback and they've had to pay very little cost for doing so," said Rapp-Hooper.

She added: "It is, unfortunately, now game over."

Brands : Can U.S. Internationalism Survive Trump?

It is hard to avert one's eyes from the flaming train wreck that is the Donald Trump presidency. But with respect to foreign policy, Trump's rise has raised a question that will endure even after his time in office ends: What is the future of American internationalism? After all, for all the discussion today of how Trump's foreign policy has proven more mainstream than his campaign rhetoric promised, the fact remains that in 2016 the American people elected a candidate who scorned or ridiculed many aspects of the foreign policy traditions that the United States has followed since World War II — free trade, alliances, promotion of democracy and human rights, a commitment to a positive-sum global order, and others. So was Trump's triumph simply an aberration, or does it signal that American internationalism is politically dead?

This is the question I explore in a recent report for *War on the Rocks*. But suffice it to say that the answer is ambiguous — that there is evidence to support two very different interpretations of this issue.

On the one hand, it is easy to make the case that Trump's election was more of a black-swan, anomalous event than something that tells us much about the state of public opinion on foreign policy. The election campaign was dominated not by deeply substantive foreign policy debates, in this interpretation, but by the historic unpopularity of both candidates. And of course, Trump was decisively defeated in the popular vote by a card-carrying member of the U.S. foreign policy establishment — and he might well have lost decisively in the electoral college, too, if not for then-FBI Director James Comey's intervention and a series of other lucky breaks late in the campaign.

There is, moreover, substantial polling data to suggest that American internationalism is doing just fine. According to surveys taken during the 2016 campaign, 65 percent of Americans believed that globalization was "mostly good" for the United States, and 89 percent believed that maintaining U.S. alliances was "very or somewhat effective at achieving U.S. foreign policy goals." Support for U.S. military primacy and intervention against threats such as the Islamic State also remained strong, as did domestic backing for the United Nations and the Paris climate change accords.

As an extensive analysis of this polling data by the Chicago Council concluded, there does not seem to be any wholesale public rejection of American internationalism underway: "The American public as a whole still thinks that the United States is the greatest and most influential country in the world, and bipartisan support remains strong for the country to take an active part in world affairs." And indeed, insofar as Trump has had to roll back some of the more radical aspects of his "America first" agenda since becoming president — tearing up the North American Free Trade Agreement, declaring NATO obsolete, launching a trade war with China — he seems to be adjusting to this reality.

That's the good news. But on the other hand, American internationalism simply cannot be all that healthy, because Trump did win the presidency by running on the most anti-internationalist platform seen in decades. American voters may not have been voting for that platform itself, but at the very least they did not see Trump's radical views on foreign policy as disqualifying. And as one digs deeper into the state of American internationalism today, it becomes clear that there are indeed real problems with that tradition — problems that Trump exploited on his road to the White House, and that are likely to confront his successors as well.

Trump's rise has highlighted five key strains that have been weakening the political foundations of American internationalism for years now.

First, since the end of the Cold War, it has become harder for Americans to identify precisely why the United States must undertake such extraordinary exertions to shape the global order. Without a pressing, easily identifiable global threat, in other words, it is harder to intuitively understand what American alliances, forward force deployments, and other internationalist initiatives are for.

Second, although U.S. internationalism has proven very valuable in shaping a congenial international system, it is undeniable that aspects of that tradition — such as nation building missions in Afghanistan and Iraq — have proven costly and unrewarding in recent years. Not surprisingly, many Americans are thus questioning if the resources that the country devotes to foreign policy are being used effectively. This disillusion has shown up in public opinion polling: Whereas 29 percent of Americans believed that promoting democracy should be a key foreign policy objective in 2001, only 18 percent thought so in 2013.

Third, the credibility of the U.S. foreign policy establishment has also been weakened over the past 15 years. This is because policy elites in both parties pursued policies — the Iraq War under President George W. Bush, the subsequent withdrawal from Iraq and creation of a security vacuum in that country under President Barack Obama — that led to high-profile disasters. As a result, when Trump — who actually supported the invasion of Iraq before later opposing it — answered establishment criticism by pointing out that the establishment had brought the United States the Iraq War and the Islamic State, his rejoinder probably made a good deal of sense to many voters.

Fourth, U.S. internationalism has been weakened by the declining economic fortunes of the working and middle classes — a phenomenon that has made those groups less enthusiastic about bearing the costs and burdens associated with U.S. foreign policy. The pursuit of globalization and free trade has not been the primary culprit here — issues like automation and the transition to a postindustrial economy have been more important. But it is undeniable that globalization has exacerbated economic insecurity for the working class in particular, and China's integration into the global economy has taken a significant toll on manufacturing and related employment in the United States. During the Republican primaries, in fact, 65 percent of Trump voters believed that U.S. involvement in the international economy was a bad thing. During the general election, Trump overperformed in areas hardest hit by competition from international trade.

Fifth, and finally, one can discern among many voters an amorphous but powerful sense that U.S. internationalism has become unmoored from U.S. nationalism — that America's governing classes have pursued an agenda that has worked nicely for the well-to-do, but brought fewer benefits to the ordinary Americans whom U.S. foreign policy is meant to serve. This dynamic is evident in the 57 percent of the population who believed in 2016 that the United States was focusing too much on other countries' problems and not enough on its own. Cracks are growing in the political consensus that has traditionally undergirded American internationalism — cracks through which Trump was able emerge in 2016.

The bottom line is that American internationalism is not dead yet, but that it faces serious longterm maladies that could, perhaps, ultimately prove fatal. Regardless of what policies Trump pursues as president, or how long he lasts in that job, addressing those maladies will be a fundamental challenge for future presidents and for all observers who still believe that U.S. internationalism is worth preserving.

Los Angeles Times

Times editorial board : At what point does Trump's comic inarticulateness become dangerous?

Plenty of reasonable people believe that the United States should put its own strategic interests above concerns about human rights when it comes to foreign policy. To them, it's simply a matter of being realistic.

But even those who believe the U.S. should be less critical of other countries' human-rights records wouldn't go so far as to praise a brutal strongman for behaving badly.

Yet that's exactly what Donald Trump appears to have done when he spoke on the phone in April with President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines. According to a copy of Trump's comments circulated by the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, the president praised Duterte for doing an "unbelievable job on the drug problem." Then he repeated it: "A great job."

