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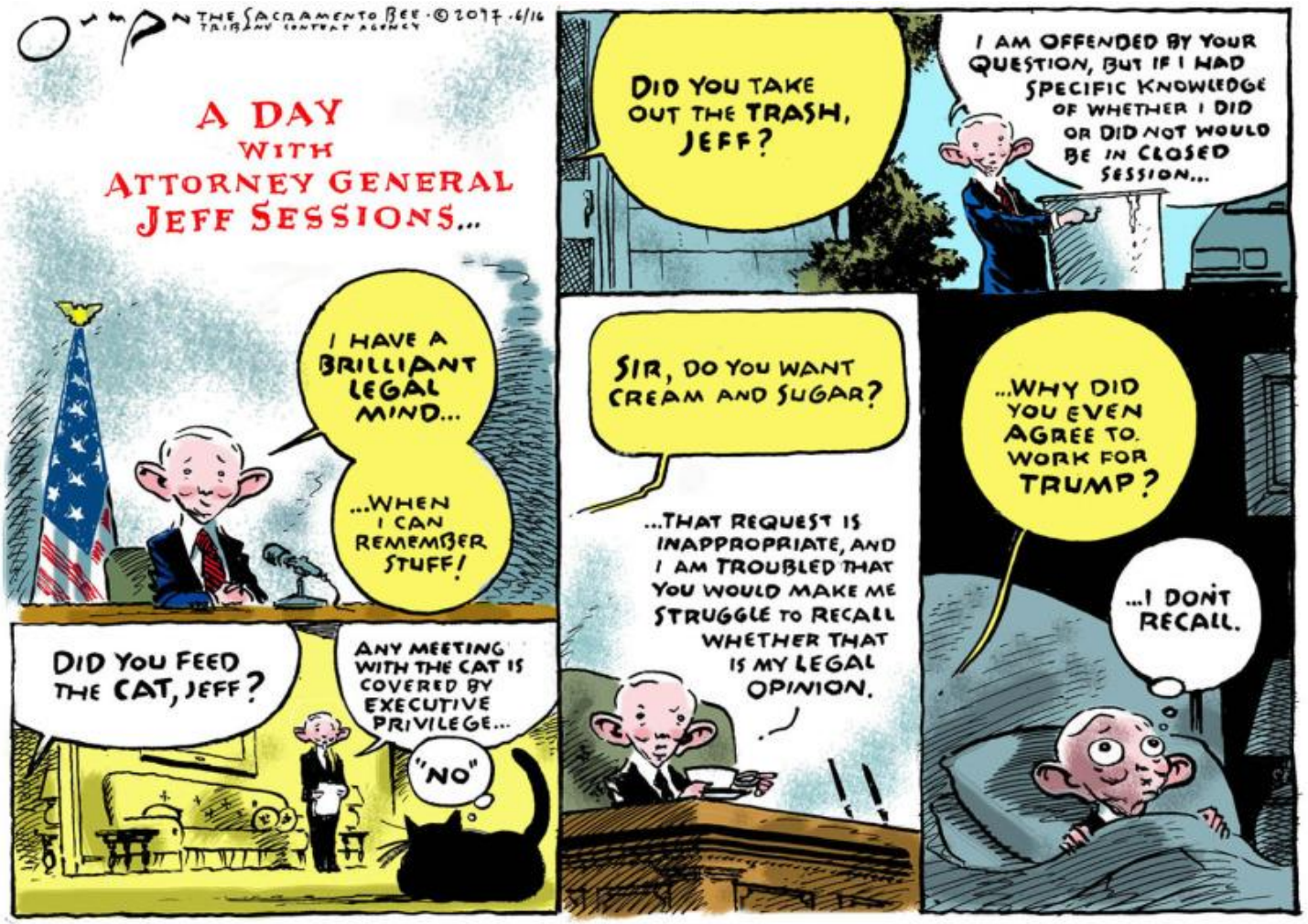

FRANCE – EUROPE

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

French President Macron Notches Convincing Victory in Parliamentary Elections

William Horobin and Stacy Meichtry

7-9 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 10:19 p.m. ET

PARIS—French President Emmanuel Macron won a commanding majority in parliamentary elections, empowering him to carry out economic overhauls that are contentious at home but pivotal in persuading Germany and the European Union to insulate the common currency from shocks.

Mr. Macron's party, La République en Marche, and its centrist ally had won 350 of the 577 seats in the National Assembly in the second and final round of voting on Sunday, the Interior Ministry said.

The victory for the staunchly pro-Europe movement undercuts nationalist forces that had appeared ascendant in the wake of the U.K.'s vote last year to leave the EU. Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front hoped to mount a robust opposition force after reaching the presidential runoff in May, but on Sunday her party only landed eight seats, not enough to guarantee space on parliamentary committees.

The vote also left the country's traditional parties on life support. The Socialists of former President François Hollande went from being a majority party to the edge of oblivion, notching 45 seats with their allies. The center-right Les Républicains and an ally finished a distant second to Mr. Macron's party, with 137 seats, according to the almost-complete count. That center-right alliance previously held 225 seats.

Instead Mr. Macron, a 39-year-old political newcomer, has reshaped Parliament in his own image, handpicking academics, athletes, business owners and deserters from traditional parties to fill the National Assembly and pass legislation of his choosing.

"By a wide majority, the French chose hope instead of anger," said Prime Minister Édouard Philippe.

The only weakness in Mr. Macron's majority on Sunday was the historically low turnout that produced it. More than 56% of voters abstained, according to the count.

"The French people wanted to give us a clear majority, but…they didn't want to give us a blank check," said Christophe Castaner, Mr. Macron's secretary of parliamentary relations, who also won a seat on Sunday.

"Even if the Macron government has a very strong majority, his ideas are in the minority," Ms. Le Pen said after winning a seat, her first ever, in northern France.

Lackluster support from the broader public could weigh on Mr. Macron's ability to make unpopular changes to the domestic labor market and keep France's end of what he considers a "New Deal" for Europe.

That involves loosening rigid protections for workers to bring France in line with other European countries and stir growth and job creation. Such changes have sunk past presidencies as the ultimate arbiter of national politics, the French street, unleashed crippling strikes and protest.

If Mr. Macron succeeds at home, it will go a long way in rebalancing the Franco-German axis that led the construction of the EU, European officials say. France's economically weakened neighbors in the south are particularly eager to see France resume its traditional role as advocate for their economies, which rely on looser monetary and fiscal policy to stimulate growth.

"The quicker Mr. Macron will be in transforming France, the more rapidly he will become strong in Europe," said Sandro Gozi, Italy's undersecretary on European affairs.

Mr. Macron wants Germany and other strong eurozone countries in the north to make longstanding commitments to backstop the whole currency union rather than responding ad hoc to crises. The French president has campaigned for the eurozone to have its own budget and Parliament with a shared finance minister.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who once dreaded the prospect of a National Front victory, has promised to work with Mr. Macron, praising him for "a magnificent campaign against populism."

Ms. Merkel followed up on Sunday, as a Twitter post by her spokesman said, "Here's to continued good cooperation for" Germany, France, and Europe.

Still, Mr. Macron's plans face deep-seated skepticism in Germany, where leading politicians have long been suspicious that Paris's calls for EU integration amount to demands that Berlin foot the bill for profligacy in Greece and beyond.

Ms. Merkel and her key allies have largely shied away from backing Mr. Macron's specific demands of a eurozone finance minister and a common eurozone budget.

Gunther Krichbaum, chairman of the German parliament's EU affairs committee, said Europe should focus instead on using its established instruments to help struggling countries rather than creating new structures.

"We must first make full use of the existing possibilities before we start thinking about new ones," Mr. Krichbaum said in an interview.

Behind the scenes, French officials say they are skirting demands for new European bodies in order to first establish common ground with Germany on how much sovereignty each side is willing to give up.

"We're talking about a fundamental construction site that will take some time," one French official said.

Mr. Macron plans to waste no time at home. He has said he would seek a mandate from his parliamentary majority in July to legislate by decree, fast-tracking his labor overhauls, so they will go into effect as early as September. That month, Ms. Merkel faces a re-election campaign in Germany.

The changes aims to give companies greater leeway in reaching agreements with employees that sidestep restrictions in France's labor code, such as the 35-hour workweek and rules that make it costly to hire and fire people. Mr. Macron's government will seek parliamentary approval in July so the changes can be effective as early as September.

Some German officials say that if Mr. Macron shows he is serious about what Germans say are long overdue overhauls, there will be an expectation that Germany after its own elections make some political concessions.

Beyond that, some in Berlin are skeptical of Mr. Macron's chances for success, especially given the entrenched opposition to overhauls in parts of the French public that didn't vote for him or his party. La République en Marche's victory in the first round of the parliamentary election last week was based on the support of only 13.4% of registered voters.

"The money will not fall on fertile ground, so to speak, if these necessary structural reforms aren't made," Mr. Krichbaum said.

"He won't force Madame Merkel's hand. He doesn't have the weight," said Dominique Freulon, a retired executive assistant who typically votes right but cast her vote for a Socialist on Sunday to oppose Mr. Macron's party.

—Giovanni Legorano in Rome and Anton Troianovski in Berlin contributed to this article.

Write to William Horobin at William.Horobin@wsj.com and Stacy Meichtry at stacy.meichtry@wsj.com

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TIME

Emmanuel Macron Brought Hope to France. Can He Bring Reform?

Vivienne Walt / Paris

6-7 minutes

Emmanuel Macron sealed an astonishing victory in the French Presidential Election with a crushing defeat of his rivals in parliamentary elections on Sunday. His brand-new La République En Marche (the Republic on the Move) party won a gigantic majority in the National Assembly, leaving the country's two traditional political parties reeling in defeat and capping the 39-year-old's stunning rise to power.

But at least for now, another aspect of the elections has astonished French pollsters almost as much as Macron's impressive victory: Optimism.

In a country famous for its public grouching, political observers say they are amazed to see the country in the grip of hope, rather than anger. The upbeat tone is especially striking because it comes after years of despair over double-digit unemployment and groaning public debt, and also because it strands in contrast to the fraught politics playing out in both Britain and the U.S.

"When you look at rates of optimism around the world, France is very low ranked," says Édouard Lecerf, Global Director of Political and Opinion Research at Kantar Public in Paris. But he says Macron cannily turned voters' exasperation to his advantage, offering them an upbeat vision of how great France could be. Much like former President Barack Obama, Macron made hope—an elusive concept—a key theme in his campaign, and now in his new presidency, repeatedly telling voters that France had huge potential globally. "He made it possible for people to think positively again," Lecerf says. "That is the most unexpected part of what has happened."

Since Macron's victory on May 7, the sense of optimism has been palpable — especially in the president's urban strongholds where many have likened the rock star treatment afforded to Macron to that given to Obama after the former U.S. president's first victory in 2008. When Macron visited the sprawling Viva Technology conference in Paris last Thursday, hundreds of people mobbed the president in the hall, where about 5,000 startups were featured, calling out "Emmanuel!"

"There is a feel-good atmosphere at the moment," says Augustin Boulot, 27, a campaign coordinator in Paris for Macron's party. "It is what has been missing in the country for a long time now," he said, standing in the party's headquarters in Paris on Sunday night, as candidates and party officials gathered to watch the results come in.

It is not clear, however, how long those good feelings can last. There are already signs that Macron could face roiling anger in the months ahead, as he begins to rolls out his sweeping economic reforms—including the record-low turnout in Sunday's elections, and the fact that those same economic proposals sparked months of violent street protests just last year.

Macron's plans include cutting taxes for many businesses, and drastically overhauling France's watertight labor protections, which he believes has paralyzed the labor market. He also wants to allow companies to negotiate their own deals with staff representatives, effectively breaking the power of national unions to dictate terms. In recent weeks Macron has hosted union leaders in the Elysée Palace, trying to stave off mass demonstrations against his plans.

Despite these efforts, Macron could still face months of protests from union activists and far-left groups, who have depicted the former Rothschild banker as a metropolitan elitist representing only the interests of the rich. "We should not be mesmerized by the fact that he has won the election, and a huge majority," Lecerf says. "Part of France feels that they are totally marginalized. He has to rebuild unity."

Although Macron's party, commonly known as En Marche, won 306 out of 577 seats, more than 57% of registered voters stayed away from the polls—a record-low turnout for French elections. That meant that Macron's supporters won only 16.55% of registered votes, according to the government's official results. The low turnout might have reflected the fact that En Marche's big victory was long seen as inevitable, perhaps making people believe that going to the polls was unimportant.

But the President is wasting no time with triangulation, and pressing on with what he has promised. His parliamentary candidates have committed themselves to approving his reform plans, perhaps in one of their earliest moves after they convene next week for their first session.

That will not come without a fight. Macron's opponents seized on the abstention rate over the two weekends of voting as proof that the president's economic reform plan would face stiff opposition—perhaps in demonstrations and strikes, replaying months of violent battles on the street last years, when Macron was Economy Minister.

Last week, Sylvain Roch, regional leader of the far-left union group CGT said in a radio interview that the low turnout in the first round of voting was partly due to the fact that "many French have been left disgusted and do not accept the politics of Macron."

And then, barely an hour after polls closed on Sunday night, far-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose party won 17 seats, vowed to begin mobilizing against Macron. "From now on the force of abstention must become the force of the citizens' revolution," he tweeted. Mélenchon, a veteran of the far-left who built a passionate youthful following in the presidential elections, won a seat in France's second-biggest city Marseille, beating the candidate from En Marche — so can oppose Macron in parliament as well as on the streets.

France, having experienced one form of political revolution this spring, may see another before the summer is over.

The Washington Post

French parliamentary elections give big boost to Macron

By James McAuley

7-9 minutes

PARIS — Emmanuel Macron was projected to win a large parliamentary majority Sunday, with the centrist party he founded little more than a year ago triumphing at the polls.

Although the result was expected after an earlier round of voting last week, the rise of Macron's pro-Europe, pro-business party represented a watershed moment in modern French politics. In a system that has only ever been governed by the center-left or the center-right, Sunday's vote marked the beginning of a French "third way," a government from the center that once seemed impossible.

Macron's Republic on the Move party was projected to win at least 355 of 577 total seats in France's National Assembly, according to French polling institutes. Although the figures were not as high as initially anticipated — and voter abstention approached a record percentage — the victory still represented the emergence of a powerful new political force in France.

"This Sunday, you gave a clear majority to the president of the republic and to the government," said Édouard Philippe, France's prime minister. "It will have a mission: to act for France. By their vote, the French, in their great majority, preferred hope to anger, confidence to withdrawal."

After a year that saw landmark victories for populist campaigns in Britain and the United States, Macron's election in May was widely seen as bucking an international trend. And now, France has placed its trust in Macron's ambitious, as-yet-untested political program, giving him a rare carte blanche to make good on his promise to "renew political life."

For Macron's aides, the victory of his party was itself a renewal, given that half its candidates were women and many were minorities in a country where neither group has traditionally been well represented in public life.

"For the first time under the Fifth Republic, the National Assembly will be profoundly renewed, more diverse, younger, with many professional, community and political backgrounds," said Catherine Barbaroux, the interim president of Republic on the March, in a speech Sunday night.

For analysts, the astonishing success of the newly founded party suggested the French people's desire to give their new president, who calls himself "neither left nor right," a chance.

"It reflects a judgment of the first weeks in power of Emmanuel Macron," said Dominique Moïsi, a foreign policy adviser at the Institut Montaigne, a Paris think tank close to the Macron campaign.

"They elected him, but they were not sure at first," Moïsi added. "Then they saw that he was incarnating the republic better than their previous president."

Predecessor François Hollande, in whose administration Macron briefly served as economy minister, was the most unpopular head of state in modern French history. Following a constant string of terrorist attacks, stagnant unemployment figures and an unresolved migrant crisis, the executive branch plummeted in the esteem of many French voters. In some polls, Hollande's approval rating reached the single digits.

By contrast, Moïsi said, Macron — after just one month in office — has asserted himself as a force to be

reckoned with on the world stage, projecting the image of a strong and powerful France that recalls the stubborn statesmanship of Charles de Gaulle.

First, Macron faced off against President Trump in a six-second handshake, and publicly criticized his American counterpart's decision to withdraw from the Paris climate accords, inviting — in fluent English — American climate scientists and researchers to relocate to France. Then he launched a catchphrase that played with Trump's campaign slogan: "Make Our Planet Great Again."

Several days later, Macron stood in the gilded halls of the Palace of Versailles outside Paris next to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Instead of making nice, the 39-year-old French president, the youngest in history, used the subsequent news conference to blast Russia's state-owned media outlets, such as Sputnik and Russia Today, as "organs of influence and propaganda."

But at the same time, France's 2017 elections, which concluded Sunday with the second and final round of voting for parliamentary candidates, reached a different sort of historic mark, as well: Never before has voter abstention been so high, at roughly 58 percent, according to one exit poll.

That called into question the legitimacy of Macron's otherwise unprecedented mandate.

Marine Le Pen, the far-right leader Macron crushed in the presidential election but who ultimately won a parliamentary seat in the Pas-de-Calais region, wasted no time attacking the strength of the president's mandate in her Sunday victory speech.

"Abstention has broken new records, and mistrust of the republic has reached a peak," she said. "This abstention considerably weakens the legitimacy of the new National Assembly. To this is added the very serious lack of representation of the chamber elected tonight. It is scandalous that a movement such as ours, with 6.7 million voters in the presidential elections, cannot obtain a group in the National Assembly."

Including Le Pen, eight members of the National Front were projected to win parliamentary seats, an increase from the two the party held in the previous Parliament.

For weeks, Macron's opponents and political analysts have worried that Macron's strong majority will enable him to shove changes through Parliament with little regard for opposition input.

In September, for instance, Macron is expected to move a major labor bill through Parliament that would, among other things, give companies the power to lengthen hours and adjust wages on a case-by-case basis, as opposed to having to observe uniform rules. In interviews with French newspapers, the leaders of France's most powerful labor unions have all warned Macron not to go too far too fast.

But if the remarkable rise of Macron — a political unknown just three years ago — represented a drastic overhaul of France's political system, Sunday's results suggested that there will, in the end, be some semblance of an opposition. Although each of France's two traditional parties were greatly diminished, the center-right Republicans took 125 seats, while the center-left Socialists took 49.

On the far left, the French Communist Party and France Unbowed, the radical leftist coalition founded by Jean-Luc Mélenchon last year, were expected to win 11 and 19 seats, respectively.

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Like Le Pen, Mélenchon, another defeated presidential candidate who represented a political extreme, took aim at Macron's mandate, especially with regard to the president's proposed market revisions.

"This bloated majority in the National Assembly does not in our eyes have the legitimacy to perpetrate the anticipated social coup, the destruction of all public social order by the repeal of the labor law," Mélenchon said.

For others, however, the results suggested a lesson that, in the political landscape of 2017, was perhaps counterintuitive: The center can hold, and the center can grow.

"It's interesting that 2016-2017 has seen a dual revolution," Moïsi said. "In the same sense that no one could have predicted the election of Donald Trump, no one could have predicted the election of Emmanuel Macron."

The New York Times

Emmanuel Macron's Party and Allies Win Big in France (UNE)

Alissa J. Rubin, Aurelien Breeden and Benoît Morenne

7-8 minutes

PARIS — President Emmanuel Macron of France won a crucial stamp of approval on Sunday as voters gave him and his allies a decisive majority in parliamentary elections, but a record-low turnout cast a shadow over his victory, pointing to the hurdles he will face as he seeks to revive the country's economy and confidence.

When the votes were counted, Mr. Macron's party, La République en Marche (the Republic on the Move) and its allies had won 350 seats in the 577-member National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament.

Mr. Macron, a relative political newcomer who was elected on May 7, had called for a strong mandate to advance his legislative agenda, including plans to loosen France's restrictive labor laws. Voters swept in many first-time candidates, including some of Arab or African ancestry, and elected more than 200 women, a record in France's modern history.

For the two mainstream parties, the outcome was a bleak repudiation: The center-right Republicans and their allies were relegated to a distant second place, with an estimated 135 members for its bloc in Parliament, while the Socialists and their allies, who had a majority in the last election, saw their bloc reduced to an estimated 45 seats.

The former Socialist prime minister Manuel Valls appeared to have barely won re-election in his district, by a margin of just 139 votes. His opponent made accusations of improprieties and asked for a recount. Several prominent Socialist representatives, including four who served as ministers in the previous government, lost their seats.

Parties on both the far left and the far right won more seats — and Mr. Macron's bloc won fewer — than analysts had projected in the past week. Still, Mr. Macron "has all the powers," said Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, who resigned on Sunday as head of the Socialist Party, which with its allies won both the presidential and the parliamentary elections of 2012, only to see their popularity erode under the leadership of Mr. Macron's predecessor, François Hollande.

A top Republican official, François Baroin, wished Mr. Macron "good luck" but said his party would continue to be heard, as the largest opposition party. Most of the better-known Republicans were re-elected, but Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, a moderate and one the party's top officials, lost to a Macron-backed candidate in her Paris district.

The National Assembly in Paris. Ian Langsdon/European Pressphoto Agency

The record-low turnout, about 43 percent, dimmed Mr. Macron's victory and pointed to the tentative, even ambivalent, view of many French citizens toward his promises to transform France.

"Many people are in a state of uncertainty, a 'wait and see,'" said Luc Rouban, a professor at the Center for the Study of French Political Life at Sciences Po.

"The level of abstention in the second round is a sign that a large part of the working-class electorate are not going to vote anymore," Mr. Rouban said, describing the sense of alienation evident in the abstention as "an invisible fracture" separating the poorest and more modestly off members of French society from the rest.

Election posters outside a polling station during the first round of the French legislative elections in Paris last week. Ian Langsdon/European Pressphoto Agency

Mr. Macron's opponents seized on the abstention rate to try to discredit his victory. The leader of the far-left France Unbowed party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, said the abstention level was "crushing," adding, "Our people have entered into a form of civic general strike." He suggested that with such a high number of people declining to vote, the government was robbed of its legitimacy.

A majority of eligible voters did not show up, perhaps because they thought Mr. Macron's candidates did not need their support or, more worryingly for Mr. Macron, because they were unwilling to give him their endorsement. Many might have been tired of voting, having been called to the polls not only for the two rounds of the presidential election and then two rounds of voting for Parliament, but also for primary elections on the left and the right ahead of the presidential election.

Nonetheless, the overall picture for Mr. Macron was a positive one.

"A year ago, no one could have imagined such a political renewal," Prime Minister Édouard Philippe said, adding: "Abstention is never good news for democracy. The government interprets it as a strong obligation to succeed."

Mr. Macron, 39, has seemed like a golden child of Western liberal democracy of late, with his stunning rise to power in little more than a year and his seemingly unerring sense of how to exercise it in his first weeks in office.

But Sunday's abstention rate suggests that he has yet to convince many French voters that his ideas and legislative program will make their lives better. The high rate could spur union-led street protests, a longtime staple of French politics, especially if Mr. Macron tries, as he has promised, to fast-track part of his legislative program.

President Emmanuel Macron needs a majority in the National Assembly to push through his agenda. Pool photo by Martin Bureau

Still, with 350 representatives elected on the ballot of La République en Marche or its close ally, the Democratic Movement, Mr. Macron could justifiably say that a majority of those who voted chose his program of loosening France's restrictive labor laws, making it easier for businesses to hire and fire employees, and reducing worker protections with the goal of creating more jobs.

The National Assembly, France's lower and more powerful house of Parliament, will lose little time getting to work and — if all unfolds as Mr. Macron hopes — the steps will begin to change France. Although Parliament will not vote on key measures in its first few weeks in office, it will start discussing the measures later this summer, setting the stage for rapid passage in the early fall, including the contentious overhaul of France's labor laws.

Also on tap for completion in the next four months is a potentially controversial codification in common law of some measures in the current state of emergency, such as the ability to conduct house raids or place people under house arrest without the prior authorization of a judge. An ethics law for politicians is also expected.

In Sunday's voting, Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front party and its allies saw a precipitous drop in support since the presidential election, winning nine seats. Ms. Le Pen herself won her race for a seat in a district of northern France, but the No. 2 in her party, Florian Philippot, lost his race. Just two months ago in the immediate aftermath of the first round of the presidential election, analysts had predicted that the National Front might obtain more than 50 seats.

Marine Le Pen, the head of the far-right National Front, at a rally in Calais this month. Philippe Huguen/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Mr. Mélenchon, the far-left leader, won his seat in a district in the Mediterranean port city of Marseille. His party and its Communist allies won 27 seats, fewer than might have been expected after Mr. Mélenchon's strong showing in the presidential election, but enough to challenge the Socialists for the status as the main left-wing opposition party.

Only the mainstream right party, the Republicans, and its allies managed to maintain a significant presence in Parliament.

A polling station in Lyon during the first round of of legislative elections. Laurent Cipriani/Associated Press

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Macron Deals a Crippling Blow to France's Establishment

Nick Kostov and William Horobin

5-6 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 10:20 p.m. ET

PARIS—The resounding victory of President Emmanuel Macron's fledgling political force in parliamentary elections crushed the traditional parties that have governed France since the end of World War II.

The French president's party La République en Marche, founded barely a year ago, bulldozed into the National Assembly with its centrist ally, taking 350 of the 577 seats.

In its wake was the rubble of France's former left-right divide—the Socialist Party and the center-right Les Républicains—that had taken turns governing the country for decades.

The Socialists of former President François Hollande and allies, who formed the majority in the assembly for the past five years, secured a mere 45 seats. The head of the party, Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, resigned within minutes of the results coming in.

"The left must change everything, its form and its fundamentals, its ideas and organization," Mr. Cambadélis said.

Les Républicains and an ally hung on to 137 seats in an alliance with another centrist group, slightly more than polls had shown last week. Previously, that center-right alliance had 225 seats.

"We have a group that is large enough to make our commitments and beliefs heard," said François Baroin, who led the Les Républicains.

The scale of the French establishment's defeat is a measure of its collective failure to reinvigorate a country whose economy has languished for decades, straining to address tensions with its Muslim minority and clocking mediocre economic growth. Unemployment hovers near 10%, and more than twice that among young voters.

Gen. Charles de Gaulle, the father of postwar France, laid the foundations for French conservatism as well as for three decades of galloping economic growth known as Les Trente Glorieuses. Socialist François Mitterrand took the reins in the 1980s and '90s and hammered out the framework of the European Union, including its single currency, with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who died last week.

As power continued to alternate between the two sides, however, France ran out of economic momentum, and the European project stalled. The timeworn themes of taxation and welfare hardened the left-right divide while a larger clash loomed between the forces of globalization and economic nationalism.

The latter was seized by the National Front, a far-right party with xenophobic roots that started to notch victories in local, regional and European Parliament elections. The banner of globalism and European integration, meanwhile, was taken up this year by Mr. Macron, who founded his own political party in April last year, saying he would transcend the left-right divide and directly take on Ms. Le Pen.

In beating Ms. Le Pen in the May presidential election, Mr. Macron also put the establishment parties on notice heading into the parliamentary races: Join me or risk oblivion. Many Socialist lawmakers ditched their party and sought Mr. Macron's blessing to run on a République en Marche ticket.

"We have a party which has a relationship with Mr. Macron that's ambiguous," said Guillaume Balas, a Socialist Party MEP and a close aide to the party's defeated presidential candidate, Benoît Hamon. "We don't know if we should be in the majority or in the opposition."

Mr. Macron also drove a wedge through Les Républicains by appointing centrists from the party to senior positions in his government. In around 50 constituencies, Mr. Macron struck deals with some lawmakers from Les Républicains, agreeing not to field a candidate for his party if they agreed to back him in Parliament.

The young leader also tapped voters' desire for political renewal by making a point of choosing candidates who had no political experience. La République en Marche candidates included a mathematician, a hairdresser, a theologian, police officers, lawyers, sports stars and even a retired bullfighter.

France's new National Assembly will stand in contrast to its peers in Europe, where traditional parties still have a firm grip on power. In the U.K., the Conservatives and Labour Party got a combined 82% in the general election this month. In Germany, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats are each forecast to get more than 25% of the vote in September general elections.

If France's traditional parties are to survive, they will have to rebuild from the regional and local levels where they still have a presence, analysts say.

"Despite being extremely weakened they remain the parties that have by far the greatest number of elected officials if you look at all echelons. That doesn't vanish overnight," said Philippe Marlière, a professor of French politics at University College London.

Write to Nick Kostov at Nick.Kostov@wsj.com and William Horobin at William.Horobin@wsj.com

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The Washington Post

France's Macron wins even greater power (online)

https://www.facebook.com/ishaantharoor

7-9 minutes

Analysis Interpretation of the news based on evidence, including data, as well as anticipating how events might unfold based on past events

June 19 at 1:00 AM

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French President Emmanuel Macron's Republic on the Move party was projected to win a large majority in the parliamentary elections June 18. French President Emmanuel Macron's Republic on the Move party was projected to win a large majority in the parliamentary elections June 18. (Bastien Inzaurralde, Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

French President Emmanuel Macron's Republic on the Move party was projected to win a large majority in the parliamentary elections June 18. (Bastien Inzaurralde,Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

You've heard this before, but we need to say it again: French President Emmanuel Macron pulled off something extraordinary in 2017. At the beginning of January, he was a 39-year-old maverick politician with a roguish smile and no institutional backing from the country's dominant political parties. Six months later, he is France's unlikely 39-year-old head of state and — as the results of Sunday's final parliamentary vote indicated — the architect of an astonishing dismantling and remaking of the country's political establishment.

Macron's Republic on the Move party, which was only formed last year, was projected to win at least 355 of 577 seats in Parliament — a commanding majority. The center-right Republicans will be his main opposition, albeit with a shrunken total of about 125 seats. The center-left Socialists, France's ruling party until a few weeks ago, suffered a ruinous and perhaps fatal collapse, losing hundreds of seats and emerging with just about 48 members in Parliament.

"This Sunday, you gave a clear majority to the president of the republic and to the government," said Édouard Philippe, France's prime minister. "It will have a mission: to act for France. By their vote, the French, in their great majority, preferred hope to anger, confidence to withdrawal."

The far-right National Front led by Marine Le Pen, whom Macron defeated in a closely watched presidential contest last month, also disappointed. While Le Pen will take a seat in the National Assembly for the first time, her party is beset by infighting and ideological debates over the way forward. The France Unbowed movement led by staunch leftist Jean-Luc Mélenchon was projected to win about 19 seats and, in alliance with the Communists, might present the most aggressive opposition to Macron's pro-business, pro-Europe agenda.

Macron's critics suggest that historically low turnout — particularly among young people and the working class — casts his mandate into doubt. **But the new makeup of the French Parliament still signals a profound moment of affirmation for Macron, who championed a "neither left nor right" brand of politics at a time when the centrist status quo seems under siege across the West.**

"It's interesting that 2016-2017 has seen a dual revolution," said French foreign policy expert Dominique Moïsi to The Washington Post. "In the same sense that no one could have predicted the election of Donald Trump, no one could have predicted the election of Emmanuel Macron."

Many of the people now set to enter office are political novices, drafted into Macron's party because of their specific professional skills or technocratic training and expertise. Others abandoned the center-right and center-left to join up with a movement whose anti-establishment message rang true with voters without promising the radical disruption of more extreme parties. Half of Macron's candidates were women; a significant proportion belong to France's minority groups.

Armed with the biggest electoral mandate in years, Macron, a former investment banker, will seek to push through key reforms he believes are vital to reinvigorating France's faltering economy. The coterie of center-right politicians and experts now guiding Macron's economic policy led my colleague James McAuley to suggest that his supposed "radical centrism" looks more like an unvarnished conservatism. That will now be put to the test.

In September, as McAuley detailed, "Macron is expected to move a major labor bill through Parliament that would, among other things, give companies the power to lengthen hours and adjust wages on a case-by-case basis, as opposed to having to observe uniform rules. In interviews with French newspapers, the leaders of France's most powerful labor unions have all warned Macron not to go too far too fast." A tense period of negotiations with the country's major labor unions is expected.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Some analysts suggest this move to a more German or Scandinavian model of labor relations is long overdue — but it cuts against the French social contract cherished by many.

"If you believe the workers of this country and salaried employees generally are going to be fleeced simply because all the glossy magazines have published a smiling photo of the young prince, you are dreaming," said Mélenchon to Europe 1 radio, sneering at Macron. "This is France, and a century and a half of struggle for the rights enshrined in the labor are not going to be wiped out at the stroke of a pen. There will be a struggle."

Since coming to power, Macron has already set about asserting himself as a figure of global heft. A proselytizer of the European project, he engaged in several eye-catching confrontations — a white-knuckle handshake with President Trump and a public upbraiding of Kremlin policy while standing alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin. Should German Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling party win reelection later this year, as is expected, Europe's liberal status quo will have two powerful defenders secure in office and ready to take action.

In a marked departure from his affable, chatty persona on the campaign trail, Macron has retreated from the press since becoming president. He has adopted the "Jupiter approach," as it's known in the French lexicon — acting aloof at the top of the nation's political pantheon while those below him duke it out in the daily struggles of governance. We'll see how long he'll be able to remain above the fray, but the French president is in a position of strength that leaders of most other democracies would envy.

Bloomberg

Balance of Power: Macron's Revolution

Ben Sills @bensills23 More stories by Ben Sills

5-6 minutes

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by and

19 juin 2017 à 05:55 UTC−4

Emmanuel Macron may now be the most powerful French president since Charles de Gaulle after crushing the establishment yet again in the country's National Assembly elections.

Macron's Republic on the Move party and its allies won 350 seats in the 577-strong parliament after yesterday's second round. The result is even more astonishing for the fact that his party didn't exist 14 months ago.

Macron now has five years to remake a country plagued by economic weakness, terrorism and near-record unemployment. A recent poll showed 88 percent of people think France has lost its way.

It's a task that has eluded French presidents for decades, and the 39-year-old Macron will have to overcome a mixture of apathy and discontent if he's to pull it off. Turnout for the assembly elections was the lowest on record. And Macron will face the inevitable wave of street protests when he tries to implement his reforms.

But the prize is a big one. If he succeeds he'll join Margaret Thatcher and, to a lesser extent, Gerhard Schroeder in the pantheon of European leaders who transformed their countries.

If not, the populist wave may be difficult to hold back next time.

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Global Headlines

Another attack in London | Police are investigating a potential terrorist attack in North London after a van plowed into a crowd near a mosque early Monday, killing one person and injuring 10. London was already a city on edge and this would be the fourth terrorist incident in as many months. It comes as Prime Minister Theresa May clings to power after a disastrous election result and her widely criticized response to last week's Kensington tower block inferno.

Obamacare secrecy sparks Senate showdown | Democrats are mulling the prospect of grinding legislative business to a halt to protest secret efforts to craft an Obamacare repeal bill. Republicans want to fulfill their campaign pledge to repeal and replace the 2010 Affordable Care Act, but some of them have already voiced doubt about whether the Senate can act this year. A push by Democrats to stall proceedings won't make it any easier.

Brexit talks (finally) start | Almost a year since Britain voted to leave the EU, Brexit negotiations opened today in Brussels amid confusion over just what the U.K. wants from the divorce. Head over to Bloomberg's daily Brexit Bulletin for a full rundown of what's at stake and a closer look at the two negotiating teams.

Kushner seeks to revive Mideast peace talks | President Donald Trump's son-in-law and top adviser, Jared Kushner, plans to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas when he travels to Israel and the West Bank this week. The visit will be Kushner's third to the region since Trump was elected and follows a report in the New York Times that he's seeking a criminal lawyer to defend him over his deepening involvement in the various Russia election-meddling investigations.

Abe's popularity slides | Japanese leader Shinzo Abe suffered his biggest drop in public approval since taking office for a second time in 2012 after another scandal reinforced allegations of cronyism. While it's unlikely he's going anywhere soon, members of his own party are starting to offer rare criticism of the once "Teflon" leader, denting his chances at becoming Japan's longest-serving prime minister.

