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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Bungled Attacks, Small Operations Signal New Phase in Terror (UNE)

Julian E. Barnes and Noemie Bisserbe

7-8 minutes

BRUSSELS—Two botched attacks in Europe in recent days signal that Islamist terror has entered a new phase, security officials say, one that is more disorganized and less sophisticated but risks spawning a growing number of assailants keen to kill with any means at hand.

When an Islamic State sympathizer tried to set off a bomb Tuesday night at a train station here, it failed to detonate with the intended force. Investigators suspect he used a faulty explosives recipe found online. The intended victims were able to flee, and the attacker was shot dead.

Last Monday, another would-be terrorist drove a sedan packed with guns, thousands of rounds of ammunition and two canisters of propane gas onto the Champs-Élysées in the heart of Paris. He rammed the lead vehicle of a police convoy, apparently intent on an attack. Instead, police said, he died when he was overcome by fumes after the collision, and no one else was killed or injured.

The lack of training and know-how of this new breed of attacker means many fail. But their lack of direct connection to terror networks makes them hard for intelligence services to track, and their often unsophisticated weapons—such as knives or cars—are easy to get. So authorities fear the attacks will grow.

"We may be entering an era not of lone wolf, but stray dog attacks," said one Western security official.

The man who fumbled the attack in Belgium, Oussama Zariouh, attempted to prepare the hydrogen-peroxide-based explosive TATP in his Brussels apartment, the official said. He managed to make a flammable substance, but one lacking serious explosive power, and the initial detonation only started a fire. The explosion then went off, but without the intended force.

"The guy was able to build a bomb, but the bomb failed," said Claude Moniquet, a former French intelligence official who leads the Brussels-based European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, a think tank. "Most of these attacks fail because these guys are not trained."

Such terrorism marks a shift from the kind of large-scale attacks

carried out by extremist cells that have hit the Continent in the past, including Islamic State militants' gun-and-bomb attacks in Paris in November 2015 and March 2016 attacks on Brussels airport and subway.

Authorities across Europe say they have seen an uptick in terror activity—often of the small-scale, less–organized kind—since a May 2016 call by Islamic State for its supporters to kill non-Muslims in the West.

The changing nature of the attacks also reflects improved security in Europe, where the European Union and national governments have stepped up surveillance, tightened borders and deployed more police and soldiers. Military campaigns against Islamic State in the Mideast have also made it more difficult for terror leaders to organize and carry out attacks.

But officials warn it would be reckless to underestimate the continuing threat of extremist groups even if they may be conducting operations that are more frequently smaller-scale. "It is too easy to say they are too degraded, they are not capable anymore," said a European official. "That would be a mistake."

In May, a suicide bomber killed 22 people in Manchester, England, with a powerful and relatively sophisticated device in an attack claimed by Islamic State. British authorities are investigating whether the assailant met with Islamic State operatives in Libya ahead of the attack.

Authorities in Germany last year said they arrested two groups of people on terrorism-related charges who were suspected of traveling from Syria with the purpose of carrying out a large attack.

In the U.S., a Canadian man, Amor Ftouhi, was charged in an assault on a police officer Wednesday at the Flint, Mich., airport. Authorities said Mr. Ftouhi, who is of Tunisian descent, yelled "God is great" in Arabic before he stabbed the officer in the neck.

"We continue to have no indication to suggest the attack was part of a wider plot," said David Gelios, FBI special agent in charge.

A U.K. government official said in May that security services had disrupted 18 separate plots in Britain since June 2013, five of them since a Muslim convert plowed his car into pedestrians and then fatally stabbed a police officer in March outside the country's Parliament building.

In April, police arrested a man carrying knives near 10 Downing Street, the official residence of the country's prime minister.

The number of attempted attacks also has jumped in France over the past two years, French law-enforcement officials said. One of the officials attributed many of the attacks to men who didn't belong to organized networks and had become radicalized through exposure to materials on the internet.

Adam Djazari, the man who crashed his car into the police van last Monday in Paris, was described by authorities as an Islamic State sympathizer. He had been summoned by police to a meeting the afternoon of the attack, prompting him to act in haste, officials said.

Since a November 2015 jihadist assault in Paris that killed 130 people, there have been roughly a dozen terror attacks in France. More than half of those targeted police or military patrols; three police officers were killed.

Only the attacker died in Germany's first suicide bombing last July in the Bavarian town of Ansbach. A 2016 machete attack claimed by Islamic State in Charleroi, Belgium, injured but didn't kill a police officer and left the assailant dead. In March, a terrorist at Orly airport in Paris was killed by soldiers on security detail after he threw a bag containing a can of gasoline and tried to take a weapon from a soldier.

In June, three men drove a truck onto London Bridge, then went on a rampage with knives, killing eight people before they were shot dead by police. The attack was claimed by Islamic State. The Western security official, speaking of the Brussels train station bomber, said: "Even though he didn't create the violence he wanted to, it still had a huge disruption."

A number of the recent smaller scale attacks have occurred in high-profile areas, such as the Champs-Élysées or London Bridge. They spread fear and upheaval.

Corrections & Amplifications Claude Moniquet is a former French intelligence official. An earlier version of this article incorrectly spelled his surname as Monique. (June 26, 2017)

—Bertrand Benoit in Berlin, Valentina Pop in Brussels and Jenny Gross in London contributed to this article

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The Washington Post

Vietnamese dissident recounts forced deportation to France (online)

By Philippe Sotto | AP

4-5 minutes

By Philippe Sotto | AP June 25 at 8:53 PM

PARIS — A Vietnamese dissident who says he was arrested at his home in southern Ho Chi Minh City and forcibly exiled to France said he is determined to continue his activity as a pro-democracy blogger.

Pham Minh Hoang, a 61-year-old math lecturer, recounted his arrest and deportation in a phone interview Sunday with The Associated Press a few hours after his arrival in France. He said three police officers burst into his house on Friday and grabbed his arms when he refused to follow them while wearing only shorts, an undershirt and slippers.

"Once outside, I was horrified to see that there were not three, but a hundred policemen in uniform and in plainclothes around my house and in the neighboring streets," said Hoang, who was a dual French-Vietnamese national before he was stripped of his Vietnamese citizenship last month.

After being detained in front of his wife, Hoang said he was driven to a detention center two hours away, where he spent 24 hours and was visited by the Consul General of France. He said Vietnamese authorities forced him on a plane to Paris on Saturday night.

Hoang's deportation came two weeks after he learned a presidential decree had revoked his Vietnamese citizenship. Human Rights Watch denounced Hoang's expulsion in a statement as a "blatantly illegal, rights violating act" that effectively forces the activist into "indefinite exile."

Vietnam's Foreign Ministry did not respond to a request for comment Sunday. The French foreign ministry confirmed that its Consul General assisted Hoang in Ho Chi Minh City. As a French citizen, he can settle in the country and enjoy full freedom of speech, the ministry said.

The human rights activist and blogger was sentenced to three years in prison in 2011 for attempted subversion by posting articles on his blog criticizing the Communist government and for being a member of the California-based Vietnam Reform Party, or Viet Tan. The government considers Viet Tan a terrorist organization.