Trump's comments are deplorable. As everyone who has been paying even the slightest attention to events in the Philippines knows, Duterte's government has sanctioned extrajudicial attacks as a solution to the nation's drug problems, leading to the brutal killings of thousands of suspected dealers. He's not doing a great job — he's a thug, and his policies ought to be condemned, as human rights groups around the world have done.

But here's another thing about Trump's comments: They're also weird. Our 45th president is such a strange, inarticulate, lazy speaker that his words often raise as many questions as they answer. For instance: Can we really be certain that Trump intended to praise Duterte for encouraging the killing of drug suspects? Or could the president have just been babbling, saying whatever came into his head?

If so, it would hardly be the first time for this president. Sometimes he seems to have no understanding of the topic he's discussing; at other times, he seems to be filling space in a conversation or falling back on a kind of flattering salesman's patter that doesn't require thought.

This is not meant to let him off the hook. What a president says matters very much; the world is parsing and considering his every word in a way that audiences don't do on, say, "The Howard Stern Show" or "The Apprentice."

But the inarticulate emptiness of Trump's overused filler words sometimes suggests that there's not a lot of thought behind them. His assertion that Duterte was doing a "great job" and an "unbelievable job" was familiar in tone to his bizarre comment to leaders of several Persian Gulf countries earlier this week that he would sell them "lots of beautiful military equipment." What did that mean? In what sense are tanks, helicopters and missile defense systems beautiful? Was Trump trying to express something, or was he just adding meaningless adjectives?

Or his recent comments in the guest book at Yad Vashem in Israel saying it was "so amazing" to visit there "with all of my friends." Amazing? Is that the most fitting word he could come up with for a Holocaust museum?

Actually, "amazing" is a generic word for Trump (like "great" or "beautiful"); he has used it to describe Infowars' Alex Jones, Frederick Douglass, the Clintons, his wife, Melania, and now, Yad Vashem, to name just a few things. But when he used it at Yad Vashem, the result was a guest book comment that doesn't communicate what he no doubt hoped to communicate.

It's hardly news that Trump speaks in vague, woolly language, and that everything to him is great or fantastic or beautiful or amazing, except when it's sad because it's been done by a loser. During the campaign, a research team at Carnegie Mellon University concluded that Trump's grammar in speeches was "just below" a sixth-grade level, and his vocabulary was in line with a seventh-grader's.

He is who he is. He is neither Lincoln nor Obama. What's more, his imprecise language, grade-school syntax and general inarticulateness have undoubtedly benefited him at times; they probably helped him get elected. But in a president, they are depressing. Don't most of us want a president who can express our fears and aspirations better than we do?

And worse yet, Trump's platitudes and tossed-off testimonials can be reckless, sending policy signals that the president never intended to send. His supporters may shrug it off because they don't take him literally, but the Dutertes and the Putins and the Kim Jong-Uns are listening closely.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Barone : Trump Middle East Trip & Diplomacy Resembles Normal American Foreign Policy

What a difference a week makes. On May 19, President Donald Trump took off in Air Force One for the Middle East and Europe. He left behind a Washington and a nation buzzing about his firing of FBI director James Comey, the multiple reasons

he had given for doing so, the meeting he'd had with the Russian foreign minister a day later and his statement that Comey is a "nut job."

The I-word — impeachment — was in the air as Democrats and mainstream media muttered that he was obstructing justice by attempting to throttle investigation of collusion with the Russians. Brainy and quirky conservative *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat argued that the Trump Cabinet should remove him from office as unfit under the 25th Amendment.

So it has been something of a surprise to see the Trump who emerged from Air Force One in Riyadh behaving quite differently, like a competent American president.

In Saudi Arabia, he delivered a sobering speech that invites comparison with Barack Obama's Cairo address to the Muslim world almost exactly eight years ago.

Obama apologized for the misdeeds of the West, ranging from the Crusades a millennium ago to 19th- and 20th-century colonialism to the overthrow of the Mosaddegh regime in Iran eight years before he was born. Trump apologized for nothing.

Instead, before an assembly of leaders from about 50 Muslim-majority nations, Trump denounced in no uncertain terms Islamic extremism and Islamic terror groups and insisted that Muslims must "drive them out" of their places of worship, communities and "holy land."

Trump also announced a $110 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia and denounced Iran for fueling "the fires of sectarian conflict and terror." This presumably delighted the Saudis and the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf states, who were dismayed at Obama's eight-year tilt toward Iran.

That started with his cold indifference to the mullah regime's squashing of the 2009 protests and culminated in the 2015 nuclear agreement, which, as Obama adviser Ben Rhodes confessed to *The New York Times Magazine*, was pushed through with a false "narrative" and a compliant media "echo chamber."

At best, the deal delayed Iran's acquisition of nuclear arms; it has not changed Iran's terrorist-supporting behavior as Obama apparently hoped. Trump's turn to an explicitly anti-Iran policy may turn out better.

Trump then journeyed to Israel — on the first scheduled nonstop flight from Riyadh to Tel Aviv in history — and became the first sitting president to visit the Western Wall. In Bethlehem, at the side of Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, he condemned the "evil losers" responsible for the bombing of a concert hall in Manchester, England. In Vatican City, emerging from an apparently amicable meeting with Pope Francis, Trump said, "I won't forget what you said."

My tentative conclusion is that Trump is more of a conventional president than he promised or than his critics fear.

The next stops, as this is written, are a NATO meeting in Brussels and a G-7 meeting in Taormina, Sicily. It's possible that Trump will commit some dreadful faux pas along the way. But so far, he has been behaving presidentially.

That may come as a surprise to critics. *New York Times* editorialists have whined that he is forsaking the policies of his two immediate predecessors, but they haven't fully explained why those policies should be followed. In fact, Trump has not gone so far as his campaign rhetoric sometimes suggested.

The U.S. Embassy remains in Tel Aviv, not Jerusalem; the Iranian nuclear deal has not been renounced; America remains a signer of the Paris climate declaration. John Bolton complained in the *Wall Street Journal* that Trump has failed to make changes abroad, just as Ann Coulter is complaining that he is failing to build the wall along our southern border.

My tentative conclusion is that Trump is more of a conventional president than he promised or than his critics fear. His early morning tweets are unnerving; his propensity for unrehearsed ad-libs is potentially dangerous; his taste in interior decoration is appalling.