Iran fires six missiles into Syria | Iran fired missiles at Islamic State targets in Syria for the first time in retaliation for twin terror attacks in Tehran earlier this month. The strike may signal the Islamic Republic's willingness to deploy its military power in the region's conflicts and show that it won't back down from its rivals -- particularly Saudi Arabia, which Iran accused of encouraging the deadly violence in its capital.

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Cold War déjà vu | There's been a lively debate among historians and diplomats for years over whether the U.S. and Russia are headed for a new Cold War. The case has been strengthened in recent days after Trump restored some restrictions on Cuba last week and the Senate approved a bill to toughen sanctions on Russia. As Marc Champion reports, this all has some of America's European allies worried.

Photographer: Miller, Chris

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Chicago Tribune : France's Macron to reshuffle government after huge parliament win

French President Emmanuel Macron is poised to rearrange his Cabinet after his new centrist party engineered a landslide in the country's parliamentary election, enabling the government to quickly start passing its first big laws.

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe will resign "in the coming hours" and a new government will be named in the next few days, government spokesman Christophe Castaner said Monday on RTL radio. It's a largely symbolic move required after a legislative election.

Since Macron's new party, Republic on the Move!, won an absolute majority in the 577-seat National Assembly, Castaner said the government reshuffling would be "technical and not far-reaching."

He refused to say whether ministers who have come under corruption suspicions would keep their jobs.

Many victorious parliament members have not held office before. They started arriving Monday at the National Assembly to learn their way around before the first parliament session next week.

After Sunday's vote, the number of French female lawmakers is the highest ever at France's lower house of parliament, reaching 38.7 percent — up from 26.8 percent in the outgoing Assembly.

Republic on the Move! and its allies from the Modem party took 350 seats — more than the 289 seats needed for a majority, according to the Interior Ministry's definitive results.

During a visit to the Paris Air Show, Macron declined Monday to comment on the parliament election. His government is expected to pass its first set of measures during a special parliamentary session starting on June 27 — laws to strengthen security, improve ethics in politics and reform France's restrictive labor laws.

The conservative Republicans and their allies are the main opposition group in parliament, winning 137 seats. The Socialist Party, which dominated the outgoing Assembly, was the main loser in Sunday's vote, winning only 29 seats.

Far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon's party won 17 seats, over the minimum of 15 needed to form a group, a tool that provides extra funds and speaking time.

The far-right party National Front party won 8 seats — up from 2 in the outgoing Assembly — including one for its leader, Marine Le Pen.

Le Pen on Monday praised Sunday's vote as "historic" result but denounced an "anti-democratic voting system" that she says doesn't represent the "real weight" of her far-right party in the country.

The National Front won 8.75 percent of the votes nationwide, which is more than the Socialists and Melenchon's far-left party, yet it has less seats.

"We're worth at least 80 (seats) in my opinion, given the energy we will use to promote our views," Le Pen told a news conference.

Others agree that France's current two-round voting system favors mainstream parties and their allies.

Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said the government wants to reduce the number of lawmakers in the future and change the voting system to introduce a partial proportional representation. This would give smaller parties better representation at the National Assembly.

Bloomberg

Macron Under Pressure to Deliver as French Turnout Plummets

@gviscusi More stories by Gregory Viscusi

7-8 minutes

by , , and

18 juin 2017 à 18:21 UTC−4 19 juin 2017 à 02:39 UTC−4

- Most French voters stayed home for parliamentary election
- President set for biggest legislative majority in 15 years

There was no public celebration from President Emmanuel Macron's government on Sunday night as his party claimed a historic majority in the French legislature.

Macron's Republic on the Move and its allies won 350 seats in the 577-strong National Assembly, giving them the biggest majority in 15 years. But the number of voters turned off by the political process highlighted the urgency of the job facing the country's 39-year-old leader.

How Macron Won the Legislative Elections

Sunday's turnout of 42.6 percent was the lowest ever for a French legislative election, and more than 10 percentage points below the previous record, a reminder that almost half of the vote in April's first round of the presidential election went to candidates opposed to the open borders and free markets of the European Union that Macron favors.

"Abstentionism is never good for democracy," Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said in a televised statement. "The government will consider it has an obligation to succeed. Now comes the time for action."

Macron's majority gives him a free hand to drive through his program of liberalizing France's labor market and push for closer European integration. He has five years to persuade those disenchanted voters that they'll benefit from his recipe rather than more radical alternatives. His anti-euro antagonists Marine Le Pen of the National Front and far-left Jean-Luc Melenchon both claimed seats for the first time, giving them a platform to keep promoting their more populist approaches.

The second largest group in parliament will be the center-right Republicans with 113 seats. The Socialist majority from the previous

parliament was decimated, the party retaining only 29 seats.

“What’s at stake is much more than whether Macron can be re-elected,” said Jean Garrigues, a professor of history at the University of Orleans. “The entire political establishment of France will live or die by this. If Macron doesn’t succeed, then the next political response to people’s anger will come from one of the extremes.”

As is the custom after a parliamentary election, the French cabinet will resign today. Macron is expected to re-appoint basically the same cabinet later this week -- all the ministers standing in Sunday’s election won their seats, so there will be no reshuffle forced on the president.

“There may be some technical changes but on the whole it should be a confirmation,” government spokesman Christophe Castaner said on RTL Radio Monday morning. “But that’s up to the president and the prime minister.”

Read more about France’s parliamentary election

German Chancellor Angel Merkel and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker saluted Macron’s parliamentary win late Sunday.

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The new parliament meets for the first time June 27, with labor-market reform at the top of the agenda, a task that has eluded French presidents for generations. Philippe has said he’ll present his plans to cabinet ministers on June 28 and in July ask parliament for permission to legislate by decree. Macron aims to have the new rules in force by September, when Germany’s national election should establish the foundation for broader European reforms.

“We now have the means to put in place our policies, and it’s up to us to do it,” Castaner said. “But there will be some strong voices in the opposition.”

The government is being watched both domestically and internationally because France’s 3,000-page labor code is blamed for discouraging hiring and keeping French growth below the euro-area average. Unemployment in France is roughly double that of Germany and the U.K., helping Le Pen to attract her party’s biggest ever vote in May’s presidential runoff.

Luckily for Macron, he’s inheriting an economy showing signs of a cyclical improvement for the first time in years, with consumer confidence at its highest in a decade.

“Firming economic growth and rising employment in France and across most of Europe provide a favorable backdrop,” Holger Schmieding, an economist at Berenberg bank in London, said in an emailed note. “Making dismissal rules more flexible in times of an economic upswing is less difficult politically than in times of crisis.”

‘Total Resistance’

Yet the government also has to contend with a budget that risks overshooting its 3 percent target in 2018, according to the National Auditor, even before enacting the tax cuts and spending increases Macron promised during the presidential campaign.

Bruno Le Maire

Photographer: Charly Triballeau/AFP via Getty Images

“It won’t be easy,” Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said after winning re-election in his Normandy constituency Sunday evening. “The French voters’ decision leaves a massive responsibility on our shoulders -- to deliver results.”

Melenchon, who took 19 percent in the first round of the presidential election, will have 17 seats in parliament, and his sometime allies the Communists another 10. He promised “total resistance” to Macron’s economic policies and said his majority had no legitimacy because of the low turnout.

The government is also promising other contentious legislation. This Wednesday the cabinet will propose making emergency counter-terrorism powers permanent, a move opposed by many human-rights groups.

On the economic front at least, Schmieding said Macron has a mandate for his reforms because he’s been straight with voters about his plans from the start, unlike his Socialist predecessor Francois Hollande, who tried to tack to the center in mid-term.

The president “has campaigned for reforms and he won the presidential and the subsequent legislative elections with convincing majorities,” Schmieding said. “Macron has proven to be a skillful and focused political operator.”

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Macron's party wins majority in French parliament

By Laura Smith-Spark, Chandrika Narayan, and Ryan Prior, CNN

Updated 8:24 PM ET, Sun June 18, 2017

Macron party likely to win landslide majority 02:38

Story highlights

- President Emmanuel Macron's party expected to win majority of seats
- A landslide victory will help Macron carry out political and economic reforms

*(CNN)*French President Emmanuel Macron's centrist party scored a decisive victory after Sunday's second round of parliamentary elections, France's Interior Ministry announced.

With 97% of the vote in, Macron's La Republique En Marche party had won 300 seats. Its political ally, the Mouvement Démocrate, MoDem,won 41 seats.

That margin of victory would give Macron, a pro-European centrist, the large majority he craves to further his political revolution -- and would inflict a further blow on the country's traditional ruling parties. The conservative Les Républicains and their allies trailed with about 129 seats.

The center-left Socialist Party and their allies were projected to win 41 to 49 seats. Party leaders began reacting to the projected results soon after polls closed closed Sunday evening.

The far-right National Front won 8 seats.

"This evening despite an alarmingly low turnout, the triumph of Emmanuel Macron is indisputable, the defeat of the left is unavoidable, the defeat of the Socialist party is without appeal, the right is facing a real failure," said Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, the leader of the Socialist party.

François Baroin, the leader of Les Republicains, also remarked on the low turnout.

But he told BFMTV that Macron was "the artisan of this victory" and wished him success.

Meet Macron's party candidates 02:13

Macron's party, founded just a year ago, won the first round of elections on June 11 with less than half of eligible voters going to the polls.

Turnout again looked set to be low for the second round. Nationwide, it stood at just over 35% as of 5 p.m. local time (11 a.m. ET) on Sunday, France's Interior Ministry said on its website, significantly down compared with the same time in the 2012 election.

Macron won the French presidency last month without the support of a traditional mainstream party, as his newly minted En Marche! movement helped carry him to a convincing election victory over far-right candidate Marine Le Pen.

How the elections work

To win a seat outright in the first round of voting, candidates had to win more than half the votes, which must account for at least a quarter of the registered voters.

If no single candidate managed to achieve that target, then all candidates who won at least 12.5% of registered voters advanced to the second round. The winner from the second round will then advance to Parliament.

What to know about Emmanuel Macron 01:32

According to BFMTV, more than 1,000 candidates ran in Sunday's elections.

La Republique En Marche and the Mouvement Démocrate won a combined 32.3% of the vote in the election's first round. The established Les Républicains trailed with 15.8% of the vote.

How Emmanuel Macron won the French presidency 01:50

Both the Republican and Socialist parties, which have traditionally governed during the time of the Fifth Republic, struggled with turnout.

Le Pen's right wing National Front party garnered 13.2% of the vote in last Sunday's first round and was originally expected to take one to four seats. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's far-left party claimed 17 seats after accounting for 11% of the vote in the first round.

Read: Emmanuel Macron: From political novice to President

Mistrust in politics

Though Macron and his party received a majority, leaders from across the spectrum were quick to

point out that the low turnout meant the victory might not amount to a full-throated mandate from the French electorate.

"The low level of participation shows that there is a high level of mistrust in politics," Macron's far-right opponent in the final round of the presidential election, Le Pen, said. "The extremely low turnout considerably weakens the legitimacy of the new national assembly and this quinquennium begins on a very bad basis."

Mélenchon, leader of the far-left insoumise movement, had a similar view. "We have good news. First of all, the extremely low turnout today has an offensive political significance. Our people have entered a form of general civic strike in this election."

Edouard Philippe, the center-right politician whom Macron selected as his prime minister, called the vote a "frank majority" and said, "through the vote, the French people chose hope over anger." Yet he added that "low turnout is never good news," noting that the government had an "obligation to succeed."

"Tonight, the time for action is starting for the new presidential majority," Philippe said.

The newly elected President is leading a country suffering from high unemployment, a stagnant economy and security worries. Macron is hoping to carry out the far-reaching reforms he promised during his campaign.

USA TODAY

Voters set to hand President Emmanuel Macron a majority

Jabeen Bhatti, Special for USA TODAY

6-7 minutes

Raw: Macron votes in French election

Watch French President Emmanuel Macron votes in the final round of French Parliamentary elections on Sunday, June 18. Wochit

French President Emmanuel Macron casts his ballot in the second round of the French parliamentary elections at the City Hall in Le Touquet, France, on June 18, 2017.(Photo: CHRISTOPHE ARCHAMBAULT / POOL, EPA)

PARIS — French voters gave President Emmanuel Macron a large majority in Parliament with Sunday's second-round election, handing the independent newcomer a clear mandate to overhaul the government.

With 97% of the votes counted, Macron's Republic on the Move! party won 43% of the vote, followed by the conservative Republicans with 22%, and the far-right, anti-immigrant National Front at just under 9%. The Socialists, who ruled the nation before Macron, won only 6%.

"Through their vote, a wide majority of the French have chosen hope over anger," said Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, a center-right politician who joined Macron's movement.

Republicans leader Francois Baroin declared his party the main opposition after losing to Macron's movement. He wished Macron "good luck" because he said he wants France to succeed.

Macron's party was created less than two years ago, yet it dominated in the first round of voting on June 11. Official partial results Sunday night showed his party and its allies won 327 of the 577 seats in the National Assembly, with 33 seats yet to be counted — far beyond the 289 needed for a majority in the powerful lower house.

Macron, 39, the youngest French head of state since Napoleon Bonaparte, won office in May, promising to lead a revolution to renew confidence in government and revive the country's stagnant economy with an agenda that mixes liberal and conservative policies.

"It is a movement that disrupts," said Eddy Fougier, a political scientist with the Paris-based French Institute of International and Strategic Affairs.

"It is not a protest movement because Emmanuel Macron isn't protesting anything — he is the incarnation of the elite French," Fougier said. "But it's like someone who arrived in a market with their start-up where there were already dominant players, and changed the rules."

Macron has proposed a raft of pro-business measures, including making it easier to hire and fire workers and creating a new tech visa to entice developers and engineers to relocate to France. France's unemployment stands at 10%, but joblessness among young people is 25%.

He has also pushed back against those in France and Europe who want to break up or weaken the European Union, and criticized far-right politicians who have said countries should close their borders to immigrants fleeing the Syrian civil war and other violence.

Macron voters said they are less interested in his sometimes controversial platform — such as changing France's strict labor law that is considered a sacred cow — than the fact he is shaking things up.

"It's time for something new," said Celine Haroun, 35, a stay-at-home-mom in Paris who voted for Macron's party. "I think it's enough now" from parties that held power in the past.

Those parties have mainly been shut out of governing. The Interior Ministry counted the center-right Republicans and allied candidates as winning 131 seats, with 33 seats still uncounted. The Socialist Party could get fewer than 50 seats. The polarizing far-right, anti-immigrant National Front, headed by Marine Le Pen, won eight seats.

Former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing and his wife Anne-Aymone vote in Authon, in central France, on June 18, 2017. The former leader, now 91, was president from 1974-1981. (Photo: Guillaume Souvant, AFP/Getty Images)

Republic on the Move!'s style sharply diverges from France's traditional mainstream parties, whose members usually are culled from the country's political landscape and its most elite universities, known as the "Grandes Écoles."

Instead, most candidates in Macron's party have never held office or studied politics — a condition Macron set before the parliamentary elections. The candidates applied online to run. Half are women. Ethnically African and Middle Eastern candidates are heavily represented. Currently only around 12 deputies in the assembly have backgrounds from those regions.

"Macron can hardly be described as "anti-establishment," because he actually is a part of the French establishment," as a banker and a former minister under Socialist President François Hollande, said Adriano Bosoni, a senior Europe analyst based in Barcelona with Stratfor, a strategic intelligence firm. "However, his youth and his relative lack of political experience allowed Macron to present himself as a breath of fresh air in French politics."

"Macron managed to attract voters who wanted to protest against the traditional political parties, which in a sense makes him a part of the "anti-establishment" wave that we see in Europe and the United States," he added. "But at the same time, he managed to do this while defending centrist and moderate positions on economic and social issues."

One aspect of the election could mar Macron's sweep. The turnout was trending low, with just over 35% of eligible voters casting ballots by late Sunday afternoon, less than the 41% at the same hour in the first round of parliamentary voting a week ago, according to the Interior Minister.

A low turnout arguably could reflect a contempt of government that Macron is seeking to reverse. Because his party could receive less than a majority of total registered voters, that could weaken Macron as he pursues his agenda, analysts said.

Meanwhile, Haroun said she was taking a wait-and-see attitude, hoping for the best, maybe even a revolution that would bring real change.

"Even if they abuse the power, which is normal for politicians, we can get them out in a few years," she said. "And besides, how bad can it be — after all, it's not Le Pen. For that, we must be thankful."

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Macron Generation Sweeps Out French Old Guard Promising Change

@gviscusi More stories by Gregory Viscusi

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19 juin 2017 à 04:35 UTC−4

- President's party leads transformation of National Assembly

- LREM lawmakers include entrepreneurs, academics, technologists

In 16 years since leaving university, Olivia Gregoire advised the French and Peruvian governments on health care, created her own marketing firm, and got to know the inside of job centers and labor courts when the euro crisis left her unemployed.

On Monday she starts a new career as a lawmaker representing a middle-class district of Paris for President Emmanuel Macron's political movement Republic on the Move, or LREM. She says she's not at all worried that she doesn't know how things are done in the French National Assembly's 18th-century home in the Palais Bourbon.

Olivia Gregoire, center, campaigns in Paris.

Photographer: Gregory Viscusi/Bloomberg

"I've never heard of anyone who went to university to study how to be a member of parliament," the 38-year-old Gregoire said last week during a break in campaigning at a Paris street market. "I'll be bringing real experience to the things I'll be voting on."

Macron, 39, demanded that at least half of his party's candidates in the parliamentary election be new to elected office, a signal to voters he intends to make good on his pledge to shake up the political system. While his opponents warned that electing an army of lawmakers unschooled in parliamentary procedure risked dysfunction in the legislature, voters embraced Macron's movement.

Mathematician, Entrepreneur

Sunday's second and decisive round of voting saw LREM and its allies win 350 of the 577 seats in the National Assembly, the biggest majority in 15 years, albeit amid record-low turnout. Gregoire defeated Philippe Goujon from the center-right Republican party -- a man who has held elected positions since she was four years old -- by 56 percent to 44 percent.

Other LREM lawmakers elected Sunday to represent Paris include a solar-panel entrepreneur, a business journalist, a lawyer, and a computer programmer. Cedric Villani, who won the prestigious Fields Medal for math in 2010, will be representing a district south of Paris. Typhanie Degois, a 24-year-old who just earned a university degree in international affairs, narrowly defeated an incumbent who had held a circumscription in the Alps for 20 years.

"I have serious doubts about their ability to be members of parliament," Julien Dray, a former spokesman for the Socialist Party, said June 16 on BFM TV. "It's not nothing being a deputy. It's not something that you improvise. We are going to have some unpleasant surprises."

Government spokesman Christophe Castaner has said REM will provide training for its new deputies, though hasn't given any details. Journal du Dimanche said the new deputies will have to attend a two-day seminar next weekend.

"LREM will work for the greatest integration for these new members," he said June 8 on BFM. "They will have some technical difficulties, after all, after five years in parliament I can't answer all the questions. But I don't think it's a problem to bring in people with experience in the world of business, of culture."

'Re-energize Politics'

Anne-Marie Idrac, a former trade minister in a center-right government and a deputy from 1997 to 2002, said learning the ropes of how laws and debates are handled in the National Assembly isn't particularly difficult. More challenging will be understanding the lawmaker's role and how it relates to the government.

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"Those who come from the business world will have to learn that it's not a decision-making executive position, it's a collective body of deliberation," said Idrac, 65, who is now president of Toulouse Airport and a board member at Total SA and Bouygues SA. "I'm not going to say all will be easy and all will turn out to be wonderfully perfect deputies, but it's a chance to re-energize French politics."

Gregoire said the party, as of last week, hadn't told her and other candidates what was planned for them after the election because they didn't want to act as if victory was in the bag. Parliament's first session is June 27.

"We will learn the ropes just like all the other doctors, lawyers, and engineers did before us," said Gregoire. "There may be more of us from civil society, but we are hardly the first."

'The Old Ones Cheated'

Gregoire met Macron at Paris' Sciences Po institute, from where they both graduated in 2001. She said she didn't know him well at the time.

"I was into partying, and we used to throw great parties," she said. "We'd invite him, but he never came. He was there to work."

She went straight into the workforce after graduating while he went to France's elite ENA school for civil servants, but she did keep in touch over the years via classmates. She joined his nascent political movement in March 2016, a month before it was officially launched, and helped work on the movement's health-care platform.

Her varied career has also included stints at public relations firms and preparing the IPO of an industrial company -- ultimately derailed by the financial crisis -- roles she's combined with looking after her wheelchair-bound father.

Campaigning at the Paris street market, she fielded questions from voters varying from access to pensions to how to deal with terrorism. Anne-Marie Louvet, an 92-year-old, said she's lived in the neighborhood since 1945 and has five kids, 16 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren. She came up to offer her support.

"We need a change," Louvet said. "The old ones cheated. You won't cheat, will you?"

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Le Pen Wins Seat in French Assembly, Saving Her Political Career

More stories by Helene Fouquet

@HeleneFouquet

3 minutes

by

18 juin 2017 à 15:19 UTC−4

- National Front set to claim fewer than 10 seats in Parliament
- Far-right leader had vowed to lead opposition to Macron

The National Front's Marine Le Pen won her northern Henin-Beaumont constituency to claim her first-ever national post and keep alive her chances of clinging on to the party leadership despite her defeat in the presidential election.

How Macron Won the Legislative Elections

Le Pen won the district with about 59 percent of the vote, beating Anne Roquet from President Emmanuel Macron's Republic on the Move, according to Le Parisien Selon. It was 48-year-old Le Pen's third attempt to get a parliamentary seat. The lifelong politician has previously served as a European lawmaker and a regional councilor since running in her first campaign in 1998.

The result is a minor victory for the nationalist firebrand, who started the year eyeing the presidency and end up with just a handful of seats in the National Assembly, too few to form a parliamentary group and have role in setting the political agenda.

"We are the only force that will fight against the dilution of France," Le Pen said in a televised statement, declaring victory.

After losing to Macron with 34 percent in May's presidential runoff, Le Pen had vowed to make the National Front the main opposition. But the party is set to hold only eight seats, Ipsos estimated after sampling initial ballots. With 15 seats, French parties can form their own group in parliament, which gives them a chance to lead committees and more time to question the government.

"There is no material progress for the National Front," said Brice Teinturier, head of public opinion at pollster Ipsos.

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The Last Hurrah of Airbus's Trillion-Dollar Man

More stories by Christopher Jasper

7-8 minutes

In two decades as the sales boss at Airbus SE, John Leahy has

racked up a staggering $1 trillion-plus in orders ranging from diminutive A318s that list for about $75 million up to the double-decker A380, with a price tag topping $400 million. As Leahy prepares for what will probably be his last global air show—Paris, a venue where Airbus has typically announced deals worth many billion dollars—his last hurrah may disappoint.

As representatives of manufacturers, suppliers and airlines prepare to meet at Le Bourget, a historic airfield on the northern edge of the French capital, carriers aren't really in buying mode. After a slew of successful product introductions over the past few years, Airbus has little new to show, and its order book is already filled with commitments for planes stretching out almost a decade. Rival Boeing Co., meanwhile, has a fresh model, an upgraded version of its 737, that's likely to attract a flurry of buyers.

Leahy, though, is a master of air-show theatrics, so no one expects him to fly away from Paris empty-handed. "Don't worry about John Leahy," says Airbus Chief Executive Officer Tom Enders. Though Enders declined to comment on business prospects for the show, he said his colleague will "live forever" in the annals of Airbus, having been responsible for the bulk of the 17,000-plus jet sales achieved by the near 50-year-old company.

The 66-year-old New Yorker, who has been with various units of Airbus since 1985, has outlasted more than a half-dozen counterparts at Boeing since he was appointed chief salesman in 1994. During that time he has lifted Airbus' share of the jetliner market from 18 percent to a roughly 50:50 balance with Boeing, and in 2012 he was named an officer of France's Légion d'Honneur for his services to the industry.

Leahy says he plans to retire this year—"sooner rather than later"—and move from Airbus's Toulouse headquarters back to the U.S., handing the sales operation over to his deputy Kiran Rao, 53. He hasn't given a departure date, and could remain until the Dubai Air Show in November, where the big Gulf carriers typically place their orders.

Leahy is a constant globe-trotter, racking up hundreds of thousands of miles a year in the air, and usually eschews private planes for commercial service (first class) to see how customers are using the aircraft he sells. When he can, the executive flies into a city in the morning, spends the day negotiating, then boards a plane for an overnight flight to his next pitch.

With his penchant for contrast-collar shirts favored by Wall-Street bankers, shock of white hair and honeyed timbre to carry his detail-obsessed presentations, Leahy is somewhat of an outlier at a planemaker whose executive ranks preserve a careful balance between European managers to reflect regional stakeholders.

Over the years, Leahy has become legendary for a thick skin and no-holds-barred negotiating style that one colleague recalls saw him dash out of church to take a customer call. While that full-on approach can sometimes lead to tensions with airlines, he often lands spectacular last-minute contracts, such as a 200-plane, $18 billion deal secured from AirAsia Bhd. at the 2011 Paris show after talks that went on into the early hours.

In the French capital this year, Leahy is likely to secure further orders for the A350 wide-body aircraft, featuring a composite fuselage that reduces fuel burn, and the A330neo, a decades-old model that's been given a life-extending new engine. Deals may focus on customers in Asia and other emerging markets, where growth in air-travel is stronger.

In smaller single-aisle planes, Airbus's A320neo family could be considered by European discount operators, but risks being overshadowed by Boeing's 737. Though the manufacturer hasn't announced details, it's said to be planning a bigger version of the competing 737 Max series equipped with 230 seats in a single-class layout.

The U.S. company may announce as many as six separate deals for the Max 10, with United Airlines, Indonesia's Lion Mentari Airlines PT and SpiceJet Ltd. of India all said to be looking as placing contracts, according to people familiar with negotiations. Boeing will also provide an update on its plans for an all-new "middle-of-market" aircraft that would replace the defunct Boeing 757 single-aisle jet and the soon-to-go 767 wide-body.

Yet even those developments are in part testimony to Leahy's success.

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The salesman used his influence in pushing Airbus to upgrade the A320, allowing it to bring the model to market almost 18 months before the revamped 737, turning the aircraft into the fastest-selling new model in commercial aviation history. And crucially he was able to make a case for a longer-range version of the largest A321neo which Airbus says is winning up to 80 percent of attainable orders—leaving Boeing without a competing product in a market that the two new planned models are only now beginning to address.

At past air shows, Leahy would typically use a closing show press conference to bask in the order haul of previous days, often reeling in major deals at the 11th hour just to upset the horse-race that Boeing looked set to win. In 2013, he quipped that he'd probably go fishing after securing so many deals in a few days that Airbus had come within reach of its annual order target.

This time round, he'll be looking ahead to a more permanent break.

—With assistance from Francois de Beaupuy, Benjamin Katz and Julie Johnsson.

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THE DAILY BEAST

Flake News! France Faces a Major Croissant Shortage

Erin Zaleski06.19.17 1:00 AM ET

7-8 minutes

PARIS—A looming butter shortage has pushed prices up to exorbitant levels, and one baking industry group is warning of "a major crisis" that could imperil the very existence of the croissant as we know it—or at least as we ought to know it.

A "major crisis" over a crescent roll? Oh, yes.

A true French croissant is an entirely different beast from the mass-produced, flabby incarnation that populates grocery store pastry aisles. The crust is golden-brown and delicately flaky. A single bite will send flakes fluttering into your lap or sticking to your fingers, so perhaps not the most elegant choice if on a date, but, ah, the taste sensation. The multi-layered interior is light and tender with an intense, buttery flavor—and for a good reason. Butter is crucial to creating a French croissant. Lots of butter.

"A croissant is composed of 25 percent butter," Armelle Favre, a spokesperson for the industry group Federation des Entrepreneurs de la Boulangerie (FEB), explained to The Daily Beast. "And butter," she added, "accounts for half of a croissant's costs."

A lack of this essential ingredient could therefore spell doom for the pastry that is an integral part of much of the country's morning routine—croissant and coffee for breakfast, anyone?

"We have gone from paying €2,500 ($2,798) per ton [of butter] to paying €5,300 ($5,930) between April of last year and June," Matthieu Labbé, an FEB representative, told Agence France Press earlier this week. Labbé said that the butter shortage could mean that customers will be shelling out more for their beloved baked good. And this is apparently the best-case scenario.

"Our concern is also not being able to get butter in the coming months, and that production lines will stop," Labbé said.

And it gets worse. Croissants are not the only famous French treat under threat. The dearth of butter could also impact other goodies like the pain au chocolat (a square, croissant-like pastry with thin slabs of chocolate inside) and the brioche, as well as butter-heavy cakes and cookies.

Fabien Castanier, the general secretary of the Fabricants de Biscuits et Gâteaux de France, said in a news release that rocketing butter prices are costing professional cookie and cake makers an extra €68 million annually, resulting in "unsustainable economic pressure" on the industry.

"Unfortunately, the situation is going to worsen in the coming weeks with a strong risk of butter running out," he said, echoing Labbé's remarks.

Indeed, Castanier told The Daily Beast that certain specialty butters may be hard to come by as early as this summer.

So what is behind this potential cake and pastry paucity?

The butter price hike is being blamed on a larger, countrywide dairy crisis, namely a shortage of milk supplies in France. In recent years, French dairy farmers have complained that production costs have outpaced earnings.

"They [dairy farmers] have been facing a crisis for the past 30 months and the price they get for milk does not cover their production costs," Christiane Lambert,

president of the French farmers' union FNSEA told Radio France International. Indeed, on Tuesday, protesting milk farmers vented their frustration by dumping cow manure outside of dairy processing facilities in western France.

A rising milk demand in international markets, especially Asia, is also fueling the dairy shortage. Moreover, the milk that is available is being used for cheese and cream, not butter.

As I reported this story, the alarming possibility of croissant collateral damages in the country's ongoing dairy deadlock was making me slightly anxious. The butter-laden carb bomb is the ultimate comfort food on a dreary day. And unlike the hamburger, which has become a recent item on French menus, the croissant has endured for at least two centuries.

Although its origins in France are shadowy (legend has it that the croissant actually originated in Austria and that Marie Antoinette introduced it to the French court in the 1770s), today it is ubiquitous, appearing in French bakeries and chain supermarkets nationwide. According to the French daily, *Le Monde*, a Rennes-based factory for the bread company Bridor produces nearly 500,000 of them each day. Run a Google image search for "French breakfast" and the croissant features prominently in nearly every picture.

No more croissants? Is it really possible? Could upcoming price hikes return the flaky delicacy to its storied royal origins, making it so costly that only those with Marie-Antoinette-style affluence can afford to indulge? Should I stock up now and freeze a bunch of them for future rainy days?

I decided to head over to my local boulangerie, to find out how business was faring and whether my favorite French pastry, the pain au chocolat, cost €100 yet.

"There has definitely been a lot of talk about this, but I am not worried," Boris Lumé, the owner of the quaint, postage stamp-sized bakery said. "There was a similar butter price increase a few years back."

Lumé explained that his bakery deals directly with small, regional butter producers, rather than going through intermediaries the way a large-scale baking corporation would. Dealing one-on-one with small producers keeps costs relatively stable. And because his pastries sell for higher than average prices to begin with, the they won't increase further. A croissant at Boris' costs €1.10, while the average price, according to Lumé, is around €.90.

However, across town artisan baker Jérôme Blouet said he was feeling the pinch of rising butter costs.

"We are bearing the brunt of it," Blouet told *Le Parisien*.

Blouet said that if butter prices were to continue to rise, a price increase was possible, but that it wouldn't apply to croissants (which cost €1.05 at Blouet's boulangerie), pains au chocolat, and other sought-after viennoiseries. Apparently, customers keep a close eye on croissant costs and may even swap bakeries if prices rise too drastically.

Favre and other baking insiders believe that one way to avoid a potential croissant crisis is to convince dairy producers to make more butter. The FEB is also calling on large distributors to pay more for croissants and other baked treats to avoid any production line stoppages. Higher prices for distributors could also mean slightly higher prices at boulangeries, but the magic crescents would live on.

At least, that is what I told myself as I left Lumé's bakery with a neatly-wrapped pain au chocolat tucked into my bag.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

London Attack: One Person Killed After Van Hits Pedestrians in Finsbury Park

Jenny Gross and Wiktor Szary

6-8 minutes

Updated June 19, 2017 2:27 a.m. ET

LONDON—A vehicle rammed into a crowd outside a mosque in north London early Monday, killing one person and injuring at least 10 others, in what British authorities said was a potential terror attack.

A 48-year-old man was detained by members of the public at the scene and arrested, the Metropolitan Police said in a statement. He was transported to a hospital as a precaution and will be taken into custody once discharged, police said. There are no other suspects, police said, although the investigation is at an early stage.

Toufik Kacimi, chief executive of the Muslim Welfare House, told broadcaster Sky News that witnesses heard the alleged attacker say "I did my bit" before being detained. A local imam intervened to protect the man from the crowd, Mr. Kacimi said.

"What I can confirm: It is not a mental health issue, the guy did what he did deliberately," he said.

One man was pronounced dead at the scene, police said. Eight people were taken to three hospitals, while two people were treated at the scene for minor injuries, the police said.

"At this stage there are no reports of any person having suffered knife injuries," the police said, following media reports that the van driver stabbed people.

Prime Minister Theresa May said the incident was being treated as a potential terrorist attack.

Mohamed Abdulle, a 20-year-old delivery truck driver, said he was two cars behind the van when it swerved into a crowd of people shortly after midnight. He saw two individuals run from the van and people at a nearby shop tackled and held a third person until the police arrived.

The attackers looked like they were in their mid-30s or mid-40s and were white, he said.

"He just swerved into the corner," Mr. Abdulle said. "I've seen six people on the floor. All I could see was people scattered on the floor."

The Counter Terrorism Command is investigating the incident. "Due to the nature of the incident, the police will deploy extra resources to reassure the public, especially those observing Ramadan," police said.

The Muslim Council of Britain, which represents organizations and mosques around the U.K., said a van ran over worshipers as they left the Finsbury Park Mosque. "Our prayers are with the victims," it said on Twitter.

The council later tweeted that the attack took place outside the Muslim Welfare House near the mosque, not outside the Finsbury Park Mosque itself.

"It appears from eye witness accounts that the perpetrator was motivated by Islamophobia," said Harun Khan, secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Britain, in a statement. "We urge calm as the investigation establishes the full facts, and in these last days of Ramadan, pray for those affected and for justice."

The attack comes less than a month after a suicide bomber blew himself up outside Manchester Arena following an Ariana Grande concert, killing 22, many of them teenagers. The U.K.'s terrorism threat level was briefly raised to its highest and most critical level after the Manchester attack, but was subsequently lowered to severe, meaning an attack is seen as highly likely.

"This is a terrible incident," Mrs. May said. "All my thoughts are with those who have been injured, their loved ones, and the emergency services on the scene."

Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party, said he was "totally shocked," adding that he was in touch with the mosques, police and local authorities. London Mayor Sadiq Khan said the incident "was clearly a deliberate attack on innocent Londoners, many of whom were finishing prayers during the holy month of Ramadan."

At Finsbury Park, a 23-year-old graduate student who declined to give his name said he was leaving prayers when he heard screaming. "I was literally walking past," he said. "Man. People were shouting, people were crying."

People gathered outside the Finsbury Park subway station waiting for news about what had happened.

Saeed Hashi, a 28-year-old who works at a London subway station, said he was smoking a cigarette near Finsbury Park Mosque after prayers when he saw a van ram into three people, including an older woman, and then continue to knock down others.

"We saw a van was driving very fast, so we thought at the beginning he wanted to catch the traffic light," Mr. Hashi said. "But he didn't. He hit a woman first and then two men. He carried on, and another three, or four, or five."

Mr. Hashi said he and five others pinned the alleged attacker to the ground after he jumped out of the van. The man screamed obscenities about Muslim people as he tried to escape his captors.

Mr. Hashi said the alleged attacker, a muscular man with a tattoo, bruised him and ripped his white T-shirt. He said he also saw two other people flee the scene.

"We thought at the beginning he was drunk on something, but when I came near him, he didn't smell like alcohol."