Hoang eventually served 17 months in prison and three years of house arrest.

International human rights groups and some Western governments have criticized Vietnam for jailing people for peacefully expressing their views, but Hanoi says only law breakers are put behind bars.

"The vaguely worded decision was a thinly veiled move to silence Pham Minh Hoang for his peaceful advocacy," Viet Tan said in a statement about the stripping of Vietnamese citizenship from Hoang.

Before being deported from his country, Hoang said he was questioned at length by two officials whom he thinks were members of the political police. When he refused to consent to his deportation, he said officials reminded him that his wife and daughter were still living in Vietnam. Two policemen slept in the room where he was held, he said.

France is not a country unknown to Hoang. He studied and lived here for 27 years between 1973 and 2000, working as a computer and civil engineer. It is where he started to write articles critical of his country's regime. He said he returned to Vietnam to teach and help the Vietnamese youth with the new technologies.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Today, he doesn't know who will take care of the disabled brother who lived with him in Ho Chi Minh City. He hopes he'll be able to stay in regular contact with his wife and his 13-year-old daughter.

"I will continue to help my daughter do her homework, using internet video or other secure means," he said.

Hoang assumes he will have to remain in France for a long time and said he is determined to continue his political activism — "my raison d'être" — as an exile.

"I still have a little hope, one day, to come back to live and die in Vietnam," he said.

The New York Times

France's Areva NP Eyes Higher Sales, Profits in Next Five Years-Report (online)

Reuters

1-2 minutes

PARIS — Areva NP, the nuclear reactor business company in which EDF is in the process of buying a majority stake, is eyeing a sharp rise in sales and profits over the next five years, Les Echos newspaper reported.

Les Echos cited a document on Areva NP's strategic plans from now until 2021, which said the company was eyeing sales to rise by 50 percent from now to reach 4.8 billion euros (£4 billion) by 2021.

It added that Areva NP was also targetting earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) of 600 million euros by 2021, up from 95 million euros last year.

French state-owned power group EDF is currently in the process of buying a majority stake in Areva NP, following a restructuring of French nuclear group Areva.

Officials at Areva NP could not be immediately reached for comment.

(Reporting by Sudip Kar-Gupta and Pascale Denis; Editing by Vyas Mohan)

The New York Times

France's EDF Says Still Reviewing Hinkley Point Costs (online)

Reuters

2 minutes

PARIS — French state-owned power company EDF said on Monday that it was still reviewing the costs and schedule of its planned Hinkley Point C power station in Britain, responding to a media report that said the project faced cost overruns.

"As indicated in the 2016 annual financial report, a full review of the costs and schedule of the Hinkley Point C project is in progress following the financial investment decision and in accordance with the project company's rules of governance," EDF said in a statement.

"EDF will disclose the results of this review as soon as it is completed," it said.

Le Monde newspaper reported over the weekend that Hinkley Point C would have a budget overrun of between 1-3 billion euros (£0.87-£2.63 billion) as its construction could be delayed by two years.

Hinkley Point C would be Britain's first new nuclear plant in decades, but it has been plagued by delays and criticised for its guaranteed price for electricity, which is higher than current market prices.

(Reporting by Sudip Kar-Gupta; editing by Jason Neely)

The New York Times

Yoplait Learns to Manufacture Authenticity to Go With Its Yogurt (online)

Charles Duhigg

9-12 minutes

Alex Dos Diaz

A few years ago, as the Yogurt Wars were heating up and Greek invaders were storming the grocery aisles, executives at Yoplait, one of the nation's largest yogurt companies, began arguing among themselves.

Thick, sour Greek yogurts with names like Chobani, Fage and Oikos were surging in popularity. Sales of runny, sugary Yoplait were oozing off a cliff. So Yoplait executives ran to their test kitchens and developed a Greek yogurt of their own. All they needed was the perfect, authentic-sounding name.

One group argued for the Greek word for health and some oddly ecstatic punctuation: Ygeía! Another camp said that sounded like someone vomiting, and pushed instead for made-up names that combined Yoplait with Hellenic suffixes, such as Yoganos.

For months, several current and former employees told me, executives debated the options. One manager began ostentatiously leafing through a Greek dictionary during meetings; a rival, not to be outdone, started auditing Greek language classes.

Eventually a choice was needed. Yoplait, based in Minneapolis, is part of General Mills, the huge international food conglomerate, which prides itself on cleareyed, data-driven decision-making. Cold, hard numbers — not passion — have made Cheerios, Green Giant and Betty Crocker into colossal brands. "We're disciplined," David Clark, a 26-year company veteran, told me. "That's why we succeed."

So in the end, executives turned to their spreadsheets. They discovered that neither Ygeía! nor Yoganos — nor any of the other ersatz names — tested well. The data pointed in a more traditional direction. So to great fanfare, in 2010, they released their finely tuned attempt to reclaim the yogurt crown.

They called it Yoplait Greek.

It tanked almost immediately. And so has almost every other Greek yogurt product that Yoplait has put on shelves. The company's overall yogurt sales have declined by over $100 million since 2010. As Chobani and others have earned billions, General Mills's share of the yogurt market has shrunk by a third.

So now, Yoplait is opening a new front in the cultured-milk battles. Next month, when you walk down the dairy aisle of your grocery store, you'll see the company's latest salvo, a new formula that executives say is innovative, exciting and — *c'est possible?* — passionate. They're calling it Oui by Yoplait, in homage to the company's French roots.

Whether it will succeed remains to be seen. Yoplait has stumbled before. But if, as you are shopping, you happen to pick up a small glass pot of Oui and are momentarily transported to the French countryside, you'll know that the company has finally figured out how to look beyond the data and embrace the narrative.

Yoplait may have figured out how to fake authenticity as craftily as everyone else.

In that lesson, there's a deeper business experiment — one you contribute to every time you pick up a product because you think someone once told you that it was healthier, or tastier, or better for the environment, or something like that. All companies manufacture authenticity to some degree. That's called marketing. But, increasingly, creating a sense of genuineness is essential to success.

"For consumers today, food isn't just about sustenance, it's about an experience," said Darren Seifer, a food analyst at the NPD Group, a market research company. "People want a story behind what they buy. That's why craft beers and small organics are doing so well. They're selling authenticity. The big companies want that."

Consider, for instance, the unlikely tale of Chobani, the company that essentially created the Greek yogurt industry in the United States. In 1996, as Chobani's well-oiled promotional machine will tell you, a Turkish immigrant named Hamdi Ulukaya arrived in the United States with $3,000 in his pocket. Sixteen years later, he was selling $1 billion worth of Greek yogurt by employing refugees from local resettlement centers and extolling the artisanal virtues of Chobani for the body, environment and soul.

This story of authenticity has been essential to Chobani's success and central to positioning Greek yogurt as an alternative to the sugary concoctions that come from companies like Yoplait. Chobani's story has been told thousands of times, everywhere from The New Yorker magazine to "60 Minutes" — free advertising worth more than $3 million, according to the data firm MediaQuant.