But the notion that he won the presidency through collusion with Russia is implausible and wholly without evidence. His odd campaign statements about Vladimir Putin and Russia were known to voters, and Hillary Clinton made intelligent criticism of them in the debates.

Democrats and journalists assuming that further investigations will lead to impeachment are pursuing what movie director Alfred Hitchcock called a MacGuffin — something a movie's characters are pursuing that is, to quote Wikipedia, "typically unimportant to the overall plot."

Now the question is whether Donald Trump, after acting like a president abroad, can start doing so at home.

ETATS-UNIS

Vox : Trump and GOP are trading away yoiur health care

Arms for health care, anyone? With the help of his son-in-law, President Donald Trump just inked a $110 billion weapons deal with Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the Congressional Budget Office announced Wednesday that the House-passed American Health Care Act (AHCA) will cut the deficit by $119 billion.

The numbers are close, yet so far apart. One number is the yield from an arms deal designed to give the President something to celebrate on his international tour. The other number is equally random, the savings we're expected to see from House Republican's last-ditch effort to give the President something to celebrate shortly after his 100th day in office.

And these numbers tell you everything you need know about the administration's priorities.

Now that we have the Congressional Budget Office's report in hand, we see in the cold, hard numbers that the Obamacare repeal is worse than the original version that House Republican leadership backed out of on March 24. The bill's initial failure proved humiliating for the President and House Speaker Paul Ryan, who ruefully declared that Obamacare would remain "the law of the land" for the foreseeable future.

But Ryan didn't count on the White House's desperation to pass something, anything that could bring together Freedom Caucus members and more moderate, business-minded conservatives. And no one could have predicted the two nutty and deceptive last-minute amendments that successfully arranged the marriage of far right and middle Republican representatives: a quality insurance opt-out option to delight red states and an $8 billion fig leaf.

The Century Foundation's Jeanne Lambrew broke down what the AHCA is really about, a redistribution of wealth upward.

Describing the $8 billion set aside to support programs for people with preexisting conditions who won't be able to access commercial insurance under the AHCA (which lets insurance companies return to the practice of jacking up prices on the sick), Lambrew explains that the money pales in comparison to the tax relief the bill is really designed to deliver.

Each $1 in spending for affordable health care is matched by "$4 on tax breaks for the pharmaceutical industry, $5 on tax breaks for health savings accounts that disproportionately benefit high-income people, $18 on tax breaks for the health insurance industry, and $29 on tax breaks for people with income above $200,000," she writes.

According to the CBO, 14 million Americans will lose their insurance next year if the AHCA makes it through the Senate and onward to the President's rubber stamp. And 23 million fewer of us will have health insurance 10 years from now than if Obamacare were left in place.

"It's a horrible score because the AHCA is a horrible bill," Rep. Ted Lieu (D-California), a fierce administration critic, told me in an email. "The President lied when he said coverage for preexisting conditions would be guaranteed."

Lieu says he is particularly concerned about the CBO's analysis that older people who need ongoing medical care could see premiums increase by 800%. "That's the equivalent of no insurance because it's completely unaffordable," he wrote.

The new CBO analysis comes just after the President's budget proposal that wreaks havoc on the country's social safety net, zeroing in on Medicaid in particular, a program most middle-class American's don't know they may need some day.

That is because Medicare doesn't cover long-term care: it will support just 100 days of nursing home care,

after which you're on your own. Seven in 10 of us will need some type of long-term care in our later years, and many of us won't be able to afford it.

That's why millions of seniors rely on Medicaid to provide in home assistance or care in facilities. The same applies to yet millions more people with significant disabilities.

Note, then, that while the budget cuts tens of billions of dollars from welfare, disability benefits and Medicaid, it spikes military funding by $469 billion, and devotes $2.6 billion for the President's promised border wall.

The President of the United States clearly feels deeply about the terrorist threat and protecting the "Homeland." I think we all share the sentiment, regardless of party affinity, but Democrats seem to have a capacity to walk and chew gum that conservative Republicans lack.

Existential external threats have provoked the President and his party to spare no expense to fend them off with firepower, even though the battle with endlessly replicating male zealots who see fit to kill children at concerts cannot be won through brute military might.

Instead of the President's increased military spending, we could halt the deep cuts he proposes to the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Social Security and food stamps, and we'd still have $175.5 billion left over.

We could apply those billions toward the gargantuan job of repairing our country's standing among the peoples of the world in the wake of electing such a boorish President, and tracking the additional terrorist sympathizers his words have arguably helped breed.

As I look at a health care bill that trades away quality health care in favor of tax breaks for wealthy people and wealthy corporations, and a budget proposal that trades away our social safety net for a bigger military industrial complex, I think about how we're always told Trump is a "transactional" president.

What are all the deals for? Why do we protect the homeland, why do we fight? If we are a nation that wants to put its elderly, its sick and its disabled on the street, while gilding its corporate class and shouting down the rest of the world, we are truly bankrupt.

Bloomberg

Editors : Exposing the Obvious About the GOP Health-Care Bill

The gory details of the Congressional Budget Office's report on the House legislation to "repeal and replace" Obamacare are, in many ways, superfluous. The bill's flaws, substantive and otherwise, have long been evident. Less clearly understood, though equally disturbing, is the larger political context.

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

That's not to say the particulars of the CBO report, released Wednesday, are irrelevant: far from it. The report says the Republican effort would increase the number of uninsured by 14 million in 2018, rising to 23 million in a decade. Millions would lose coverage due to the bill's cuts to Medicaid. Others would lose it because people who are older, sicker or both would find they are priced out of useful insurance. People with pre-existing health conditions would, once again, be at the actuarial mercy of insurance companies that were never organized to be charities.

These numbers fill in the big picture, which looks something like this: Health care, which depends on highly skilled labor and sophisticated technology, is expensive. Insurance to pay for that care, therefore, is also expensive. It is especially expensive for people who are, due to misfortune or advancing age, prone to costly illnesses.

Providing health insurance to more people, then, requires more money. A lot more. The Affordable Care Act imposed a range of taxes, including a special Medicare surcharge on high earners, to pay for these costs.

The Republican plan, the American Health Care Act, repeals those and other taxes, totaling some $662 billion over 10 years. It also cuts Medicaid funding by $834 billion over a decade.

The bill would provide some funding for tax credits and high-risk pools. But mostly it transfers money currently used to pay for care for the sick and poor to the nation's wealthiest taxpayers. (According to one estimate, the bottom 80 percent of income earners would see little or no benefit from the plan's tax cuts.)