Mr. Hashi said he saw a woman bleeding from her legs and other

people on the ground. Emergency officials tried to resuscitate a man on the ground, he said.

Mr. Hashi said he was in a state of shock.

"I was walking, and I thought I was dreaming or something," he said. "It's just a hate crime against religion. Tomorrow they will say he was mentally ill."

The Finsbury Park incident is the latest London attack where a vehicle was used as a weapon. Earlier this month, three assailants mowed down people on London Bridge before stabbing people with knives, leaving a total of eight people dead. In March, an attacker used a vehicle to hit pedestrians outside the British Parliament, killing five.

The Egyptian-born radical cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri, who was jailed for life by a U.S. court for supporting terrorism, used to preach at the Finsbury Park Mosque.

In 2005, the mosque changed its board of trustees and imams. It hasn't been linked to extremism since the changes.

Write to Jenny Gross at jenny.gross@wsj.com and Wiktor Szary at Wiktor.Szary@wsj.com

Appeared in the June 19, 2017, print edition as 'One Dead After Van Hits People Near London Mosque.'

The New York Times

Van Hits Pedestrians Near a Mosque in London, Killing One

Iliana Magra and Sewell Chan

7-9 minutes

LONDON — A van drove into a group of pedestrians early Monday near a mosque in London, killing one person and injuring 10 in what the mayor called a "horrific terrorist attack" that struck Muslims as they finished prayers.

The Metropolitan Police confirmed that the case was being investigated as a possible act of terrorism. The driver of the van, a 48-year-old man, was arrested after bystanders kept him from fleeing, the police said in a statement.

One man was pronounced dead at the scene. Eight pedestrians were taken to three separate hospitals, and two were treated at the scene for minor injuries, the police said.

The mayor, Sadiq Khan, acknowledged that the situation was still unfolding, and he urged Londoners to remain calm and vigilant. "While this appears to be an attack on a particular community," he said, "like the terrible attacks in Manchester, Westminster and London Bridge it is also an assault on all our shared values of tolerance, freedom and respect."

Emergency services near Finsbury Park. The Metropolitan Police said the episode was being investigated as a possible terrorist attack. Ritvik Carvalho/Reuters

The British prime minister, Theresa May, said that she would lead an emergency meeting later Monday about the case. "All my thoughts are with the victims, their families and the emergency services on the scene," she said.

The police had been summoned to Seven Sisters Road in Finsbury Park, a neighborhood that is home to many immigrants, at 12:20 a.m., officials said.

Witnesses there, and numerous accounts on social media, said the pedestrians were hit outside the Finsbury Park Mosque or the nearby Muslim Welfare House, a community center.

"We have been informed that a van has run over worshippers as they left #FinsburyPark Mosque," the Muslim Council of Britain said on Twitter. "Our prayers are with the victims."

An area in Finsbury Park cordoned off after a vehicle struck pedestrians near a mosque in London on Monday. One man was pronounced dead at the scene. Victoria Jones/Press Association, via Associated Press

A Twitter post on the account of Muslim Engagement and Development, a nonprofit organization that fights Islamophobia and encourages British Muslims to get more involved in media and politics, said, "Our prayers and thoughts with those injured outside Muslim Welfare House in Seven Sisters road."

One witness, Mahroof Mohammed, said he was having his evening tea at a Somali restaurant on Seven Sisters Road when he heard people running.

He went outside and saw several injured people. "There were seven or eight. Three of them were bleeding badly," he said. "They were all leaving the mosque when they got hit."

Mr. Mohammed said that most of the victims he saw were men, but that he also saw one older woman injured.

Eight pedestrians were taken to three separate hospitals, and two were treated at the scene for minor injuries, the police said. Thomas Van Hulle, via Reuters

A second witness, who gave his name as Ali and did not want his surname published, said he came out of his house after hearing a loud noise and saw two men, including one in a wheelchair, on the ground, along with a woman whose lips were bleeding.

"Then there was a guy underneath the van," Ali said. "We pulled the van, and the guy underneath it was bleeding, but he could speak. He was bleeding from his head."

Ali said the driver seemed to intentionally strike the pedestrians. "I think it was deliberate because the guy accelerated when he turned left on a dead-end road," he said.

Mohammed Kozbar, the chairman of the Finsbury Park Mosque, said in a Twitter post that it was a "cowardly attack."

Boubou Sougou, 23, was leaving the gym at the intersection of Seven Sisters and Isledon Roads when he saw people bleeding in a parking lot near Finsbury Park Mosque, he said.

"One old man was severely injured," he said. "His family had gathered around him, trying to resuscitate him."

On social media, witnesses said they believed that the victims had been performing Tarawih, the evening prayers said by Sunni Muslims at night in the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

The police arrived about 15 to 20 minutes after the episode, Mr. Mohammed said, adding that bystanders held the driver until the police arrived. "It was three local men that were holding the man from the van until police came and put him inside the van," he said.

Mr. Sougou added, "I saw the attacker attempting to run away, but people from the mosque held him back."

"Some of them wanted to beat him up, but were stopped by the ones that were holding him until the police came," he said.

The police said the driver was taken to a hospital as a precaution and would undergo a mental health review.

Mr. Mohammed said the man held was white, had heavily tattooed arms and was not speaking.

The Finsbury Park Mosque opened in 1994 and became a hotbed of Islamist militants, including Zacarias Moussaoui, a Frenchman convicted of conspiring to kill Americans as part of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, and Richard C. Reid, who tried to down an American jetliner in late 2001 with explosives packed in his shoes. In 2015, the mosque's former imam, Mostafa Kamel Mostafa, was sentenced to life in prison in Federal District Court in Manhattan on 11 terrorism-related charges.

The mosque was raided by the authorities in January 2003, and in February 2005 it was reconstituted — "run by a new board of trustees with a new management team, new imams, a new name and new ethos," according to its website. Five stories tall with space for 1,800 worshipers, it is a major house of worship for North London, in an area known for a large immigrant population.

The mosque states on its website: "The work of the new management reflects the proper role of a mosque — as a place of worship, religious learning and social interaction. It also presents the true teachings of Islam as a religion of tolerance, cooperation and peaceful harmony amongst all people who lead a life of balance, justice and mutual respect."

Attacks involving vehicles have shaken London in recent months. On March 22, a 52-year-old Briton rammed a car into a crowd of pedestrians on Westminster Bridge, fatally injuring four of them, and then stabbed a police officer to death before he was gunned down by the police.

On June 3, three men drove a van into pedestrians on London Bridge, before launching a knife attack in nearby Borough Market. Eight people were killed before the men were shot to death by the police.

Bloomberg

Editorial : A Plan for Brexit

by The Editors More stories by The Editors

5-6 minutes

Allies?

Photographers: Ben Stansall/Niklas Halle'n/AFP/Getty Images

With the start of Brexit negotiations looming, the British government has only the most tenuous grip on power. Amid paralyzing uncertainty, how can the main actors -- Prime Minister Theresa May, opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn, and government leaders across the European Union -- make their way forward?

The main thing is to agree to reach a deal of some kind before the U.K. officially leaves the EU on March 29, 2019. If this doesn't happen, the result will be a chaotic exit that would be terribly damaging for the U.K. and pretty bad for the EU as well. It's a needless risk. The way to avoid this so-called cliff-edge scenario it is to aim for a transitional accord that allows as much time as necessary to design a longer-term relationship.

Granted, achieving even this limited short-term deal won't be easy. But it's possible, and in some ways recent events may help.

May's immediate problem is she has no majority in Parliament. To get the necessary legislation passed, she will need either to unite her bitterly divided party or gather cross-party support for her Brexit proposal.

At the moment, the latter looks more feasible. To that end, she should propose for Labour's consideration a transitional arrangement, based on membership of the European Economic Area. This would allow membership of the EU's single market, financial-services "passporting" and other valuable trade preferences, but it would also involve free migration to and from EU countries and leave the U.K. subject to EU lawmaking with next to no political representation.

That's a constitutionally unattractive and indeed unthinkable long-term arrangement -- but workable as a short-term expedient, and vastly better than the cliff-edge. May could never unite her party around this idea: Hardline Tory euroskeptics would have a collective breakdown at the very thought. That's where Corbyn comes in.

The Labour opposition could and should back a proposal along these lines. After all, it's a variant of the softer Brexit members have been vaguely advocating -- an approach that prioritizes economic stability at the price of recovering less national sovereignty from the EU, especially over immigration. Corbyn could sell this as a win to his supporters, and it would be. May could grit her teeth and let that happen, emphasizing the need for national unity.

But what would Europe make of such an approach? Until recently, the EU might have deemed it too forgiving, even though it would minimize the risks to its own economies. Yet the desire to punish the Brits for their uprising may be waning. May's electoral humiliation, following the crushing of David Cameron, might be seen as punishment enough. Even without further reprisals, Brexit is looking less and less appealing as a model for others.

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The U.K. economy is limping, with rising inflation and slowing growth: The price of Brexit may be stagflation. Meanwhile, Europe's confidence is on the upswing. Most of its economies are finally doing better. Populist insurgencies have been fended off in France and the Netherlands, and are stumbling in Italy. The startling success of Emmanuel Macron and his new party in France's elections seems to herald a new era of European progress and reform. There's no need for EU politics to stay in a defensive crouch when it comes to Brexit.

Make no mistake, Britain's in trouble. But there is a silver lining. In the U.K., May's humiliation makes compromise with Corbyn necessary; in the EU, Macron's triumph makes generosity toward the U.K. possible. Somewhere in there is a path out of this mess.

--Editors: Clive Crook, Michael Newman.

To contact the senior editor responsible for Bloomberg View's editorials: David Shipley at davidshipley@bloomberg.net .

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The New York Times

Portugal Fires Kill More Than 60, Including Drivers Trapped in Cars

Raphael Minder

7-9 minutes

Flames and smoke cut off roads on Sunday in Capela Sao Neitel, in central Portugal, where members of the National Guard tried to contain several forest fires. Paulo Cunha/European Pressphoto Agency

MADRID — A raging forest fire in central Portugal this weekend killed more than 60 people, including at least 30 motorists who were trapped in their cars when the flames enveloped a stretch of road.

The fire, which was still burning on Sunday afternoon, has brought "a dimension of human tragedy that we cannot remember," Prime Minister António Costa said during a visit to the scorched area around Pedrógão Grande.

The initial deadly blaze started on Saturday, and the flames spread along four fronts with "great violence," said Jorge Gomes, the secretary of state for internal administration. By Sunday afternoon, five infernos were raging in central Portugal, he said.

The death toll stood at 61, according to Lusa, the national news agency. Officials said they expected the toll to rise.

Half of the people killed died in their cars, Mr. Gomes confirmed, after being hemmed in by the flames while driving along a road through the densely forested area between Figueiró dos Vinhos and Castanheira de Pêra.

The bodies of several motorists who died after fleeing their vehicles were found on Sunday along roads cut off by wildfires in central Portugal. Miguel A. Lopes/European Pressphoto Agency

Officials said they had found 17 bodies near the road, possibly those of people who had tried to escape on foot once they realized there was no way to continue driving. Two people were also killed in a car crash related to the fire.

Several houses were destroyed by the flames. Portuguese television showed people scrambling to leave their homes in the early hours of Sunday morning, escorted by firefighters and other rescue teams, as huge flames engulfed hamlets across the dry, cracked terrain.

Several roads were cut off by flames and thick smoke as firefighters tried to prevent the fires from spreading.

About 1,600 firefighters, assisted by airplanes and helicopters, were working to contain the damage. The police and military units were called in to help, and European Union officials in Brussels activated the bloc's civil protection mechanism to send reinforcements. Spain sent two planes to help contain the fires.

An investigation into the cause of the fires is likely to look into why motorists were left stranded on the road, and whether the authorities cut off all of the access roads quickly enough to prevent drivers from inadvertently heading toward the blaze.

Burned cars on a road near a forest fire in Figueiro dos Vinhos, Portugal, on Sunday. Rafael Marchante/Reuters

The cause of the initial fire near Pedrógão Grande was not immediately clear. Officials had suggested that it was started by lightning during a dry thunderstorm, in which lightning strikes but there is no rain.

José Maria de Almeida Rodrigues, the national director of Portugal's judicial police, told Lusa on Sunday, "Everything points very clearly toward natural causes."

Portugal, where summer wildfires are common, has been experiencing a heat wave for several days, with temperatures climbing above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, or 40 degrees Celsius.

And though Portuguese fire experts said on Sunday that it was difficult to say for sure how the fires had spread so rapidly, environmentalists warned that the country needed to urgently improve its forest management and fire monitoring.

Domingos Xavier Viegas, a fire expert who is a professor at the University of Coimbra, said the speed of the fire's progression suggested that it had started simultaneously in different places and that its advance was probably aided by the gorges and ravines that cut through the area's terrain. They can help fires progress, Mr. Xavier Viegas told Lusa, creating new pockets of fire that "easily catch people by surprise."

Smoke engulfed the village of Torgal, near Castanheira de Pêra, in central Portugal, on Sunday. Patricia De Melo Moreira/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Wildfires are very unpredictable, firefighting experts say, especially when high temperatures, low humidity and a particularly dry landscape create a vast tinderbox in large wooded areas.

"We know fire behavior has changed and continues to change, yet we continue to be surprised every time, when we shouldn't be," said Don Whittemore, a former assistant fire chief in Colorado who has studied wildfire behavior. "The notion that firefighters will be able to put out, suppress or make safe a wildfire is becoming less and less of a reliable notion."

João Branco, the president of Quercus, an environmental association, said that the fires in Portugal reflected "a situation of negligence" and a flawed approach to forestry that has led to the large-scale replacement of pine trees with eucalyptus trees in areas around Pedrógão Grande. Eucalyptus contains an oil that burns easily. Mr. Branco said that the government had regularly promised to improve Portugal's forestry policies, but that instead, "everything continued in the same way."

The Portuguese branch of the World Wildlife Fund said the devastating fires should serve as another urgent reminder that the government needed to improve its forestry management.

"Responsible forestry management is more effective and financially more efficient than the huge mechanisms used every year to combat forest fires," WWF Portugal said in a statement.

Firefighters from Portugal's National Guard worked to contain a forest fire on Sunday in Capela Sao Neitel. Paulo Cunha/European Pressphoto Agency

The blaze around Pedrógão Grande is Portugal's worst forest fire in more than half a century. In 1966, 25 soldiers died while trying to put out a fire in the hills near Sintra.

Patrícia De Melo Moreira, a photographer for Agence France-Presse based in Lisbon, accompanied firefighters on Sunday to the road where drivers had been stranded.

"They were just trying to control the fire and stop it from spreading because it was just so huge," she said by telephone. "Many clearly died in their cars, and the road was completely destroyed, melted."

Ms. De Melo Moreira later made her way to villages in the fire zone, where residents had been alerted to the advancing blaze.

"People are just standing outside, staring, trying to see if the fire could be getting closer to their houses," she said. "Everybody is very worried, but also pretty calm."

President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa paid tribute to the firefighters early on Sunday, saying they faced the toughest conditions possible: "temperature, wind and zero humidity."

He spoke of the "human warmth" and solidarity displayed by people caught in the tragedy, and sent a message of "gratitude, comfort and support to all those who have been doing the best that they can."

The Washington Post

Liberal mosque opens in Berlin

https://www.facebook.com/anthony.faiola

6-8 minutes

BERLIN — Inside the red-brick building that now houses the German capital's newest and perhaps most unusual mosque, Seyran Ates is staging a feminist revolution of the Muslim faith.

"Allahu akbar," chanted a female voice, uttering the Arabic expression "God is great," as a woman with two-toned hair issued the Muslim call to prayer. In another major break with tradition, men and women — typically segregated during worship — heeded the call by sitting side by side on the carpeted floor.

Ates, a self-proclaimed Muslim feminist and founder of the new mosque, then stepped onto the cream-colored carpet and delivered a stirring sermon. Two imams — a woman and a man — later took turns leading the Friday prayers in Arabic. The service ended with the congregation joining two visiting rabbis in singing a Hebrew song of friendship.

And just like that, the inaugural Friday prayers at Berlin's Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque came to a close — offering a different vision of Islam on a continent that is locked in a bitter culture war over how and whether to welcome the faith. Toxic ills like radicalization, Ates and her supporters argue, have a potentially easy fix: the introduction of a more progressive, even feminist brand of the faith.

"The intention is to give liberal Islam a sacred space," Ates said. "I feel very discriminated by regular mosques where women have to pray in ugly backrooms."

The subject of withering criticism as well as hopeful support, the house of worship is part of a small but growing number of liberal mosques founded all or in part by women. Seen by their backers as an antidote to gender bias that often leaves Muslim women praying in smaller spaces, the new kind of "feminist mosques" amount to a rallying cry for change, observers say.

In London, for instance, the female-founded Inclusive Mosque Initiative opened its doors in 2012. Female imams routinely lead prayers in spaces that welcome male and female Muslims of any sect — gays and lesbians included. More recently, mixed-gender or all-female prayers have spread to boutique mosques from California to Switzerland to Denmark.

Women and men traditionally pray separately in mosques for reasons of modesty. Some argue that the Koran does not explicitly call for separation, but others say that female voices should not be heard during prayer.

Nevertheless, women are said to have served as imams in ancient Islam, and female Muslim activists have been challenging the norms surrounding the religion for decades. Notable among these activists is Amina Wadud, an American who famously delivered a Friday sermon at a South African mosque in 1994.

Enter Ates, who opened the Berlin mosque largely through donations. A 54-year-old Turkish Kurd, she is both well known and polarizing in Germany's Muslim community of more than 4 million. As a student, she narrowly survived a gun attack at a counseling center for Turkish women. And after years of fighting for women's rights, repeated death threats forced her to close her legal practice in 2006.

The debut of her mosque brought a round of fire on social media from critics. "#Mosque without #Islam. Those who know Ates know that she is in favor of an Islam that is not based on its sources," tweeted the advocacy group Generation Islam.

Burhan Kesici, chairman of the Islamic Council for the Federal Republic of Germany, dismissed her house of worship as a fad.

"We're observing this and are wondering . . . how what is happening there is supposed to be rooted in Islam at all," he said.

He added, "Of course women are equal. That there's a separation in religious practice doesn't mean that they're not equal. I'm curious how long this congregation will last. . . . It seems a random conglomerate of different Islam critics."

At the inaugural service Friday, the mosque housed inside an old theater space of a Protestant church lured more journalists than worshipers, as well as a significant security presence. Among the young Muslims attending was Haithm al-Kubati, 26, a Yemeni who moved to Germany six years ago.

It was, he said, his first time praying in a mosque with women.

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"It still takes a bit of getting used to. But it's often the case when something is new that it is a bit strange, perhaps even a bit scary. But I am sure that this is the way of the future," he said.

Elham Manea, the female imam who shared in leading the Friday prayers, said mixed worship is an issue of equality.

"How and when a woman is asked to pray mirrors her social status within her community," Manea said. "She is asked to pray separately from men, to cover her hair during prayer . . . and to stop praying during the days of her menstruation. . . . All these restrictions are imposed on her because they mirror the social conviction that a woman is not fully complete and perfect like a man and [that] she without doubt isn't equal."

"I understand that change is hard, because one is used to doing the same thing for centuries, and it will of course be difficult to change it. But still the time for change is now. . . . And we're calling for it respectfully."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : Helmut Kohl

Updated June 18, 2017 6:05 p.m. ET 18 COMMENTS

3-4 minutes

Among the many leaders who shaped modern Europe, few have been as consequential as Helmut Kohl, who died Friday at age 87. He saw his country through the death of the Cold War and the birth of a reunited Germany at the center of a more deeply integrated European Union.

Born in 1930, Kohl came of age amid the furies of a nihilistic German nationalism and then amid the wreckage of its defeat. He was compelled to join the Hitler Youth, as were all boys in that era, but was part of the first generation of Germany's postwar leaders too young to have fought in the conflict. His parents instilled in him a devout Catholicism that shaped his later political outlook.

He entered politics in the Christian Democratic Union, which with its Bavarian sister party the CSU became Germany's main center-right party. He rose to the Chancellorship of West Germany in 1982, a position he would hold for a postwar record of 16 years.

He took power after years of Social Democratic *Ostpolitik*, or engagement with East Germany, and when the anticommunism of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II still faced considerable skepticism among putative foreign-policy experts. One of Kohl's early contributions was to defend plans to deploy Pershing II missiles in West Germany against fierce protests across Europe.

Kohl also built on the work of his predecessors in reconciling Germany with the rest of Europe. His friendship with French President François Mitterrand was legendary, and that proved crucial in persuading other European leaders to accept a reunified Germany after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.

That reunification—and the creation of the euro, which Kohl accepted as its price—remains controversial. Economists are right that the euro and many economic-policy decisions governing reunification created challenges that still dog the EU. Kohl was right that peaceful German integration was worth the price.

Europe's first tasks after 1989 were political, not economic: to welcome the formerly subjugated people of Eastern Europe back into Western civilization, and to find a way for Germany to be a nation again without being a threat. Kohl, driven by his commitment to European unity, aided both projects with his policy of rapid reunification and the euro. The result was a Continent that weathered the collapse of a malign neighboring superpower while remaining at peace with itself.

Historians will remember that achievement more than the commonplace political scandals that engulfed Kohl later in his long career. Rarely does a leader change his nation as dramatically for the better as Helmut Kohl did.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Hanushek: German-Style Apprenticeships Simply Can't Be Replicated

Eric A. Hanushek

4-5 minutes

June 18, 2017 5:33 p.m. ET

Say the words "apprenticeship program," as the Trump administration has been doing recently, and maybe you imagine a win-win: Young people welcomed by companies that want to train them to become skilled workers.

Some American policy makers have begun to see Germany's approach—credited with helping it navigate the 2008 recession while keeping youth unemployment in the single digits—as the magic formula. But adapting the German system for the U.S. is little more than a dream.

Over half of young Germans enter apprenticeships, which can lead to certification in more than 300 different careers. Many are blue-collar jobs ranging from construction to baking, but apprenticeships also cover white-collar fields like information technology and engineering.

An apprenticeship generally involves two to three years of work and study after secondary school. In Germany's "dual system," apprentices work on the job for three or four days a week and spend the rest of the time in academic instruction paid for by the government. This setup has been shown to ease a student's transition into work. Openings in apprenticeships are based on employers' demands for workers, and youths who've earned a vocational certificate are readily hirable.

But this comes at a cost. Workers enter the job market with skills that often become obsolete as industries change. The early-career advantage is offset by disadvantages later in life. Research shows that after age 50 German workers with general education do better than vocationally trained ones, many of whom leave the workforce.

Germany and the European Union recognize the need to retrain people whose earlier skills become obsolete. There are continuous calls for "lifelong learning." Unfortunately, governments have not figured out effective ways to retrain older workers, and companies often don't see the advantage of doing so. Training over the course of a career is significantly more prevalent among workers with a general education.

Moreover, the U.S. cannot quickly replicate Germany's deep history of apprenticeships. The German system builds on a half-century of employer experience, on national standards, and on a relatively rigid labor market that relies on certification as a hiring credential.

By contrast the U.S. has retreated from vocational education. In high schools, it has morphed into an alternative way to teach basic skills such as math and reading and to motivate students not doing well in the general curriculum. The move toward broad standards and accountability via test scores hasn't helped vocational education either.

Community colleges might provide something like the mixture of education and training found in the German system, but they have not developed serious relationships with industry. The construction trades have found some success with apprenticeships, but this has not been replicated for white-collar jobs. And skill certification is much less important in the U.S. labor market than in the German market.

Even if the U.S. succeeded in expanding apprenticeships, the problem of skill obsolescence remains. The American model of providing vocational training to those who do not like or do not do well in the general curriculum does not augur well for adaptation when new skills are required.

Employers like the idea of vocational training because it could reduce the demands on them to train new workers. But when the skills they need change, they also may find it easier simply to return to the entry-level market rather than retrain their existing workforce.

The largest problem of skills in the U.S. today isn't a shortage of young workers with specific competencies. Instead it is a need for more general cognitive skills that give workers the ability to adapt to new circumstances and new jobs. In that area, American schools are not competitive with their international competitors—and more apprenticeships won't help.

Mr. Hanushek is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Dougherty: EU Sanctions Punishing Poland & Eastern Europe Are Mistaken. Muslim Migration Serious Problem

7-8 minutes

The European Union announced this week that it would begin proceedings to punish Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic for their refusal to accept refugees and migrants under a 2015 scheme the E.U. commission created. The mission's aim was to relieve Greece and Italy of the burden from migrant waves arriving from the Middle East and Africa, largely facilitated by European rescues of migrants in the Mediterranean.

The conflict between the EU and these three nations of the Visegrád Group is not just about the authority the EU can arrogate to itself when facing an emergency (one largely of its own making), but about the character of European government and society in the future. It is hard not to conclude that the dissenting countries are correct to dissent. Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia had voted against the 2015 agreement. Poland's government had supported it then, but a subsequent election saw a new party come into power that rejected the scheme.

There is no doubt that Italy and Greece are under strain. This week the mayor of Rome, Virginia Raggi, pleaded with the Italian government to stop the inflow of people to her city. Raggi is a member of the Five Star Movement a Euroskeptic and anti-mass-migration association. Her

election was a distress signal in itself, sent by the electorate. And Raggi has sent another such signal to Italy's government, saying that it is "impossible, as well as risky to think up further accommodation structures."

But the EU's plan to impose sanctions on Eastern Europe has been met by unusually frank talk from dissenters there. Mariusz Błaszczak, the interior minister of Poland, said in an interview that taking in migrants would be worse than facing EU sanctions. "The security of Poland and the Poles is at risk" by taking in migrants, he said, "We mustn't forget the terror attacks that have taken place in Western Europe, and how — in the bigger EU countries — these are unfortunately now a fact of life."

The Polish government certainly has the wind of democratic support at its back. The truth is that the majority in nearly every European country says that migration from Muslim countries into Europe should be slowed down or stopped entirely. In Poland, less than 10 percent of respondents disagree with the statement that "all immigration from majority Muslim nations should be stopped."

When public sentiment runs so strongly this way, and the sentiment of the political class runs the other way, coercive measures such as sanctions become inevitable. But that coercion may be dangerous to the continuation of the European project.

This week, former Czech Republic president Vaclav Klaus issued a fiery denunciation of the EU's scheme: "We are protesting the attempt to punish us and force us into obedience." He said that his nation should prepare itself to exit the European Union altogether. But he also took all the subtext hiding behind refugee politics and made it explicit. "We refuse to permit the transformation of our country into a multicultural society . . . as we currently see in France and in Great Britain."

In the past year, Western European politicians often scolded Eastern European governments for retreating from European values, "the open society," and democracy. And Eastern Europeans on social media just as often threw that rhetoric back in their face. Which looked more like an open democratic society, Paris with its landmarks patrolled by the military — or Krawkow, with its Christmas market unspoiled by the need for automatic weapons?

The Eastern European governments are right to reject the farcical 2015 scheme. First because it is based on so many lies. Western Europe's policy on "refugees" has been dishonest from beginning to end. The vast majority of people arriving are not fleeing war in Syria or Iraq. They are coming from Chad, Afghanistan, and Eritrea, and they are looking for economic opportunity in Europe.

There's also the fact that Germany, France, and Britain already have Islamic and immigrant ghettos that can incorporate — that is, hide — new migrants. The settlement of these migrants in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic means the establishment of new ghettos, against the wishes of current residents and a crashing tsunami of public opinion.

The security concerns are very real. Terrorists such Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the mastermind of the 2015 attacks at the Bataclan theater and other spots in Paris, have used the migrant flow to escape detection when returning from Syria to commit jihadi violence in Europe. And even if immediate danger is not imminent, Eastern European leaders have noted that once European communities accepted small numbers of immigrants, the demand for accepting more only grew.

What Eastern European countries see is that in the past three decades, Western European countries have elected to import religious and racial divisions into their society.

Surely, Eastern European leaders have noticed that incorporation of Muslim populations in Western Europe creates new demands on the government, both in social services and in policing. Germany and Sweden must now cope with a giant flow of unskilled labor into economies that have no demand for unskilled labor by people who haven't acquired the native language. Britain and France must cope with their immigrant communities by building an ever larger and more invasive security state, one that is straining to cope with the number of known radicals. Richer nations such as France and Britain can afford and are habituated to the domestic surveillance that grows with "multiculturalism."

What Eastern European countries see is that in the past three decades, Western European countries have elected to import religious and racial divisions into their society. The early returns are bad enough to dissuade them from imitating their neighbors to the west.

The threats from bureaucrats in Brussels are also counterproductive. After all, Eastern Europe has some recent historical experience of officious government employees who think that population transfers are just part of getting on board with the ideological project the future demands.

Right now, the Western European political class can continue to blame and threaten their Eastern European partners. But perhaps they should see the resistance from Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as a warning, just like Brexit, or the rise of populist parties. A course correction is desperately needed. And politicians can push a recalcitrant public for only so long.

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— *Michael Brendan Dougherty is a senior writer for* National Review Online.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Murray: Europe's Elites Seem Determined to Commit Suicide by 'Diversity'

Douglas Murray

5-6 minutes

June 18, 2017 5:34 p.m. ET

Europe in 2017 is racked with uncertainty—the eurozone crises, the endless challenges of the European Union, national elections that resemble endless rounds of bullet-dodging. Yet even these events are insignificant compared with the deep tectonic shifts beneath the Continent's politics, shifts that Europeans—and their allies—ignore at our peril.

Throughout the migration crisis of recent years I traveled across the Continent, from the reception islands into which migrants arrive to the suburbs in which they end up and the chancelleries which encouraged them to come. For decades Europe had encouraged guest workers, and then their families, to come. As Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel once admitted, nobody expected them to stay.

Yet stay they did, with their numbers swelling even when there were no jobs. Waking up to the results of their policy, European societies rebranded themselves "multicultural" societies, only to begin wondering what that meant. Could a multicultural society make any demands of its newcomers? Or would that be "racist"?

From the 2000s legal and illegal immigration picked up. Boats regularly set out from Turkey and North Africa to enter Europe illegally. Syrians fleeing civil war pushed into the Continent, soon joined by people from across sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Far East.

Today the great migration is off the front pages. Yet it goes on. On an average weekend nearly 10,000 people arrive on Italian reception islands alone. Where do they go? What do they expect? And what do we expect of them?

To find the answer to these and other questions it is necessary to ask deeper questions. Why did Europe decide it could take in the poor and dispossessed of the world? Why did we decide that anybody in the world fleeing war, or just seeking a better life, could come to Europe and call it home?

The reasons lie partly in our history, not least in the overwhelming German guilt, which has spread across the Continent and affected even our cultural cousins in America and Australia. Egged on by those who wish us ill, we have fallen for the idea that we are uniquely guilty, uniquely to be punished, and uniquely in need of having our societies changed as a result.

There is also, for Europe, the sense of what I call tiredness—the feeling that the story might have run out: that we have tried religion, all imaginable forms of politics, and that each has, one after another, led us to disaster. When we taint every idea we touch, perhaps a change is as good as a rest.

It is often argued that our societies are old, with a graying population, and so we need immigrants. When these theories are challenged—by asking, for instance, why the next generation of Germany's workforce might not come from unemployed Greece rather than Eritrea—we are told that we need low-skilled workers who do not speak our

languages because it makes Europe more culturally interesting. It is as though some great hole lies at the heart of the culture of Dante, Bach and Wren.

When people point out the downsides of this approach—not least that more immigration from Muslim countries produces many problems, including terrorism—we get the final explanation. It doesn't matter, we are told: Because of globalization this is inevitable and we can't stop it anyway.

All these instincts, when put together, are the stuff of suicide. They spell out the self-annihilation of a culture as well as a continent. Conversations with European policy makers and politicians have made this abundantly clear to me. They tell me with fury that it "must" work. I suggest that with population change of this kind, at this speed, it may not work at all.

Yet still it is possible that the publics will not go along with the instincts of their leaders. Earlier this year, a poll of European attitudes was published in which citizens of 10 countries were asked a tough question: whether they agreed that there should be no more Muslim migration into their countries. Majorities in eight out of the 10 countries, including France and Germany, said they wanted no more Muslim immigrants.

Over recent decades Europe has made a hasty effort to redefine itself. As the world came in, we became wedded to "diversity." As terrorism grew and more migrants arrived, public opinion in Europe began to harden. Today "more diversity" remains the cry of the elites, who insist that if the public doesn't like it yet, it is because they haven't had enough of it.

The migration policies of the political and other elites of Europe suggest that they are suicidal. The interesting thing to watch in the years ahead will be whether the publics join them in that pact. I wouldn't bet on it.

Mr. Murray is author of "The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam," out this week from Bloomsbury Continuum.

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. Fighter Jet Shoots Down Syrian Warplane

Michael R. Gordon and Thomas Erdbrink

5-7 minutes

WASHINGTON — An American fighter jet shot down a Syrian warplane on Sunday after it dropped bombs near local ground forces supported by the United States, the first time the American military has downed a Syrian aircraft since the start of the civil war in 2011, officials said.

The confrontation represents a further escalation between forces supporting President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and the United States, which has been directing the military campaign in Syria and Iraq against the Islamic State.

The American F/A-18 shot down the Syrian government warplane south of the town of Tabqah, on the same day that Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps launched several midrange missiles from inside Iran at targets in Syria, hoping to punish Islamic State forces responsible for last week's terrorist attacks in Tehran.

The Guards Corp said it "targeted the headquarters and meeting place and suicide car assembly line" of "ISIS terrorists" in the province of Deir al-Zour, where Islamic State forces surround an estimated 200,000 people in a government-held section of the provincial capital of the same name.

American officials said there appeared to be no direct connection between the two events, but they underscored the complexity of a region in which Syria, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel and the United States with its allies have carried out air or missiles strikes, albeit in pursuit of different and often competing objectives.

For the United States, the main focus has been battling the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL. This month, Syrian Kurdish and Arab fighters, supported by American advisers and air power, began the battle for Raqqa, the militants' self-declared capital.

Even before that battle is over, however, tensions have risen over control of eastern Syria as Iranian-backed militias, including the Lebanese group Hezbollah, have moved to extend their reach toward areas where the American-based fighters are also operating.

Not only are forces loyal to Mr. Assad interested in controlling the oil-rich Deir al-Zour Province and relieving the pressure on a Syrian military garrison that has been surrounded there, but the Iranian-backed Shiite fighters are also believed to be trying to link up with Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and establish a supply corridor that runs from Syria to Iraq and, eventually, to Iran.

The confrontation in Syria on Sunday began around 4:30 p.m. local time, when American-backed ground Syrian fighters, who are officially called the Syrian Democratic Forces, came under attack by what the Pentagon described only as "pro-Syrian regime forces" and were forced from their positions in the town of Ja'Din, south of Tabqah. Several of the American-supported fighters were wounded.

The United States had airlifted hundred of Syrian fighters and their American military advisers near Tabqah in March in a generally successful push to cut off the western approaches to Raqqa.

To scare away the adversary forces, American warplanes buzzed the pro-Assad troops in what the Pentagon called a "show of force." That appeared to put an end to the fighting, and the Americans sought to defuse the situation by calling their Russian counterparts from Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar.

But the Syrians were not finished. At 6:43 p.m., a Syrian SU-22 warplane dropped several bombs near the American-backed fighters. Attempts to warn the Syrian plane away from the area using an emergency radio frequency failed, said Col. John J. Thomas, the spokesman for the United States Central Command, which oversees American military operations in the Middle East.

An F/A-18 "Super Hornet," which was patrolling the area after launching from the George H. W. Bush aircraft carrier, quickly shot down the Syrian plane. American advisers were not in the immediate vicinity of the bombing by the Syrian SU-22.

A statement by the American-led task force that is fighting the Islamic State stressed that it was taken under rules of engagement permitting the "collective self-defense" of its Syrian partners.

This month, an American F-15E shot down an Iranian-made drone after it attacked American fighters in southeastern Syria.

The United States has set up a garrison at al-Tanf in southeastern Syria, where Syrian fighters and American, British and Norwegian advisers have been based.