Oui by Yoplait

As Chobani grew, Big Yogurt got worried. So Yoplait commissioned a series of focus groups that initially

soothed executives' anxieties: Taste tests revealed that most people disliked Greek yogurt. It was too sour and unfamiliar, the data said. The products' names were too hard to remember. There was little need, Yoplait executives told one another, for concern.

But as the Greek phenomena gained steam — today, it accounts for more than a third of all yogurt sales in the United States — Yoplait's studies found an interesting hiccup: Even though people said they disliked Greek yogurt, they kept on trying it, again and again, until they *learned* to like it. Why? Because, consumers told Yoplait's researchers, they liked the Chobani story.

Consumers heard that Greek yogurt made it easier to lose weight. (There are 15 grams of sugar in a strawberry Chobani cup; Yoplait's strawberry has 18.) People said they had heard Chobani was more natural. (Though Chobani does not contain preservatives, other ingredients are similar to those of competitors.)

But the most powerful story, according to current and former Yoplait executives who described their research, was that consumers simply thought Chobani was cool. It was easier to believe it was authentic and healthy because it had an exotic name, a founder who embodied rags-to-riches success and lots of buzz.

So Yoplait began collecting data on how to become cool itself. The lust for numbers, however, doomed even its best efforts. There were dozens of proposed innovations — hipper labels for Yoplait Greek, yogurts that tasted like exotic beers or jalapeño peppers, recipes that made tongues tingle or supposedly whitened teeth — but whenever these concepts were tested, there was never enough data to push them forward.

The problem for Yoplait was that authenticity — like innovation — almost never tests well. This is a common phenomenon. "Data regresses to the mean," said James Gilmore, a professor at the University of Virginia and an author of "Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want." "Something that's really original, really authentic, it's probably not going to score that well because people have a knee-jerk reaction against new things."

Eventually, however, after six long years of releasing Yoplait Greek products that tests indicated should be big successes but almost never were, General Mills finally admitted there was one option left: Executives needed to study the science of manufacturing genuineness.

So they began passing among themselves studies showing that people get a neurological rush when they buy something they believe is authentic, like clothing made by hand instead of a machine. But to make authenticity seem genuine, the research indicated, products needed some kind of story.

Chobani's narrative, drawing on the founder's personal story and a simple, timeworn recipe, fit perfectly into the American dream. What's more, the product's name was hard to pronounce, making it a little rough around the edges, which seemed even more authentic.

Yoplait began scouring its own history and ultimately found a tale that seemed to resonate: For centuries (or so the story goes), French farmers have made yogurt by putting milk, fruit and cultures into glass jars and then setting them aside. So Yoplait tweaked its recipe and began buying glass jars.

"Instead of culturing the ingredients in large batches and then filling individual cups," the company's news release reads, "Oui by Yoplait is made by pouring ingredients into each individual pot, and allowing each glass pot to culture for eight hours, resulting in a uniquely thick, delicious yogurt."

Some may question how much these distinctions matter. "But the simplicity of this idea, that this is a French method, coming from a French brand, with a French name, that's authenticity," Mr. Clark, who is now the president of United States yogurt at General Mills, told me.

What's more, when data started coming back from focus groups, Yoplait's executives became even more enthusiastic. Some customers said they hated the name Oui. Others didn't know how to pronounce it. (A small group said Oui sounded like a pornographic magazine. Which is accurate. It ceased publication in 2007.) Yoplait executives were thrilled. These were the imperfections they were looking for! Finally, they had engineered their way to authenticity.

So, soon you'll be able to buy Oui. (The yogurt, that is.) It has a creamy texture and sweet flavor. And if this product is a success — if years from now someone tells the heartwarming story of how the Greek hordes were defeated by simple French pots — then we'll know that Yoplait's number crunchers finally figured out the formula for authenticity, and have reclaimed their crown. *Le roi des données est mort. Vive le roi*.

Bloomberg

Editorial : NATO Can Fight Terrorism and Help Refugees

by The Editors More stories by The Editors

4-5 minutes

NATO can help.

Photographer: Aris Messinis/AFP/Getty Images

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has now formally enlisted in the fight against Islamic State. It can begin by helping to stem the flow of refugees trying to reach Europe from North Africa.

This would be more than a humanitarian exercise; it would be a counterterrorism operation. Wherever refugees gather in hopelessness, violent extremists have a fertile recruiting ground. And the number of refugees is staggering.

Nearly 200,000 people fleeing violence and poverty tried to cross of the Mediterranean last year, and at least 5,000 died in the attempt. The U.N. estimates that there are more than half a million refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people in Libya alone. Neither the fractured Libyan government nor the European Union can cope with the numbers, leaving hundreds of thousands of people in makeshift refugee camps -- some of which are controlled by human traffickers and resemble concentration camps, according to a German government report.

Those who make it across the Mediterranean don't fare much better. Most end up in overcrowded camps in Italy where social services are lacking and applications for asylum languish. Those intercepted in Libyan waters are sent back. Sometimes the traffickers dump their human cargo in the sea to avoid capture.

So what can NATO do? With more than 700 ships at its disposal, a lot.

For starters, it can build on Italian-led Operation Sophia, which has saved thousands of lives but is woefully inadequate to the task. NATO's sophisticated surveillance capabilities, such as long-range patrol airplanes and satellite imagery, can monitor ports in Africa and the Middle East and aid in search-and-rescue efforts. NATO can also help the EU's efforts to professionalize the Libyan coast guard.

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The alliance can foster far more naval cooperation and intelligence sharing among its members, and with intergovernmental entities like Interpol. This should also involve another underutilized asset: private shipping companies, which are obligated to respond to other vessels in distress. NATO could also encourage member states build more camps on Mediterranean islands and could aid with construction, perimeter security, health care and the like.

NATO patrols in the Mediterranean could also provide a more direct benefit in the fight against terrorists: stemming the flow of arms from the Middle East to Islamist terrorists in North Africa. Islamic State already has a foothold in Libya and is trying to expand into Tunisia.

Two years ago, the civil war in Syria caused the exodus of millions, which set off a political crisis from Greece to the U.K. and created a lasting rift between Turkey and its NATO allies. That time, the alliance watched from the sidelines. Now, as fighting intensifies and conditions deteriorate in Syria, NATO can't afford to make the same mistake.

The Washington Post

One year after the Brexit vote, Britain's relationship with the E.U. is unlikely to change much. Here's why. (online)

By Andrew Moravcsik

8-11 minutes

It has been a year since the Brexit referendum. Negotiations between Britain and Europe have now begun and will continue for most of the next decade. As a matter of formal international law, we do not know whether Britain will remain in the European Union, become an associate member, achieve a "partially attached" status akin to that of Norway or Switzerland, or negotiate a unique arrangement.

Yet one thing has become clear: A broad renunciation of substantive policy coordination with the European Union — the "hard Brexit" option — is unlikely. Instead, when it is all over, surprisingly few real policies are likely to change — and those that do will probably favor Europe, not Britain.