Because that upward redistribution of money is politically unpopular, and literally deadly, House Republicans sought to camouflage the basic trade in which they are engaged -- reducing access to health care in exchange for tax cuts for the wealthy. The CBO report merely exposed what was obvious all along.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Editors : American Health Care Act – CBO Scoring Is Alarmist

The Congressional Budget Office's revised score for the revised American Health Care Act has been fodder for another round of alarmist headlines. But, as in March, the congressional scorekeeper's projections merit a serious grain of salt.

The CBO estimates that the health-care legislation will result in 23 million fewer people having insurance in ten years, down from 24 million under the previous version. Once again, the salient finding is that many of these people will choose not to purchase health insurance once they are no longer compelled to do so, and, once again, these numbers rely on enrollment projections in the Obamacare exchanges that are wildly optimistic. There is no reason to believe, as the CBO does, that there will be around 18 million people enrolled in the exchanges by this time next year.

But the CBO's Obamacare-related projections have always been suspiciously rosy. In 2010, the CBO projected that about 24 million would be on the Obamacare exchanges by 2017. In 2016, reality not having caught up to theory, they moved those projections down to 15 million. The actual number looks to be lower still: about 11 million.

That the CBO has been so far off, and for so long, should no longer come as a surprise. The CBO has repeatedly overestimated the effect that the individual mandate would have on insurance-coverage rates. At the same time, the CBO has underestimated the effect of incentives — e.g., the tax credits offered by the AHCA. With an eye to the current score, this is grounds for a deep breath. The CBO's estimate of consumers who will forgo coverage is likely to be exaggerated: Consumers will be less responsive to the end of the individual mandate, and they will be more responsive to incentives offered in the new bill. Also, it's likely that insurance companies will negotiate rates to be more attractive to consumers using tax credits — a contingency for which the CBO also does not plan.

The CBO also does not account for the effects that the states will have on coverage. The organization has no idea how many states will take up the waivers, how they will use them, and what the impact will be. That's a significant lacuna.

So, what was true in March is still true: The CBO's systematically biased model exercises far too much influence on the health-care reform process, and rather than trying to game the CBO, Republicans should be looking for ways to make health insurance more widely available and more affordable. Senate Republicans, currently working on their own health-care reform bill, could do a lot to that end — for example, by making tax credits more generous for those just above the Medicaid line and just below the Medicare age threshold, or by encouraging states to establish default enrollment plans.

The priority here should be good, sustainable policy. Democrats manipulated and massaged the Affordable Care Act to get the CBO's stamp of approval in 2010, and look how that's turned out.

USA TODAY

Slavitt : Republican health care bill fails the Jimmy Kimmel test. Again.

Every so often, a "national moment" takes us out of our day-to-day and helps shape our national thinking. The Exxon Valdez oil spill helped forge our national opinion about environmental responsibility.

Terri Schiavo's life-support case made the public contemplate a dignified death. Someday, when we look back on the current health care debate, we may see how a national moment helped us articulate a new consensus when late night TV host Jimmy Kimmel told the poignant story of the birth of his son, Billy.

For those who missed it, Billy was born with a serious heart condition that required emergency surgery. There were many important parts to Kimmel's tale — from the nurse who first noticed a problem to the heroism of the doctors and clinicians who conducted open heart surgery that saved the infant's life.

But what made the Kimmel moment resonate was the juxtaposition of our hopes and needs as parents in the health care system with the stark reality of the Republicans' American Health Care Act. On Wednesday, three weeks after the House passed it, the latest version of the AHCA finally had its impact evaluated by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, and the results were stunning: Similar to an earlier report, 23 million fewer people would be insured a decade from now. In addition, coverage would be unavailable or prohibitively expensive in large parts of the country for services such as mental health, substance abuse, maternity and pediatric dental care. Out of pocket costs would increase too as lifetime caps, outlawed under the Affordable Care Act, would return.

Kimmel's experience forces the question that is boiling just below the surface — whether Americans have a basic right to health care, or whether that right is reserved for those who can afford it. Or as Kimmel simply put it, "No parent should ever have to decide if they can afford to save their child's life."

In 2010, the ACA took a big step toward guaranteeing that people wouldn't need to choose between getting care and losing their home. Since it became law, it has helped reduce personal bankruptcy filings by half. At the core of the debate about the bill before the Senate is whether we want to build on that progress or surrender the health and financial security millions of Americans have gained.

If the AHCA becomes law, people like Billy with pre-existing conditions would lose protection against being charged more for insurance. The prohibition against lifetime caps and the requirement that insurers cover a package of basic essential benefits would also disappear. Like many parents in his shoes, Kimmel shudders at the thought of his son growing up without access to care through no fault of his own.

To be sure, there are voices arguing against the right to health coverage. Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, recently said, "Nobody dies because they don't have access to health care." Newt Gingrich ridiculed Kimmel because, in his view, the emergency room is required to treat kids like Billy. Some politicians who have never been without access to care may like to believe that people without insurance will all be cared for, but they are grossly misinformed.

Emergency rooms are required to treat life-threatening cases, but unlike Medicaid, they don't have to provide the many other services and treatments people need. Without insurance, Billy would have had the experience described by John Phillips, a pediatric cardiologist in West Virginia. Beyond the immediate emergency, he writes, "care, procedures and surgeries ... are only possible if the child has health care coverage that allows the family to afford them." With most kids in West Virginia living in or near poverty, he says, there's only one way to honor their "basic right" to care for everything from juvenile diabetes to congenital heart conditions to asthma: Medicaid.

In every community, Medicaid is the program that handles the needs of children, seniors in nursing homes, low-income people and people with disabilities. The bill in front of the Senate would cut Medicaid by more than $800 billion over 10 years, or 25%, to pay for large tax cuts for the wealthy.

Kimmel's experience crystallized the national debate for at least one Republican senator. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, a doctor, told CNN he won't support a bill that doesn't pass "the Jimmy Kimmel test." Appearing on Kimmel's show, Cassidy and Kimmel agreed on that test: "No family should be denied medical care, emergency or otherwise, because they can't afford it."

Given our divisions, it's often hard to imagine reaching a consensus in this country on anything. Yet polls show Americans are increasingly aligning behind the Kimmel test, in favor of universal and affordable coverage ensured by the government. In one sign of the times, after Miss USA — Kara McCullough — called health care a privilege, there was such backlash that she soon softened her words. "I said it, and I'm going to own it. It is a privilege to have health care," she said, then added: "Do I believe it's a human right? Of course I do."