The United States has warned pro-Assad forces to stay out of a "deconfliction" zone it has declared around the garrison. The town of Ja'Din is little more than a mile north of this deconfliction area, but the United States has made it clear that the Syrian fighters it supports and the American and other allied advisers that accompany them are not limited to that buffer area.

After Sunday's episode, the American-led task force said it was not seeking a confrontation with Mr. Assad or the Russian and Iranian forces or Shiite militias that are

fighting to support the Syrian leader — but added that it would defend the Syrian fighters it has assembled to pursue the Islamic State.

"The coalition's mission is to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria," the official statement said. "The coalition does not seek to fight Syrian regime, Russian, or pro-regime forces partnered with them, but will not hesitate to defend coalition or partner forces from any threat."

Iran offered official statements about its military actions, too, and a video of the launch of one of the missiles was posted by the semiofficial Fars News Agency.

The Guards Corps said the strike, sending missiles flying over neighboring Iraq into Syria, had been carried out in retaliation for the terrorist attacks this month on the Iranian Parliament building and the shrine of the founder of the Islamic Republic. Eighteen people died in those attacks and dozens were wounded. The Islamic State claimed responsibility.

The Iranians made no effort to offer warnings about or "deconflict" their missile strike with the United States, American officials said. The Iranian missile attack was seen by analysts as a sign of an escalating role for Iran in the Syrian conflict and an indication of Tehran's growing power in the region.

The missile strike over a considerable distance may have also been designed to send a message to Iran's enemies in the region, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, as well as the United States, which maintains multiple military bases in the Middle East.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

U.S. Says It Shot Down Syrian Aircraft (UNE)

Dion Nissenbaum in Washington and Raja Abdulrahim in Beirut

6-8 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 11:01 p.m. ET

An American warplane shot down a Syrian government jet on Sunday, the Pentagon said, marking the first time in Syria's civil war that a U.S. pilot has struck a regime plane and signaling an increased willingness by the Trump administration to directly challenge President Bashar al-Assad and his allies.

On Sunday, the U.S. military said it had shot down the Syrian SU-22 after regime forces twice attacked members of American-backed Syrian fighters leading the assault on Raqqa, the self-declared capital of the Islamic State terror group.

With the strike, the U.S. military made it clear it is now willing to target Syrian regime jets to protect the coalition of Kurdish and Arab fighters working with U.S. special-operation forces to push Islamic State, also known as ISIS, from Raqqa.

The U.S. military said the confrontation began Sunday afternoon when Syrian forces attacked the Syrian Democratic Forces near Raqqa, forcing the U.S.-backed fighters to retreat as they evacuated their injured. Coalition aircraft flew low over the regime forces in a "show of force" that stopped them from advancing, the military said.

The U.S., which has no direct contact with the Syrian regime, then said it used an established deconfliction line with the Russians, who fly their own airstrikes in Syria in support of Mr. Assad, to try to bring the fight to a halt. About two hours after the initial Syrian attack, a regime SU-22 jet dropped bombs on U.S.-backed forces in the same area.

Citing "collective self-defense of coalition partnered forces," the U.S. military said an American F/A-18E Super Hornet shot down the regime jet. Col. John Thomas, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command, said there were no U.S. forces in the "immediate vicinity" of the Syrian regime attack.

Syrian state media called the U.S. attack a "flagrant aggression" and said the jet was carrying out a mission against Islamic State militants when it was downed. The pilot is missing, according to state media. The Syrian army said the U.S. "attack stresses coordination between the U.S. and ISIS," according to Syrian state media.

Col. Thomas dismissed that characterization and said that the coalition saw the Syrian forces attack the U.S.-backed fighters.

Sunday's strike signaled an expansion of the U.S. military's willingness to directly confront Mr. Assad's forces. And it poses a new question for the American military: Would it be willing to shoot down a Russian or Turkish jet that carries out any similar attacks?

Col. Thomas said the message was purely for the Syrian regime forces, not the Russians.

"The whole goal here is, when these situations have been occurring, to de-escalate," he said. "We're not putting on any ultimatums. It's case-by-case. You try to dial it down rather than ramp it up."

Aaron Stein, a resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington, said the strike was an outgrowth of an ill-defined strategy that is being driven more by battlefield tactics than an overarching administration policy.

"Nobody has thought this through," he said. "There doesn't seem to be any policy guidance."

Over the past month, the U.S. military has launched a series of airstrikes on pro-Assad regime forces in southern Syria, where an Iranian-made drone carried out an attack on U.S.-led coalition forces before being shot down by an American pilot. Now, U.S. forces are challenging Syrian regime forces in the north.

In its statement, the U.S. military tried to defuse tensions.

"The coalition's mission is to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria," the military said. "The coalition does not seek to fight Syrian regime, Russian, or pro-regime forces partnered with them, but will not hesitate to defend coalition or partner forces from any threat."

Sunday's incident is believed to be the first time a manned American jet has shot down another once since 1999, when an American pilot shot down a Serbian jet over Bosnia.

For most of the six-year war in Syria, the U.S. has sought to avoid direct confrontations with Mr. Assad's forces in the country and focus its firepower on defeating Islamic State. That calculus began to change in April, when Mr. Trump approved airstrikes on a Syrian regime airfield, a punitive strike meant to deter Mr. Assad from using chemical weapons.

Things worsened last month in southern Syria where U.S. forces are beefing up their presence at a training base near the border with Iraq and Jordan. The U.S. carried out airstrikes on Iranian-backed militias seen as a threat and later shot down an Iranian-made drone circling U.S.-led coalition forces in the area. The fighting in southern Syria has raised concerns about increasing escalation that could draw the U.S. military more deeply into the conflict.

Meanwhile, Iran's Revolutionary Guards force said Sunday that it had launched multiple missile strikes targeting Islamic State in one of its last Syrian strongholds, Deir Ezzour province. The strike was in retaliation for a June 7 attack on Iran's parliament and a shrine in Tehran claimed by the terror group.

The hard-line paramilitary force said it had fired medium-range surface-to-surface missiles from bases in western Iran. It claimed that the strike hit a command center and logistics centers used for assembling suicide car bombs and had killed many fighters.

The Guards said the missile strikes were a warning to deter any further action by terrorists after the attack this month that killed 17 people.

Tehran has played a major role in backing Mr. Assad in the six-year-old civil war, sending advisers and militia fighters to aid the regime. But this is the first time it has launched direct attacks from its territory. Iran has allowed Russia to use its territory to stage airstrikes on rebels in Syria.

Iran's unusual show of force comes as archrival Saudi Arabia is increasingly asserting itself in a regional power struggle with Tehran, emboldened by a friendlier administration in Washington. At the same time, the U.S. is confronting Syrian forces and their allies more frequently to protect American-backed Syrian rebels who are fighting both the regime and Islamic State.

—Aresu Eqbali in Tehran contributed to this article.

Write to Dion Nissenbaum at dion.nissenbaum@wsj.com and Raja Abdulrahim at raja.abdulrahim@wsj.com

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Israel Gives Secret Aid to Syrian Rebels

Rory Jones in Tel Aviv, Noam Raydan in Beirut and Suha Ma'ayeh in Amman, Jordan

7-9 minutes

June 18, 2017 3:17 p.m. ET

Israel has been regularly supplying Syrian rebels near its border with cash as well as food, fuel and medical supplies for years, a secret engagement in the enemy country's civil war aimed at carving out a buffer zone populated by friendly forces.

The Israeli army is in regular communication with rebel groups and its assistance includes undisclosed payments to commanders that help pay salaries of fighters and buy ammunition and weapons, according to interviews with about half a dozen Syrian fighters. Israel has established a military unit that oversees the support in Syria—a country that it has been in a state of war with for decades—and set aside a specific budget for the aid, said one person familiar with the Israeli operation.

Israel has in the past acknowledged treating some 3,000 wounded Syrians, many of them fighters, in its hospitals since 2013 as well as providing humanitarian aid such as food and clothing to civilians near the border during winter. But interviews with half a dozen rebels and three people familiar with Israel's thinking reveal that the country's involvement is much deeper and more coordinated than previously known and entails direct funding of opposition fighters near its border for years.

"Israel stood by our side in a heroic way," said Moatasem al-Golani, spokesman for the rebel group Fursan al-Joulan, or Knights of the Golan. "We wouldn't have survived without Israel's assistance."

Israel's aim is to keep Iran-backed fighters allied to the Syrian regime, such as the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, away from the 45-mile stretch of border on the divided Golan Heights, the three people said.

But its support for rebels risks heightening tension with President Bashar al-Assad's government, which has long accused Israel of helping rebel groups. Mr. Assad has said Israel supports rebel groups and launches airstrikes in Syrian territory to undermine his hold on power. Israel has said it doesn't favor any one outcome in the civil war.

Israel captured part of the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 war and later annexed it—a move the international community doesn't recognize.

The threat of a permanent presence of Iranian and Hezbollah forces on the Syrian side of the strategic plateau could drag Israel's military further into a conflict that it has watched warily but mostly stayed out of since it began in 2011. Israeli officials haven't ruled out such an escalation at a time when they are cultivating other alliances with Arab states against their common enemy—Iran.

Fursan al-Joulan's commander, who goes by the nickname Abu Suhayb, says his group gets roughly $5,000 a month from Israel. It isn't linked to the Western-backed Free Syrian Army and doesn't receive Western funding or arms.

The office of Israel's prime minister referred questions to the Israeli military, which didn't respond to requests for comment on whether it was sending cash to or dealing directly with rebel commanders in the Golan region. It said only that it was "committed to securing the borders of Israel and preventing the establishment of terror cells and hostile forces … in addition to providing humanitarian aid to the Syrians living in the area."

The person familiar with Israel's assistance confirmed that cash moves across the border but said it goes for humanitarian purposes. However, rebels interviewed said they use the cash to pay fighters' salaries and to buy weapons and ammunition—something the Israeli military wouldn't comment on.

Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah have played a major role in propping up Mr. Assad's forces. That help, as well as significant military intervention by Russia, has given the regime the upper hand in the multisided war.

Given the ascendancy of Iran in the war, Israel now fears it will establish control of a strip of land in Syria and Iraq that could be used to transport weapons to military bases in southern Lebanon and the Syrian side of the Golan.

Israeli officials have several times accused the Syrian regime and its Iranian and Shiite allies of planning attacks against Israel from Syrian side of the Golan. By contrast, Israeli officials have pointed out that rebels in that area have never tried to attack.

An Islamic State affiliate also has carved out a pocket of control on the south end of the Syrian Golan and clashes with rebels at times. Its fighters exchanged fire with Israeli forces last year.

The Israeli army has occasionally intervened in the Syrian war by launching airstrikes to stop suspected Iranian arms shipments bound for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

This effort to set up a de facto buffer zone in Syria is reminiscent of another Israeli scheme to protect its northern border by carving out a so-called security zone in south Lebanon during that country's civil war in the 1970s and 1980s. Known as the "Good Fence" policy, it preceded an Israeli invasion of south Lebanon in 1982 that helped spawn Hezbollah. Hezbollah battled the Israelis until they withdrew in 2000.

Israel has dubbed the current Golan operation "The Good Neighborhood" policy, according Ehud Ya'ari, a fellow at the Washington Institute and Israeli political analyst briefed on Israel's support to Syrian militias. It began under former Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon and continued under his successor, Avigdor Lieberman.

The fighters said rebel groups scattered across a roughly 125-square-mile border zone regularly deal with Israel.

"It's a matter of interests," said the person familiar with Israeli policy. Israel offers the humanitarian support and in return gets a "buffer zone" of local militias defending themselves.

Fursan al-Joulan is the main rebel group coordinating with Israel, according to fighters. It first made contact with the Israeli military in 2013 and Israel soon began sending cash and other aid, fighters said.

The group had just launched an offensive against regime forces in southwestern Quneitra province, which encompasses the Syrian side of the Golan, according to the spokesman Mr. Golani, who uses a nom de guerre.

The fighters carried wounded comrades to a border point where they were met by Israeli soldiers speaking Arabic, said Mr. Golani. Relatives of the wounded men pleaded for help and ambulances soon arrived to take the injured to hospitals in Israel. The moment was a turning point that opened communication between Israel and the moderate faction of opposition fighters, he said.

For Mr. Golani, the contact was also bittersweet. His cousin had died shortly before the encounter, killed by shrapnel that sliced open his stomach. He said he believes his cousin would have survived with surgery.

Fursan al-Joulan, based in Quneitra province, has roughly 400 fighters loosely allied with four other rebel groups on the Golan that also receive Israeli aid, according to the commander Abu Suhayb and other rebels. Some of these other groups are affiliated with the Free Syrian Army or receive other Western funding and weapons.

In total, there are roughly 800 rebel fighters across more than a dozen villages in this area, where thousands of civilians live, fighters said. Many of the rebels and civilians in this area rely on some level of support from Israel, they added.

"Most people want to cooperate with Israel," said a fighter with rebel group Liwaa Ousoud al-Rahman, also fighting on the Golan.

Write to Rory Jones at rory.jones@wsj.com

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Iraqi Troops Press Into Mosul's Old City to Dislodge ISIS

Ben Kesling and Ghassan Adnan

4-5 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 3:18 p.m. ET

BAGHDAD—Iraqi forces on Sunday pushed into Mosul's historic Old City, in what is expected to be the final and most intense phase of the fight to retake the country's second-largest city from Islamic State control.

The U.S.-backed offensive began soon after sunrise, with troops advancing on the Old City from three sides, Iraqi military officials said. By nightfall some units had pushed forward a few hundred yards, the military said, which can be considered a substantial gain in an urban environment.

"With the blessing of God, the army, counterterrorism forces and federal police started breaking into the Old City to liberate what is left of the western side of Mosul," Lt. Gen Abdul Amir Yaralla, operations

commander in Nineveh province, said in a brief statement.

The fighting is expected to mark the heaviest and bloodiest stage of the monthslong fight for Mosul because the Old City district is a densely populated warren of narrow streets and alleys, which will likely require house-to-house combat to clear out the militants.

"For sure Daesh is going to fight in a fierce way since this is their last place," said Lt. Gen. Abdul Ghani al-Assadi, commander of Iraq's counterterrorism force, the country's special forces, using another name for Islamic State. "But we have taken into consideration how the place is densely populated, the streets are narrow and explosive devices might be placed by the enemy."

The Iraqi military said it has given Islamic State fighters a chance to surrender via announcements by loudspeaker on the battlefield. But both Iraqi and U.S. forces have said in the past they expect the militants to keep fighting.

As night fell, Lt. Gen. Jabbar al-Darraj, commander of the country's 16th division, said on state TV that he hoped Islamic State fighters would give up, and that the Iraqi troops remained ever mindful of noncombatants.

"We have prepared safe corridors to receive civilians and prepared vehicles to transport civilians when we reach them," he said.

The fight for Mosul began in October, with Iraqi military and Kurdish Peshmerga troops pushing through rural areas and outlying villages primarily to the east of the city. Despite casualties among the troops, they made relatively quick progress before entering the city itself.

With U.S.-led coalition air support, including a new policy from Washington that allowed a more visible American troop presence on the ground and greater flexibility in air and artillery targeting, the Iraqi forces retook the east side of the city by the end of January.

In February, Iraqi troops crossed the Tigris river, which splits the city in half, and began squeezing Islamic State deeper into the heart of Mosul's dense neighborhoods. Fighting slowed in recent weeks as Iraqi troops engaged in bitter street-to-street battles in the neighborhoods adjacent to the Old City.

Iraqi troops struggled to advance through streets jammed with abandoned cars, booby-trapped houses and hidden Islamic State sharpshooters, while trying to avoid causing civilian casualties among the thousands of residents rounded up to be used as human shields by Islamic State.

As many as 100,000 civilians remain in the Old City, according to United Nations estimates last week. Fighting has displaced more than 600,000 people just from the west side of the city, the U.N. estimates, with a large number of those pushed into camps near the city.

Iraqi forces gave no timeline for concluding the operation, though officials praised its launch before the end of Islam's holiest month of Ramadan.

"These are blessed days, these are the last 10 days of Ramadan and we hope to achieve victory," said Abdulwahab al-Taee, spokesman for the Interior Ministry, in a statement.

Write to Ben Kesling at benjamin.kesling@wsj.com

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The Washington Post

Iraqi forces fight their way into the narrow streets of Mosul's historic center

https://www.facebook.com/lovedaymorris?fref=ts

6-8 minutes

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi forces faced snipers, mortar fire and booby traps as they began an assault on Mosul's Old City on Sunday, breaking into a maze of narrow streets and alleyways where hundreds of hardened Islamic State militants are expected to make a bloody last stand.

Clouds of smoke rose above the historic city center in the early morning as a barrage of artillery and airstrikes from U.S.-led coalition jets struck militant targets.

From nearby buildings bulldozers could be seen attempting to break through the barricades that marked Islamic State defense lines, coming under heavy fire but eventually opening the way for counterterrorism forces that led the assault.

Intense gun battles broke out after they entered. With the winding streets making car bombs more difficult to mobilize, the militants compensated with antitank weapons and mortar fire, which crashed down into streets behind the front lines. Snipers also waylaid the advance.

"They are besieged, they will fight to the death," said Master Sgt. Latif Omran, as his unit, armed with M-4 assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, waited just back from the front line for Humvees to ferry them forward.

['Death, death, red death': Residents of Mosul's Old City brace for the militants' last stand]

Over the past eight months, the militants have been gradually corralled into the Old City — an area of little more than a square mile on the western banks of the Tigris River.

The loss of their last foothold in Mosul, once the largest city the militants controlled, will strike a huge symbolic blow to the Islamic State. It was in the Old City's Great Mosque of al-Nuri that the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared the formation of a caliphate three years ago.

Since then the group has lost the majority of its territory in Iraq, while an offensive for Raqqa, the Islamic State's Syrian capital, began last month.

However, despite the losses few expect an easy fight for the last few inches of Mosul, where the United Nations estimates that as many as 150,000 civilians remain trapped.

The tiny lanes of the Old City make the terrain particularly challenging for Iraqi forces, as they can't enter many areas with their armored vehicles. Much of the fighting will have to be done on foot.

"This is their forward defense line so there's fierce resistance," said Lt. Gen. Abdelwahab al-Saedi, deputy head of the counterterrorism forces, at a base in western Mosul. "They are using the mortar shells heavily."

As the assault began, so did the inevitable casualties. Minutes after Omran and his unit left for the front came a crackle over the radio. "Our gunner is injured — we need another," came the voice of one officer.

While the counterterrorism forces lead the assault into the center of the Old City, moving east toward the river, army and police forces are supporting their flanks.

On the other side of the front lines, terrified families are trapped in their houses. Sheltering in crowded basements, many have not seen sunlight for weeks. Humanitarian agency workers have urged Iraqi and coalition forces to use caution and restrain the use of heavy weaponry.

"The buildings of the old town are particularly vulnerable to collapse even if they aren't directly targeted, which could lead to even more civilian deaths than the hundreds killed so far in airstrikes across the rest of the city," said Nora Love, the International Rescue Committee's acting country director.

Iraqi commanders and the U.S.-led coalition say they are taking into account the integrity of the buildings and the fact that the militants are using civilians as shields as they carry out strikes. Still, civilians who have managed to dodge Islamic State snipers to flee, and those still trapped inside, say civilians are dying every day in the bombardment.

As the assault began in the morning, three TOS-1 missiles sailed into the city. The thermobaric rockets cause a blast of pressure and can kill over an area of 3,000 square feet in open terrain. They were used on school buildings known to be devoid of civilians, said Col. Arkan Fadhil, who coordinates airstrikes with the coalition. The pressure blast can be contained by surrounding buildings in urban areas, he said.

Counterterrorism forces had taken two of the school buildings by the end of the day, giving them a "foothold" in the Old City, he said.

About 75 Islamic State militants manned the forward defense line — in groups of two or three — he said. Saedi said counterterrorism forces had taken about 150 yards by the early afternoon. Federal police forces also claimed to have gained around 150 yards.

Instead of being told to stay in their homes as they have been elsewhere, civilians will be asked to evacuate both for their own protection and to make the neighborhood easier to clear, according to commanders.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Over the past five days, loudspeakers have blared into the Old City, promising "salvation" and

urging Islamic State forces — whose numbers are difficult to estimate — to surrender.

But as many as 400 of those inside are hardened foreign fighters, who are likely to fight to the death, said Lt. Gen. Sami al-Aridhi, also a counterterrorism commander. Some Iraqis fighting for the Islamic State have managed to flee with displaced families, he said.

While there is not much ground to cover, some commanders predict the final push for Mosul could last at least a month.

The elite counterterrorism units — which have led the majority of Iraq's fight against the militants over the past three years — have suffered a 40 percent casualty rate since the beginning of the operation, according to U.S. figures, raising concerns about how long they can sustain a prolonged battle. Saedi said the casualty rate remained in the "acceptable range."

The New York Times

Zenko: Why Is the U.S. Killing So Many Civilians in Syria and Iraq?

Micah Zenko

5-7 minutes

Rescue workers searching through debris for bodies in Mosul, Iraq, in March. Felipe Dana/Associated Press

Two weeks ago, the American military finally acknowledged what nongovernmental monitoring groups had claimed for months: The United States-led coalition fighting the Islamic State since August 2014 has been killing Iraqi and Syrian civilians at astounding rates in the four months since President Trump assumed office. The result has been a "staggering loss of civilian life," as the head of the United Nations' independent Commission of Inquiry into the Syrian civil war said last week.

"At least 484 civilians have been unintentionally killed by coalition strikes," the United States Central Command, or Centcom, the military command responsible for the Middle East, said in a June 2 statement. Four months earlier, Centcom had said at least 199 civilians had been killed up to that point in the bombing campaign. Estimates by independent monitors are much higher. Airwars, a watchdog group, says coalition airstrikes have killed nearly 4,000 civilians.

The civilian death toll has risen mainly because the battle has moved deeper into major cities. But even as the civilian death toll ticks upward, the American military has relaxed oversight, investigation and accountability on civilian casualties. Finding out the reasons for these tragic mistakes, seeing what can be learned from them and enforcing the American military's own standards could save thousands of lives.

Mr. Trump has given the military "total authorization" to decide how, and how much, force will be used, authority that was more closely held by the Obama White House. But Secretary of Defense James Mattis insisted on May 28 that the rules of engagement have not changed. "There is no relaxation of our intention to protect the innocent," he said.

One reason for the huge increase in noncombatant deaths is that the United States is dropping more bombs — a more than 20 percent increase from the last four months of the Obama presidency to the first four under Mr. Trump.

Also, more strikes have occurred in populated areas, like Mosul, the Islamic State's last stronghold in Iraq. A 500-pound bomb aimed at two snipers there detonated stored explosives, which collapsed a building and killed 105 Iraqi civilians on March 17, according to Centcom. Since the Islamic State is using residential buildings as command posts, storage depots and fighting positions, noncombatant deaths are more likely.

Yet far more troubling factors have emerged.

Even as the American military has accelerated its bombing, there is no independent assessment of the intelligence used to identify targets. Brig. Gen. Richard Coe, who investigated a mistaken attack on a Syrian military convoy in September, acknowledged that there was no "red team" to critique the decision-making process, a common approach in many commands. "Each person is expected to do that on their own," General Coe said, "and then, in the process, funnel up the pros and cons to decision makers." Individuals immersed in identifying enemy targets cannot simultaneously evaluate their own judgments.

Until June 13, the American military had only two people investigating Iraqi and Syrian civilian casualties full time. There now are seven full-time investigators, still a meager commitment given that around 10,000 troops are stationed in Qatar at the command's headquarters for the air war. A dozen people investigated such claims at the height of the Afghanistan surge in 2011. If the military were concerned about civilian deaths, more investigators with training and experience in targeting would be assigned to those teams.

There is also no longer any public accountability. On May 26, an American military press officer confirmed that the Pentagon will no longer acknowledge when its own aircraft are responsible for civilian casualty incidents; rather they will be hidden under the umbrella of the "coalition." The United States military has been responsible for 95 percent of airstrikes in Syria and 68 percent in Iraq. Centcom should own up to its own actions rather than dispersing responsibility.

Congress has shown little interest in identifying the root causes of civilian deaths, holding commanders or lower-level officers accountable, or ensuring that the lessons learned from mistaken strikes are integrated into future operations. Congress could exercise its oversight role by mandating Pentagon reporting about what steps it has taken to mitigate civilian harm, funding additional awareness training for American and other coalition officers, and holding public hearings with senior civilian and military officials.

Since the air war began some 22,000 airstrikes ago, military officials have repeatedly claimed that they "do everything possible" to protect civilians. Making good on that promise is not only the right thing to do — it is also strategically vital to the longer-term effectiveness of the fight against terrorism.

The New York Times

Editorial : Fighting, While Funding, Extremists

The Editorial Board

4-5 minutes

The Saudis are also annoyed that Qatar talks to Iran, their chief rival, but it's hardly surprising since the two nations jointly manage a major offshore natural gas reserve.

American judgments about Qatar's activities have been as mixed as Qatar's record. In 2014 the State Department branded Qatar a "permissive jurisdiction" for terrorist financing, but has since praised its efforts to prevent such financing and to stop terrorists from crossing its borders as evidence of a "strong partnership." In February, Daniel Glaser, a former Treasury official, praised Qatar for a "good job" in trying to prevent terrorist financing through controls on its financial sector and local charities and in prosecuting people for illegal transactions. Even so, he complained that terrorist financiers are "operating openly and notoriously" in Qatar and Kuwait, and he urged the two governments to shut down such activities.

SAUDI ARABIA Since the Sept 11 attacks, staged mainly by Saudi-born hijackers, and a series of attacks by Al Qaeda and ISIS against the kingdom, Saudi Arabia has become more serious about extremism; some experts regard it as the top counterterrorism partner in the region. It has taken a zero-tolerance approach to ISIS and joined the American-led coalition fighting the group. Even so, American government reports say financial support for terrorism from Saudis "remains a threat to the kingdom and the international community." And while this has been ignored by Mr. Trump, Saudi Arabia undermines whatever good work it does by continuing to spend billions of dollars spreading Wahhabism, its ultraconservative brand of Islam — which in turn inspires ISIS, Al Qaeda and other Sunni extremists — through a network of imans and mosques in countries like Kosovo, Indonesia and Pakistan.

Dependent on the Wahhabi clerics for legitimacy, the royal family has been slow to reform a religion that teaches that nonbelievers and wayward Muslims should be shunned or fought if they reject its strict message. Experts say some Saudi school texts seem to make a virtue of hating others. The Saudis, aided by American intelligence and arms, may also be creating extremists with their brutal war in Yemen.

IRAN Unlike Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Iran is a Shiite nation. It is thus a natural enemy of Sunni terrorist groups like ISIS, which it is fighting in Iraq. Iran has been the target of two recent devastating attacks on Tehran for which ISIS

has claimed credit. At the same time, if other terrorist groups are counted, Iran is a bad actor. It was designated a state sponsor of terrorism by the State Department in 1984, five years after the Iranian revolution, and is one of three countries, along with Sudan and Syria, still on the list.

American experts say that whatever Saudi Arabia or Qatar's failings, Iran's are worse because its involvement with extremist groups is sponsored by the government. According to State Department reports, Iran finances, trains and arms Hezbollah and other Shiite forces in Syria who have committed human rights abuses in the fight to prop up Syria's notorious butcher, President Bashar al-Assad; anti-Israeli Hezbollah forces in Lebanon; and Shiite militants in Bahrain. Historically, Iran has also provided weapons, training and funding to Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups.

Significantly, the Americans are not accusing Russia, Iran's ally, of terrorism for using its firepower to keep the Assad government in power; no Iranians were named as responsible when the administration in February published a list of 78 major terrorist attacks. And some of Iran's activities, particularly its war on ISIS, dovetail with Western ambitions.

Each of these three main players has a role to play in the larger effort to defeat and defund terrorists. But there needs to be clarity and honesty about the various sources of the problem, and the various contributions each nation can make to the struggle. Exaggerating or misrepresenting the misdeeds of Qatar and Iran, while giving the Saudis a free pass, will only benefit Saudi Arabia's efforts to expand its regional influence.

The New York Times

As U.S. Adds Troops in Afghanistan, Trump's Strategy Remains Undefined (UNE)

Mark Landler and Michael R. Gordon

9-11 minutes

WASHINGTON — When President Trump made his first major decision on the war in Afghanistan, he did not announce it in a nationally televised address from the White House or a speech at West Point.

Instead, the Pentagon issued a news release late one afternoon last week confirming that the president had given the defense secretary, Jim Mattis, the authority to send several thousand additional troops to a war that, in its 16th year, engages about 8,800 American troops.

Mr. Trump, who writes avidly on Twitter about war and peace in other parts of the world, said nothing about the announcement. But its effect was unmistakable: He had outsourced the decision on how to proceed militarily in Afghanistan to the Pentagon, a startling break with how former President Barack Obama and many of his predecessors handled the anguished task of sending Americans into foreign conflicts.

The White House played down the Pentagon's vaguely worded statement, which referred only to setting "troop levels" as a stopgap measure — a tacit admission of the administration's internal conflicts over what to do about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan.

With a president who ran for office almost never having talked about the war, a coterie of political advisers who bitterly oppose deeper American engagement in it, and a national security team dominated by generals worried about the consequences if the United States does not act quickly, the decision could succeed in buying time for Mr. Trump and his advisers to fully deliberate over what to do in Afghanistan.

But former commanders and military scholars said that in sending troops before having a strategy, Mr. Trump has put the cart before the horse, eroded the tradition of civilian control over the military, and abdicated the president's duty to announce and defend troop deployments.

"A commander in chief keeps control of limited wars by defining missions, selecting commanders and setting troop levels," said Karl W. Eikenberry, a retired lieutenant general who was a top commander and the American ambassador in Afghanistan. "To delegate any of these is dangerous."

The decision to send additional troops represents at least a temporary victory for Mr. Mattis and Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, the national security adviser, over Mr. Trump's aides, including his chief strategist, Stephen K. Bannon, who had warned that sending more troops was a slippery slope toward nation building, anathema to nationalists like him who reject both the interventionist neoconservatives of the George W. Bush administration and the limited war fought by Mr. Obama.

Those objections stymied the troop proposal several weeks ago. But officials said the White House was rattled by a huge truck bomb in Kabul, the Afghan capital, that killed more than 150, as well as by fears that military trends are running against the government of President Ashraf Ghani, an American-friendly former World Bank official, to the point that it might be in danger of collapse.

General McMaster — who served in Afghanistan as the head of an anti-corruption task force and is closely allied with Mr. Mattis, another former general with Afghanistan experience — argued passionately to Mr. Trump that the military effort had to be expanded without further delay, according to one official.

"What we are seeing now is that the president has acknowledged that the Afghan mission is important, and we ought to do it right," said James Jay Carafano, a national security specialist at the conservative Heritage Foundation who advised Mr. Trump's presidential transition.

White House officials say they are still debating America's role in Afghanistan — one senior adviser said they would consider issues as basic as whether the country needs a strong central government, rather than the warlords who have historically divided power there. In the meantime, the Pentagon is moving ahead with plans to send 3,000 to 5,000 troops to try to stabilize the country.

But it is not clear what Mr. Trump's view of the strategy is, or even how involved he is in the debate. Officials said he did attend two National Security Council meetings last week — the first to discuss the troop issue, and the second to discuss the broader policy for South Asia.

Mr. Trump has said virtually nothing about Afghanistan since he was elected, or even since he started his campaign. But his views on the issue, based on Twitter posts when he was a private citizen, are uniformly hostile to America's involvement in the war.

"It is time to get out of Afghanistan," Mr. Trump wrote in 2012. "We are building roads and schools for people that hate us. It is not in our national interests."

Even Mr. Mattis has acknowledged that more troops will not be sufficient without a broader strategy, which the White House does not plan to complete before mid-July. Among the major questions are how to deal with the sanctuaries that the Taliban and other militants still have in neighboring Pakistan, how to fight Afghanistan's endemic corruption, and how to encourage a political settlement with the Taliban.

"The 3,000 to 5,000 may prevent a near-term backsliding, but it is not going to be decisive in turning the tide of this war," said Michèle A. Flournoy, the top Pentagon policy official during the Obama administration. "The administration needs to accompany any troop increase with a new political and economic strategy to help the Afghans achieve greater stability."

Some experts noted that Mr. Trump's hands-off approach on troop numbers was squarely in the Republican tradition of avoiding anything perceived as micromanaging the military, a criticism frequently leveled at Mr. Obama. But the Pentagon has assumed an even more outsize role in this administration, given a chaotic White House staff and an impulsive, preoccupied president.

"The president doesn't have the time or interest to make these decisions, so they want to leave the decision-making to Mattis," said Richard H. Kohn, a military historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who advised General McMaster on his doctoral thesis. "They trust Mattis because he's got the expertise and common sense."

On Friday, the Pentagon said Mr. Mattis had not yet made a decision on the precise troop increase. Any decision will come only after the Pentagon consults with other government agencies, the Afghan government and NATO allies, a spokeswoman, Dana W. White, said in a statement, adding, "The secretary will continue to follow the president's guidance on our overall strategy."

In several days of congressional testimony last week, Mr. Mattis argued that sending more troops would have multiple benefits. Instead of limiting itself to advisers at high-level corps headquarters, the United States would have advisers accompany Afghan brigades in the field, where their mentoring of Afghan troops would be more effective, he said.

The advisers would also call in air and artillery, which would enable the United States to expand its firepower on behalf of Afghan forces. That would more closely resemble what American forces are doing in Iraq and Syria to fight the Islamic State.

“These are going to be people specifically designed, trained and organized and equipped to go in and advise them how you take the hill, get them the air support and artillery support and rocket support that will enable them,” Mr. Mattis told the House Armed Services Committee.

That suggested that in addition to advisers, the United States would be sending artillery and surface-to-surface rocket units, as well as more Special Operations forces.

The Obama administration initially limited the use of American air power against the Taliban, hoping to make the Afghan military less dependent on the United States. But since Afghanistan has no real air force, the move resulted in lost ground and soaring Afghan casualties, prompting Mr. Obama to modify the policy.

Because Mr. Obama pushed for a faster troop reduction than some of his commanders had wanted, the advisory effort has been limited. In February, Gen. John W. Nicholson Jr., the commander of the American-led force in Afghanistan, said he had a “shortfall of a few thousand” troops.

About 6,700 American troops are training and advising Afghan forces, including 400 who are outside the country and 2,100 who are involved in counterterrorism operations. (NATO and other nations have deployed another 6,500 troops for the training effort.)

“Three thousand to 5,000 additional advisers and trainers is essential,” John R. Allen, a retired general who served as the commander in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2013, said in an interview.

When he served as the commander in Afghanistan, General Allen envisioned a residual force of 13,600 Americans and 6,000 NATO and other foreign troops — a force level that would have allowed advisers to be placed at all of the Afghan Army corps headquarters, to accompany Afghan brigades on some operations, and to set up a national training center in Helmand Province.

The White House is calling its strategy a South Asia policy, to distinguish it from the Obama administration’s so-called Af-Pak policy. Officials said it would include diplomacy with Pakistan, India and even Iran, a nation that American diplomats cooperated with during the early months of the Afghan war but that the White House now sees as a bitter foe.

But the administration’s efforts to harness diplomacy may be handicapped by the depleted condition of the State Department. And that suggests to some that whatever strategy the Trump administration eventually arrives at will be dominated by the military.

“I am not against a troop increase,” said Daniel F. Feldman, who served as special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan under Mr. Obama. “But this appears to be tactics waiting for a strategy.”

The Washington Post

Afghan war faces flurry of setbacks as new U.S. military policy nears (UNE)

https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100011342442800&ref=br_rs

9-11 minutes

Taliban fighters stormed a police base in southeastern Paktia province, Afghanistan, after detonating a suicide car bomb outside. Taliban fighters stormed a police base in southeastern Paktia province, Afghanistan, after detonating a suicide car bomb outside. (Reuters)

(Reuters)

ISLAMABAD — As American military officials complete plans that are likely to send several thousand additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan, a flurry of setbacks in the war have underscored both the imperative of action and the pitfalls of various approaches.