These predictions stem from an analysis of the three most important factors that political scientists believe structure international economic and political affairs: interdependence, influence and institutions.

Interdependence: Why Britain does not really want to eliminate E.U. policies

British Euroskeptics often decry E.U. policies as unnecessary and damaging regulations crafted by arbitrary bureaucrats and unelected judges. But Brexit is unlikely to change the substance of very many E.U. rules — because the British government does not really want it to.

[Pundits condemn Britain's tough line on Brexit. They're wrong.]

In recent decades, Europe has moved decisively in directions Britain favors. The European Union is now built around a single market with shared regulations. Participation in other policies is essentially optional; that's true for the Euro, collective defense, the Schengen zone for free movement, social policy, homeland security, external immigration, and so on. Britain long opted out of most E.U. policies it dislikes. But on those issues where Britain participates fully in the European Union, it is deeply connected to Europe.

Prime Minister Theresa May's negotiating stance toward Brussels actually treats most of Britain's current commitment to policy coordination with Europe as essential or uncontroversial. London does not even propose, much less expect, to tamper with free trade in manufactured goods and services under common regulations, which is the European Union's most important policy, or with common research policies or the rights of all Europeans currently living abroad.

Britain needs the European Union's liberal rules because it benefits from them: It wants continental countries to guarantee access for its exporters, service providers and educated individuals — all areas where the British are relatively competitive. Nor does London propose to dilute anti-crime and homeland security policies or defense cooperation, which help keep Britain safe.

Influence: Why Britain lacks the bargaining power to get a better deal

The second reason Brexit is unlikely to involve major policy changes is that Britain is weak. British leaders are tempted, as governments usually are in international negotiations, to "cherry-pick" policies, keeping those they like but rejecting a few they don't. London has proposed to retake control of fisheries, agriculture, foreign trade and especially immigration policies, where it feels disadvantaged, and it has voiced ambivalence about the process by which rules are enforced. The Europeans, naturally, will not want to let Britain treat such policies as optional items on a menu.

On these disputed issues, Britain's ability to exempt itself from existing E.U. policies depends on its power. The government promises toughness. May asserts that "no deal is better than a bad deal." David Davis, her secretary of state for exiting the European Union, adds, "If our country can deal with World War II, it can deal with this."

Yet experienced diplomats and political scientists distrust such Churchillian rhetoric. They know that what a government can get in an international negotiation depends on that country's relative bargaining power.

[The real reason the U.K. voted for Brexit? Jobs lost to Chinese competition.]

Decades ago, political scientists Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye identified "asymmetrical interdependence" as the basic source of influence in international economic negotiations. When a buyer and seller bargain over the price of a house or a car, the person who needs the deal more is at a structural disadvantage. In world politics, power similarly stems from interdependence: The more dependent a country is on external flows of trade and investment, the more concessions it will make to secure a liberalizing agreement. That is why small countries, for which trade constitutes a critical lifeline, usually have less clout.

Britain is unlikely to extract many concessions from a far larger Europe on which it is asymmetrically dependent. Almost 50 percent of British exports go to Europe: They total 13 percent of British GDP, while European exports to Britain total only 4 percent of European GDP. If no agreement is reached, Britain has at least four times more to lose.

Britain will have to prioritize what it cares most about, such as future migration; it is likely to expend its limited bargaining power to achieve those goals. Yet, generally, if anyone is to make concessions to preserve the basic relationship, it is more likely to be Britain than Brussels. And that means retaining current policies.

To enhance British bargaining power, some Tories suggest rapidly signing trade agreements with non-European countries. Yet such trade agreements generally take a decade or more to negotiate and implement, and Britain is so small that it is unlikely to wield more influence on the United States or China than on the European Union.

Institutions: Why European political institutions block the spread of Euroskeptic populism

British Euroskeptics still hoping for a "hard Brexit" might look beyond these international factors and hope that domestic politics will lead to their preferred outcome. Euroskepticism could spread, leading the European Union to collapse. Over the past year, many commentators have jumped on the bandwagon, portraying the Netherlands, France and other European countries as teetering on the brink of government by radical-right Euroskeptic populists who would demand "Frexit," "Grexit" and similar referendums.

Yet a final reason a hard Brexit is unlikely is that surprisingly few Europeans are skeptical about the European Union; almost all who are lack real domestic power.

[The "wave" of right-wing populist sentiment is a myth]

Monkey Cage newsletter

Commentary on political science and political issues.

European political institutions create a bulwark against radicalism. Electoral systems underrepresent small splinter parties. Two-round elections prevent minorities from imposing their views. Coalition government excludes or moderates extremist parties. Binding referendums are widely illegal or narrowly constrained by the need for parliamentary approval.

Few of the dire press predictions about populism have come to pass or have any realistic chance of doing so. In France, National Front (FN) candidate Marine Le Pen's first-round presidential run became global news, although she never had a real chance to prevail in the decisive second round. Now Emmanuel Macron's pro-European party has swept legislative elections, leaving only eight out of 577 seats for the FN. Recent Austrian elections had a similar result. In the Netherlands, even though Gerd Wilders's anti-immigrant and moderately Euroskeptic party came in second in recent parliamentary elections with 13 percent, it has been shunned as a coalition partner.

Even in the rare circumstances when Euroskeptics win, the fundamentals of E.U. policy remain largely unchanged. In a nonbinding referendum a year ago, Dutch voters rejected the European Union's treaty of association with Ukraine — yet last month, without any public controversy, the Dutch parliament ratified the treaty anyway. In Hungary, Euroskeptic Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's right-wing party controls the government. Yet while Orbán has criticized Brussels's immigration policy, he has never proposed exiting the European Union — a suicidal prospect for a small country such as Hungary.

Britain is in a difficult negotiating position: Its economy and security are too deeply connected with Europe, its international bargaining power too limited, and its populists too politically constrained to sustain a hard Brexit. In theory, Britain could ultimately carry out its threat to leave the European Union, but in practice, more will remain the same than will change.

Andrew Moravcsik is professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton University and director of Princeton's European Union Program.

The Washington Post

Europe has been working to expose Russian meddling for years (UNE)

https://www.facebook.com/michael.birnbaum1

12-16 minutes

RIGA, Latvia — As the United States grapples with the implications of Kremlin interference in American politics, European countries are deploying a variety of bold tactics and tools to expose Russian attempts to sway voters and weaken European unity.

Across the continent, counterintelligence officials, legislators, researchers and journalists have devoted years — in some cases, decades — to the development of ways to counter Russian disinformation, hacking and trolling. And they are putting them to use as never before.

Four dozen officials and researchers interviewed recently sounded uniformly more confident about the results of their efforts to counter Russian influence than officials grappling with it in the United States, which one European cyber-official described as "like watching 'House of Cards.'"

"The response here has been very practical," observed a senior U.S. intelligence official stationed in Europe. "Everybody's looking at it."

In the recent French elections, the Kremlin-friendly presidential candidate lost to newcomer Emmanuel Macron, who was subjected to Russian hacking and false allegations in Russian-sponsored news outlets during the campaign. In Germany, all political parties have agreed not to employ automated bots in their social media campaigns because such hard-to-detect cybertools are frequently used by Russia to circulate bogus news accounts.

Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats said Russia is employing similar tactics attempting to influence elections in Europe to those it used to influence the 2016 U.S. election, on May 23 at the Capitol. Coats: Russia is interfering in French, German and British elections (Senate Armed Services Committee)

(Senate Armed Services Committee)

The best antidote to Russian influence, European experts say, is to make it visible.

"We have to prepare the public," said Patrick Sensburg, a member of the German Parliament and an intelligence expert.

President Trump's embrace of the "fake news" label for traditional mainstream news outlets and his own record of unabashed distortions have, moreover, energized Western Europe against the threat of disinformation, said Claire Wardle, strategy and research director at Europe's largest social media accountability network, First Draft News. "Now you're seeing Western Europe wake up.''

Methods vary. Sweden has launched a nationwide school program to teach students to identify Russian propaganda. The Defense Ministry has created new units to seek out and counter Russian attempts to undermine Swedish society.

In Lithuania, 100 citizen cyber-sleuths dubbed "elves" link up digitally to identify and beat back the people employed on social media to spread Russian disinformation. They call the daily skirmishes "Elves vs. Trolls."

In Brussels, the European Union's East Stratcom Task Force has 14 staffers and hundreds of volunteer academics, researchers and journalists who have researched and published 2,000 examples of false or twisted stories in 18 languages in a weekly digest that began two years ago.

"What we try to do centrally in Brussels is put all of those pieces of the jigsaw together," Giles Portman, head of the task force, said at a conference last year.

And beyond exposing Russian efforts, European countries are also moving to suppress them.

France and Britain have successfully pressured Facebook to disable tens of thousands of automated fake accounts used to sway voters close to election time, and it has doubled to 6,000 the number of monitors empowered to remove defamatory and hate-filled posts.

The German cabinet recently endorsed legislation — now before Parliament — to impose fines of up to $53 million on social-media companies that fail to remove posts deemed to be "hate speech." Some especially notorious recent examples concerning migrants have been traced to Russian origins.

And sometimes the effort goes face-to-face. Here in Riga, Vladimir Dorofeev, a 42-year-old reporter for the Kremlin's Sputnik news site, widely regarded as a conduit for propaganda as well as news, found out personally how Latvian authorities deal with the challenge.

In Dorofeev's first week on the job, the Latvian Security Police questioned him about Sputnik's local staff size, its editor and its payment procedures.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" he said they asked him. "Do you understand they can use you?"

His answers went into the files, to become part of a standing counterintelligence investigation, the kind Latvia has undertaken to ferret out clandestine Russia meddling since it broke free of the Soviet Union in 1991.

"Maybe this is new to the Western world, but not for us," said Normunds Mezviets, the security service chief here. "For 20 years, we've been calling attention to this. There is no reason to panic."

'Informational conflict'

Russia has not hidden its liking for information warfare. The chief of the general staff, Valery Gerasimov, wrote in 2013 that "informational conflict" is a key part of war. Actual military strength is only the final tool of a much subtler war-fighting strategy, he said. This year, the Defense Ministry announced the creation of a new cyberwarrior unit.

No longer able to compete in conventional military terms — the U.S. defense budget is about eight times larger than Russia's — Moscow has emphasized this less expensive but difficult-to-thwart tactic. "Weaponizing information" involves the dissemination of factual distortions and outright lies to achieve political ends. It builds on decades of experience wielding propaganda, going back to the Soviet era. In that sense, Europe has had more years of exposure than the United States.

"There has always been Russian propaganda, false information, attempts to smear people — that's nothing new," said Carl Bildt, a former prime minister of Sweden who was in Tallinn, Estonia, recently for a cybersecurity conference.

What is undeniably new, though, is the digital sophistication that Moscow can now employ: hacking and releasing documents from the Democratic National Committee and the campaign of France's Macron, for example, or infiltrating the network of the German Parliament. Russian officials have denied hacking France and Germany and have tended to shrug off the wider allegations, with President Vladimir Putin calling them "nonsense."

Putin's apparent goal, intelligence officials and Russian experts say, is to weaken Western unity, restore Russia's influence in the world and, not least, shore up support at home.

Especially since Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, the Kremlin has portrayed the West as Russia's principal antagonist — supporting popular revolutions in Libya, Ukraine and Syria; backing pro-democracy civil society groups, including independent media; and, more recently, deploying NATO troops in four countries that border Russia.

Russians began experimenting with information warfare 10 years ago in Estonia, followed by attempts at disruption in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Finland, Bosnia and Macedonia. But the full power of the disinformation arsenal became apparent only in 2014, following the street protests that overthrew the corrupt, Moscow-friendly government of Ukraine.

As Russian troops, in uniforms without insignia, seized Crimea, Russian media portrayed the fighters loyal to the new government in Kiev as Western-backed fascists and Nazis intent on massacring the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine. That version of events didn't get much traction in the West, but it was effective in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, where Russian-backed separatists were quick to launch insurgencies. Washington, the Russian press said, was preparing for World War III against Russia.

The disinformation was effective at home in Russia, too.

U.S. and European intelligence agencies, research groups and journalists describe the Russian disinformation campaign in Europe as an online network of networks that together amplify particular, distorted, anti-Western themes and news items by using hidden ownership, trolls and automated bots.

U.S. intelligence agencies also say Russia covertly funds political parties, think tanks and social organizations in Europe, but they have offered little evidence for these allegations.

In Eastern Europe, hours of combative political talk shows on Russia's domestic channels, featuring Russian nationalists tearing down Western straw men to the roar of approving audiences, carry past borders by way of the Internet and airwaves to reach Russian-speaking populations. In many of Russia's immediate neighbors, there are no Russian-language alternatives to the channels and websites backed by Moscow.

In Scandinavia, Russian efforts are more devoted to the harassment of mainstream journalists and online trolling on social media and news websites.

In Western Europe, local-language versions of the Russian outfits RT and Sputnik use automated bots and Twitter and

Facebook accounts to spread their spin to far-right and far-left news websites, from which it sometimes seeps into the mainstream media.

"These are pretty well-designed messages for local audiences," said Jakub Janda, the deputy director of the Prague-based European Values think tank. "They're targeting local decision-makers and the public, and they're trying to shift their opinions."

Pushing back

Monitoring these so-called news websites has become a core mission for some security services. In Sweden, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, which usually prepares for chemical spills, bomb threats and natural disasters, is also monitoring websites for exaggerated news stories about refugees and crime, subjects "the Swedish population is afraid of right now," said Mikael Tofvesson, who heads the agency.

"Those are our vulnerabilities," he said.

"Most of the malicious activities are aimed at eroding trust within our societies between different groups, political movements, the elites and the people," said Jonatan Vseviov, permanent secretary of Estonia's Ministry of Defense.

Russia's efforts in Estonia have not had much success to date, largely because many in society are aware of such propaganda, the government is vigilant and the nation's ethnic Russians have little desire to join with the Kremlin because they live better in Estonia than they would across the border, analysts say.