How quickly this consensus translates from ordinary Americans to the Senate is now the big question. Our deliberative body is under pressure to create a "win" for President Trump in another rushed process, but senators like Cassidy understand that they are all that stands in the way of millions losing their access to care. To change course, his colleagues must speak up now and say they will never vote to allow this to happen under any circumstances.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

GOP Senators Will Contemplate Health-care Overhaul During Weeklong Recess

Kristina Peterson and Stephanie Armour

The Congressional Budget Office's latest analysis of the health-care overhaul bill passed by House Republicans underscored for their GOP colleagues in the Senate that they need a different version.

They just don't know yet what it will look like.

"We're not going to pass that bill in the Senate," Sen. Marco Rubio (R., Fla.) said of the legislation passed by the House earlier this month dismantling and replacing much of the Affordable Care Act. But the Senate's bill, he added, is a "work in progress."

Senate Republicans said aides are expected to begin drafting parts of their own health-care bill next week, when lawmakers are back in their home states for a week-long Memorial Day recess. But GOP senators said there was little consensus yet on the major policy planks of how they plan to overhaul the health-care system.

"Staff will start putting together some language we can look at when we return," Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, the second-ranking Senate Republican, said Thursday. But on key policy issues, "there is no final agreement yet," he cautioned.

Senators' eagerness to embrace major changes is likely to depend on what they confront at home next week. Supporters of the 2010 health-care law are planning rallies and airing ads attacking Republicans for the projected pitfalls of the House GOP bill, with some new fuel supplied by Wednesday's report from the nonpartisan CBO.

The budget office estimated that the House GOP bill would reduce the deficit by $119 billion over 10 years, but produce 23 million more uninsured people than the ACA by 2026. CBO also predicted that while premiums could go down for many healthy people under the House GOP bill, people with pre-existing conditions in states that opt out of some ACA requirements could face "extremely high" premiums, even with additional federal funding included in the bill.

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) said Thursday that the CBO estimate didn't fully factor in the flexibility states would be given to search for new ways to support their sickest residents.

"The states will also do some of the lifting," Mr. Ryan said. "We will have federal resources and state resources, which taken together will improve the situation."

However, the CBO report specifically said the bill's funding to help states aid people with pre-existing conditions wouldn't significantly lower their premiums, health analysts said.

Democrats predicted that Republicans would have a tough time selling their health-care plans to constituents in the wake of CBO's latest assessment.

"I don't know how in the world they could explain the miserable review that was given to the House bill," said Sen. Dick Durbin (D., Ill.) "Many of these people have lived with pre-existing conditions for such a long period of time, they can remember what it was like before the passage of the Affordable Care Act."

How to protect people with pre-existing conditions is a central concern of Senate Republicans, who have multiple working groups and lunches three times a week devoted to hashing out ideas. Senate GOP lawmakers also said they are intent on bringing down the cost of health-care premiums and deductibles, but have yet to secure any widespread agreement on how to do so.

Meanwhile, conservative Senate Republicans are pushing for a more rapid end to the ACA's Medicaid expansion while more moderate GOP lawmakers are concerned that changing the entire way Medicaid is paid for could mean big cuts for their states.

And Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) can only lose two GOP votes or their bill won't pass under a complex budget process being used to move the legislation.

Advocacy groups are girding for battle.

AARP, the politically potent advocacy group for Americans over 50 years old, has launched a seven-figure television advertising campaign targeting GOP Sens. Jeff Flake of Arizona, Cory Gardner of Colorado, Dean Heller of Nevada, as well as Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, both from Alaska.

On the other side, the American Action Network, a right-leaning advocacy group, announced a $2 million ad campaign this week in support of the House GOP bill and lawmakers who have backed it.

Interest groups are lobbying or outlining their concerns to senators. The American Benefits Council, a trade association representing employer-sponsored benefit plans, said in a letter this week to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, (R., Utah) that letting states obtain waivers under the House GOP health bill could "make it impossible" for companies to consistently offer coverage because of the state-specific insurance requirements.

American's Health Insurance Plans, the largest trade group for insurers, also sent a letter this week to Mr. Hatch urging a transition period if there is a health overhaul bill for people in the individual insurance market or on Medicaid.

Republican senators have stuck to their message that the current health law is broken and needs to be repealed.

"The Obamacare status quo is unsustainable, it's indefensible, and we have to move beyond it before more Americans get hurt," Mr. McConnell said on the Senate floor Thursday.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina said on Thursday that it is seeking a 22.9% average rate increase on its 2018 Affordable Care Act plans, and a number of other insurers have also said they would ask for rate increases or will leave the exchanges.

That rate increase would have been 8.8% if it hadn't figured in the impact of losing the cost-sharing subsidies under Obamacare, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina said. They said the state exchange was stabilizing.

Some insurers say they have lost millions of dollars while others are citing continued uncertainty over the fate of the law and payments insurers receive for providing cost-sharing subsidies to consumers.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City plans to pull out of ACA exchanges, which will likely leave part of northwestern Missouri with no marketplace plans in 2018.

Supporters of the ACA had long been preparing to mount their most vigorous defense when the GOP repeal bid reached the Senate, targeting states such as Alaska, Arizona and Nevada.

They are especially wary of the possibility that Senate leaders can woo particular legislators with quietly negotiated amendments, after being able to do it with some legislators in the House.

"Mitch McConnell and congressional Republicans are following the same secret, partisan repeal path as the House, and anyone who thinks this battle to save health care is over is wrong," said Leslie Dach, campaign director for Protect Our Care.

They also have to be careful that the latest score on the House bill doesn't allow Senate Republicans to position themselves as fixing the problem. They say they are determined to ensure that any Senate effort is compared to the coverage numbers associated with the Affordable Care Act, not the House bill.

"Instead of whether the Senate has made the House bill better, the only measure the American people care about is whether a Senate bill results in better coverage and lower costs," Mr. Dach said.

The Washington Post

UNE - Jared Kushner now a focus in Russia investigation

Investigators are focusing on a series of meetings held by Jared Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law and an influential White House adviser, as part of their probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 election and related matters, according to people familiar with the investigation.

Kushner, who held meetings in December with the Russian ambassador and a banker from Moscow, is being investigated because of the extent and nature of his interactions with the Russians, the people said.