Further complicating the picture are questions about how to deal with neighboring Pakistan and balance separate fights against Afghan and foreign-based insurgents.

In the latest attack Sunday morning, Taliban fighters stormed a police base in southeastern Paktia province after detonating a suicide car bomb outside. At least five members of security forces and several civilians were killed, officials said. The attack came one day after an Afghan army commando shot and wounded seven U.S. troops inside an army base in northern Balkh province.

Almost every week seems to bring alarming and embarrassing developments that cast doubt on the ability of Afghan security forces to protect the public and make headway against the domestic Taliban insurgency and the more ruthless Islamic State.

From the powerful truck bomb that decimated a high-security district of Kabul on May 31, killing more than 150 people and sparking days of protests, to the Saturday shooting at the same base in Balkh where Taliban infiltrators killed more than 140 Afghan soldiers April 21, a spate of attacks from various sources is inflicting blow after blow on the nation’s battered psyche.

The United States is not winning in Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told Congress on June 13, saying he was crafting a new strategy which he will brief to lawmakers by mid-July. The United States is not winning in Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told Congress on June 13. (Reuters)

(Reuters)

The Saturday shooting was one of several recent insider attacks that are raising new concerns about poor vetting and conflicting loyalties, even among the elite Afghan special operations forces that the U.S. military sees as crucial to boosting the war effort. Experts said such attacks would be likely to increase if more U.S. troops arrive.

In eastern Nangahar province, where Afghan and U.S. special operations forces have been waging a joint campaign against Islamic State fighters, another Afghan army commando — reportedly a Taliban sympathizer or member — fatally shot three U.S. troops June 10.

U.S. military officials have claimed to be making steady progress in that fight. In April, the United States dropped its largest non-nuclear bomb on a complex of caves and tunnels used by Islamic State fighters, reportedly killing 92.

But last week, in an equally dramatic response, hundreds of Islamic State fighters captured Tora Bora, the underground labyrinth that was once the redoubt of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Underscoring the confused battlefield situation, it was the Taliban that Islamic State forces fought and drove out of the area.

U.S. military officials have expressed growing concern about the war and urged that several thousand more U.S. troops be sent to shore up Afghan forces. Fewer than half of the country’s 407 districts are under full government control, and Taliban forces have come close to occupying several provincial capitals.

But no new U.S. policy or troop numbers have yet been announced, reportedly because of disagreements within the Trump administration. They include arguments over whether sending more troops would make a decisive difference, how much NATO allies should contribute and whether the United States should pressure Pakistan to rein in Taliban insurgents believed to be operating from safe havens there.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who was recently given authority by President Trump to set troop levels in the Afghan conflict, said last week that the United States is “not winning” in Afghanistan and that the Pentagon will present its strategy plan next month. “We will correct this as soon as possible,” he told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Both Afghan and American analysts, however, doubt that adding several thousand more troops to the 8,400 currently here will make much difference in a war that at one point involved 140,000 U.S. and NATO forces. They stress that U.S. policy also needs a strong political component to strengthen the government and push for reconciliation.

“It’s clear that the U.S. cannot win this war militarily,” said Michael Kugelman at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. “The Taliban insurgency seems to strengthen by the day, the Islamic State remains resilient, public anger is building” and “Afghan troops are turning on their American trainers.”

He said the new U.S. policy “can’t come soon enough, but deploying a few thousand new troops will do little to shift the calculus on the ground.”

Afghan analysts and officials argue that the top U.S. priority should be pressing Pakistan to cease harboring anti-Afghan militants. A spokesman for the defense ministry said Sunday that the U.S. government needs to put “real pressure on Pakistan to make it drop its support for terrorists.”

Atiqullah Amarkhel, a retired Afghan army general, said that the government is facing an agile guerrilla enemy and that United States needs to focus on cutting its "lines of supply and support and training" in Pakistan. Sending more U.S. troops, he added, will "give more ammunition" for insurgents to attract recruits among young and jobless Afghans.

Mattis said the Pentagon plans to take a "regional approach" to the war and address "where this enemy is fighting from," which is "not just Afghanistan." Afghan officials have been more blunt, accusing Pakistan of harboring a violent Taliban branch called the Haqqani Network.

At a conference this month, President Ashraf Ghani charged that Pakistan is waging an "undeclared war of aggression" on Afghanistan.

Pakistan's military commanders bristled at the "unwarranted accusations" and said Afghans should "look inward" to solve their insurgent problems.

Some members of Congress and U.S. think tanks have urged the Trump administration to crack down heavily on Pakistan, a former Cold War ally and a major recipient of U.S. aid. Clearly worried, Pakistani officials have denounced recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and have strongly denied backing the Haqqani Network.

But other voices have argued against putting excess pressure on Pakistan, saying it could risk political instability and religious unrest. Pakistan has suffered from years of militant attacks, most recently a spate of suicide bombings at Sufi shrines and other civilian targets in February.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told a congressional hearing last week that the United States has "very complex relations" with Pakistan, but Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.) insisted that "if we don't succeed in Afghanistan," it is because of Pakistan's military-run intelligence service.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

On the problem of insider attacks, Amarkhel said it is easy for anti-government sympathizers to "penetrate the ranks" of the security forces, because poor security and vetting make it difficult to assess recruits.

"It is hard to find the enemy within yourself," he said, adding that the Afghan military leadership is weak and politicized. "The recent insider attacks are not the first ones and will not be the last."

U.S. watchdog agencies have noted that corruption and nepotism within the Afghan military leadership have undermined the capacity of its forces, but changes in top officials appear to have made little difference. After the April 21 attack on the base in Balkh, Ghani dismissed both the defense and interior ministers.

Salahuddin reported from Kabul. Sharif Walid in Kabul and Haq Nawaz Khan and Shaiq Hussain in Islamabad contributed to this report.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Jared Kushner to Travel to Middle East in Effort to Advance U.S. Peace Efforts

Carol E. Lee

3-4 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 9:42 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior White House adviser, Jared Kushner, plans to travel to the Middle East this week to try to advance U.S. efforts to reach an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, a White House official said Sunday.

The trip marks the White House's first major follow up to Mr. Trump's trip to the region last month and suggests Mr. Kushner's policy portfolio is far from shrinking despite scrutiny by federal investigators into his meetings with Russian officials.

Mr. Kushner plans to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem and travel to Ramallah to meet with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas to discuss "their priorities and potential next steps" in the peace process, the White House official said.

He is scheduled to arrive in Israel on Wednesday. Jason Greenblatt, Mr. Trump's top representative on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, plans to arrive in the region two days earlier.

The White House official stressed that no major breakthroughs are expected during the trip and said there is no expectation for three-party talks at this time.

"It's important to remember that forging a historic peace agreement will take time, and to the extent that there is progress, there are likely to be many visits by both Mr. Kushner and Mr. Greenblatt, sometimes together and sometimes separately, to the region," the official said, "and possibly many trips by Israeli and Palestinian negotiators to Washington, D.C., or other locations as they pursue substantive talks."

White House officials have pointed to an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement as a priority for Mr. Trump.

The White House official said, "The president has asked some of his most trusted advisers to spearhead the peace effort."

Mr. Kushner was a chief architect of Mr. Trump's visit to Jerusalem and Bethlehem on May 22-23 and his earlier stop in Saudi Arabia for meetings with Gulf State leaders.

Just days after the visit, Mr. Kushner's White House role was questioned after revelations that his meetings with Russian officials had become part of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election and possible collusion between Moscow and Trump campaign officials.

Mr. Kushner has an expansive policy portfolio that includes overseeing not only Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts but also U.S.-China relations, and other domestic and foreign policy issues.

He has retained a lawyer amid the expanding Russia probe, which also is scrutinizing his business ties. He plans to cooperate with the Senate Intelligence Committee and has said he would cooperate with the FBI as well.

Mr. Kushner has been coordinating the policy with the national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

Write to Carol E. Lee at carol.lee@wsj.com

Appeared in the June 19, 2017, print edition as 'Kushner Plans Trip to Middle East.'

The New York Times

North Korea Accuses U.S. of 'Mugging' Its Diplomats in New York

Choe Sang-Hun

3-4 minutes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea on Sunday accused United States officials of "mugging" its diplomats at Kennedy International Airport by seizing a diplomatic package they were carrying.

A North Korean delegation, returning home from a United Nations conference in New York, was about to board a plane on Friday when more than 20 agents and police officers from the Department of Homeland Security confiscated the package, the North's official Korean Central News Agency quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying.

"As the diplomats vigorously resisted, they grabbed the diplomatic package using physical violence and made off," he said, adding that the North Koreans were carrying a valid diplomatic courier certificate.

"This clearly shows that the U.S. is a felonious and lawless gangster state," he said. "The U.S. should reflect on its reckless act and be fully aware of the grave consequences to follow."

The spokesman said North Korea "regards this mugging by the U.S. as an intolerable act of infringement upon the sovereignty" of the country, and demanded an explanation and an apology. The spokesman was not quoted by name, as is common in North Korean news reports.

He did not disclose what the diplomatic package contained.

In a statement, the Department of Homeland Security said its officers assisted in the inspection of three North Korean citizens on Friday, seizing "multiple media items and packages." It did not explain why the items were seized, but said the North Koreans attempted to retrieve them.

"According to the U.S. State Department, the North Korean citizens were not accredited

members of North Korea's mission to the U.N. and had no entitlement to diplomatic immunity," the statement said. "The package in question had no protection from inspection."

North Korea said its delegation had attended a session of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities.

The controversy comes at a delicate time in relations between North Korea and the United States. On Tuesday, North Korea released an American college student, Otto F. Warmbier, who is in a coma after 17 months of captivity. American doctors said Mr. Warmbier had suffered extensive brain damage. North Korea said it had freed him on "humanitarian grounds" but did not reveal details of his medical condition.

Mr. Warmbier was detained in January 2016 while trying to leave North Korea, which he visited on a tourist visa. He was subsequently sentenced to 15 years of hard labor on charges of committing the "hostile act" of stealing a political poster from a wall in his hotel.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Top North Korean Nuclear Negotiator Secretly Met With U.S. Diplomats

Jay Solomon

7-9 minutes

June 18, 2017 7:00 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—For more than a year, American diplomats have held secret talks in Pyongyang and European cities with North Korea's top nuclear negotiator, hoping to free U.S. prisoners and even establish a diplomatic channel to constrain North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

The official dispatched by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un —Madame Choi Sun Hee —is well known to U.S. officials, fluent in English and is believed to have direct access to Mr. Kim. That raised expectations that the regime eventually might engage with the Trump administration about the future of Pyongyang's weapons efforts. So did the agreed release this month of 22-year-old American prisoner Otto Warmbier, until it emerged he was in a coma.

"Given the reported status of Mr. Warmbier's condition, any diplomatic path forward is going to be extremely difficult," said Suzanne DiMaggio of the New America Foundation, a Washington think tank, who helped establish an unofficial channel with the North Koreans early last year. But she had a suggestion for Pyongyang to begin to repair the damage: "If the North Koreans immediately released the remaining three prisoners, it could set up an atmosphere for potentially serious talks."

President Donald Trump has repeatedly said he isn't seeking regime change in North Korea and hasn't ruled out negotiations to curb North Korea's rapidly advancing nuclear and ballistic-missile programs.

Still, there is concern inside the U.S. government about Mr. Warmbier's health and his treatment by North Korean guards during 18 months in custody. He was returned to the U.S. in a coma, and doctors said he has lost an extensive amount of brain tissue.

Early last year, Ms. DiMaggio established through interlocutors in Stockholm a "track two" dialogue with North Korea, a term reflecting the fact no active U.S. officials were present at the initial meetings. She made the first of two trips to the North Korean capital in February 2016, in an early bid to help defuse the nuclear crisis.

Ms. DiMaggio has long worked to establish diplomatic channels to countries in conflict with the U.S. She held numerous track two discussions with Iranian officials before the Obama administration formally started nuclear negotiations with Tehran in 2012.

Madame Choi was a major player in nuclear and missile negotiations that took place both during the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, current and former U.S. officials said. Her official title now is the director-general of the North America affairs bureau of North Korea's Foreign Ministry.

"When Track Two participants meet with her, what they're getting is someone who can convey very accurately to us what the North Koreans want us to hear," said Robert Einhorn, a former senior State Department official who worked on North Korea in the Obama and Clinton administrations and met Madame Choi last month. "She's a valuable interlocutor because of her experience and connections."

Bill Richardson, the former New Mexico governor and U.S. energy secretary, separately began a string of about 20 meetings with North Korean diplomats in New York at about the same time as Ms. DiMaggio's trips that were focused on gaining Mr. Warmbier's release. The North Koreans' favorite spot for meetings was The Palm steakhouse in New York, close to their United Nations offices.

Mr. Richardson sent his own representative to Pyongyang last September to seek Mr. Warmbier's release. "[Mr. Warmbier's] situation will temper the desire for dialogue for the time being," said Mr. Richardson, a self-proclaimed champion of engagement. "I'm so unhappy and disgusted by what's happened to him."

The Obama administration had largely frozen direct contacts with North Korea in a policy that became known as "strategic patience."

The two sides reached a preliminary agreement in 2012 that called for Pyongyang to freeze its missile tests in return for the U.S. shipping food aid to the country. But the deal collapsed after the North test-fired what it claimed was a rocket for a civilian satellite program.

Obama administration officials grumbled that any agreements with Pyongyang appeared futile.

Mr. Richardson has held negotiations with North Korean officials on prisoner issues dating back to the 1990s, when he was a congressman and then-President Clinton's ambassador to the U.N. But he said the dynamic of his encounters has changed under the rule of Mr. Kim, who took power in late 2011.

North Korean Foreign Ministry officials, he said, aren't as aware of developments in Pyongyang as they were under Mr. Kim's father and grandfather, the previous leaders of the communist country. The issue of American prisoners, Mr. Richardson said, appeared now to be totally under the mandate of the North's security forces.

"It's conceivable my interlocutors didn't even know about Otto Warmbier's status," Mr. Richardson said in an interview.

Following Mr. Trump's inauguration, the official and nonofficial American contacts with the North Koreans started to merge, said U.S. officials and participants in the dialogue.

The State Department's special representative for North Korea, Joseph Yun, was first scheduled to attend a meeting with Madame Choi and other North Korean diplomats in New York this February, these officials said.

But the Trump administration canceled the North Koreans' visas at the last minute after Mr. Kim's half brother was assassinated in Malaysia. The U.S. believed the killing was state-sanctioned, a charge Pyongyang has denied.

In May, Mr. Yun attended a meeting with Madame Choi in Oslo that was organized by Ms. DiMaggio and the Norwegian government. It largely focused on the status of the American prisoners.

Mr. Yun and Madame Choi had dinner and a two-hour meeting in the Norwegian capital. But the senior North Korean diplomat didn't provide any details about Mr. Warmbier's declining health, according to senior U.S. officials. She did promise to provide access to American prisoners in North Korea, using Swedish diplomats in Pyongyang.

Madame Choi told reporters in Beijing after leaving Norway that Pyongyang would be willing to meet U.S. officials for talks on the nuclear issue "if the conditions are set."

Americans who have met Madame Choi said the North Korea diplomat is steadfast that Pyongyang will maintain its nuclear weapons arsenal but is open to the possibility of limiting it. "They have not ruled out partial steps, like a cap or freeze as a temporary measure," said Mr. Einhorn, who is now at the Brookings Institution. "They don't attack that; nor do they says it's acceptable."

It wasn't until June 6 that North Korea invited Mr. Yun for a direct meeting in New York with Pyongyang's ambassador to the U.N., according to the State Department. It was here that the U.S. finally was notified that Mr. Warmbier was in a coma.

The revelation resulted in Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's decision to send a diplomatic and medical team to Pyongyang to bring the University of Virginia student home.

Three Americans remain in North Korean prisons.

—Felicia Schwartz contributed to this article.

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com

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The Washington Post

Hiatt: Why I can't stop thinking about Otto Warmbier

https://www.facebook.com/fhiatt1

6-7 minutes

By Fred Hiatt Editorial Page EditorJune 18 at 7:10 PM

I can't stop thinking about Otto Warmbier. And the more I think about him, the more I remember all the smart people I've heard over the years explaining why the North Korean regime — the regime that "brutalized and terrorized" Otto, as his father said last week — shouldn't be challenged or destabilized.

Warmbier is a smart and immensely likable kid who graduated from high school in 2013 in his hometown of Wyoming, Ohio, and enrolled in the University of Virginia. Toward the end of 2015 he was traveling in China when he signed up, out of curiosity and a sense of adventure, for a four-day New Year's trip to North Korea. As the rest of his tour group departed from Pyongyang International Airport on Jan. 2, 2016, Warmbier was detained.

Two months later he showed up on North Korean television confessing to his supposed offense: trying to pilfer a propaganda poster from his hotel to bring home as a souvenir. We don't know if the coerced confession was truthful or made up. Even if truthful, the resulting sentence of 15 years at hard labor was obscene.

Evening Edition newsletter

The day's most important stories.

Warmbier, who is now 22, wasn't seen or heard from again until last week, when the Trump administration managed to secure his release and fly him home to Ohio. Only it turns out that Warmbier is incapacitated, and apparently has been for almost his entire time in captivity.

"His neurological condition can be best described as a state of unresponsive wakefulness," said Daniel Kanter, a University of Cincinnati Medical Center neurologist who examined Otto. "He shows no signs of understanding language, responding to verbal commands or awareness of his surroundings. He has not spoken. He has not engaged in any purposeful movements or behaviors. . . . This study showed extensive loss of brain tissue in all regions of the brain."

Undated video shows American student Otto Warmbier throwing snowballs in North Korea before his arrest for "committing hostile acts" against North Korea. Undated video shows American student Otto Warmbier throwing snowballs in North Korea before his arrest for "committing hostile acts" against the North. (Austin Warmbier)

(Austin Warmbier)

We don't know whether North Korean guards beat Warmbier into a coma or whether his abuse and maltreatment came in some other form. What we do know is that a healthy young man flew to Pyongyang, was unjustly seized and then became lost to the world — with no one bothering to inform his parents.

Here's something else we know: Thousands — no, hundreds of thousands — of Koreans have been subjected to similar criminal abuse as Otto Warmbier suffered at the hands of North Korea's Stalinist regime. In 2014, a U.N. commission reported that "systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea . . .

"The use of torture is an established feature of the interrogation process in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," the U.N. commission found. "Starvation and other inhumane conditions of detention are deliberately imposed on suspects. . . . Persons who are found to have engaged in major political crimes are 'disappeared,' without trial or judicial order, to political prison camps (kwanliso). . . . Their families are not even informed of their fate if they die. . . .

"The inmate population has been gradually eliminated through deliberate starvation, forced labour, executions, torture, rape and the denial of reproductive rights enforced through punishment, forced abortion and infanticide. The commission estimates that hundreds of thousands of political prisoners have perished in these camps over the past five decades. The unspeakable atrocities that are being committed against inmates of the kwanliso political prison camps resemble the horrors of camps that totalitarian States established during the twentieth century."

Translation: The gulag of the Soviet Union, the concentration camps of Nazi Germany — they have been roughly replicated in North Korea. The whole world knows this — the U.N. report is a public document — and yet the regime lives on. How can that be?

It turns out that plenty of people find the regime repugnant but convenient. China's Communist rulers are first in that line: Kim Jong Un annoys them, but they do not want a unified, pro-Western Korea on their border. South Korea has a Ministry of Unification but also many citizens who do not want the responsibility or expense of bringing 25 million impoverished North Koreans up to their living standard (South Korea's population is about 50 million).

For its part, the United States is more interested in negotiating an end to North Korea's nuclear weapons program than helping its captive millions. "Our goal is not regime change," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in April.

An American university student who was detained for 17 months in North Korea suffered a serious neurological injury that resulted in "extensive loss of brain tissue" but showed no signs of botulism, according to doctors. An American student who was detained for 17 months in North Korea suffered a serious neurological injury that resulted in "extensive loss of brain tissue." (Reuters)

(Reuters)

And so, though the country is backward and totally dependent on outside assistance, the regime lives on. The prison camps endure. And Otto Warmbier's heartbroken mother sits by his side, hoping to coax some sign of consciousness from her damaged boy.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

China Pushes U.S. Aside in Pakistan

Saeed Shah

6-7 minutes

June 18, 2017 7:00 a.m. ET

ISLAMABAD—Pakistan's ruling power structure has long been summed up with the saying "Allah, Army and America."

China is now staking a claim to supplanting the U.S. with tens of billions of dollars of investment, an embrace that promises Pakistan economic benefits and saddles it with debt—ensuring the relationship will last.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has made Pakistan his flagship partner in a program to spread Chinese-built infrastructure—and Beijing's sway—across Asia and beyond. Pakistan has so far signed on to $55 billion in Chinese projects, many of them guaranteeing China a high return on its investments and granting tax breaks to Chinese companies.

Former President Barack Obama's "Asia pivot" is giving way to Mr. Xi's infrastructure juggernaut, in a model that could be replicated across the region.

"China came in when no one else was willing to invest," said Commerce Minister Khurram Dastagir. The U.S. missed its chance, he said.

Beijing calls its program "One Belt One Road," referring to the ancient sea and land Silk Road trade routes that China seeks to revive. Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif inaugurated the program's first big completed project here in late May, a Chinese-built, coal-fired power plant in his home province of Punjab.

China is building roads, railways, power plants and a port, and has lent Pakistan $2 billion in under two years to shore up its foreign-exchange reserves.

A promised $1 trillion Chinese splurge hasn't yet materialized for many countries. But in Pakistan, $18 billion in projects are under construction in what is known as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

The centerpiece is Pakistan's Arabian Sea port at Gwadar, under expansion and run by a Chinese company to enable trade in goods from China's southwest.

Pakistan calculates that the Chinese investments will add 2 percentage points to growth in the next few years by providing infrastructure needed to kick-start industrialization.

President Donald Trump has abandoned what was viewed by the Obama administration as a counterbalance to China, a trade deal with nations in the region called Trans Pacific Partnership. An American official said civilian aid to Pakistan, a longtime ally, remained substantial but "getting our message out is a challenge."

"The Chinese are winning the perceptions game, whatever the reality. That then leads to political outcomes, because people see the inevitability of China's rise and China's power," said Ely Ratner of the Council on Foreign Relations, an independent U.S. think tank.

While Washington's approach in Asia is military-led, Beijing is binding countries to its interests with economics, said Mr. Ratner.

At a Chinese celebration of its belt and road plan in Beijing in May, Matt Pottinger, senior director for East Asia at the National Security Council, welcomed the initiative but called for Beijing to "ensure that privately owned companies can bid in a fair process."

That means that American businesses should be allowed to compete for contracts, U.S. officials said.

There is little sign of that in Pakistan. Islamabad chooses bidders from an all-Chinese short-list provided by Beijing. Pakistani officials say this is because Chinese companies bring their own financing.

The U.S. has asked to participate in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, but nothing has come of it, one of the American officials said.

Much as the U.S. secured the Pakistan alliance with aid to the country's powerful military, China has made the Pakistani army a beneficiary. Many construction contracts that weren't given to Chinese firms have been awarded to the military's engineering arm. The military has raised a special force, now at 15,000 and set to double in size, to protect Chinese projects.

Since 2001, Islamabad has received $33 billion in U.S. military and civilian aid, according to the Congressional Research Service. But U.S. aid hasn't yielded any high-profile infrastructure projects in Pakistan, and Pakistani officials say that joining America's war on terror has cost it $123 billion in economic losses and tens of thousands of lives.

"We want to move away from geopolitics, to geoeconomics, from fighting wars for others," said Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan's planning minister, who oversees the Chinese investment. "Our vision is to place Pakistan as the hub of trade and commerce in this region."

China's expenditure isn't aid. With transport projects, Pakistan incurs debt; power plants come with an obligation for Pakistan to purchase the electricity produced.

Tahir Mashhadi, a senator from the opposition Muttahida Qaumi Movement, compared China to the East India Company, the commercial enterprise that colonized India before the British government took over.

"Here's the danger: the banks are Chinese. The money is Chinese. The expertise is Chinese. The management is Chinese. The profits are for China. The labor is Chinese," said Mr. Mashhadi.

Nadeem Javaid, chief economist at Pakistan's planning ministry, said Pakistan would be paying $5 billion a year to China by 2022, but that the debt should be easy to manage as Pakistani exports rise, electricity prices fall, and toll revenues are generated from trade from China to Gwadar.

"The fears," he said, "are not genuine."

—Trefor Moss in Shanghai and Qasim Nauman in Islamabad contributed to this article.

Write to Saeed Shah at saeed.shah@wsj.com

The New York Times

Using Texts as Lures, Government Spyware Targets Mexican Activists and Their Families (UNE)

Azam Ahmed and Nicole Perlroth

14-17 minutes

MEXICO CITY — Mexico's most prominent human rights lawyers, journalists and anti-corruption activists have been targeted by advanced spyware sold to the Mexican government on the condition that it be used only to investigate criminals and terrorists.

The targets include lawyers looking into the mass disappearance of 43 students, a highly respected academic who helped write anti-corruption legislation, two of Mexico's most influential journalists and an American representing victims of sexual abuse by the police. The spying even swept up family members, including a teenage boy.

Since 2011, at least three Mexican federal agencies have purchased about $80 million worth of spyware created by an Israeli cyberarms manufacturer. The software, known as Pegasus, infiltrates smartphones to monitor every detail of a person's cellular life — calls, texts, email, contacts and calendars. It can even use the microphone and camera on phones for surveillance, turning a target's smartphone into a personal bug.

The company that makes the software, the NSO Group, says it sells the tool exclusively to governments, with an explicit agreement that it be used only to battle terrorists or the drug cartels and criminal groups that have long kidnapped and killed Mexicans.

Continue reading the main story

But according to dozens of messages examined by The New York Times and independent forensic analysts, the software has been used against some of the government's most outspoken critics and their families, in what many view as an unprecedented effort to thwart the fight against the corruption infecting every limb of Mexican society.

"We are the new enemies of the state," said Juan E. Pardinas, the general director of the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness, who has pushed anti-corruption legislation. His iPhone, along with his wife's, was targeted by the software, according to an independent analysis. "Ours is a society where democracy has been eroded," he said.

The deployment of sophisticated cyberweaponry against citizens is a snapshot of the struggle for Mexico itself, raising profound legal and ethical questions for a government already facing severe criticism for its human rights record. Under Mexican law, only a federal judge can authorize the surveillance of private communications, and only when officials can demonstrate a sound basis for the request.

It is highly unlikely that the government received judicial approval to hack the phones, according to several former Mexican intelligence officials. Instead, they said, illegal surveillance is standard practice.

"Mexican security agencies wouldn't ask for a court order, because they know they wouldn't get one," said Eduardo Guerrero, a former analyst at the Center for Investigation and National Security, Mexico's intelligence agency and one of the government agencies that use the Pegasus spyware. "I mean, how could a judge authorize surveillance of someone dedicated to the protection of human rights?"

"There, of course, is no basis for that intervention, but that is besides the point," he added. "No one in Mexico ever asks for permission to do so."

The hacking attempts were highly personalized, striking critics with messages designed to inspire fear — and get them to click on a link that would provide unfettered access to their cellphones.

Carmen Aristegui, one of Mexico's most famous journalists, was targeted by a spyware operator posing as the United States Embassy in Mexico, instructing her to click on a link to resolve an issue with her visa. The wife of Mr. Pardinas, the anti-corruption activist, was targeted with a message claiming to offer proof that he was having an extramarital affair.

Photo

Carmen Aristegui, a Mexican journalist, has been targeted by spyware, as has her teenage son. Credit Edgard Garrido/Reuters

For others, imminent danger was the entry point, like a message warning that a truck filled with armed men was parked outside Mr. Pardinas's home.

"I think that any company that sells a product like this to a government would be horrified by the targets, of course, which don't seem to fall into the traditional role of criminality," said John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher at Citizen Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, which examined the hacking attempts.

The Mexican government acknowledges gathering intelligence against legitimate suspects in accordance with the law. "As in any democratic government, to combat crime and threats against national security the Mexican government carries out intelligence operations," it said in a statement.

But the government "categorically denies that any of its members engages in surveillance or communications operations against defenders of human rights, journalists, anti-corruption activists or any other person without prior judicial authorization."

The Mexican government's deployment of spyware has come under suspicion before, including hacking attempts on political

opponents and activists fighting corporate interests in Mexico.

Still, there is no ironclad proof that the Mexican government is responsible. The Pegasus software does not leave behind the hacker's individual fingerprints. Even the software maker, the NSO Group, says it cannot determine who, exactly, is behind specific hacking attempts.

But cyberexperts can verify when the software has been used on a target's phone, leaving them with few doubts that the Mexican government, or some rogue actor within it, was involved.

"This is pretty much as good as it gets," said Bill Marczak, another senior researcher at Citizen Lab, who confirmed the presence of NSO code on several phones belonging to Mexican journalists and activists.

Moreover, it is extremely unlikely that cybercriminals somehow got their hands on the software, the NSO Group says, because the technology can be used only by the government agency where it is installed.

The company is part of a growing number of digital spying businesses that operate in a loosely regulated space. The market has picked up in recent years, particularly as companies like Apple and Facebook start encrypting their customers' communications, making it harder for government agencies to conduct surveillance.

Increasingly, governments have found that the only way to monitor mobile phones is by using private businesses like the NSO Group that exploit little-known vulnerabilities in smartphone software. The company has, at times, operated its businesses under different names. One of them, OSY Technologies, paid Michael T. Flynn, President Trump's former national security adviser, more than $40,000 to be an advisory board member from May 2016 until January, according to his public financial disclosures.

Before selling to governments, the NSO Group says, it vets their human rights records. But once the company licenses the software and installs its hardware inside intelligence and law enforcement agencies, the company says, it has no way of knowing how its spy tools are used — or whom they are used against.

The company simply bills governments based on the total number of surveillance targets. To spy on 10 iPhone users, for example, the company charges $650,000 on top of a flat $500,000 installation fee, according to NSO marketing proposals reviewed by The New York Times.

Even when the NSO Group learns that its software has been abused, there is only so much it can do, the company says, arguing that it cannot simply march into intelligence agencies, remove its hardware and take back its spyware.

"When you're selling AK-47s, you can't control how they'll be used once they leave the loading docks," said Kevin Mahaffey, chief technology officer at Lookout, a mobile security company.

Rather, the NSO Group relies on its customers to cooperate in a review, then turns over the findings to the appropriate governmental authority — in effect, leaving governments to police themselves.

Typically, the company's only recourse is to slowly cut off a government's access to the spy tools over the course of months, or even years, by ceasing to provide new software patches, features and updates. But in the case of Mexico, the NSO Group has not condemned or even acknowledged any abuse, despite repeated evidence that its spy tools have been deployed against ordinary citizens and their families.

From Hope to Intimidation

Journalists, human rights defenders and anti-corruption campaigners have long faced enormous risks in Mexico. For decades, they have been followed, harassed, threatened and even killed for their work, occupational hazards more common in authoritarian states than in countries in good standing with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as Mexico is.

But when President Enrique Peña Nieto came into office in 2012, promising to lift Mexico to its rightful place on the world stage, there was an inkling of hope that the nation's democracy was coming into its own.

His party passed a list of badly needed changes, taking aim at the failing education system and moving to enhance the transparency of Mexico's bureaucracy. Competition in some core industries, like telecommunications, has increased.

But by 2014, much of the early promise of the Peña Nieto administration was dashed by the crises subsuming it, including the mysterious disappearance of 43 teaching students after a clash with the police, and accusations that the president and his wife got a special deal on a multimillion-dollar home from a government contractor.

Continue reading the main story

Photo

People mourning Alexander Mora, one of 43 teaching students who vanished in 2014 after a clash with the police in Guerrero State. Lawyers looking into the students' disappearance have been targeted by spyware. Credit Adriana Zehbrauskas for The New York Times

The scandals have left an enduring mark on the president's reputation. After a stunning rise built on a perfectly crafted image — a young, energetic president working across party lines, the embodiment of a new Mexico — Mr. Peña Nieto was suddenly recast as an out-of-touch, corrupt politician with abysmal approval ratings.

In no small part, that fall was thanks to the Mexican journalists who broke news of the scandals, as well as the lawyers and activists who refused to let the country forget about them.

"You have to remember this was a government that went from setting the agenda to being entirely reactive," said Carlos Loret de Mola, a news anchor for Televisa who has some of the best sources inside the Mexican government.

Mr. Loret de Mola, who received at least eight messages laced with NSO software, added, "They looked at journalists and thought, 'They are bringing these things out and embarrassing us, so it's better if we spy on them.'"

Mexico is still a far cry from Turkey, which jails more journalists than any other nation in the world. It is hardly China, an authoritarian state where critics are silenced and a Western-style free press has been cast as a political peril by the government. But Mexico is in crisis on these fronts all the same.

More journalists were killed in Mexico last year than during any other year this century, and 2017 is off to an even worse start. Government critics are routinely harassed and threatened, and now they are being targeted with incredibly sophisticated software.

"The fact that the government is using high-tech surveillance against human rights defenders and journalists exposing corruption, instead of those responsible for those abuses, says a lot about who the government works for," said Luis Fernando García, the executive director of R3D, a digital rights group in Mexico that has helped identify multiple abuses of Pegasus in Mexico. "It's definitely not for the people."

Supporters protested the firing of Carmen Aristegui in 2015. She was dismissed following a report on a sweetheart real estate deal involving Mexico's First Lady. The sign at center says: "To listen to Aristegui is an act of rebellion and of hope. Out with Peña." Edgard Garrido/Reuters

'About Getting Revenge'

Perhaps no journalist in Mexico has done as much to damage the reputation of the president than Carmen Aristegui. And few have paid as dearly for it.

In 2014, she and her team broke the scandal of the so-called Casa Blanca, or White House, a story of real estate intrigue that involved a special deal handed to Mexico's first lady, Angélica Rivera, by a major government contractor close to the president.

The story reached a worldwide audience and forced the president's wife to surrender the house, presenting the Mexican government with the sort of ethical quandary that in a different country might result in a congressional inquiry or the appointment of an independent prosecutor.

Instead, the president was cleared of wrongdoing by a prosecutor who had worked closely with his campaign team, while Ms. Aristegui lost her job. That moment marked the beginning of a sustained campaign of harassment and defamation against her: lawsuits, break-ins at her offices, threats to her safety and the monitoring of her movements.

"It's been about getting revenge for the piece," she said. "There's really no other way to see it."

The $7 million home at the heart of the "Casa Blanca" scandal involving Mr. Peña Nieto's wife. Hector Guerrero/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

So when she began receiving text messages in 2015 from unknown numbers, instructing her to click on a link, she was suspicious. One message asked for her help in locating a missing child. Another alerted her to sudden charge on her credit card. And she received a text message purportedly from the American Embassy about a problem with her visa. Impersonating an American government official is a possible violation of United States law.

When the messages failed to entice her to click on the links and inadvertently download the software, they grew increasingly strident, including one warning that she could be imprisoned. Several came from the same phone

number, leaving a record of the spyware operator's sloppiness.

Still, the spyware operators pressed on. Starting as early as March, they began targeting Ms. Aristegui's then-16-year-old son, Emilio, who was living in the United States at the time. Some of the texts were similar to the ones she had received. Others were made-up headlines about Ms. Aristegui, sent from what appeared to be a news agency.

"The only reason they could be going after my son is in the hopes of finding something against me, to damage me," she said.

Ms. Aristegui is the embodiment of the hope — and the crushing limitations — for a free media in Mexico. Though she was fired over what her employer called internal disagreements, she continued publishing on her own, eventually drawing enough of an audience to sustain a team of reporters.

But the work has taken its toll. In one lawsuit, filed by the president of her former employer, a judge cited Ms. Aristegui last November for her "excessive use of freedom of speech."

Her website, Aristegui Noticias, has been hacked numerous times, including on the eve of publishing a major investigation into the massacre of more than a dozen civilians by the federal police.