The counterassault in Europe involves researchers in Britain, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, Ukraine and Latvia. In Slovakia, some 1,400 advertisers have agreed to boycott a list of false, conspiratorial websites compiled by one nonprofit research organization.

Political leaders also are appealing to the public and mainstream media to ignore predictable releases of embarrassing documents stolen by Russian hackers in an effort to tip elections in favor of pro-Russian candidates. In France, the media complied with a government ban on reporting documents stolen from Macron's campaign and published less than 48 hours before voting.

Consortiums such as StopFake.org, about Ukraine, and Correctiv.org in Germany have sped up fact-checking with new digital tools and with cross-border journalistic partnerships.

Traditional news organizations have increased fact-checking, too, with projects such as Le Monde's Decodex in France and BBC's RealityCheck. And they have developed tools readers can use to identify what they call "fake news" outlets.

A good-spirited competition has broken out between government, researchers and investigative journalists to be the first to reveal the latest Russian attempt to pollute the legitimate news ecosystem, said Inga Springe, director of the Baltic center for investigative journalism, Re:Baltica.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

In April, her website published an article under the headline "Three Baltic Russian-language news sites known collectively as Baltnews are secretly linked to the Kremlin's global propaganda network." Using a clue originally unearthed by the Estonian security service, Re:Baltica painstakingly traced the websites' ownership from Latvia to the Netherlands and then to Rossiya Segodnya, a news agency owned and operated by the Russian government.

"It was our biggest scoop," said Springe, who said she was surprised "the Kremlin didn't try to hide the network behind more offshore companies."

"It also proved our suspicions," she said, that the Kremlin controls considerably more media networks outside Russia than it chooses to admit.

Birnbaum reported from Tallinn, Estonia. Ellen Nakashima in Tallinn contributed to this report.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump—and Merkel's Response to Him—Is Issue in German Election

Anton Troianovski

6-7 minutes

June 25, 2017 11:10 a.m. ET

DORTMUND, Germany—Germany's main center-left political party on Sunday attacked Chancellor Angela Merkel for what its leaders characterized as a failure to stand up to President Donald Trump, signaling that the U.S. relationship will be a prominent campaign issue ahead of the national election here in September.

The Social Democrats pounced on Ms. Merkel's promise that Germany will move toward spending 2% of its economic output on defense—a target agreed to in 2014 by American allies in Europe and emphasized by Mr. Trump in recent months.

Mr. Trump's demand would mean "a Germany—surrounded by friends—that has armed itself to the teeth in the middle of Europe," Social Democratic chancellor candidate Martin Schulz told an arena in Germany's industrial heartland, at the party's convention. "I ask you: Do we want this? We know from our history: More security does not come with more weapons."

Mr. Schulz amplified his months of criticism of the 2% spending goal even though the Social Democrats have served as the junior partner in Ms. Merkel's governing coalition since 2013. But the allusions to Mr. Trump at Sunday's convention showed how the new U.S. president—whose approval rating among Germans is 5%, according to a recent poll—is coloring European politics.

"We must be self-confident in countering President Trump," former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder said, recalling his own opposition to President George W. Bush and the Iraq war. "This seems to be somewhat lacking now."

Ms. Merkel, who is running for a fourth four-year term, represents the center-right Christian Democrats and holds a roughly 15-point lead in the polls over Mr. Schulz. She has also sought to distance herself from Mr. Trump, but has used softer language. She told a beer-tent audience in Bavaria last month that the times in which Europe could completely rely on others were "partly past."

"One could also have said: We don't know whether or not we can still rely on the United States," Mr. Schulz said after needling Ms. Merkel for being too vague. "But we know very well that we can't rely on an aimlessly wandering President Donald Trump."

Ms. Merkel last year pushed through parliament an 8% increase in German military spending to €37 billion, a sum representing 1.2% of gross domestic product. Mr. Schulz said Germany, Europe's biggest economy, did need billions of euros more in military spending—but not a level that would give it "the biggest army of our continent."

Ralf Stegner, a deputy chairman of the party, said opposition to Mr. Trump and the 2% spending goal would become "a central issue in the campaign."

"Trump, in a negative sense, will play a big role in how the SPD positions itself," Mr. Stenger said in an interview, using his party's acronym. "This is a question that moves the German public."

Beyond the crowd-pleasing Trump criticism, however, delegates acknowledged that Ms. Merkel would be hard to unseat. Her actions on the world stage, some said, appear to have been enough to persuade voters she would defend German and European interests against challenges from Mr. Trump. Several expressed particular frustration with her frequent appearances alongside the popular new French President Emmanuel Macron, who was praised by Mr. Schulz and other convention speakers.

The Social Democrats' poll numbers shot up to a near-tie earlier this year with the Christian Democrats when party elders tapped Mr. Schulz, a former president of the European Parliament, to lead the campaign to unseat Ms. Merkel. But that period of euphoria—which delegates here referred to as the "Schulz hype"—ended with a string of regional election losses this spring and the emergence of a seemingly re-energized Ms. Merkel.

Polls show that Ms. Merkel has nearly regained the popularity she enjoyed before the influx of refugees and migrants in Germany in 2015 cost her support. An Infratest Dimap poll earlier this month found she was Germany's most popular politician, with an approval rating of 64%.

"The chancellor has a natural advantage in her executive position, and she is playing it very skillfully," said Stephan Grüger, a Social Democratic regional lawmaker in the western state of Hesse. "She fills some of the voters with pride—they say, 'Our Angela!'"

The Social Democrats' role in governing Germany alongside Ms. Merkel since 2013 adds to their difficulty as the Sept. 24 election approaches: The Social Democrats have to find ways to criticize Ms. Merkel's record while defending their own moves in her government.

The party promised to lower taxes on low and midlevel earners and not to raise the retirement age. It also criticized Ms. Merkel for failing to

engage in policy debates—something Mr. Schulz referred to as "an attack on democracy."

Mr. Schulz faces a narrow path to the chancellery. According to current polls, even a coalition between all three left-of-center parties—the Social Democrats, the environmentalist Greens, and the radical Left—would only represent about 40% of the vote, well short of a parliamentary majority. Ms. Merkel's Christian Democrats, on the other hand, could forge a governing coalition with the Greens, with the business-friendly Free Democrats, or again with the SPD.

"We must acknowledge that Angela Merkel is very deft at politics," said Manfred Ruhland, a delegate from Bavaria.

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The New York Times

Editorial : Progress on Gay Rights in Serbia, With a Catch

The Editorial Board

3-4 minutes

Ana Brnabic, a 41-year-old lesbian, has been nominated as prime minister of Serbia. Darko Vojinovic/Associated Press

Serbia hardly has a progressive track record on gay rights. So when President Aleksandar Vucic announced this month that he was nominating Ana Brnabic, a 41-year-old, openly lesbian, woman as prime minister, he stunned Serbians and outside observers alike.

Ms. Brnabic — who only entered politics last year when Mr. Vucic named her a minister of public administration and local government — would secure a double first for Serbia, which has never been led by a woman or by someone who is openly gay. The nomination also plays to the canny Mr. Vucic's political ambitions.