The Washington Post reported last week that a senior White House official close to the president was a significant focus of the high-stakes investigation, though it did not name Kushner.

FBI agents also remain keenly interested in former Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn and former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, but Kushner is the only current White House official known to be considered a key person in the probe.

The Post has not been told that Kushner is a target — or the central focus — of the investigation, and he has not been accused of any wrongdoing. "Target" is a word that generally refers to someone who is the main suspect of investigators' attention, though prosecutors can and do bring charges against people who are not marked with that distinction.

"Mr. Kushner previously volunteered to share with Congress what he knows about these meetings. He will do the same if he is contacted in connection with any other inquiry," said Jamie Gorelick, one of his attorneys.

In addition to possible coordination between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign to influence the 2016 presidential election, investigators are also looking broadly into possible financial crimes — but the people familiar with the matter, who were not authorized to speak publicly, did not specify who or what was being examined.

Sarah Isgur Flores, a Justice Department spokeswoman, said, "I can't confirm or deny the existence or nonexistence of investigations or subjects of investigations." The FBI declined to comment.

At the time of the December meetings, Trump already had won the election. Contacts between people on the transition team and foreign governments can be routine, but the meetings and phone calls with the Russians were not made public at the time.

In early December, Kushner met in New York with the Russian ambassador to the United States, Sergey Kislyak, and he later sent a deputy to meet with Kislyak. Flynn was also present at the early-December meeting, and later that month, Flynn held a call with Kislyak to discuss U.S.-imposed sanctions against Russia. Flynn initially mischaracterized the conversation, even to Vice President Pence — ultimately prompting his ouster from the White House.

Kushner also met in December with Sergey Gorkov, the head of Vnesheconombank, which has been the subject of U.S. sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support of separatists in eastern Ukraine.

In addition to the December meetings, a former senior intelligence official said FBI agents had been looking closely at earlier exchanges between Trump associates and the Russians dating to the spring of 2016, including one at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington. Kushner and Kislyak — along with close Trump adviser and current attorney general Jeff Sessions — were present at an April 2016 event at the Mayflower where then-candidate Trump promised in a speech to seek better relations with Russia. It is unclear whether Kushner and Kislyak interacted there.

The New York Times reported that Kushner omitted from security-clearance forms his December meetings with Kislyak and Gorkov, though his attorney said that was mere error and he told the FBI soon after that he would amend the forms. The White House said that his meetings were normal and inconsequential.

Kushner has agreed to discuss his Russian contacts with the Senate Intelligence Committee, which is conducting one of several investigations into Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

In many ways, Kushner is a unique figure inside the White House.

He is arguably the president's most trusted adviser, and he is also a close member of the president's family. His list of policy responsibilities is vast — his foreign policy portfolio alone includes Canada and Mexico, China, and peace in the Middle East — yet he rarely speaks publicly about any of them.

Former FBI director Robert S. Mueller III is now leading the probe into possible coordination between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign, and he has set up shop in the Patrick Henry Building in

downtown D.C. Even before he was picked by Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein to take over the case, investigators had been stepping up their efforts — issuing subpoenas and looking to conduct interviews, people familiar with the matter said.

A small group of lawmakers known as the Gang of Eight was recently notified of the change in tempo and focus in the investigation at a classified briefing.

It is unclear exactly how Mueller's leadership will affect the direction of the probe. This week, Justice Department ethics experts cleared him to take over the case even though lawyers at his former firm, WilmerHale, represent several people who could be caught up in the matter, including Kushner, Manafort and Trump's daughter Ivanka, who is married to Kushner.

Mueller resigned from the firm to take over the investigation.

Investigators are continuing to look aggressively into the dealings of Flynn, and a grand jury in Alexandria, Va., recently issued a subpoenas for records related to Flynn's businesses and finances, according to people familiar with the matter.

Flynn's company, the Flynn Intel Group, was paid more than $500,000 by a company owned by a Turkish American businessman close to top Turkish officials for research on Fethullah Gulen, a cleric who Turkey's president claims was responsible for a coup attempt last summer. Flynn retroactively registered with the Justice Department in March as a paid foreign agent for Turkish interests.

Separately from the probe now run by Mueller, Flynn is being investigated by the Pentagon's top watchdog for his foreign payments. Flynn also received $45,000 to appear in 2015 with Russian President Vladimir Putin at a dinner for RT, a Kremlin-controlled media organization.

THE DAILY BEAST

Jared Kushner Now a Focus of FBI Russia Probe

Jeremy Corbyn, the controversial leader of Britain's Labor Party, will blame the U.K.'s foreign wars for terror attacks such as the Manchester suicide bombing when campaigning for the country's general election recommences Friday. According to a leaked speech, Corbyn, who has been mocked and reviled for his extreme left-wing stance, will claim a link between "wars our government has supported or fought in other countries and terrorism here at home," as he relaunches his party's election campaign Friday after the three-day pause. *The Independent* reports that Corbyn will stress that his assessment is shared by the intelligence and security services and "in no way reduces the guilt of those who attack our children," but will add, "An informed understanding of the causes of terrorism is an essential part of an effective response that will protect the security of our people, that fights rather than fuels terrorism. We must be brave enough to admit the 'war on terror' is simply not working. We need a smarter way to reduce the threat from countries that nurture terrorists and generate terrorism."

the Atlantic

Jared Kushner Now a Focus of the FBI's Russia Investigation

Aria Bendix

Last week marked a a new high in Jared Kushner's brief political career. President Trump's tour of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the Vatican, which Kushner had arranged and planned, went off without a major hitch. This week portends to be a more trying one for Kushner, as he returns to Washington to be greeted by the news that he is now a focus of the FBI's Russia investigation.

On Thursday, NBC News and *The Washington Post* reported that investigators are looking into meetings Kushner held in December with Sergey Kislyak, the Russian ambassador to the U.S., and Sergey Gorkov, the head of Vnesheconombank (VEB), a state-owned Russian bank that previously financed a deal with Trump's former business partner. An array of other outlets quickly confirmed those reports.

Although the reports did not specify why those meetings provoked FBI concern, news of the investigation comes as little surprise. Last week, the *Post* reported that FBI investigators had focused in on a senior White House aide with close ties to Trump. As Trump's son-in-law and a senior adviser to the president, Kushner's name was floated as a potential person of interest. Trump's top strategist, Steve Bannon, has also fueled speculation about Kushner's alleged Russian ties. "Mr. Bannon has told confidants that he believes Mr. Kushner's contact with Russians, and his expected testimony before Congress on the subject, will become a major distraction," *The New York Times* reported in April.