And her offices were broken into last November. So brazen were the assailants that they didn't bother wearing masks. Nor did they steal much — one computer, a watch and a bag hanging from the back of a chair. Their faces and fingerprints were captured on cameras in the office. Still, no one has been caught.

The threats, harassment, even the spying, all of it she channels into work.

"For me, I have opted to believe that my public work is what will best protect me," she said. "The great challenge for journalists and citizens is that the fear serve us, and not conquer us."

Juan Pardinas, general director of the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness, has pushed for anti-corruption legislation. His wife was sent a digital message claiming to offer proof he was having an affair. Iván Stephens/GDA, via Associated Press

Texts Laced With Menace

It was Dec. 21, 2015, and Mr. Pardinas was at the beach with his family, trying to enjoy the start of his Christmas vacation. But his phone kept buzzing, at first with calls from lawyers, and then with an odd text message.

It had been a long few months in an even longer campaign: to pass an unprecedented law forcing Mexico's public servants to disclose their financial conflicts of interest.

In November, he had presented a study on the costs of corruption in Mexico, confirming with facts and figures something that nearly all Mexicans knew in their hearts — that corruption was crippling the country.

He followed it up with media interviews, poking fun at the Mexican government's embarrassing response to corruption. He joked that it probably spent more money on coffee and cookies than on the office in charge of prosecuting graft.

The study, the interviews, a seemingly endless gantlet of meetings with politicians — it all laid the groundwork for the new law, which Mr. Pardinas, a private citizen directing a public policy group, was helping to write.

So even as Christmas approached and his family relaxed in the coastal town of Puerto Vallarta, Mr. Pardinas was busily consulting lawyers on the final draft, which he had just over a month to submit.

And then a message: "My father died at dawn, we are devastated, I'm sending you the details of the wake, I hope you can come." Attached was a link.

Mr. Pardinas thought it odd that whoever had sent such a personal text was not even among the contacts in his phone. He showed his wife the message, and decided to ignore it.

Things only picked up from there, both on his proposed law and the odd messages. The government roundly ignored his bill, until he and others gathered more than 630,000 signatures supporting it.

Mr. Pardinas's tone grew bolder. He told one radio host that "for the government of Mexico, anti-corruption measures are like garlic to a vampire."

Then came another text message. This one appeared to be from the news outlet Uno TV, which sends daily news headlines to cellphone users across the country. The headline struck him: "The History of Corruption Within the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness." It was particularly alarming because that was his organization.

He declined once more to click on the link, suspecting foul play. More text messages came, including the next day. Only this time, having failed with Mr. Pardinas, they tried his wife.

The message, sent from the same news headline service, said that leaked videos showed Mr. Pardinas having sexual relations with a member of his staff. It was also sent to a colleague.

Mr. Pardinas called his wife, telling her that she appeared to be part of a broader harassment effort. "Oh, it's these people again," she responded.

The campaign to pass the law continued, and the bill made it through Congress relatively unscathed. But the Senate decided to add an extra provision: Everyone who worked for a company that received government money would also have to disclose their interests and assets. That meant the bill would cover more than 30 million people.

The president vetoed the bill, saying it needed more discussion, essentially kicking the can down the road.

Mr. Pardinas continued his broadsides in interviews, naming obstructive lawmakers and well-connected companies that benefited from government money. Few activists go so far as to name names in interviews, but Mr. Pardinas, who holds a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics, plowed ahead anyway.

The initiative seemed doomed. Yet another message arrived, on Aug. 1, this one laced with menace: "Listen, outside of your house is a truck with two armed guys, I took their photo look at them and be careful."

Mr. Pardinas, who was at work when this message came, once again declined to take the bait. But he did call his wife, again, asking her to look out their window to see if there was a truck parked outside. There was not.

"By the end, my wife had Olympic-style training in this hacking stuff," Mr. Pardinas said.

At center, Mario Patrón, executive director of the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center, at a ceremony in which Mexico's attorney general apologized to Otomí women for wrongfully jailing them on charges of kidnapping six policemen. He and other lawyers for his group have had their phones digitally broken into. Rebecca Blackwell/Associated Press

'It Comes With the Territory'

Mario E. Patrón was on edge. The conference table was packed with fellow human rights defenders, including the United Nations commissioner for human rights in Mexico. Everyone was there to discuss the bombshell expected to drop.

An international panel brought to Mexico to investigate the haunting disappearance of 43 teaching students was releasing its final report the next day, at the end of April 2016. The findings, Mr. Patrón knew, were going to be brutal.

The government would be accused of negligence, incompetence, even malfeasance in its handling of the case. Like others in the room, Mr. Patrón, whose organization represents the parents of the missing students, was wondering how the government would respond.

His phone buzzed and he glanced at the screen. "THE GOVERNMENT OF MEXICO GETS OUT IN FRONT OF THE GIEI," the text message read, using the acronym for the international panel. It seemed like the news he had been waiting for.

He showed the message to his colleague, then clicked on the link. But instead of an article or a news release, it simply redirected him to a blank page. Confused, he left the meeting and raced to his office to begin making calls to see what the government had in store.

And like that, he fell into their trap.

Mr. Patrón is the executive director of the Miguel Augustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center, perhaps the most highly respected human rights group in Mexico. The group focuses on the nation's most serious cases of human rights abuses, making it a nettlesome critic of the government.

In addition to Mr. Patrón, two other lawyers for the group were targeted with the software: Santiago Aguirre, the primary lawyer representing the families of the missing students, and Stephanie E. Brewer, a Harvard-educated American lawyer who has worked for the group since 2007.

"We have always suspected they spied on us and listened to us," Mr. Patrón said. "But to have evidence that we are victims of actual surveillance — it confirms that we are under threat. And that the government is willing to use illegal measures to try and stop us."

Beyond the missing students, Centro Prodh, as the group is called, is representing one of the few survivors of a military raid in 2014 in the town of Tlatlaya, where the army stormed a suspected cartel hide-out and killed 22 people.

A warehouse in Tlatlaya, where the army killed 22 people in a

suspected drug hide-out in 2014. Mr. Patrón's group is representing one of the few survivors of the episode. Rebecca Blackwell/Associated Press

While pursuing the case, the group unearthed a memorandum ordering the soldiers to kill suspected cartel members, strengthening the argument that the events did not unfold as a firefight, as the military claimed, but were instead extrajudicial executions carried out by the soldiers.

The organization's clients also include the women of Atenco, a group of 11 university students, activists and market vendors who were arrested by the police more than 10 years ago during protests in the town of San Salvador Atenco and brutally sexually assaulted on the way to prison.

Aside from the grave abuse of power, the case was especially sensitive: The governor who ordered the crackdown on the protesters was Enrique Peña Nieto, now the president of Mexico.

From the very beginning, the case was an uphill battle. Arrested on trumped-up charges, some of the women spent more time in prison than the officers who raped them.

Finding no recourse in Mexico, Ms. Brewer and others appealed to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, a regional body outside the Mexican judicial system, to review the case. And they waited — for nearly seven years.

Finally, in 2015, the commission found in favor of the women, ordering the government to investigate the case all the way up the chain of command, a directive that would include Mr. Peña Nieto. Ultimately, the case was sent to the Inter-American Court, an independent judiciary with jurisdiction over Mexico, a major blow to the nation's presidency.

One evening Ms. Brewer was at home, getting ready for bed when a text message arrived. The date practically coincided with the 10-year anniversary of the assaults on the women, an eerie bookend to their decade-long struggle for justice.

On her phone was a provocative question, a taunt even, asking whether anyone defended the soldiers and members of Mexico's navy who also suffered abuse.

"And you guys that do human rights against this, what about the dignity of them …" The message contained a link, presumably to a news story or a tip.

Intrigued, Ms. Brewer clicked on it. She was directed to a broken link, a telltale sign of the malware.

"It's just part of defending human rights in Mexico," she said. "It comes with the territory."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

In Cuba Policy Shift, Trump Stresses Human Rights, Mutes Concerns Elsewhere

Felicia Schwartz

5-6 minutes

June 17, 2017 7:00 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—In rolling back the Obama administration's steps to normalize relations with Cuba, President Donald Trump on Friday appeared to shift from the approach he has used with other countries, in which the president has played down U.S. concerns about human rights.

During meetings recently with leaders from China, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and others, Mr. Trump has kept talk of prisons and press freedom to a bare minimum, and usually out of public earshot.

But in his speech Friday in Miami, Mr. Trump blasted the human rights and civil-liberties record of Cuba's Castro regime, repeatedly saying that the U.S. embargo would remain in place until the island's government took steps to open up.

"We will not lift sanctions on the Cuban regime until all political prisoners are freed, freedoms of assembly and expression are respected, all political parties are legalized and free and internationally supervised elections are scheduled," he said.

Mr. Trump's move on Friday represented a step to satisfy the demands of Florida political allies with hard-line views on Cuba and to fulfill a campaign vow to reverse former President Barack Obama's deal with Cuba. Still, less obviously, Mr. Trump's policy also took into account pressure from business groups, Republicans in agricultural states and others to avoid completely undoing the opening to Cuba and to refrain from interfering with projects already under way.

So while he emphasized human rights and civil liberties in his speech, the policy outlined by Mr. Trump also recognized matters of importance to many Americans and U.S. businesses, in keeping with the "transactional" foreign policy approach he has used elsewhere.

"If you're looking to acknowledge the political and the personal views of a shrinking part of the Cuban-American community in Miami, clearly this policy and the announcement does that," said Matthew Aho, a special adviser at the Akerman law firm who works with companies looking to do business in Cuba. "But it also preserves the foundation of normalization and of the post-2014 period."

Politically, Mr. Trump had to thread a needle to alter Mr. Obama's policy while not upsetting business leaders and voters in rural states that supported him in wide margins, and where farmers see big opportunities to ship their goods should the U.S. embargo ever be fully lifted.

"By rolling back reforms that have benefited U.S. citizens, everyday Cubans and our economy, we are taking a step backward, not forward." said Sen. John Boozman (R., Ark.) "It would be more effective to continue an open line of communication and working relationship with a government in need of democratic assistance, instead of shutting them out. Through this approach, we not only trade goods, but ideas. The two go hand-in-hand."

The U.S. sent $83.4 million in goods to Cuba in the first four months of this year. Farmers see big potential in selling rice, poultry and other products to Cuba, but those sales still aren't practical because U.S. law blocks the kind of credit needed to ease those shipments.

In a sign of the political importance Mr. Trump placed on Friday's announcement, he devoted a significant portion of his remarks to reflections on his presidential campaign and the support he received in Florida. "I have wonderful memories from our visit during the campaign," Mr. Trump said.

He told those supporters Friday that he was "canceling" the Obama administration's policy shift.

In reality, he retained many elements of it.

Trump administration officials have stressed they don't want to interrupt American business already under way on the island. Depending on how regulations are crafted in the coming months by officials at the Treasury and Commerce departments, there could be carve-outs that would satisfy some businesses. The policy allows airlines and cruise lines to keep operating.

The White House moved to address concerns raised Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who worried about leaving current projects in limbo. The final policy guidance stresses that the Trump administration doesn't intend to interrupt ongoing projects.

Backers of the policy shift pointed to Mr. Mnuchin's intervention, citing his department's responsibility for crafting many of the final regulations as evidence that the Trump administration might not go too far in scaling back some of the space for business created by Mr. Obama.

The policy stands to adversely affect travelers by ending a practice begun under the Obama administration that allowed travelers to plan their own trips, rather than travel with tour groups, which resulted in a boost in tourism.

A document released by Treasury officials explaining the changes says the administration will work with travelers affected by the changes who have begun to plan trips. But a longer term decline in the number of American travelers likely to be a result from Mr. Trump's shift stands to harm airlines, which had expected demand to grow over time.

—Carol E. Lee and William Mauldin contributed to this article.

USA TODAY

Editorial : Trump's Cuba policy travels the wrong way

The Editorial Board , USA TODAY

4-6 minutes

Tourists talk with a Cuban in Havana on June 16, 2017.(Photo: Yamil Lage, AFP/Getty Images)

For more than five decades, the United States sought to curb the Castro regime's tyranny by imposing a trade embargo on Cuba and severing diplomatic relations. The strategy just plain didn't work. If anything, it gave the Castro brothers — current leader Raul and his now-deceased brother Fidel — a way to blame their own failures on America.

President Obama tried a different path in 2014. He reopened the U.S. Embassy in Havana and eased restrictions on travel, business contracts and licensing. A broad trade embargo enacted by Congress remains in place, and there were no illusions that repression in Cuba would disappear overnight. But Obama's initiative was a worthwhile alternative to fruitless isolation and carried the hope that, over time, exposure to American ideas and capitalism might pull Cuba into the light of freedom.

Now President Trump — in his eagerness to reverse policies associated with his predecessor and play to the Cuban-American community in South Florida — has offered the worst of both worlds: restoring some of what failed in the past, while watering down what might succeed in the future.

In his speech before a hard-line crowd in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood Friday, Trump said he was acting on behalf of "innocents locked in prisons." The nasty communist regime in Havana does indeed deserve condemnation for human rights violations. But Trump's newfound solicitude for the oppressed rang hollow given his recent embraces of dictators in Egypt, the Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

A key part of Obama's relaxed policy toward Cuba was greater freedom for individual Americans to visit the island. The result was a flood of U.S. tourism: a record 615,000 American tourists last year, including 285,000 not of Cuban heritage, a jump of 74% in that category.

OPPOSING VIEW:

Trump reverses this, again restricting individual travel and restoring heavily regulated group excursions. He also bars American companies and people from doing business with companies controlled by the Cuban military, saying he wants more "people-to-people" interactions. But his policy would achieve precisely the opposite.

When Americans were free to travel individually, they arrived in droves and stayed at privately owned bed-and-breakfast hotels or private homes through Airbnb, ate at private restaurants, and hired private tour guides. "More than half my customers are Americans," 33-year-old Dionys Diaz told *The Washington Post*, "the best tippers." Diaz had worked with relatives to restore a 1954 Chevy convertible, painted it pink and earned $25 a ride from tourists outside Havana's Hotel Nacional.

Limiting U.S. travel to tightly controlled, "educational" groups will doubtlessly reverse the growth in U.S. tourism, hurting small Cuban entrepreneurs and reducing people-to-people interactions. It makes no sense. If the Cuban military didn't buckle under the pressure of decades of tough sanctions, Trump's watered-down restrictions can hardly fare better.

Rhetoric about tearing up Obama's bad deal with the Castro regime notwithstanding,
Trump isn't reversing all of Obama's changes. Newly restored diplomatic relations continue, as do direct flights or cruises to Cuba. Cuban Americans can continue to send money back to the families on the island.

Trump's partial rollback is out of step with public and political sentiment in the United States. Two-thirds of Americans favor reopening ties to Cuba. A bill that would allow unrestricted travel to Cuba has 55 supporters in the Senate. The conservative U.S. Chamber of Commerce complains that Trump's Cuba policy will hurt American businesses and jobs. And farm-state Republicans want to expand Cuban markets.

As with the normalization of American ties with Vietnam in 1994, the tide of history points toward restoration of relations between the United States and its island neighbor, even if the president tries to stand athwart it.

USA TODAY

Calzon: Cuba policy: President Trump is correct

Frank Calzon
Published 4:49 p.m. ET June 18, 2017 | Updated 16 hours ago

2-3 minutes

Cuban President Raul Castro(Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Critics of President Trump's Cuba policy are falling prey to President Obama's "narrative." Obama's policy was in fact not new but a return to the old, discredited policy of embracing Latin American dictators at the behest of corporate businesses while ignoring U.S. interests.

Obama's policy was developed in secret, in collusion with a foreign leader responsible for the murder of Americans in international airspace.

Shouldn't Cuban policy be respectful of the Constitution and U.S. statutes? Isn't it in the national interest to deny millions of dollars to a Cuban military that represses and kills Venezuelan demonstrators? To condition normalized relations on returning to American justice terrorists wanted by the FBI, including the murderer in cold blood of a New Jersey state trooper?

Obama wasn't bothered by Cuba's alliance with North Korea or its attempted smuggling of warplanes and missiles to Pyongyang, nor by Cuba inviting to Havana Russian spy ships that monitor U.S. military communications. Obama also chose to ignore the intelligence community advising Congress that Cuba presents a cybersecurity threat.

President Trump has correctly decided these threats must be taken seriously.

OUR VIEW:

At issue is not trade with Cuba; for years, American companies have sold millions to Havana on a cash-and-carry basis. But Havana has defaulted on most foreign loans and now wants credits.

Havana has sharply cut purchases to force American companies to lobby for the regime. The U.S. taxpayer should not pick up the tab.

Those doing the lobbying should register as foreign agents.

Beatings and political detentions increased dramatically while Obama looked the other way. Strengthening Cuba's military is not in the best interest of the Cuban people or the United States.

Let's support the president and send the message to Havana that if the military regime wants millions from America, its anti-American foreign policy and repression at home must change.

Frank Calzon is executive director of the Center for a Free Cuba.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

O'Grady: Cubans Need a Truth Commission

Mary Anastasia O'Grady

5-6 minutes

June 18, 2017 5:39 p.m. ET

President Trump opened another chapter in U.S.-Cuba relations on Friday when he announced a rollback of portions of the detente policy with Havana introduced by President Obama in December 2014. Human-rights groups cheered, libertarians jeered, and the international—and American—left warned that the new policy will harm Cubans and U.S. investors.

All sides are dug in, as they have been for decades. Yet the reality is that when it comes to liberating Cuba, the embargo is a distraction. With or without it, the Castro police state will hang on until the civilized world speaks with one voice to condemn the illegitimacy of the regime as it did with South Africa during apartheid.

That's not happening because the communist state's pro-Castro narrative still has defenders in the West. The human-rights challenge is to expose this big lie. What's needed is a truth commission that would allow Cubans themselves to tell what really happened.

The Trump administration's changes are aimed at weakening the military dictatorship by denying it easy access to U.S. dollars via the military-owned tourism industry. American companies' ability to form partnerships with those businesses will be pared back and American travelers will face new restrictions.

This is an important symbolic change. Yet the effects are likely to be minimal. Despite the tendentious

claims of too many American journalists, Cuba is not "isolated," nor is it starving because of the embargo. The rest of the world can do business in Cuba and the regime buys all the food and medicine it wants from the U.S.

There is no U.S. prohibition on the export of construction materials to nonstate actors in Cuba. But the regime doesn't allow the free flow of goods because economic freedom is a path to political freedom. Small businesses are permitted only if they don't become too profitable and their owners don't express ideas independent of the totalitarian state. Cuban privation is made in Havana.

Raúl Castro loves to whine about Cuba's lack of internet capability and to blame it on the embargo. But as one dissident on the island wrote to me last week, the regime is the reason Cubans lack access. "Information is always power," he explained, so the "government doesn't have the will nor is it a priority" to see people informed. Where there is internet, he noted, the government blocks news sites.

What is more, he wrote, the regime "keeps all the money earned by the people's sweat and uses it for military contingencies, maintenance of weapons, diplomatic personnel, officials, representatives abroad, spies, etc." If the dictatorship "decides a dissident should die, it is not difficult to . . . accomplish" the task.

Such complaints counted for little with Barack Obama. Instead, in 2016, the U.S. president attended a baseball game in Havana with Castro, who also invited members of the Colombian narcoterrorist group FARC. The U.S. also barred Cuban dissidents from attending the reopening of the U.S. Embassy in Havana.

Moral myopia about Cuba is explained in some cases by the fact that the regime is the international symbol for anti-Americanism. To condemn Castro would be to acknowledge that the U.S. was right to try to end the tyranny.

A high-profile truth project would correct the record. One myth that needs to be debunked is that resistance to the Castro hijacking of a revolution originally meant to restore the 1940 constitution came solely from white, upper-class Havana.

In 1958 Cuba was one of the richest countries in Latin America. Cubans widely understood the link between rising living standards and constitutional democracy. They were heavily in favor of removing dictator Fulgencio Batista from power to restore the rule of law. Fidel Castro and the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra derived their support from that sentiment.

By the summer of 1959 it was clear Fidel wanted absolute power. Among the first to realize it were small farmers living in central Cuba and the foothills of the Escambray Mountains. Those *guajiros* formed the backbone of a resistance that lasted six years. Their communities suffered unspeakable atrocities in a Soviet-supervised cleansing.

The military savagely attacked villages, displacing families and forcibly relocating many to the remote western end of the island. Survivors have told me that the regime also rounded up women and children and made them captive in Havana while it crammed men and boys into chicken coops for days and weeks to crush the rebellion.

The Cuba Archive Truth and Memory Project has documented 934 executions mostly in the Escambray. Another 607 political prisoners were executed between 1960 and 1970 and the vast majority of them are believed to have been captured in the Escambray.

Mr. Trump has taken a first step toward moral clarity on Cuba. But real progress requires an honest look at the historical record that acknowledges the regime's many crimes against humanity.

Write to O'Grady@wsj.com.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Deadly Collision Crushed Captain's Cabin of USS Fitzgerald

Alastair Gale and Gordon Lubold

6-8 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 9:41 p.m. ET

YOKOSUKA, Japan—As most of its crew slept on Friday night, the USS Fitzgerald passed through one of Japan's busiest shipping lanes just south of Tokyo, a watch crew assigned to guide its passage.

In a period of seconds, a 29,000-ton cargo ship loaded with containers plowed into its right side, crushing a large section of the destroyer's main structure, including the captain's cabin and sleeping quarters for 116 sailors below the waterline. Seawater flooded in through a large gash.

As the crew scrambled to save themselves and the ship, seven sailors didn't make it out of the berthing area. Their bodies were recovered by divers after the ship crawled to the port of Yokosuka.

The U.S. Navy on Sunday identified the seven victims as Gunner's Mate Seaman Dakota Kyle Rigsby, 19 years old, from Palmyra, Va.; Yeoman 3rd Class Shingo Alexander Douglass, 25, from San Diego; Sonar Technician 3rd Class Ngoc T Truong Huynh, 25, from Oakville, Conn.; Gunner's Mate 2nd Class Noe Hernandez, 26, from Weslaco, Texas; Fire Controlman 2nd Class Carlos Victor Ganzon Sibayan, 23, from Chula Vista, Calif., Personnel Specialist 1st Class Xavier Alec Martin, 24, from Halethorpe, Md.; and Fire Controlman 1st Class Gary Leo Rehm Jr., 37, from Elyria, Ohio.

"The water inflow was tremendous," Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, head of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, said in a news briefing on Sunday. "There wasn't a lot of time" for sailors to react.

Badly injured, the captain, Bryce Benson, escaped from his cabin. He was airlifted to a nearby hospital where he was receiving emergency treatment on Sunday before being questioned.

"He's lucky to be alive," Vice Adm. Aucoin said.

The question of why a U.S. destroyer was rammed by a cargo ship more than three times its size, one of the worst incidents in recent U.S. Navy history, has no immediate answers.

Some former military and commercial shipping captains speculate that the Fitzgerald may have failed to follow international regulations that require ships to give way to other vessels to their starboard, or right side.

"Unless the destroyer lost steering control, which is unlikely, it should have given right of way to the container ship," said Yiannis Sgouras, a retired captain of tankers and cargo ships who worked in the world's busiest trade route from Asia to Europe.

Others caution that there are potentially many other contributing factors to the collision. Tracking data sent by the cargo ship, the ACX Crystal, showed it reversed course around 2:05 a.m. local time, shortly before the time of the collision given by the U.S. Navy of approximately 2:20 a.m.

However, Nippon Yusen K.K . , the Japanese shipping company that operates the 728-foot-long ACX Crystal, has stated that the collision occurred around 1:30 a.m. That discrepancy hasn't been resolved. "She did not reverse the course before the collision. She did after the collision," a Nippon Yusen company spokesman said.

Both Japan and the U.S. are launching investigations, and each side declined to speculate about possible blame. The 20 Filipino crew members of the ACX Crystal, all of whom were unharmed, have been questioned, a spokesman for the Japan Coast Guard said.

Adm. John Richardson, the U.S. Navy's chief of naval operations, left for Japan late Sunday in a hastily scheduled trip, defense officials said. He will meet with sailors and families from the Fitzgerald as well as Japanese officials to thank them for their assistance during the incident, officials said. He will also survey the ship and discuss with port officials the work required to get the destroyer repaired, they said.

The Pentagon is still attempting to ascertain just what caused the collision, but as of Sunday evening there was no clear explanation for top officials. One official said there was yet no clarity on exactly what occurred.

"I don't even have a guess at this point," the official said.

Around 400 vessels a day pass through the region where the collision took place, around 56 nautical miles southwest of Yokosuka, according to the Japanese Coast Guard. Official records show three accidents have been reported in the same area in the past five years.

Collisions at sea for the U.S. Navy are extremely uncommon, said Bryan McGrath, a former destroyer captain, who said they occur only once or twice a decade, if that. He said he couldn't remember a recent collision that was this consequential. "There are 275 ships in the Navy and 100 are under way all over the world," navigating "millions and millions of miles" every year, said Mr. McGrath, who retired in 2008 and is now a consultant. "This is very, very rare."

Yoji Koda, a retired vice admiral and former commander in chief of Japan's navy, said that when U.S. Navy vessels are in the vicinity of Japan their alert level is the same as civilian vessels. He said one

possibility was that either or both of the ships in the latest collision were using an autopilot system for guidance.

"Although they have watchmen, their responses tend to be delayed," he said.

Vice Adm. Aucoin said all questions about the cause of the incident would require the results of the investigation, adding that the U.S. would work "hand-in-hand" with Japan.

Navy officials said they were working to inform family members of those killed, and had taken over 500 calls to a hotline for relatives to obtain information about the incident. One senior Navy official said all the crew of the ship were grieving.

Vice Adm. Aucoin said that despite the extensive damage to the Fitzgerald, a ship equipped with an advanced Aegis ballistic missile defense system, it would be restored to the U.S. 7th Fleet. That process could take up to a year, he said.

The repair process could cost around the same as the $250 million spent over 14 months on restoring the USS Cole, a similar ship to the Fitzgerald, which was heavily damaged by a terrorist bombing in Yemen in 2000.

—Costas Paris and Chieko Tsuneoka contributed to this article.

Write to Alastair Gale at alastair.gale@wsj.com and Gordon Lubold at Gordon.Lubold@wsj.com

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The New York Times

More People Were Forcibly Displaced in 2016 Than Ever Before

Rick Gladstone

4-5 minutes

A water collection point in South Sudan in February. A United Nations report on global trends says that nearly 750,000 people fled the African country last year. Tyler Hicks/The New York Times

The relentless civil war in Syria and a surge of South Sudanese fleeing the collapse of peace efforts in their country helped propel the global population of displaced people to a record in 2016, the United Nations refugee agency said Monday.

The agency's annual Global Trends report, a statistical assessment of refugees, asylum seekers and people forcibly displaced from their homes, reflected a worsening of conflict, mayhem and persecution.

The new total of 65.6 million people displaced from their homes is 300,000 higher than the 2015 number, which had been the highest since World War II.

"By any measure this is an unacceptable number, and it speaks louder than ever to the need for solidarity and common purpose in preventing and resolving crises, and ensuring together that the world's refugees, internally displaced and asylum seekers are properly protected and cared for while solutions are pursued," Filippo Grandi, the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, said in releasing the findings.

The new report was issued at a time when governments in Europe and the United States have become increasingly resistant to accepting more refugees and asylum seekers as xenophobic political trends have helped feed hostility and mistrust.

The Trump administration has vowed to restrict refugees and toughen immigration through "extreme vetting" and a proposed suspension of visas for people from six predominantly Muslim nations. Anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe has roiled the politics in Britain, Hungary, the Netherlands, France, Italy and Germany, among others.

The 2016 report showed that the number of refugees worldwide reached 22.5 million, the most ever. More people fled the conflict in Syria — 5.5 million — than any other country, but the biggest new source of refugees was what the report called "the disastrous breakdown of peace efforts" in South Sudan. Nearly 750,000 people fled that fledgling country last year.

Among the refugees, asylum seekers — people who have fled their country and are seeking international protection — totaled 2.8 million by the end of 2016.

There were 40.3 million people displaced inside their own countries at the end of 2016, slightly fewer than the 40.8 million at the end of 2015. The report attributed that slight reduction in part to people who had returned to their homes, offsetting the number of new people who had fled. Still, the report said, many returnees "did so in less than ideal circumstances and facing uncertain prospects."

Of the 65.6 million displaced people in the world, 10.3 million had become displaced in 2016. "This equates to one person becoming displaced every three seconds," the report said, "less than the time it takes to read this sentence."

About two-thirds of the newly displaced people fled somewhere else in their own country. The report showed that 84 percent of all refugees who crossed borders went to low- or middle-income countries at the end of 2016, and that roughly one in three was hosted in the poorest countries, which can least afford the burden.

By population, the report said Syria still accounts for the biggest number of displaced people at 12 million, followed by Colombia with 7.7 million, Afghanistan with 4.7 million, Iraq with 4.2 million and South Sudan at 3.3 million.

Those rankings do not include the longstanding Palestinian population of roughly 5.3 million, but that figure is included in the total.

ETATS-UNIS

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

State Officials to Testify on Possible Russian Involvement in 2016 Election

Rebecca Ballhaus, Erica Orden and Valerie Bauerlein

8-9 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 4:12 p.m. ET

The Senate and House intelligence committees are set on Wednesday to hold two open hearings examining Russian hacking efforts during the 2016 election, featuring testimony from current and former Department of Homeland Security and Federal Bureau of Investigation officials as well as state election directors.

Steve Sandvoss, the executive director of the Illinois State Board of Elections, is expected to walk the Senate committee through a cyberattack last July that allowed hackers to breach a database of up to 200,000 personal voter records.

The board informed the state attorney general's office of the cyberattack. The board was subsequently contacted by the FBI, but the agency hasn't informed the board who was responsible for the attack, according to Ken Menzel, the board's general counsel.

An information-technology report to the board in August said the FBI was "highly confident" that no voter data had been altered.

The Senate committee will hear testimony from J. Alex Halderman, a Michigan computer scientist who helped lead a push last year for an examination of paper ballots and electronic voting machines in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan to conclusively prove that hackers hadn't manipulated the results. A series of legal rulings ultimately halted some of the recount efforts, while others were completed and found no widespread irregularities.

The hearings represent the most robust effort to date to elicit public testimony from state election officials concerning what federal officials have described as an aggressive and sustained effort by Russia to interfere with the 2016 presidential election.

Special counsel Robert Mueller is investigating whether campaign advisers to President Donald Trump had ties to the Russian activities, a probe that has expanded to include whether the president obstructed justice by trying to influence its outcome, according to a person familiar with the investigation. Russia has denied the allegations. On Sunday, a personal lawyer for Mr. Trump, who has called the

investigations a "witch hunt," denied that the president was under investigation.

States are also examining their own systems. A survey by The Wall Street Journal of election officials in nearly 50 states found many continue to participate in a DHS program of periodic checks of their election systems for any vulnerabilities. Many officials had been in touch with the FBI before the election, when the bureau had provided states with a list of suspicious IP addresses.

The North Carolina State Board of Elections' investigations unit, led by a former FBI agent, is investigating the reported attempts to compromise VR Systems Inc., a Tallahassee, Fla., firm whose electronic poll book software was used on Election Day in 21 of the state's 100 counties.

The software deals with checking voters in, not with counting their votes. But on Election Day last year, that system failed in Durham County, which holds the state's most reliable Democratic voters. That forced the county to issue ballots by hand, meaning longer lines and delays—factors that can often depress turnout. The county voted for Democrat Hillary Clinton by 77.7%, while Mr. Trump won the state with 49.8% of the vote, according to the state's board of elections.

"The Republicans were claiming that this was Democratic voter fraud, but maybe the other explanation, the simplest answer, is most likely to be the correct one. Look at the Russians," said Gerry Cohen, former special counsel to the North Carolina legislature and an expert on state election law. "If you were trying to hurt Democrats in North Carolina, shutting down Durham's Election Day voter check-in would be your quickest and most effective method."

The aim of the Senate hearing, according to an email sent by a committee aide to those testifying, is to "give the public an unclassified look at Russian activity in the 2016 U.S. election, as well as a look at what we are facing from an election security standpoint in 2018 and 2020."

Former Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson, meanwhile, will testify before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on Wednesday to discuss "Russian active measures" during the 2016 election.

Department of Homeland Security officials have said at least 20 states were targeted during the 2016 election. Last August, the FBI issued a warning to state governments that cited the Illinois breach and a hacking attempt in Arizona. Speaking before the House Judiciary Committee in September, then-FBI Director James Comey said the agency's counterintelligence investigators were "doing an awful lot of work…to understand just what mischief is Russia up to in connection with our election."

An FBI spokeswoman declined to comment on the agency's investigation.

In early June, the website the Intercept published a top-secret National Security Agency document that said Russian military intelligence had executed a cyberattack on at least one U.S. voting software supplier in August 2016.

The document also said Russian operatives had sent "spear-phishing" emails to more than 100 email addresses linked to local government organizations—potentially including local election officials—in the days preceding the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The NSA report, however, didn't draw conclusions about whether such activity had any effect on the outcome of the election.

At least five counties in Florida have reported receiving the phishing emails described in the Intercept article that appeared to come from VR Systems. But none appear to have resulted in a breach of their voting systems.

VR Systems this month said it had no indication that any customers had been compromised by the phishing emails and said it has "policies and procedures in effect to protect our customers and our company."

As states undertake their own investigations of the 2016 election, DHS is weighing whether to maintain the designation of voting apparatus as "critical infrastructure," which gives the federal government additional authority to protect the systems, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly said in testimony to the Senate Homeland Security Committee earlier this month.

That decision was made by Mr. Kelly's predecessor, Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Kelly testified that he has had a "large amount of pushback" on the determination from states and members of Congress.

Many states have expressed concern about additional federal authority over their election systems and have said the Constitution provides states the right to run their own elections.

In his testimony earlier this month, Mr. Kelly said he doesn't support rolling back the designation and hopes to persuade states that they allow the federal government to be helpful on such issues. When asked about the review of the designation, a DHS official defended it, emphasizing that it allows the department to "prioritize our cybersecurity assistance to election officials, for those who request it."

"A designation makes it easier for the federal government to have full and frank discussions with key stakeholders regarding sensitive vulnerability information," the Homeland Security official said. The official also noted that the designation creates no new regulations for states.

—Arian Campo-Flores, Sharon Nunn and Byron Tau contributed to this article.

Write to Rebecca Ballhaus at Rebecca.Ballhaus@wsj.com, Erica Orden at erica.orden@wsj.com and Valerie Bauerlein at valerie.bauerlein@wsj.com

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump Lawyer Denies President Is Under Investigation

Andrew Ackerman and Ian Talley

5-6 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 9:08 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—A personal lawyer for President Donald Trump maintained Sunday that the president wasn't being investigated for possible obstruction of justice, contrary to recent news reports, arguing that Mr. Trump would have been alerted to any such development.

"The president is not and has not been under investigation," Jay Sekulow, an attorney for Mr. Trump, said on CBS 's "Face the Nation." Asked how he knew that, Mr. Sekulow said there has been "no notification from the special counsel's office that the president is under investigation," which he said he would expect in this circumstance.

The Wall Street Journal and other news outlets reported that investigators are now looking into whether the president sought to obstruct a Federal Bureau of Investigation probe into Russian meddling in the presidential race and possible collusion between Trump campaign aides and Russia. Special Counsel Robert Mueller is examining whether the president fired FBI chief James Comey as part of a broader effort to alter the direction of the FBI probe, a person familiar with the matter told the Journal last week.

In his comments Sunday, Mr. Sekulow said Mr. Trump's recent tweet in which he said he was being investigated was a reaction to news reports, not confirmation of the probe's existence.

"The tweet from the president was in response to the five anonymous sources purportedly leaking info to the Washington Post," he said on NBC. The Washington Post was the first to report an investigation into Mr. Trump over possible obstruction.

Subjects of federal probes often aren't initially told of an investigation in progress. But this case is an unusual one.