In fact, there is every reason to suspect that the choice of Ms. Brnabic is a decoy move. Mr. Vucic may be trying to calm European concerns as Serbia moves toward membership in the European Union, while he continues to cozy up to Russia and beef up Serbia's military.

At the same time, a failure by Serbia's Parliament to approve Ms. Brnabic's nomination would trigger an early election. It would be Serbia's third in five years, and with each election, Mr. Vucic has increased his power. When he resigned in March as prime minister to run for the largely ceremonial office of president, there were deep suspicions that he intended to shift the center of power to the presidency and install a puppet as prime minister. His victory on April 2 led to huge street protests in Serbia's capital, Belgrade.

The nomination will have the backing of 100 members of Parliament who are in Mr. Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party, but 26 more votes are needed to secure a majority. Opposition lawmakers, in a country where about half of the people believe homosexuality is an illness, are balking at approving a lesbian.

Some pro-Russian politicians see her nomination as part of a degenerate Western plot. The chief of the United Serbia party, Dragan Markovic Palma, has objected vehemently, declaring, "Ana Brnabic is not my prime minister." A vote scheduled for this week has now been delayed.

After she was nominated, Ms. Brnabic said, "If elected in Parliament, I will run the government with dedication and responsibility." Indeed, if Ms. Brnabic were allowed to exercise the rightful powers of her office and run Serbia's government, it would send a powerful signal that it is time for Serbia — and the rest of the world — to move beyond old prejudices. But that goal will be sadly compromised if Ms. Brnabic is approved only to become the tool of an autocrat, or discarded to further Mr. Vucic's sweeping political ambitions.

INTERNATIONAL

The New York Times

Editorial : The Iran Puzzle

The Editorial Board

5-7 minutes

One of the Obama administration's biggest diplomatic ambitions was to establish better relations with Iran, a nation with which the United States has been at odds since the fall of the shah and the rise of a powerful theocratic government in Tehran in 1979. The most important manifestation of that effort was a deal negotiated by the administration and its allies under which Iran agreed to curb its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

That momentary thaw, if not the agreement itself, now seems at risk. Partly this is a result of Iran's barely-concealed territorial and political ambitions, which are rightly of concern in Washington. Partly it is a result of President Trump's fondness for Saudi Arabia, a Sunni Muslim nation, which has led him to demonize Iran, a Shiite nation and the Saudis' chief rival for regional influence.

A potential flashpoint is looming in Syria. There, Iran and the United States share a common goal of defeating the Islamic State. But they have competing interests, which are growing even as the fight against ISIS seems to be going well and indeed may be approaching the endgame.

Trump administration officials worry that the Iranians, aided by the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, will seek control of enough territory in two adjacent countries, Syria and Iraq, so as to establish a land bridge from Tehran all the way to Lebanon. There they could resupply their Hezbollah allies, thus enlarging their regional influence.

Iraqi fighters at the border of Syria this month. Martyn Aim/Getty Images

Iran undoubtedly intends to play a larger regional role, and there are reasons to be wary. But the administration hasn't explained its concerns publicly and there are questions about how it plans to deal with the challenge.

Since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, Iran has been one of Mr. Assad's chief allies, deploying thousands of Hezbollah and other Shiite fighters and providing other forms of aid to help him beat back Syrian rebels. Iran's interests in Syria are thus markedly different from its interests in Iraq. In Iraq it has fought ISIS. In Syria, its focus has been on helping the Assad regime.

It is in Syria where the interests of Iran and the United States are most sharply at odds, and in Iraq where they most nearly converge. American and Iraqi security forces have just about driven ISIS from Mosul, a major Iraqi city. In Syria, America is also seeking to crush ISIS, but is doing so in concert with Syrian opposition forces, not Mr. Assad, whom it has long opposed.

As in Iraq, the fight against ISIS is going well; ISIS is close to being routed from its headquarters in the city of Raqqa. But the prospect of victory has opened the door to new tensions between American-led forces and Iranian-Syrian forces. That has manifested itself in a series of encounters this month in which the United States shot down a Syrian warplane, came close to shooting down another and downed two Iranian-made drones that were nearing American-backed troops on the ground. Iran, meanwhile, used ballistic missiles against ISIS targets.

ISIS now controls only about half the territory it once held in Syria, and, as the space shrinks, the various combatants are concentrating on a smaller area, along Syria's eastern border with Iraq and Jordan and in the Euphrates River Valley, home to oil reserves and water.

Administration officials suspect that Iran is more interested in controlling territory in these areas than defeating ISIS, and that the presence of Iranian and Syrian government forces could impede the American-led effort to finish ISIS off in Raqqa. It could also obstruct American plans to establish outposts in the Syrian and Western Iraqi desert so that fleeing ISIS fighters can be killed or captured, thus preventing them from hunkering down and later re-emerging as a threat, these officials say.

Adding to the combustible environment is Russia, the other major Assad defender, which threatened to retaliate to what Washington called its recent "self defense" moves by treating

American planes as targets. Despite this, administration officials, reflecting a president who shares Saudi Arabia's hard-line anti-Iran views, seem to consider Iran a bigger problem than Moscow and one that could threaten Israel, Jordan and other allies.

Could Mr. Trump stumble into a wider war in Syria? There are reasons to worry. He has yet to offer a comprehensive plan for dealing with Syria, including the diplomacy needed to develop a political solution to end the civil war, which could create a more stable country less vulnerable to extremist groups.

The fear is that Mr. Trump's demonizing of Iran, and his unwillingness to engage its government, could result in a broadening of the American military mission from defeating ISIS to preventing Iranian influence from expanding. This would be dangerous. Iran is a vexing state to be smartly managed, not assumed to be an implacable enemy.

POLITICO

Trump allies push White House to consider regime change in Tehran

By Michael Crowley

10-12 minutes

As the White House formulates its official policy on Iran, senior officials and key allies of President Donald Trump are calling for the new administration to take steps to topple Tehran's militant clerical government.

Supporters of dislodging Iran's iron-fisted clerical leadership say it's the only way to halt Tehran's dangerous behavior, from its pursuit of nuclear weapons to its sponsorship of terrorism. Critics say that political meddling in Iran, where memories of a 1953 CIA-backed coup remain vivid, risks a popular backlash that would only empower hard-liners.

Story Continued Below

That's why President Barack Obama assured Iranians, in a 2013 speech at the United Nations, that "we are not seeking regime change."

But influential Iran hawks want to change that under Trump.

"The policy of the United States should be regime change in Iran," said Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), who speaks regularly with White House officials about foreign policy. "I don't see how anyone can say America can be safe as long as you have in power a theocratic despotism," he added.

Cotton advocated a combination of economic, diplomatic and covert actions to pressure Tehran's government and "support internal domestic dissent" in the country. He noted that Iran has numerous minority ethnic groups, including Arabs, Turkmen and Balochs who "aren't enthusiastic about living in a Persian Shiite despotism."