While investigators believe that Kushner possesses key information related to the FBI probe, he is reportedly not currently the target of any criminal investigation. In fact, unlike former Trump aides Paul Manafort and Michael Flynn, Kushner is not considered a formal subject of a probe, and has not been subpoenaed by a grand jury. The reports do not suggest wrongdoing. Still, Kushner is the only current White House official reported to have received special attention from the FBI.

As my colleague David Graham reported last week, Kushner acknowledged in April that he had failed to disclose dozens of contacts with foreign officials while seeking top-secret security clearance within the White House. These exchanges included conversations with Gorkov and the Russian ambassador. At the time, Kushner's lawyer said the omission was an error, adding that Kushner had submitted his national-security questionnaire prematurely and would provide further information.

In a statement given by his lawyer to the *Times*, Kushner relayed what he told the FBI: "During the presidential campaign and transition period, I served as a point-of-contact for foreign officials trying to reach the president-elect," the statement reads. "I had numerous contacts with foreign officials in this capacity … I would be happy to provide additional information about these contacts." Kushner's statement, like his security questionnaire, did not disclose any names of foreign officials. In the past, Kushner has said he and Gorkov did not discuss sanctions against Gorkov's bank, VEM. The sanctions were imposed by the U.S. after Moscow annexed Crimea and carried out aggressive military action in Ukraine.

In response to the FBI's investigation of her client, Kushner's lawyer, Jamie Gorelick, told NBC News that Kushner "previously volunteered to share with Congress what he knows about" the meetings with Gorkov and the Russian ambassador. But these meetings aren't the only reported subject of investigation. On Thursday, a former senior intelligence official told *the Post* that the FBI was closely examining an April 2016 event at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, where both Kushner and the Russian ambassador were present. Despite their later communication, it is not known whether the two men interacted at the event.

News of Kushner's involvement comes just days after former FBI Director Robert Mueller was cleared by the Justice Department to oversee a special investigation into ties between Trump's campaign team and Russian officials. Not only does Mueller's former law firm, WilmerHale, represent Kushner and his wife, Ivanka Trump, but it also represents Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign manager, who is under FBI investigation. Because Mueller did not directly represent either Trump affiliate, the Justice Department has ruled out the possibility of his new role posing an ethical conflict. Last week, White House officials said the Trump administration was hoping an ethics violation would hinder Mueller's investigation.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Jared Kushner to Cooperate in Any Probe Into Meetings With Russians

Peter Nicholas, Carol E. Lee and Shane Harris

WASHINGTON—An attorney for senior White House aide Jared Kushner said Thursday that Mr. Kushner would cooperate with any investigations into meetings he had with Russians, amid a federal probe into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

Mr. Kushner's attorney, Jamie Gorelick, said in a statement: "Mr. Kushner previously volunteered to share with Congress what he knows

about these meetings. He will do the same if he is contacted in connection with any other inquiry."

Mr. Kushner hasn't been contacted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, people familiar with the investigation said. One person familiar with the investigation said Mr. Kushner's contacts with Russians have been scrutinized by federal investigators for months.

The FBI is interested in anyone associated with the Trump campaign who had contact with the Russians. FBI agents would eventually like to speak to Mr. Kushner about his meetings in December with a Russian ambassador and banker, and any other interactions he may have had with Russians linked to intelligence services, but officials haven't taken any formal steps to interview him, according to a person familiar with the probe.

Any such step would require the approval of Special Counsel Robert Mueller, and likely would come after agents have gathered more information and have a better sense of the probe's scope.

Mr. Kushner isn't considered a target or a focus of the investigation, according to the person. Mr. Kushner's meetings with two key Russians have drawn the interest of agents conducting a counterintelligence investigation to determine the extent of those efforts.

The White House previously has said that Mr. Kushner's meetings stemmed from his role during the presidential transition period as the main "point of contact" for foreign government officials.

Mr. Kushner, who is married to President Donald Trump's elder daughter, Ivanka, holds the title of senior adviser to the president. He agreed earlier this year to speak to the Senate Intelligence Committee, becoming the first White House official to do so.

During the transition period, Mr. Kushner met with the head of a state-run bank that has faced U.S. sanctions. He also met with Sergei Kislyak, the Russian ambassador to the U.S.

Mr. Kushner had been asked by the Senate Intelligence Committee to discuss his contact with the bank executive with a Senate committee probing Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election, according to White House and congressional officials. Russia has denied interfering in the election.

The committee also wants Mr. Kushner to discuss his meeting with the Russian ambassador.

Officials said Mr. Kushner met in December with Mr. Kislyak, the Russian ambassador. Mr. Kushner subsequently had an aide handle another meeting requested by Mr. Kislyak, during which the ambassador sought to arrange a meeting between Mr. Kushner and Sergei Gorkov, the head of Vneshekonombank, or VEB, the officials said.

That meeting between Mr. Kushner and Mr. Gorkov took place in December, a senior administration official said earlier this year.

The U.S. in 2014 had imposed sanctions against the Russian development bank as part of penalties that followed Moscow's intervention in Ukraine. The Treasury Department sanctions prohibit certain specified financial contacts with the bank and others on the sanctions list.

A senior administration official said earlier this year that Mr. Kushner didn't know the bank was under sanction and "wasn't there to discuss business."

VEB said its leadership met with representatives from top world financial institutions in Europe, Asia and the U.S. throughout 2016 while developing a new strategy for the bank. "The meetings took place in the format of a roadshow for Vneshekonombank's 2021 strategy with representatives from major banks and business circles in the U.S.," including the head of Kushner Cos., Mr. Kushner's real-estate firm, the bank said.

The administration official said Mr. Kushner met Mr. Gorkov at Mr. Kislyak's recommendation, and that the two men may have discussed the topics VEB described.

A spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Washington didn't respond to a request for comment.

Bloomberg

O'Brien : When the Feds Come Knocking on Kushner's Door ...

Jared Kushner, according to reporting on Thursday from NBC and the Washington Post, is now front-and-center in the FBI's investigation of Russia's intersection with the Trump presidential campaign and, apparently, the Trump White House.