Earlier in the Russia probe, Mr. Comey had informed Mr. Trump several times that he wasn't under investigation, prior to Mr. Comey being fired on May 9. Asked if it was possible a probe of Mr. Trump started since then, unbeknownst to the White House, Mr. Sekulow told CBS on Sunday: "I can't imagine a scenario where the president would not be aware of it."

Justin Dillon, a former assistant U.S. attorney in Washington D.C., said it is "ridiculous" to surmise that Mr. Trump isn't under investigation because he or his lawyers haven't been notified by the Justice Department.

"Many don't know they are being investigated until the government is quite far down the evidence-gathering path," said Mr. Dillon, now a partner at KaiserDillon, a boutique law firm specializing in white-collar crime. Mr. Dillon isn't involved with the Trump administration or any of the investigations.

Justice Department spokeswoman Sarah Isgur Flores declined to comment, referring questions to Peter Carr, spokesman for Mr. Mueller's office. Mr. Carr declined to

comment on the Russia investigation.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly called the Russia investigation a "witch hunt" and denied any collusion by his campaign with Russia. He has also said he put no inappropriate pressure on the course of the Russia investigation.

In recent days, Mr. Trump has stepped up his criticism of the investigation, targeting the people leading the Justice Department probe.

On Friday morning, Mr. Trump tweeted he was the victim of "the single greatest WITCH HUNT in American political history—led by some very bad and conflicted people!" He added: "I am being investigated for firing the FBI Director by the man who told me to fire the FBI Director!" the president also tweeted.

Mr. Trump didn't name the people he was referring to in the tweets, but they most closely align with Mr. Mueller and the man who appointed him, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein.

On Sunday, he again tweeted about the "witch hunt," calling it a distraction from his policy agenda.

Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said on ABC's "This Week" that Mr. Trump's tweets are aimed at "the besmirchment" of Mr. Mueller and his investigation. "They want to lay the foundation to discredit whatever Bob Mueller comes up with," he said.

Sen. Marco Rubio (R., Fla.), a member of the Senate intelligence committee, said he believed in the integrity of Mr. Mueller's review, and cautioned the White House against any steps that might be seen as tampering with the probe.

"The best thing that can happen for the president and country is for a full and credible investigation," Mr. Rubio said on CNN's "State of the Union." "Let's not undermine the credibility of the investigation."

On Thursday, Mr. Rosenstein issued a statement saying people should be wary of reported leaks, and of their source.

"Americans should exercise caution before accepting as true any stories attributed to anonymous 'officials.' " he wrote.

Write to Andrew Ackerman at andrew.ackerman@wsj.com and Ian Talley at ian.talley@wsj.com

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The New York Times

Blow : Trump Is Girding for a Fight

Charles M. Blow

4-5 minutes

This seemed like an acknowledgment that he was indeed under investigation. But on Sunday, the Trump lawyer Jay Sekulow made the talk show rounds to insist that what the president wrote was not what the president meant. Sekulow stated emphatically, "The fact of the matter is the president has not been and is not under investigation."

Whatever the truth may be, Trump is certainly behaving like a man who is under scrutiny and like one who is determined to defend himself every step of the way.

Last week it was reported that Mueller hired more than a dozen lawyers for his team, but as soon as he did, they came under attack by Trump cronies like Newt Gingrich. On Sunday on ABC, Gingrich issued a blistering attack on some of the lawyers Mueller has hired, suggesting Mueller stacked the deck with Democratic mercenaries out to get the president for political reasons.

At one point in the interview, Gingrich claimed: "You tell me why the first four names that came up, I don't know about the next nine, the first four names are all people who gave to Democrats. Two of them are people with a record of hiding evidence from the defense. And one of them is a person who defended the Clinton Foundation. Now in this environment with a Justice Department where 97 percent of the donations last year went to Hillary, 97 percent, explain to me why I should relax as a Republican."

This was a stinging about-face from when Gingrich praised Mueller when he was selected. Host Martha Raddatz pointed this out: "In May you said he was a superb choice for special counsel with an impeccable reputation for honesty. Less than a month later, you say he won't be fair."

But that's the thing with Trump and his hangers-on: They will say and do anything, even if it directly contradicts what they said or did moments earlier. This is how truth becomes degraded: by being casually disregarded.

This investigation is in the early stages, but Trump has no plans to wait for it to either condemn or clear him. He is taking a much more aggressive approach, one that in the end may do more harm than good.

He is attempting to defame, discredit and delegitimize.

Trump knows that whether anything from this investigation sees the light of day in a court of law, the investigation is already being litigated in the court of public opinion. In that court, he's already guilty.

Trump's public petulance about being mistreated is in fact a public appeal, in order to rehabilitate his brand.

If a legal case against Trump is born of this investigation, Trump is no stranger to a courtroom.

As USA Today reported last year, Trump has been involved in over 3,500 legal matters, which was an unprecedented number for an American presidential nominee.

Trump often prevails. As USA Today put it: "Among those cases with a clear resolution, Trump's side was the apparent victor in 451 and the loser in 38. In about 500 cases, judges dismissed plaintiffs' claims against Trump."

Trump knows that the law can be fuzzy and the legal system pliable, bending in particular under the weight of massive resources like money.

Fighting has worked well for Trump. He knows that one of the critical flaws in American jurisprudence is that it too often favors fight over right.

So Trump will fight this investigation that he calls a "witch hunt," because he realizes that it is a sprawling inquiry, potentially ending up far afield from where it started.

Mueller is not in search of a conjurer but a culprit, and he'll shine a light in every dark corner to find one.

Gingrich told Fox News's Sean Hannity on Friday of the investigation:

"They're going to get somebody. I don't think they're going to get the president, but they're going to get somebody, and they're going to get him for something. And they're probably going to go to jail."

I agree: When federal investigators start looking for something, they often find something. I'm not removing the president so quickly from jeopardy.

The president and his White House are going to fight this tooth and nail, but in the end "someone is probably going to go to jail."

POLITICO

Trump demands face time with favored Cabinet heads

Tara Palmeri

7-9 minutes

CIA Director Mike Pompeo carves out three hours almost every weekday to drive from Langley, Va., to the White House with his team to give President Donald Trump his national security briefing in person.

The CIA director's treks to the West Wing reflect Trump's insistence on frequent meetings with favored members of his team. Every president has regular contact with key Cabinet members, but Trump, who remains deeply mistrustful of career agency officials, has turned the White House into a hangout for his chosen department heads.

Story Continued Below

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has met with the president at least 34 times since he was confirmed in February, according to a POLITICO analysis of Trump's interactions since taking office. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross are also frequent guests at the White House — so much so that one White House staffer quipped, "Wilbur practically lives here." Defense secretary James Mattis has enjoyed private meetings with the president, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt has taken to eating at the White House mess several times a week.

Senior aides say Trump demands facetime with his appointees in part because he doesn't trust bureaucrats who do the day-to-day

work of the federal government. The president shuns them as tools of what he often refers to as the "deep state," and blames them for the frequent, unflattering news stories coming from his White House, according to two White House aides.

But for Trump's Cabinet members, proximity is a plus. Being physically present at the White House ensures that they have a say in policymaking — and serves as an indication of status with the president. While Pompeo, Tillerson, and others like Department of Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly are frequent White House visitors, some Cabinet secretaries have had little interaction with Trump, including Energy Secretary Rick Perry, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, according to POLITICO's analysis.

"Who gets to sit in meetings is highly competitive," said one Trump adviser. "People want to be in those meetings, because information is power."

But the constant visits to the White House are beginning to worry some inside and outside the administration.

Two administration officials said the parade of Cabinet officials going into the White House on a daily basis has prompted worries that their focus is being diverted from the day-to-day operations of their departments and agencies.

"We'll see how long it lasts," one of the officials said, noting that many secretaries don't yet have a full cast of undersecretaries to brief top White House officials. "They don't have their politicals yet, so some of it is a necessity."

Indeed, many agencies still lack top political leaders that could play a more regular role in briefing the White House. There are only four confirmed deputy secretaries at Cabinet agencies. Five have been nominated and six have no nominees, according to the nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service, which advised Trump's presidential transition team on hiring.

"The challenge here is the leadership structure isn't in place in these agencies," said Partnership for Public Service president Max Stier. "The idea that President Trump is going to look to Secretary Mattis or Secretary Kelly for advice and to lean on them heavily is all good and important. It's something to be encouraged. But what you don't want to occur is that the conversation is only through that small pipe."

Past presidents have met frequently with Cabinet secretaries, especially when key issues arise. But former White House officials said the frequency of contact seen so far under Trump is unusual.

"Obama was very clear in directing us to make sure that he stayed in touch with all of his Cabinet on a regular basis," said Broderick Johnson, who served as Obama's Cabinet secretary in the last years of his second term.

"We were very prudent about using their time," Johnson added. "President Obama's view was certainly that time they spent away from the agencies or with the president would be time that could conceivably distract from what they were trying to get accomplished."

Pompeo's daily presence in the White House for the national security briefing breaks with the practice of past presidents.

Traditionally, CIA analysts skilled in briefing would handle this part of the president's daily routine, but Trump insists on one-on-on time with the principal. Obama received his briefing in a memo and then would follow up with a lower level briefer, while Bush had a briefer present the findings, though his CIA director George Tenet would occasionally attend.

Because Pompeo spends so much of his day with Trump, the White House set up a temporary workspace for him in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the 4th floor next door to the office of the Director of National Intelligence.

While sources familiar with the issue said Pompeo has griped privately about the inconvenience of his trips to the White House, a CIA spokesperson referred to his public comments that their daily meetings are "important," and that he often "needs a great deal more of the president's time."

"It's not unprecedented that Trump is doing it, but it is not the norm," said David Priess, Author of the "President's Book of Secrets" on the history of these briefings and a former CIA officer and intelligence briefer.

A White House spokesperson did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Trump often refers to certain Cabinet secretaries as his "killers" – the highest form of praise from the commander-in-chief, according to aides.

"I've only got killers, only killers," Trump often says when introducing his Cabinet secretaries, taking pride in the team of high-net worth individuals who have excelled in military or the private sector.

"My Wilbur, on Wall Street, all you have to say is Wilbur and everyone knows who it is," Trump has said of Ross, the aides said.

And for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Trump has said, "Rex ran the world's biggest company, now he runs the State Department." Pruitt bonded with the president during discussions over how the United States should withdraw from the Paris climate agreement, other administration officials said.

Some of the cabinet officials are just his friends, and are beckoned to the President for political advice, even if it's outside of the purview of their agency.

Ross is the Cabinet official most often photographed with the president, regardless of the event. He often sits in on the President's morning intelligence briefing. Trump and Ross have known each other for more than two decades, and Ross has been a frequent guest of the president at Mar-a-Lago.

One senior administration official said White House staff understand the president's desire to rely on agency heads to learn about complex issues, but they wish that the meetings would be coordinated in advance. Instead, Cabinet secretaries like Mnuchin and Ross just stroll in with little notice.

Others in the administration remain concerned that Cabinet officials are spending too much time schmoozing with the president and attending events, and not enough at their agencies.

"Everyone is in events all day long," said one senior agency official. "Everything about this White House. It's a dog and pony show."

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The Washington Post

Safety lapses undermine nuclear warhead work at Los Alamos (UNE)

By Patrick Malone and R. Jeffrey Smith | Center for Public Integrity

17-21 minutes

An extended shutdown of the nation's only scientific laboratory for producing and testing the plutonium cores for its nuclear weapons has taken a toll on America's arsenal, with key work postponed and delays looming in the production of components for new nuclear warheads, according to government documents and officials.

The unique research and production facility is located at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in New Mexico, the birthplace of the U.S. atomic arsenal. The lab's director ordered the shutdown in 2013 after the Washington official in charge of America's warhead production expressed worries that the facility was ill-equipped to prevent an accident that would kill its workers and potentially others nearby.

Parts of the facility began renewed operations last year, but with only partial success. And workers there last year were still violating safety rules for handling plutonium, the unstable man-made metal that serves as the sparkplug of the thermonuclear explosions that American bombs are designed to create.

Los Alamos's persistent shortcomings in plutonium safety have been cited in more than 40 reports by government oversight agencies, teams of nuclear safety experts and the lab's own employees over the past 11 years. Some of these reports say that safety takes a back seat to meeting specific goals for nuclear warhead maintenance and production by private contractors running the labs. Nuclear workers and experts say the contractors have been chasing lucrative government bonuses tied to those goals.

With key work at Los Alamos deferred due to safety problems, officials and experts say the United States risks falling behind on an ambitious $1 trillion update of its nuclear arsenal, which former president Barack Obama supported and President Trump has said he wants to "greatly strengthen and expand."

During the hiatus, Los Alamos has had to forego 29 planned tests of the safety and reliability of plutonium cores in warheads now deployed atop U.S. submarine-launched and land-based missiles and in bombs carried by aircraft. The facility also hasn't been able to make new plutonium cores to

replace those regularly withdrawn from the nuclear arsenal for testing or to be fit into warheads, which are being modernized for those missiles and bombers at a projected cost of billions of dollars.

“The laboratory shut down an important facility doing important work,” said James McConnell, the associate administrator for safety, infrastructure and operations at the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), a semiautonomous arm of the Energy Department, in a recent interview at the agency’s Washington headquarters. “What we didn’t have was the quality program that we want.”

Ernest Moniz, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology physicist who served almost four years as President Obama’s energy secretary, said in a separate interview that “we were obviously quite concerned about” the shutdown at Los Alamos. Moniz said he considered the situation there a “mess” and the testing interruption “significant.”

“I don’t think it has, at this stage, in any way seriously compromised” the nuclear arsenal, Moniz said. But he added that it was still his conviction that “obviously we’ve got to get back to that” work as soon as possible. A mock plutonium core was made at Los Alamos last year in a demonstration timed to coincide with a visit by Ashton B. Carter, then secretary of defense.

At a public hearing in Santa Fe on June 7, McConnell said that while Los Alamos is making progress, it is still unable to resolve the safety issue that provoked its shutdown four years ago, namely an acute shortage of engineers who are trained in keeping the plutonium at the facility from becoming “critical” and fissioning uncontrollably. “They’re not where we need them yet,” he said of the lab and its managers.

A February report by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, an independent safety advisory group chartered by Congress, detailed the magnitude of the gap. It said Los Alamos needs 27 fully qualified safety engineers specialized in keeping the plutonium from fissioning out of control. The lab has 10.

Some of the reports obtained by the Center for Public Integrity described flimsy workplace safety policies that left workers ignorant of proper procedures as well as incidents where plutonium was packed hundreds of times into dangerously close quarters or without the shielding needed to block a serious accident. The safety risks at the Los Alamos plutonium facility, which is known as PF-4, were alarmingly highlighted in August 2011, when a “criticality accident,” as it’s known, was narrowly averted, one of several factors prompting many safety officials there to quit.

A criticality accident is an uncontrolled chain reaction involving a fissionable material such as plutonium that releases energy and generates a deadly burst of radiation. Its prevention has been an important challenge for the nuclear weapons program since the 1940s. Criticality accidents have occurred 60 times at various nuclear sites in the last half-century, causing a total of 21 agonizing deaths.

Three workers at Los Alamos died in preventable criticality accidents in the 1940s and 1950s. The most recent criticality-related deaths elsewhere occurred in 1999 at a factory north of Tokyo, where Japanese technicians accidentally mixed too much highly enriched uranium into some wide-mouth buckets. A burst of radiation — and its resulting characteristic blue glow — provoked school and road closures and the evacuation of those living nearby, plus a Japanese government order for 310,000 others to shelter in place.

The problems at Los Alamos were revealed by a year-long investigation by the Center for Public Integrity, which also found several unpublicized accidents at other privately run U.S. nuclear facilities. The investigation, which can be read in full at the Center for Public Integrity’s website, also showed that the penalties imposed by the government for these errors were typically small, relative to the tens of millions of dollars the NNSA gives to each of the contractors annually in pure profit. Some contractors involved in repeated workplace safety incidents were also awarded contract extensions and renewals by officials in Washington.

Asked about the Los Alamos facility’s record, NNSA spokesman Gregory Wolf responded that “we expect our contractors to perform work in a safe and secure manner that protects our employees, our facilities, and the public. When accidents do occur, our focus is to determine causes, identify corrective actions and prevent recurrences.”

Kevin Roark, the spokesman for the consortium of firms hired by the government to run the lab, said in an email that he would defer to the NNSA’s response. Charles McMillan, the Los Alamos lab’s director since 2011, who receives government-funded compensation exceeding $1 million a year, declined to be interviewed about its safety records or the national security consequences of the shutdown. But he said in a 2015 promotional video that “the only way” the lab can accomplish its vital national security mission “is by doing it safely.”

A near-calamity

Los Alamos’s handling of plutonium was the target of internal and external criticism a decade ago, around the time of its takeover by three profit-making firms — Bechtel National Inc., URS (now AECOM) and BWXT Government Group Inc. — in an alliance with the University of California. “We couldn’t prove we were safe,” said Douglas Bowen, a nuclear engineer on the laboratory’s criticality safety staff at the time, “not even close.”

In September 2007, the facility in question — technically known as PF-4 for Plutonium Facility Four and located in a highly secure part of the Los Alamos campus in the mountains above Santa Fe — was shut for a month while managers conducted new training and created an internal safety board to fix its problems. But in 2010, when the Energy Department did a checkup, it found “no official notes or records” the board had ever met, according to a report at the time.

Alarms were sounded more loudly after a nuclear technician positioned eight plutonium rods dangerously close together inside what is called a glovebox — a sealed container meant to contain the cancer-causing plutonium particles — on the afternoon of Aug. 11, 2011, to take a photograph for senior managers. Doing so posed the risk that neutrons emitted routinely by the metal in the rods would collide with the atoms of other particles, causing them to fission enough to provoke more collisions and begin an uncontrolled chain reaction of atom splitting.

As luck had it, a supervisor returned from her lunch break and noticed the dangerous configuration. But she then ordered the technician to reach into the box and move the rods apart, and a more senior lab official ordered others present to keep working. Both decisions increased, rather than diminished, the likelihood of an accident, because bodies — and even hands — contain water that can reflect and slow the neutrons, increasing the likelihood of a criticality and its resulting radiation burst.

“The weird thing about criticality safety is it’s not intuitive,” Don Nichols, a former chief for defense nuclear safety at NNSA, said in an interview. The calculations involved in avoiding criticality — which take account of the shape, size, form, quantity and geometric configuration of the plutonium as it moves through more than a dozen messy industrial processes — are so complex that it takes 18 months of training for an engineer to become qualified, and as many as five years to become proficient.

That’s why the consequences of the 2011 incident were so severe, even though a criticality did not occur. Virtually all the criticality specialists responsible for helping to keep workers safe at Los Alamos decided to quit, having become frustrated by the sloppy work demonstrated in the incident and what they considered the lab management’s callousness about nuclear risks when higher profits were at stake, according to interviews and government reports.

Bowen recalled frequently hearing an official with one of the private contractors running PF-4 say “we don’t even need a criticality-safety program,” and that the work was costing the contractor too much money. Former NNSA official Nichols confirmed the exodus of trained experts, saying that due to “some mismanagement, people voted with their feet. They left.” The attrition rate was around 100 percent, according to a “lessons-learned” report completed last month by the lab’s current criticality safety chief and the lone NNSA expert assigned to that issue in the agency’s Los Alamos oversight office.

The exodus provokes the shutdown

The lab’s inability to fend off a deadly accident eventually became apparent to Washington.

Four NNSA staff members briefed Neile Miller, the agency’s acting administrator in 2013, in an anteroom of her office overlooking the Mall that year, Miller recalled. The precise risks did not need an explanation, she said. She said that criticality is “one of those trigger words” that should immediately get the attention of anyone responsible for preventing a nuclear weapons disaster.

With two of the four experts remaining in her office, Miller picked up the phone that day and called McMillan at the Los Alamos complex, which is financed by a federal payment exceeding $2 billion a year. She recommended that the key plutonium lab inside PF-4 be shut down, immediately, while the safety deficiencies were fixed.

McMillan responded that he had believed the problems could be solved while that lab kept operating, Miller said. He was “reluctant” to

shut it down, she recalled. But as the telephone conversation proceeded, he became open to her view that the risks were too high, she added. So on McMillan's order, the lab was shut within a day, with little public notice.

The exact cost to taxpayers of idling the facility is unclear, but an internal Los Alamos report estimated in 2013 that shutting down the facility where such work is conducted costs the government as much as $1.36 million a day in lost productivity.

Initially, McMillan promised the staff that a "pause" lasting less than a year wouldn't cause "any significant impact to mission deliverables." But at the end of 2013, a new group of safety experts commissioned by the lab declared in an internal report that "management has not yet fully embraced its commitment to criticality safety." It listed nine weaknesses in the lab's safety culture that were rooted in a "production focus" to meet deadlines. Workers say these deadlines are typically linked to managers' financial bonuses.

Los Alamos's leaders, the report said, had made the right promises, but failed to alter the underlying safety culture. "The focus appears to remain short-term and compliance-oriented rather than based on a strategic plan," it said.

Shortfalls persisted in 2015, and new ones were discovered while the facility, still mostly shut down, was used for test runs. On May 6, 2015, for example, the NNSA sent Los Alamos's managing contractors a letter again criticizing the lab for being slow to fix criticality risks. The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board said the letter cited "more than 60 unresolved infractions," many present for months "or even years."

In January and again in April 2015, workers discovered tubes of liquids containing plutonium in seldom-used rooms at PF-4, with labels that made it hard to know how much plutonium the tubes held or where they'd come from, the safety board said. In May, workers packed a drum of nuclear waste with too much plutonium, posing a criticality risk, and in the ensuing probe, it became clear that they were relying on inaccurate and confusing documentation. Safety experts had miscalculated how much plutonium the drum could safely hold.

"These issues are very similar to the issues that contributed to the LANL Director's decision to pause operations in June of 2013," safety board inspectors wrote.

New troubles

In 2016, for the third straight year, the Energy Department and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board each listed criticality safety at Los Alamos as one of the most pressing problems facing the nuclear weapons program, in their annual reports to Congress. "Required improvements to the Criticality Safety program are moving at an unacceptably slow pace," the most recent NNSA performance evaluation of Los Alamos, released in Nov. 2016, said.

Hazardous operations at PF-4 slowly started to resume in 2016, but problems continued. In June, after technicians working in a glovebox spilled about 7 tablespoons of a liquid containing plutonium, workers violated safety rules by sopping up the spill with organic cheesecloth and throwing it in waste bins with other nuclear materials, posing the risk of a chemical reaction and fire, according to an internal Los Alamos report. A similar chemical reaction stemming from the sloppy disposal of Los Alamos's nuclear waste in 2014 provoked the shutdown of a deep-underground storage site in New Mexico for the waste for more than two years, a Department of Energy accident investigation concluded. That incident cost the government more than a billion dollars in cleanup and other expenses

Frank G. Klotz, the NNSA director, has tried to be upbeat. In March, he told hundreds of nuclear contractors packed into a Washington hotel ballroom for an industry gathering that PF-4 was fully back in business, having "safely resumed all plutonium activities there after a three-year pause."

Klotz said the updated nuclear weapons would be delivered "on time and on budget."

But a subsequent analysis by the Government Accountability Office clashed with Klotz's description. In an April report on costs associated with the NNSA's ongoing weapons modernization, the GAO disclosed the existence of an internal NNSA report forecasting that PF-4 will be unable to meet the plutonium-pit production deadlines.

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

Moreover, late last year when Los Alamos conducted its first scheduled invasive test of a plutonium pit since the shutdown of PF-4 more than three years ago, it did not produce the needed results, according to NNSA's annual evaluation of Los Alamos's performance last year. The test involved the core of a refurbished warhead scheduled to be delivered to the Navy by the end of 2019 for use atop the Trident missiles carried by U.S. submarines. A second attempt involving a different warhead was canceled because the safety analysis was incomplete, NNSA's evaluation said.

The purpose of such stockpile surveillance tests, as Vice President Joe Biden said in a 2010 National Defense University speech, is to "anticipate potential problems and reduce their impact on our arsenal." Weapons designers say these tests are akin to what car owners would do if they were storing a vehicle for years while still expecting the engine to start and the vehicle to speed down the road at the sudden turn of a key.

At the public hearing in Santa Fe on June 7, NNSA's McConnell said the agency is studying whether to keep plutonium-pit operations at Los Alamos. Options being considered include upgrading the facilities there or "adding capabilities or leveraging existing capabilities elsewhere in the country, at other sites where plutonium is already present or has been used."

Active NNSA sites that fit that description include the Savannah River Site in South Carolina, the Pantex plant in Texas and the Nevada National Security Site. The NNSA expects to complete its analysis by late summer.

This article is from the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit, nonpartisan investigative media organization in Washington.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trade War Risks From 'National Security' Tariffs

Jacob M. Schlesinger

6-7 minutes

June 18, 2017 11:33 a.m. ET

Donald Trump's trade policy has so far been more bark than bite: dramatic rhetoric about shaking up the old order, backed mainly by new studies and completion of routine Obama-era cases touted with extra fanfare.

That may change as soon as this week, when the president bares his "America First" teeth with more ferocity, advancing plans to curb steel imports in the name of "national security."

In doing so, Mr. Trump is dusting off little-used presidential powers rooted in a claim rarely invoked in world commerce—one that has the potential to destabilize the global postwar trading regime.

"Justifying import restrictions based on national security is really the 'nuclear option,'" Chad Bown, a trade expert at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, wrote recently, warning of a "downward spiral" as trading partners "use similar exceptions to halt U.S. exports of completely different products to their markets."

While Mr. Trump isn't the first president to shield the long-troubled steel industry from imports, none has made steel protectionism so central to his political persona, branding prior import limits insufficient.

In April, Mr. Trump began to make good on his campaign promises, exhuming Section 232 of a 1962 trade law giving presidents the power to block imports that threaten national security, and ordering aides to provide options on how to carry out the law. Officials are preparing to do so by the end of June, with action expected to follow quickly.

"You'll be seeing that very soon," Mr. Trump said at a June 7 Ohio speech. "The steel folks are going to be very happy."

Do steel imports threaten security?

The Bush administration weighed that question in 2001, and rejected the idea—the last time a Section 232 investigation was launched. The Commerce Department concluded at the time that only a tiny fraction of domestic steel output was needed for security-related uses, and that could be "easily satisfied…even if there were a substantial diminution of U.S. production." It also noted most steel imports come from close U.S. allies, which remains true today. About 60% of steel imports last year came from Canada, Mexico, the European Union, Japan and South Korea.

But domestic laws give an American president wide latitude to determine what threatens security, and Trump aides have made clear they take a more expansive view than predecessors.

The law's "definition of national security is much broader than what you might think," Commerce

Secretary Wilbur Ross told a Wall Street Journal conference Monday, citing measures like trade's impact on employment. He said officials were looking beyond strict military concerns, noting that "there is only one U.S. manufacturer of the kind of steel that goes into transformers" for the electrical grid. "That, to me, is a legitimate national security issue," Mr. Ross added.

Global rules also give countries tremendous discretion to curb imports for national security. That's where the Trump actions could have the biggest repercussions.

The international trading system has long reflected the uneasy balance between the need to create consistent rules that could be enforced globally with the need to respect the sovereignty of member states.

The postwar arrangement overseen by the World Trade Organization includes a national security exemption, giving countries significant freedom to use it how they see fit.

Trade law scholars call it the WTO's only "self-judging" provision, or, as one put it with foreshadowing irony in a 2011 treatise, "an unreviewable trump card." Officials have long worried that the exemption, if used liberally, could upend the whole regime, posing a no-win dilemma for the Geneva-based trade arbiters.

The WTO could declare the policy illegal, stoking domestic political anger toward a world government challenging a country's right to protect itself. Or it could approve the plan, encouraging other nations to go the same route, triggering a tit-for-tat protectionism the system was designed to prevent.

The result for 70 years has been the trade version of the Cold War's "mutually assured destruction" doctrine preventing nuclear war.

Only 10 national security complaints have been lodged in Geneva since 1949, all settled before the parties pushed the world trade body into making a ruling. Most involved diplomatic disputes, like the U.S. embargo against Cuba. The only transparently commercial case was Sweden's 1975 quotas on footwear, which was quickly dropped under pressure and ridicule from allies.

In 55 years, the U.S. had launched only 26 Section 232 studies, with just two leading to limits, both on oil imports: from Iran in 1979 and Libya in 1982. Ronald Reagan did brandish the 232 threat as a bargaining chip, using it to persuade Japan in 1986 to "voluntarily" cut machine-tools exports.

Mr. Trump has already launched two such probes—on aluminum as well as steel—and Mr. Ross said Monday "others are being considered."

When world trade leaders first created the national security exemption in 1947, officials acknowledged they were creating a potentially perilous loophole, one participant warning at the time that "the spirit in which Members of the Organization would interpret these provisions was the only guarantee against abuses," according to records of that debate.

Trump aides are still wrestling with just how strong to make their steel curbs, a struggle indicated when they twice canceled congressional briefings on the measure last week. But Mr. Trump's core trade pledge has been to challenge the spirit American presidents have applied to the global trading system for 70 years, which is why the looming steel case could have such broad reverberations.

Write to Jacob M. Schlesinger at jacob.schlesinger@wsj.com

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

In Georgia House Race, Parties Battle for New Swing Voters (UNE)

Janet Hook and Cameron McWhirter

6-7 minutes

Updated June 18, 2017 7:13 p.m. ET

CHAMBLEE, Ga.—This Tuesday's U.S. House special election in Georgia has turned into a defining clash between the two political parties, with both sides targeting a new cadre of potential swing voters: Republicans uneasy with the rise of President Donald Trump.

In the final days before the election, Democrat Jon Ossoff is offering a middle-of-the-road message that sets a different tone from his campaign's inaugural promise to "make Trump furious."

GOP leaders, fearing an upset in this suburban Atlanta district the party has held for decades, are making an urgent appeal to Republicans to support GOP candidate Karen Handel, even if they have their doubts about the president.

"I know some of you out there, some Republicans, may even be turned off by our president," said Sonny Perdue, Mr. Trump's agriculture secretary, at a sweltering get-out-the-vote rally for Ms. Handel on Saturday in an airplane hangar here. "This is a race for the heart and soul for America."

The candidates and outside groups have poured a record $60 million into this district north of Atlanta, according to an analysis of Federal Election Commission data by Issue One, a bipartisan campaign finance group.

The contest is coming down to a battle for such voters as Gracile Dawes, a lifelong Republican who was so dismayed by Mr. Trump's campaign that she ended up voting for a third-party presidential candidate.

"I just felt so sad and embarrassed," said Ms. Dawes after the New York businessman won the White House. She now supports Mr. Ossoff.

Jim Griswold, a Sandy Springs Republican who supports Ms. Handel, doesn't believe that Mr. Ossoff is as moderate as he seems. "Ossoff will be a tool of the left,"' Mr. Griswold said. "He's trying to strike an independent pose. It's a crock."

Swing Republicans and independents could tip the balance in the neck-and-neck race to pick a successor to Tom Price, who left Congress to become Mr. Trump's health and human services secretary.

Both Ms. Handel, a former Georgia secretary of state, and Mr. Ossoff, a former congressional aide and documentary filmmaker, are acutely aware of the attention showered on the race as the biggest test of strength between the parties since Mr. Trump was elected.

The two parties have battled this year in several races that have served as proxies for the national divide, most notably in two special elections for Congress in Kansas and Montana, where Democratic candidates ran far closer to their GOP counterparts than in recent elections, but Republicans still prevailed.

But Georgia has long been viewed as the ultimate bellwether of Republican vulnerability in seats that could help Democrats retake control of the House.

The district's suburban, college-educated voters are political weak points for Mr. Trump, analysis of the presidential election results and polls this year show. That category of voters is heavily represented in many House districts that will be up for grabs next year.

"The whole country is watching us right now," Mr. Ossoff told supporters in Marietta on Saturday.

Most polls show the race nearly tied, but with Mr. Ossoff consistently holding a slight lead.

Tuesday's race is a runoff election because Mr. Ossoff in April received 48% of the vote, 2 percentage points short of the 50% needed to take the seat outright in the first round of the special election.

Ms. Handel garnered 20% in the initial contest, ranking second among a crowded field of 18 candidates, 11 of whom were Republican.

In a June poll by Atlanta's WSB-TV, which showed the candidates nearly tied, Mr. Ossoff drew support from 15.3% of Republicans, while 6.8% of Democrats supported Ms. Handel.

Georgia's sixth district has been represented in the House for almost 40 years by Republicans, including former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. Its lines have changed over the years but not its partisan bent. Mitt Romney won the district by 23 percentage points in 2012. In the 2016 GOP primary, the district went for Florida Sen. Marco Rubio.

But voters here weren't quick to embrace Mr. Trump, who barely beat Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in this district. Republicans have been trying to close what they have seen as a worrisome enthusiasm gap between the parties: Their analysis of first-round voting files found that some 38,000 people who usually vote Republican didn't participate.

To mobilize the GOP, Ms. Handel has walked a fine line with Mr. Trump. She says her responsibility in Congress will be to represent the district, not the White House.

"The race is not about Donald Trump," she said in an interview after greeting voters at a taco restaurant. "It is about who people believe is best suited to represent the interests of the district."

Still, Mr. Trump came to the district for a fundraiser and has recorded robocalls to help get out the vote.

At the airport rally, Mr. Perdue defended the president and argued that ambivalent Republicans can't afford the luxury of sitting out this special election.

But Mr. Ossoff's campaign rhetoric has been moderate enough that it is

helping him win over voters such as Eric Scharff, a Marietta independent who backed Mitt Romney in 2012 but who voted for Mrs. Clinton in 2016.

Mr. Scharff said he supported Mr. Ossoff because he had "a balanced, work-with-both-sides approach."

Write to Janet Hook at janet.hook@wsj.com and Cameron McWhirter at cameron.mcwhirter@wsj.com

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The Washington Post

Rural America lifted Trump to the presidency. Support is strong, but not monolithic. (UNE)

https://www.facebook.com/danbalzwapo

10-12 minutes

Rural America has often backed Republicans in presidential elections, but rarely with the enthusiasm they showed for President Trump in 2016. More sparsely populated areas of the country form the heart of Trump Nation and continue to provide majority support for a president who has faced near-constant controversy and discord.

At a time when his job approval rating is in net negative territory nationally, more than half of all adults (54 percent) in rural America say they approve of the way he is doing his job, according to a new Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation survey. His approval rating among rural Americans is 10 percentage points higher than among suburbanites and 22 points higher than among city dwellers.

[New poll of rural Americans shows deep cultural divide with urban centers]

At the same time, however, any suggestion of rural America as near-monolithic in its support for the president represents a sizable oversimplification. Even in areas of the country where Trump scored some of his biggest margins, he is a divisive figure — loved by his supporters but disliked by many who voted for Hillary Clinton. Four in 10 adults in rural America disapprove of his job performance, a hefty number for a president still in the early stages of his tenure.

On Election Night last November, Trump lost America's cities in a landslide. In the suburbs, he narrowly prevailed over Clinton. But in the 2,332 counties that make up small-town and rural America, he swamped his Democratic rival, winning 60 percent of the vote to Clinton's 34 percent. Trump's 26-point advantage over Clinton in rural America far exceeded the margins by which Republican nominees had won those voters in the four previous elections.

That statistic alone doesn't tell the full story of Trump's appeal and the growing urban-rural division in the country. Trump's vote percentage in rural America was 29 points higher than he received in the nation's urban counties. That gap, like his overall support level among rural voters, is far larger than for Republican nominees between 2000 and 2012.

The president is fond of showing visitors to the White House a map of the 2016 election results by county. It shows a sea of red along with smaller patches of blue. The red areas represent the rural and small-town counties won by the president; the specks of blue highlight the urban areas where Clinton rolled up big margins.

That map, however impressive from a distance, is deceiving, highlighting geography over population density. Small-towns and rural areas account for 74 percent of the nation's 3,143 counties. But those counties account for just under a quarter of the total U.S. population. Suburban counties count for 46 percent of the country's population and urban counties the remaining 31 percent.

When Trump's actual vote totals are analyzed on that basis, the suburbs appear to take on greater significance in his victory march. Suburban counties provided close to half of Trump's total votes, while rural and small-town counties accounted for not quite one-third of his votes.

Still, the outsize support from voters in rural America remains a major story of the 2016 election and of Trump's presidency. Residents of rural American counties turned out in numbers big enough to help provide the crucial victory margins in states like Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Iowa — states that either had been presidential battlegrounds in recent years or consistently in the Democrats' column. The more rural the county, the better Trump did on Election Day.

What attracted these voters to Trump? One factor, based on other post-election surveys, was their dislike of Clinton, whose negative ratings were nearly as high as Trump's. Beyond that, according to the new Post-Kaiser survey, his appeal was grounded in economic and cultural issues, with immigration having particular resonance and skepticism that federal government programs have done much to help their areas.

Trump's support was also driven by a feeling among rural voters that urban and even suburban Americans do not share their values, and that the news media disrespects them.

Trump won 67 percent of the vote among rural Americans who say their values differ from people in big cities. He won 71 percent of those who say the news media disrespect them. He won 74 percent among those who say immigrants are not doing enough to adapt to the American way of life. He captured 79 percent of those rural voters who say that federal government efforts to improve people's standard of living generally make things worse.

Rural voters widely embrace the economic policy ideas Trump espoused as a candidate. Almost 7 in 10 of all rural Americans say decreasing regulations on businesses would be important elements of improving the job situation in their areas. Almost 8 in 10 say the same about lowering taxes on business and making better trade deals. Infrastructure projects really draw support, with more than 9 in 10 responding positively to such initiatives, including 74 percent calling them "very important." On most questions, rural voters who say these policies would help their communities were more likely to vote for Trump.

A sign for Corey Stewart, who was running for governor of Virginia, and President Trump and Vice President Pence are displayed on a lawn in Glade Spring, Va. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)

A sign that offers to help navigate the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, is planted on a porch in Prosperity, S.C. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)

Support for those ideas, many of which have yet to gain traction in Congress or even be proposed by the president, is tempered by more modest expectations of what a Trump presidency will do to improve the economic life of rural Americans. Overall, a slim 51 percent majority of rural residents are very or somewhat confident Trump will create jobs in their community, while 46 percent say they are not too confident or not confident at all about this.

Still, those rural voters who backed Trump in November express confidence that his presidency will improve their lives. About 8 in 10 say they are either very or somewhat confident Trump will improve health care and create jobs in their area. More than 9 in 10 Trump voters say they think he will keep the country safe from terrorism and that he will protect individual freedoms.

Hear from rural voters in Ashtabula County, Ohio, as they describe the most important issues to them. Hear from rural voters in Ashtabula County, Ohio, as they describe the most important issues to them. (McKenna Ewen, Whitney Leaming, Whitney Shefte/The Washington Post)

(McKenna Ewen,Whitney Leaming,Whitney Shefte/The Washington Post)

Concerns about immigration, abuse of public assistance and racial biases resonate especially among Trump's rural voters. More than 6 in 10 Trump supporters say immigrants are a burden because they take jobs away from American citizens rather than strengthening the country with their hard work and talents. More than 8 in 10 rural Trump voters say it's more common for government benefits to go to undeserving people rather than for needy people to go without them. And by a more than 3-to-1 margin, rural Trump voters say whites losing out because of preferences for blacks and Hispanics is a bigger national problem than racial minorities losing out to whites.

Significant partisan differences exist in rural America, as they do throughout the country. On immigration, for example, 71 percent of rural Republicans say immigrants coming to the United States in the past decade are not doing enough to adapt to the American way of life, while just 29 percent of rural Democrats agree with that.

A 57-percent majority of rural Democrats say recent immigrants have values similar to theirs, but only 27 percent of rural Republicans

express that view. Rural Democrats are almost three times as likely as rural Republicans to say federal programs designed to improve living standards do make things better — 50 percent vs. 18 percent.

Almost 4 in 10 rural Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents say they have different values than other rural and small-town residents, about three times the percentage of rural Republicans who say the same.

In other ways, residents in rural and small-town areas, regardless of party identification, often see the world and issues differently from their political counterparts elsewhere. Asked about their views of immigrants, rural Republicans are more negative in their responses than urban and suburban Republicans and rural Democrats are less positive than urban and suburban Democrats.

A similar pattern holds on the question of whether Christian values are under attack in the United States, at least among Democrats. Rural Democrats are 11 percentage points more likely to say yes to that question than urban and suburban Democrats, though rural Republicans are significantly more likely to see those values under attack than rural Democrats. And while most Democrats in all areas oppose Republican efforts to repeal and replace the 2010 Affordable Care Act, 23 percent of rural Democrats support such efforts, compared with 14 percent of urban Democrats.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

This Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation poll was conducted April 13-May 1, 2017 among a random national sample of 1,686 U.S. adults reached on cellular and landline phones with an overall margin of sampling error of plus or minus four percentage points. The sample of 1,070 rural Americans has an error margin of plus or minus 3.5 points.

This Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation poll was conducted April 13-May 1 with a random national sample of 1,686 U.S. adults contacted on landline and cell phones. The overall margin of sampling error isplus or minus 4 percentage points. The sample of 1,070 rural Americans has an error margin of plus or minus 3.5 points; the error margin is 7 points for the sample of 303 urban residents and 6.5 points for the 307 suburban residents.

Scott Clement and Emily Guskin contributed to this report.

The Washington Post

Scott Pruitt vows to speed the nation's Superfund cleanups. Communities wonder how. (UNE)

By Brady Dennis

11-14 minutes

BRIDGETON, Mo. — Dawn Chapman had listened with surprise and skepticism as the new head of the Environmental Protection Agency vowed to clean up West Lake, the nuclear waste dump that has filled her days and nights with worry.

"The past administration honestly just didn't pay attention to [it]," Scott Pruitt stressed on a local radio show in April. "We're going to get things done at West Lake. The days of talking are over."

The next month, Pruitt took to television to say a plan for the site was coming "very soon" as part of his push to prioritize Superfund cleanups across the country. "It's not a matter of money," he said. "It's a matter of leadership and attitude and management."

On a blue-sky afternoon, Chapman sat in her small home in this leafy St. Louis suburb and mulled the latest set of promises from Washington — this time from a man known more for suing the EPA and rolling back environmental regulations than for cracking down on pollution.

"Why our site? Why now? Can he keep those promises?" the mother of three wondered. Her family lives only a couple of miles from West Lake, a contaminated landfill that contains thousands of tons of waste from the World War II-era Manhattan Project. "My biggest fear is he's just going to put a Band-Aid on it."

In Bridgeton and elsewhere, others are asking similar questions with various degrees of hope and hesitation. In his previous role as Oklahoma's attorney general, Pruitt had long-standing ties to oil and gas companies and a litigious history fighting the EPA. And although he has called the federal Superfund program "vital" and a "cornerstone" of the EPA's mission, the Trump administration has proposed slashing its funding by 30 percent.

With more than 1,300 Superfund sites nationwide — some of which have lingered for decades on the EPA's ever-growing "priorities list" — it's unclear how Pruitt will back up his professed commitment in an age of scorched-earth budgets. Critics worry that a single-minded focus on speeding up the process could lead to inadequate cleanups.

Pruitt has largely dismissed such issues. He argues that the program is beset more by bloated administrative costs and a shortage of initiative than by budget woes, and he notes that, at most sites, "private funding" is available from firms deemed responsible for cleanups.

"This agency has not responded to Superfund with the type of urgency and commitment that the people of this country deserve," Pruitt reiterated Wednesday — days before a contingent from Bridgeton would arrive in Washington in hopes of meeting with him. He said he understands communities' distrust, not just about West Lake but many sites. "I'm very sensitive and sympathetic to what their concerns are," he said. "This agency has failed them. . . . They have a right to be skeptical."

That they are. Residents in the shadow of Superfund sites remain wary of his pronouncements.

"Actions speak louder than words," said BrieAnn McCormick, whose neighborhood is closest to West Lake.

[Trump's budget would take a sledgehammer to the EPA]

Families here have long lived with the reality of the site, which got its Superfund designation in 1990. The 200 acres include not just the radioactive waste that was illegally dumped in 1973, but also an adjacent landfill where decomposing trash as deep as 150 feet is smoldering in what scientists call a "subsurface burning event." The fire is now about 600 feet from that other waste.

West Lake has made Bridgeton the kind of place where some parents drive their children to playgrounds far from the landfill. Where some people keep homemade kits in their cars — face masks for days the stench hits, eyedrops for irritation, Tylenol for headaches. Where others trade stories of cancers, autoimmune diseases and miscarriages they're scared could be related to the Superfund site, although air, water and soil tests from the EPA and other government agencies have shown no link.

Activists fault the EPA for moving at a glacial pace. They accuse Republic Services, which took ownership of the landfill in 2008, of trying to avoid full-fledged cleanup.

Similar dynamics are playing out at many Superfund sites, where abandoned mines, contaminated rivers and manufacturing plants have left behind a daunting trail of lead, arsenic, mercury and other harmful substances. Some "mega sites" involve tracing hundreds of chemicals and scores of polluters.

Pruitt recently issued a directive saying that he plans to be more directly involved in decisions about Superfund cleanups, particularly ones in excess of $50 million. He established a Superfund task force, which is expected to report back this week on how to restructure the program in ways that favor "expeditious remediation," "reduce the burden" on firms responsible for cleanups and "encourage private investment" in the program.

"If this were some other world, it might be easy to believe they are trying to move things faster and in the right way," said Nancy Loeb, director of the Environmental Advocacy Center at Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law. "I don't want to say the Obama administration did a great job on Superfund; they didn't. . . . But I fear [this administration] cutting its budget and giving access to the administrator for all big companies who want to come and talk is a death knell for meaningful cleanups."

***

When Congress established the Superfund program in 1980, lawmakers gave the EPA legal powers to force polluters to pay to fix the messes they had created. They also created a tax on the petroleum and chemical industries to offset expensive, complicated cleanups when a polluting company had gone bankrupt or could not be identified.

The tax generated billions of dollars for cleanups. But Congress allowed it to expire in 1995, and by 2003 the industry-funded trust fund was essentially broke. Lawmakers have chipped away at Superfund's budget since. The program gets about $1.1 billion a year, about half what it did in 1999.

As funding dwindled throughout the 2000s, the pace of cleanups also

declined. President Trump has proposed to slash $330 million more from the program annually.

“Either cut the budget or make things go better for Superfund. Pick one. You can’t do both,” said Peter deFur, who has consulted on Superfund sites for more than two decades.

He and other experts acknowledge the agency hasn’t always moved quickly enough. But they are concerned Pruitt’s focus on accelerating cleanups might lead to simplistic solutions that leave lingering environmental risks to nearby communities, which disproportionately are poor and minority.

“The cheapest and quickest option is not always the best,” deFur said. “It’s dangerous to not get it right the first time.”

Mathy Stanislaus, who oversaw the program throughout the Obama administration, was troubled by the language Pruitt used in setting up the Superfund task force — a group led by a former Oklahoma banker whose résumé includes no environmental experience.

“Nothing in his charge . . . talks about the public health dimension,” Stanislaus said. “That, from my perspective, is revealing.”

Pruitt insists that letting polluted sites “just languish” does nothing to protect public health.

“Listen, these [responsible companies] across the country are going to be held accountable,” he said Wednesday. “They’re going to get these areas cleaned up, or they are going to be sued by this agency.”

Despite West Lake’s complex challenges, the long-awaited cleanup could move forward relatively soon. For one, there are viable parties on the hook to pay the costs. (Republic Services is one of three “potentially responsible parties” that would shoulder the remediation.) And with the EPA’s site investigation largely complete, officials already planned to make a final decision this year on how cleanup would proceed, according to former regional administrator Mark Hague.

“My goal was to get this decision done and done right with solid science and engineering behind it,” Hague said. “This is not a place to take shortcuts. . . . At the end of the day, you’ve got to be able to tell people that what we’ve done will be protective of human health and the environment.”

Although some nearby residents have pushed for a full removal of the radioactive material, a solution that could cost in excess of $400 million, Republic Services has maintained that “capping” the site with layers of rock, clay and soil would be sufficient and would avoid the risks associated with disturbing the nuclear waste. Its approach would cost closer to $50 million.

Company spokesman Russ Knocke said claims about health dangers are unfounded and unnecessarily divisive. “There’s too much fearmongering. There’s too much misinformation, and at some point science has to carry the day,” he said. “The landfill is safe, it is in a managed state, and accusations of the contrary are simply false.”

There is one thing the company and activists agree on when it comes to a cleanup, however. “It’s taken too long,” Knocke said. “We certainly welcome the priority the new administrator is placing on the site.”

Yet even with Pruitt’s renewed “sense of urgency,” tapping private dollars is not an option at some Superfund locations. At these “orphaned” sites, polluting companies long ago went bankrupt or ceased to be liable, and the cleanup responsibilities now fall mostly to the federal government. It’s difficult to envision such places getting fixed without an adequate Superfund budget.

“If we feel like the numbers of the budget are not sufficient to address those, we’ll be sure to let Congress know,” Pruitt said.

Funding is what’s needed in St. Louis, Mich., a small town that was once a hub for DDT manufacturing. The site of the former Velsicol Chemical Corp. there remains among the most contaminated anywhere. Nearly 40 years after the plant’s closure, robins still sometimes drop dead out of the sky after having eaten tainted worms from the soil.

“We are just waiting for money from EPA,” said Jane Keon, who helped found a local citizens task force. The group saw an opportunity after Pruitt vowed to prioritize the Superfund program.

“We request that you consider funding our site as an excellent public relations example,” it wrote him in a letter. “All we need now to get underway is several million dollars. . . . If you can get those dollars to us, [remediation] work can begin at once, and you would have an example to point to.”

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In and around Bridgeton, the waiting also continues. People like Meagan Beckermann, pregnant with her third child, weigh whether to leave or stay.

“For us, it’s constantly, ‘What if?’ ” she said.

On that sunny afternoon this month, Dawn Chapman stopped to visit Karen Nickel, who for years had no idea she was raising her four children down the road from a Superfund site.

The pair co-founded Just Moms, a group advocating to clean up West Lake or relocate families living close by. As they sat at Nickel’s kitchen table, they fretted that Pruitt might indeed allow the radioactive waste to be capped in place rather than removed — a solution the EPA had proposed almost a decade ago before reconsidering.

“It’s got to be done the right way,” Chapman said, as Nickel nodded in agreement. “There’s no Harry Potter wand here.”

Not far away in Spanish Village, the small development closer to West Lake than any other, BrieAnn McCormick stood on her front porch, gazing out toward the playground her children never visit. The neighborhood seemed so normal, with its freshly mowed lawns and tidy sidewalks. Balloons fluttered from a nearby house, celebrating a new baby’s arrival.

McCormick, a teacher, is tired of worrying about the nuclear waste just over the hill. She and her husband recently decided they no longer will depend on Pruitt or anyone else to finally act.

“I’m meeting with a Realtor this afternoon,” she said. “It bothers me, the idea of selling this to someone else. But I just have to get my kids out of here.”

A few days later, a sign showed up in her yard. An open house was held Sunday.

The Washington Post

Editorial : We’ve got some questions for Mr. Trump. Now tell us what you’d ask him.

https://www.facebook.com/washingtonpostopinions

3-4 minutes

By Editorial Board

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

June 18 at 7:17 PM

THE WHITE HOUSE has declared that President Trump’s tweets are “official statements.” But that does not mean that Mr. Trump’s staff will be any more helpful in explaining the president’s often confounding Twitter declarations — or, for that matter, much else about Mr. Trump.

“I think the president’s tweets speak for themselves” is spokesman Sean Spicer’s frequently invoked evasion . It is an open question whether Mr. Spicer’s goal is to avoid making statements his boss might later contradict or whether he does not have the information he needs to do his job. Indicating the latter, “I have not had a discussion with him about that” is another dodge Mr. Spicer uses, such as when he was pressed about whether the president has confidence in Attorney General Jeff Sessions, and when he was asked whether the president believes in climate change.

If the press secretary cannot speak for the president, who can? “Ultimately, the best messenger is the president himself,” Mr. Spicer said. If Mr. Trump dislikes how his surrogates perform in front of critical questioning, he can fix that by spending more time at the lectern. He has taken far too few questions from journalists over his first several months in office. He answered dozens in one go during a February news conference, but he has spent little time mixing it up with the press corps since.

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In this, Mr. Trump is not entirely unlike President Barack Obama, his predecessor, in early 2009. Yet Mr. Obama also frequently conducted town hall meetings in which members of the public were allowed to directly address the president, and some asked challenging questions. Moreover, Mr. Obama’s press team was capable of answering basic questions about his administration.

What would we ask the president, given the chance? Here are a few questions we might start with.

● Why did Mr. Trump fail while at a NATO summit meeting to affirm its Article 5, which commits each member state to come to the defense of every other?

● Does he accept that the climate is changing due to human activity?

● Does the president believe GOP health-care reform can lower both premiums and deductibles, which generally move in opposite directions? Does he know that the House bill was not designed to do that?

● Did he know about the Russia connections of Michael Flynn, Paul Manafort and Carter Page when he brought them onto his campaign?

What questions would *you* ask President Trump, if given the chance? Send your suggestions to us, at wapo.st/asktrump, and we will publish as many of them as we can. Real answers from the president, however, we cannot guarantee.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : A Terrorist's Guide to New York City

June 18, 2017 6:19 p.m. ET 64 COMMENTS

3 minutes

The New York City Council is the distilled political essence of modern progressivism, which means it can be dangerous to public health and safety. This summer tourists can see more New Yorkers relieving their bladders in public thanks to the council's reduction in penalties for crimes against public order, and now the council wants to expose the city's antiterror secrets.

A new bill would require the New York Police Department to disclose and describe all "surveillance technology," which it defines as "equipment, software, or system capable of, or used or designed for, collecting, retaining, processing, or sharing audio, video, location, thermal, biometric, or similar information." The cops would have to post this information online annually and respond to public comments.

The effort is backed by such anti-antiterror stalwarts as the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Brennan Center. Manhattan Democrat Daniel Garodnick, a co-sponsor, says the measure would enhance public trust by giving citizens more knowledge about policing techniques.

We'll see how long that trust lasts if the bill makes it easier for terrorists to thwart or evade the NYPD's antiterror methods. That's the legitimate worry of police who rely on technology and surveillance to prevent mass murder. A jihadist bombed Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood as recently as September and the department maintains on average three or four active terrorist investigations at any one time. John Miller, the NYPD's counterterror chief, says police have foiled at least 25 major terror attacks since 9/11.

New York's cops are as respectful of privacy as any in the country, and they need a court order to conduct searches or track a cellphone. They also comply with the court-ordered Handschu guidelines that impose additional due-process burdens.

An NYPD internal committee reviews these cases along with an external, civilian representative, who is currently former federal Judge Stephen Robinson. As if this weren't enough, in 2014 the city council established an inspector general for the NYPD. The miracle is that the cops have been able to keep America safe despite all of this bureaucratic oversight and political second-guessing.

New York remains a pre-eminent terror target because of its size and importance as a symbol of American culture and commerce. The recent attacks in Britain show the jihadist threat to open societies hasn't abated, and democracies need tools to defend themselves without offering terrorists a road map to thwart them.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : Trump's Non-Celebrity Apprentices

June 18, 2017 6:21 p.m. ET 67 COMMENTS

4-6 minutes

One restraint on economic growth is the increasing U.S. labor shortage, especially for jobs that require technical skills. Meanwhile, many college grads are underemployed and burdened by student debt. The Trump Administration is trying to address both problems by rethinking the government's educational priorities.

President Trump directed Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta last week to streamline regulations to make it easier for employers, industry groups and labor unions to offer apprenticeships. Many employers provide informal apprenticeships for new workers, but the Labor bureaucracy regulates and approves programs whose credentials are recognized industry-wide.

About 505,000 workers are enrolled in government-registered apprenticeships. The programs typically pair on-the-job training with educational courses that allow workers to make money while honing skills in fields like welding, plumbing, electrical engineering and various mechanical trades. While construction apprenticeships are common, training programs are growing in industries like restaurant and hotel management.

Nearly all apprentices receive jobs and the average starting salary is $60,000, according to the Labor Department. That beats the pay for most college majors outside of the hard sciences. Last year's National Association of Colleges and Employers survey estimated the starting salary of education majors at $34,891 and humanities at $46,065.

For decades the cultural and economic assumption has been that Americans will be better off with a college degree. This is still true overall, and economic returns to education have risen. This is especially true for those with cognitive ability who acquire skills in growth industries like software design or biological sciences. Politicians have responded by subsidizing college almost as much as they do housing—with Pell grants, 529 tax subsidies and more recently debt forgiveness.

Yet the politically inconvenient reality is that not every kid is cut out for traditional college, and those who struggle in high school may be better off learning a trade. Many without academic inclination or preparation often spend years (and thousands of dollars) taking remedial classes to compensate for their lousy K-12 education.

The six-year graduation rate for four-year colleges is 60% while the three-year graduation rate at community colleges is a paltry 22%. The Obama Administration response was to push even more subsidized student debt to force feed even more kids into college. Student debt doubled in the Obama years to $1.3 trillion, which will burden workers and taxpayers for decades.

Another problem is that few colleges and high schools teach vocational skills. The Labor Department Jolts survey of national job openings found more than six million in April—the most since Jolts began tracking in 2000. The vacancies include 203,000 in construction, 359,000 in manufacturing and 1.1 million in health care. These are not jobs that can be filled by Kanye West English deconstructionists. They are also typically jobs that can't be supplanted by lower-wage foreign competition.

While employers subsidize most apprenticeships, the President has proposed spending $200 million to promote the programs. This would still be a drop in the $26 billion bucket (not including student loans) that Washington spends on higher education each year.

One objection to shifting this money will come from unions that receive much federal job-training money with poor results. But if others can run a better program, they should get the cash. It's true that most government job-training programs are ineffective, so it's good that Mr. Trump has instructed federal agencies to compile a list of those that should be eliminated.

An especially odd objection is that apprenticeship training is a mistake because skills become out of date over time, especially later in one's work life. But that's a risk throughout the economy, and all the more reason to get young people skills to enter the job market now and build up savings for the future. This makes more sense than subsidizing a college degree for a job at Starbucks .

Perhaps the most important message is that there's dignity and purpose in all work, college degree or not.

Editorial : Single-payer health care would have an astonishingly high price tag

https://www.facebook.com/washingtonpostopinions

5-7 minutes

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

By Editorial Board

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

June 18 at 7:15 PM

OBAMACARE LOOKS shaky, mostly because Republicans are sabotaging it. This, in turn, has rekindled calls on the left to create a European-style "single-payer" system, in which the government directly pays for every American's health care. California lawmakers, for example, are considering such a plan for their state.

The single-payer model has some strong advantages. It is much simpler for most people — no more insurance forms or related hassles. Employers would no longer be mixed up in providing health-care benefits, and taxpayers would no longer subsidize that form of private compensation. Government experts could conduct research on treatments and use that information to directly cut costs across the system.

But the government's price tag would be astonishing. When Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) proposed a "Medicare for all" health plan in his presidential campaign, the nonpartisan Urban Institute figured that it would raise government spending by $32 trillion over 10 years, requiring a tax increase so huge that even the democratic socialist Mr. Sanders did not propose anything close to it.

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Single-payer advocates counter that government-run health systems in other developed countries spend much less than the United States does on its complex public-private arrangement. They say that if the United States adopted a European model, it could expand coverage to everyone by realizing a mountain of savings with no measureable decline in health outcomes, in part because excessive administrative costs and profit would be wrung from the system.

In fact, the savings would be less dramatic; the Urban Institute's projections are closer to reality. The public piece of the American health-care system has not proven itself to be particularly cost-efficient. On a per capita basis, U.S. government health programs alone spend more than Canada, Australia, France and Britain each do on their entire health systems. That means the U.S. government spends more per American to cover a slice of the population than other governments spend per citizen to cover all of theirs. Simply expanding Medicare to all would not automatically result in a radically more efficient health-care system. Something else would have to change.

The Congressional Budget Office has released its score on the revised American Health Care Act. Here's what's in the report. The Congressional Budget Office has released its score on the revised American Health Care Act. Here's what's in the report. (Daron Taylor/The Washington Post)

(Daron Taylor/The Washington Post)

With monopoly buying power, the government could tighten up on health-care spending by dictating prices for services and drugs. But the government already has a lot of leverage. A big reason it does not clamp down now on health-care spending is that it is hard to do so politically.

Republicans have tarred the Affordable Care Act's Medicare cuts as attacks on the cherished entitlement program. Doctors and hospitals have effectively resisted efforts to scale back the reimbursements they get from federal health programs. Small-town America does not want to give up expensive medical facilities that serve relatively few people in rural areas. A tax on medical device makers has been under bipartisan attack ever since it passed, as has the "Cadillac tax" on expensive health-insurance plans. When experts find that a treatment is too costly relative to the health benefits it provides, patients accustomed to receiving that treatment and medical organizations with a stake in the status quo rise up to demand it continue to be paid for.

A single-payer health-care system would face all of these political barriers to cost-saving reform and more. To realize the single-payer dream of coverage for all and big savings, medical industry players, including doctors, would likely have to get paid less and patients would have to accept different standards of access and comfort. There is little evidence most Americans are willing to accept such tradeoffs.

The goal still must be universal coverage and cost restraint. But no matter whether the government or some combination of parties is paying, that restraint will come slowly, with cuts to the rate of increase in medical costs that make the system more affordable over time. There are many options short of a disruptive takeover: the government can change how care is delivered, determine which treatments should be covered, control quality at hospitals, drive down drug costs and discourage high-cost health-care plans even while making the Obamacare system better at filling coverage gaps.

Editorial : Congress's Futile Game Goes On After Assault

The Editorial Board

4 minutes

The Rev. Patrick Conroy, the House chaplain, leading a prayer at second base before the 2017 Congressional Baseball Game on Thursday. Al Drago/The New York Times

It was heartening for the nation to see congressional lawmakers seek comfort in a bipartisan game of baseball on Thursday, after the vicious gunfire attack on some of their own at a practice a day earlier. Unfortunately, the resolute cry from the ball field — "The game will go on" — has a sadder parallel in the Capitol, where any hope for stronger gun safety legislation is quickly yielding to a familiar sense of futility.

"We're beyond the place where Washington responds to mass shootings," said Senator Chris Murphy, the Connecticut Democrat who led an angry filibuster a year ago demanding more than "unconscionable deafening silence" from Congress after the shock of the Orlando nightclub gun massacre. Similarly frustrated Democrats had staged a protest sit-in in the House, but this time they were muted about renewing the debate over the nation's gun carnage.

"If we had that debate, it'd end like it always ends," Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, told Politico. "We're not going to tell law-abiding people they can't own a gun because of some nut job," he added, as if the outsize toll of guns deaths — 30,000-plus a year — is an acceptable trade-off for American citizenship.

"I just don't get overexcited any more," said Senator Joe Manchin, the West Virginia Democrat who four years ago worked hard for a bipartisan compromise to close loopholes in the law on gun purchases. It was defeated by six votes in the Senate.

So the Capitol game went on with one noticeable change — the strategic decision to postpone a hearing on legislation strongly sought by the gun lobby to end 80-year-old restrictions on possessing gun silencers.

The sudden sound of gunfire is one of the few protections the American public has when shooters are loose. The congressional Republicans and staffers who were able to flee the ball field shooter know this well.

The police in more than 90 cities here and abroad use audio technology to instantly map the sound of gunfire and get quickly to the scene. The silencer measure, which sponsors, with straight faces, are calling the Hearing Protection Act, would hobble that defense.

It gravely posits that the noise of guns is such a health hazard for the shooters that silencers should not be subjected to the high-risk controls that have also governed grenades and machine guns since the days of mob warfare.

The measure amounts to a marketing favor for the gun industry, which is hoping to increase the sale of silencers as a vanity item. It

disregards the risk of deranged shooters acting out movie fantasies of silencer gunplay. As this session's primary firearms bill, it is a pathetic comment on what has become of gun safety legislation in the Republican-controlled Congress. After the gun attack on Republicans, stronger measures were soon being talked of — to make it legal for lawmakers to routinely carry guns in Washington. So the Capitol game goes on.

The Washington Post

Rogin: The State Department just broke a promise to minority and female recruits

https://www.facebook.com/josh.rogin

6-8 minutes

Dozens of young minority and female State Department recruits received startling and unwelcome news last week: They would not be able to soon join the Foreign Service despite having been promised that opportunity. Their saga is just the latest sign that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's rush to slash the size of the State Department without a plan is harming diplomacy and having negative unintended effects.

The recruits, who are part of the State Department's Rangel and Pickering fellowship programs, have already completed two years of graduate-level education at U.S. taxpayers' expense plus an internship, often in a foreign country. The deal they struck with the federal government was that after completing their educations they would be given an inside track to become full-fledged U.S. diplomats abroad if they also satisfied medical and security requirements. In turn, they promised to commit at least five years to the Foreign Service.

These minority and female candidates already went through a competitive application process, meaning they are some of the best and brightest young graduates around. It also means they have other options. Young stars don't join the State Department for the money or the glory; they want to serve and represent their country and are willing to make sacrifices to do it.

The Daily 202 newsletter

PowerPost's must-read morning briefing for decision-makers.

Many were shocked when they received a letter telling them they had one week to decide if they wanted to take a much less appealing job — stamping passports in a foreign embassy for two years — with the prospect but no guarantee of becoming a Foreign Service officer even after that.

"This is no way to treat our next generation," one Foreign Service officer serving overseas told me.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on March 16 that the State Department's current spending was "not sustainable" and he willingly accepted the "challenge" President Trump had given in proposing to cut more than a quarter of his agency's budget. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on March 16 that the State Department's current spending was "not sustainable." (Reuters)

(Reuters)

In Capitol Hill hearings last week, several lawmakers pressed Tillerson to explain why the State Department won't waive the administration's self-imposed hiring freeze for these few dozen recruits. Is the State Department still committed to diversity? Did Tillerson realize that the federal government has already spent tens of thousands of dollars educating each of these fellows?

Questioned first by Sen. Christopher A. Coons (D-Del.) last Tuesday, Tillerson didn't have all the facts at his fingertips. By the time he got the same questions the next day from Rep. Gregory W. Meeks (D-N.Y.) Tillerson and the State Department had figured out what they wanted to say.

The department decided to delay the entire class of new Foreign Service officers, and the fellows were just caught up in that decision, Tillerson said. State wants to cut 8 percent of the State Department foreign and civil service workforce by the end of next year, so onboarding new diplomats didn't make much sense.

Apparently unsatisfied, Meeks and Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-Tex.) wrote to Tillerson on Thursday to ask him to issue waivers that would make exceptions for the Rangel and Pickering fellows. It was Congress that authorized these programs and Congress intended to see them succeed, they said.

"There is substantial bipartisan and bicameral support for these fellowships and the talented young people who earn them," the letter stated. Offering the fellows temporary consular positions "does not meet Congressional intent."

State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert defended the treatment of the fellows in her Thursday briefing, saying that the consular positions, although temporary and non-tenured, represent the best State can do.

"There's a hiring freeze. But we are keeping our commitment to these fellows," she said. "Look, it's not an ideal situation."

Coons, in an interview, said that the State Department's explanation doesn't hold water because the situation that officials are decrying is of their own making. The State Department set arbitrary personnel reduction goals before its own internal organizational review is even complete.

But the larger concern, he said, is that State's treatment of the fellows is only the latest in a series of actions and decisions that are causing deep unhappiness and uncertainty across the department's workforce. He pointed to the fact that almost all senior State Department political positions remain unfilled and that Tillerson has supported draconian budget cuts for diplomacy and development.

"These signals and decisions are beginning to have a genuine negative effect on morale and on our operating capacity," said Coons. For America's diplomats, "there is real lack of certainty about the path forward, about their careers. I'm concerned we are going to lose the very best of our Foreign Service," he said.

There is certainly fat to be trimmed in the State Department's budget. But the correct tool is a scalpel, and Tillerson's method so far has been a hatchet job. His decisions might also ensure that the Foreign Service, to paraphrase former senator Bob Graham, remains largely "white, male and Yale" for years to come.

Read more from Josh Rogin's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Kessler: Zuckerberg's Opiate for the Masses

Andy Kessler

5-6 minutes

June 18, 2017 5:38 p.m. ET

At Harvard's commencement last month, dropout Mark Zuckerberg told eager graduates to create a new social contract for their generation: "We should have a society that measures progress not just by economic metrics like GDP, but by how many of us have a role we find meaningful." He then said to applause: "We should explore ideas like universal basic income to give everyone a cushion to try new things." Who wouldn't like three grand a month?

Having the government provide citizens with a universal basic income is the most bankrupt idea since socialism, but others in Silicon Valley still have been proselytizing money for nothing. "There will be fewer and fewer jobs that a robot cannot do better," Tesla CEO Elon Musk said at the World Government Summit in Dubai earlier this year. "I think some kind of universal basic income is going to be necessary."

Robert Reich, President Clinton's labor secretary, summed up the wrongheaded thinking a few months ago: "We will get to a point, all our societies, where technology is displacing so many jobs, not just menial jobs but also professional jobs, that we're going to have to take seriously the notion of a universal basic income."

This is a false premise. All through history, automation has created more jobs than it destroyed. Washboards and wringers were replaced by increasingly inexpensive washing machines, while more women entered the workforce. Automated manufacturing and one-click buying has upended retail, yet throughout the U.S. millions of jobs go unfilled. With Amazon's proposed purchase of Whole Foods , the online giant is primed finally to bring efficiency to the last mile of grocery shopping—but don't count on all grocery jobs to disappear.

The economics, which they apparently stopped teaching at Harvard, are straightforward: Lowering the cost of goods and services through automation allows

capital—financial and human—to attack even harder problems. Wake me up when we run out of problems.

These kinds of predictions aren't new, and they've been wrong almost always. In 1930 John Maynard Keynes envisioned that his grandchildren would have a 15-hour workweek. Sam Altman, who runs the startup incubator Y Combinator, dabbles in similarly bold but meaningless statements. "We think everyone should have enough money to meet their basic needs—no matter what, especially if there are enough resources to make it possible," he wrote last year, while admitting he has no idea "how it should look or how to pay for it."

Where to begin? First, the cost of a universal basic income would make free college for everyone look like austerity. The cost of anything the government touches tends to increase well faster than inflation—education, health care, housing. Price signals get distorted, but since Uncle Sam is paying, no one seems to care. Anyway, why stop at $3,000 a month? Why not $4,000 a month or $40,000? Everyone deserves a MacArthur genius grant!

If last year's presidential election proved anything, it's that people want jobs, not handouts. The education system needs reform, but there are already two billion mobile classrooms built into smartphones world-wide. Paying people not to work means you'll never get them back into the workforce. Why would you want to work when you can bang on a drum all day?

The U.S. is already turning European—I really think so. Remember the Obama administration's "Life of Julia," which glorified the nanny state? Every year more Democrats push single-payer health care because competition is deemed too messy. The safety net now has a safety net. These are all on the riverbank of paying people not to work. Universal basic income would be the final drowning of capitalism.

Many Americans really do need help, and no one should be dying in the streets. But why create an entire class of freeloaders out of people who otherwise wouldn't have sought handouts?

The bigger question is why all these Silicon Valley bigwigs are intent on giving away other people's money. Perhaps it's a misplaced sense of shame for their riches. Worse, some believe they are chosen to carry society on their backs while the teeming masses can be paid to idle along. Well, as long as they download the latest apps and are given enough to pay for wireless internet and an iPhone upgrade every few years. Facebook and videogames are already huge mind sinks. Add Mr. Musk's Neuralink direct brain interface and no one will ever get off the couch.

Most millennials are hardworking and motivated, but have you noticed that the talk of universal basic income comes just as marijuana legalization is making more gains than ever? It's already been legalized for recreational use in eight states and for medicinal purposes in 29. Universal basic income, combined with legal weed, could ruin an entire generation. We'll never get them out of our collective basements. Thanks, Zuck.

Mr. Kessler writes on technology and markets for the Journal.