There are some unanswered questions here: NBC noted that Kushner is being treated differently from Trump campaign aides, such as Paul Manafort, and former White House officials, such as Michael Flynn. Grand juries have subpoenaed records from both of those men, and it's not clear if subpoenas have landed on Kushner's doorstep.

But the Washington Post also reported -- and this seems central and crucial as to why the president's son-in-law is a different sort of target here -- that the FBI is focusing on a series of conversations that Kushner had in December with Russia's ambassador to the U.S., Sergey Kislyak.

At the time, Kushner had already spent months trying to arrange fresh financing for a troubled building his family owns, 666 Fifth Avenue.

After one of those meetings, Kislyak arranged a meeting between Kushner and Sergey Gorkov, the powerful chief executive of a major Russian bank, Vnesheconombank, also known as VEB.

The U.S. had imposed financial sanctions on VEB because of Russian President Vladimir Putin's military incursions in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. (During this period the Russians were also meeting with Flynn, Trump's incoming national security adviser.)

VEB has close ties to the Kremlin, and Gorkov attended a training academy for members of Russia's security and intelligence services. A Trump spokeswoman has described Kushner's meetings with the Russians as routine, which they may have been given his role at the time as Trump's liaison to foreign powers.

But given the significance of 666 Fifth Avenue to Kushner and his family's fortunes, it's also possible that he saw the Russians as potential investors.

It's worth recalling that Kushner had spent the prior months lobbying Anbang, an insurer and prolific deal-maker close to China's government, for a major investment in 666 Fifth Avenue. Anbang had considered investing $4 billion in the building.

Kushner overpaid for the building in 2007, when he bought it with the help of bank loans for $1.8 billion. When the financial crisis landed a year later, occupancy rates in the building plummeted and Kushner had to be rescued by outside investors.

Anbang's investment would have valued the building at a handsome $2.85 billion, and also refinanced about $1.15 billion in debt.

The possibility of a transaction brought scrutiny from two Bloomberg reporters, Caleb Melby and David Kocieniewski, as well as from Congress and the New York Times. I discussed it in a column here and here. The Anbang deal faded after the Bloomberg report.

There's good reason for all the attention being paid to these things: Kushner is a senior White House adviser and a pivotal voice on foreign policy issues. Kushner was also reportedly one of the leading voices telling Trump to fire James Comey from his job as FBI director.

"Mr. Kushner previously volunteered to share with Congress what he knows about these meetings," Kushner's lawyer, Jamie Gorelick, told CNN on Thursday. "He will do the same if he is contacted in connection with any other inquiry."

Kushner, at 36 years old, had little diplomatic or global business experience prior to the president giving him one of the White House's most powerful and multi-faceted portfolios. The prospect that he may have been jockeying for Chinese or Russian financiers to bail out him and his family from a potentially disastrous investment at 666 Fifth Avenue presents complex but obvious conflicts of interest as well as the prospect of injudicious or self-serving White House policymaking.

The Trumps and the Kushners have also played fast and loose with the norms of ethics and conflicts of interest standards as they've gone about mingling their political and business lives. It's visible in the Washington hotel that they continue to own and run not too far from the White House; it's visible in the Kushner family's recent fundraising tour in China for a New Jersey property, and it's visible -- in the very lack of visibility -- around the president's own financial holdings and tax payments.

Trump is insulated from some of this, legally. As he said just two weeks after his November election victory: "The law's totally on my side, meaning, the president can't have a conflict of interest."

The president can have a financial conflict, of course. But no federal ethics laws apply to the president. (There are anti-bribery clauses of the Constitution that do, however.)

Regardless, the president is, indeed, in a privileged legal position when it comes to financial conflicts. Trump's advisers and relatives are not immune to those laws and others, however. To the extent that the FBI is knocking on Kushner's door with financial questions, the president's son-in-law could be in a very difficult situation.

The New York Times

Editorial board : Jared Kushner, Poor Tenants' Legal Nemesis

"Community organizer" is a bully boy taunt for President Trump.

"Bibi was an IDF Special Forces commando, while Obama was a community organizer," Mr. Trump tweeted about Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel in 2014. And, earlier that year: "America is at a great disadvantage. Putin is ex-KGB, Obama is a community organizer. Unfair."

The idea of working with little pay and no fanfare to make people's struggles less onerous is a sucker's game for Mr. Trump and his cohort. When members of Team Trump play, they are never the sucker. They exploit foreclosures, promote legislation to benefit themselves, stiff workers and contractors and create multimillion-dollar scams.

For the past few years, Jared Kushner, Mr. Trump's son-in-law, who is now in charge of vital parts of the president's agenda, has been a landlord of often decrepit low-income housing. His subordinates aggressively sue tenants for the smallest infractions despite ignoring maintenance needs, and they pursue judgments even when the tenant seems to have been in the right. While landlord-tenant disputes are hardly new, tenants in Kushner complexes have complained that the company used legal action to hound them on thin or specious grounds.

Since 2011, subsidiaries of Kushner Companies, the family real estate business Mr. Kushner ran until January, bought 20,000 apartments in 34 complexes in Maryland, Ohio and New Jersey. An investigation for The New York Times Magazine and ProPublica, by Alec MacGillis, found that one major Kushner subsidiary, JK2 Westminster, had 548 cases on file against Maryland tenants. Hundreds of other cases have been filed there by individual Kushner apartment complexes.

Community organizers could have helped Kushner tenants like Kamiia Warren of suburban Baltimore, who was sued for moving out of her apartment without giving two months' notice despite having done so. Mr. Kushner's company won an almost $5,000 judgment anyway, and garnished her wages as a home health worker, and her bank account.

The Times investigation quotes the Kushner Companies' chief financial officer, Jennifer McLean, as saying that the company has a "fiduciary obligation" to collect as much revenue as possible. Mr. MacGillis adds: "One way to make sure that tenants are paying their rent and to keep them from breaking leases early … is to instill a sense of fear about violating a lease."

Last month, Mr. Trump was asked what aspects of his previous life were at odds with his role as president. "Well in business, you don't necessarily need heart," he said. "In fact, in business you're actually better off without it."

He said that wasn't true in government. But the president's actions prove otherwise. His budget plan would gut programs for the most vulnerable, slashing Medicaid, food stamps, disability insurance and public housing.

It would also eliminate the Legal Service Corporation, which represents poor tenants fighting to stay in their homes. That would be one less concern for Mr. Kushner's family.