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson appeared to endorse subverting the Iranian regime during recent testimony about the State Department's budget when Rep. Ted Poe (R-Texas) asked the diplomat whether the Trump administration supports "a philosophy of regime change" in Iran.

Noting that Trump's Iran policy is still under review, Tillerson said the U.S. would work with Iranian opposition groups toward the "peaceful transition of that government."

In response, Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif lashed out on Twitter, saying that the U.S. was "reverting to unlawful and delusional regime-change policy" toward his country.

"US officials should worry more about saving their own regime than changing Iran's," he added.

On Wednesday, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations filed a formal protest over Tillerson's statement, saying it revealed "a brazen interventionist plan that runs counter to every norm and principle of international law," and a group of prominent Iranian reformists wrote a public letter condemning Tillerson's "interventionist" stance.

A State Department spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

National Security Council spokesman Michael Anton said that manipulating Iran's internal politics is not currently a U.S. goal — nor among the "objectives" set in the initial stage of the White House's routine Iran policy review. "An explicit affirmation of regime change in Iran as a policy is not really on the table," Anton said.

As a candidate, Trump was sharply critical of U.S. efforts to topple dictators in Iraq, Libya and Syria, though each of those instances involved the use of military power, which virtually no Iran hawks currently advocate as an instrument within Iran.

But, along with Tillerson, key Trump officials are on the record as saying that Iran will remain a U.S. enemy until the clerical leaders and military officials who control the country's political system are deposed — even under the administration of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, a reformer with whom Obama cultivated ties and who was reelected in May.

As a member of Congress, Trump's CIA director, Mike Pompeo, last year publicly called for congressional action to "change Iranian behavior, and, ultimately, the Iranian regime." And Derek Harvey, the Trump National Security Council's director for Middle East affairs, told an audience at the conservative Hudson Institute in August 2015 that the Obama administration's hope of working with moderates to steer Iran in a friendlier direction was a "misread" of "the nature and character of the regime," whose structure he said he has carefully studied.

The case for political subversion in Iran has also been pressed to the White House by the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank that strenuously opposed Obama's 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran and which has close ties to many key Trump officials.

Soon after Trump's inauguration, FDD's CEO, Mark Dubowitz, submitted a seven-page Iran policy memo to Trump's National Security Council. The memo — which was circulated inside the Trump White House and recently obtained by POLITICO — included a discussion of ways to foment popular unrest with the goal of establishing a "free and democratic" Iran.

"Iran is susceptible to a strategy of coerced democratization because it lacks popular support and relies on fear to sustain its power," the memo argued. "The very structure of the regime invites instability, crisis and possibly collapse."

It maintained that Trump has an instrumental role to play in discrediting the regime. "No one has greater power to mobilize dissent abroad than the American president," the memo states, setting a goal of "a tolerant government that adheres to global norms."

In 1979, Iran underwent an Islamic revolution that overthrew a pro-U.S. shah who counted Richard Nixon and Andy Warhol among his friends, replacing him with a Shiite fundamentalist government fiercely hostile to the U.S. and Israel.

While the country does have a democratically elected parliament and president, they answer to a repressive clerical leadership led by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and backed by the military's Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In June 2009, allegations of election rigging sparked mass street protests, known as the "Green Movement," that briefly seemed to threaten Khamenei's regime. The protests were brutally suppressed, and many analysts say virtually no organized anti-regime opposition movement survives today.

There are signs of moderation within Iran's system, including Rouhani's reelection by a comfortable margin and the success of reformist candidates in May municipal elections.

That might lend support to Obama's theory that striking a nuclear deal with Rouhani — who ran his first presidential campaign in 2013 on a platform of better relations with the West — would empower his moderate political faction and demonstrate the economic fruits of cooperating with the U.S.

But many Trump officials consider Rouhani's moderation a deceptive mask for Khamenei's militant fundamentalism and believe Obama was naive to consider him a true political reformer. Most also consider Obama's nuclear deal a giveaway that only pauses Tehran's path to a nuclear bomb — while entrenching Khamenei's regime by relieving sanctions that were generating popular discontent.

The FDD memo argues that Rouhani's presidency "has managed to mislead world leaders that it is a force for moderation and pragmatism" and suggested that the Trump administration work to prevent Rouhani's reelection, although there is no evidence that it did.

The memo also proposed borrowing from Cold War anti-communist tactics, citing the Reagan administration's support of the Polish "Solidarity" labor movement, which helped to fracture Eastern European communism.

Emulating the way Reagan worked with Poland's Catholic Church and labor unions, the memo argues, Trump "can use trade unions, student organizations and dissident clerics to highlight the economic, political [and] moral shortcomings of the Iranian regime."

It also called for spotlighting Iran's atrocious human rights record as a means of pressuring Rouhani at home by reminding Iranians about the true nature of their regime. Despite the generally low priority his State Department has placed on human rights in U.S. foreign policy, Tillerson has repeatedly denounced Iran as a rights abuser — most recently during his May visit to Iran's arch-enemy, Saudi Arabia.

Anton said the FDD memo was just one of many sources of input the White House has solicited, including from experts with the nonpartisan Brookings Institution, and that "our policy is based far more on what is generated inside the government than by what comes from the outside." He did not specify how widely the memo had been circulated.

Dubowitz called the memo one of several he has submitted to the Trump administration.

Iran experts said that a U.S. regime change strategy would be a practical challenge given the lack of a strong organized opposition within Iran. And critics warned that the mere talk of regime change could drive Iranian politics in the wrong direction.

"Even the discussion of regime change is damaging, let alone a policy of regime change," said Mike Morell, a former deputy director of the CIA who focused heavily on Iran.

"A policy of regime change would be a huge strategic mistake," Morell said. He added that such an approach would drive away pro-modernization Iranians and allow Khamenei to accuse outsiders of again meddling in a country with a long history of unwanted foreign influence. "A huge potential downside is that you feed the hard-liners and lose the moderates," Morell said.

"Not only are you unlikely to be successful, but you are likely to have huge blowback," Morell added.

Trita Parsi, founder of the National Iranian American Council, said a U.S. strategy of trying to undermine Iran's government would undo progress Obama had made.

"If you put regime change back on the table, it is a complete reversal of what has been achieved thus far. Through the nuclear deal, there were channels of communication and even cooperation," Parsi said.

Parsi argued that Rouhani's reelection was a victory for reformers who have placed their hopes for changing Iran on gradual political reform, not mass street protests.

"The people have essentially chosen that they want to reform the system from within," he said. "The hard-liners could hardly hide their pleasure in seeing the U.S. take on that position."

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

U.S. Says Some Demands on Qatar Will Be Difficult to Meet

Felicia Schwartz

5-6 minutes

Updated June 25, 2017 4:01 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The U.S. sees a list of demands put forward late last week from Saudi Arabia and other governments to Qatar as a starting point for discussions to end a three-week standoff, though some conditions will be difficult to meet, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Sunday.

The list to Qatar from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, delivered Thursday, includes demands that Qatar shutter state broadcaster Al Jazeera, curb ties with Iran and end Turkey's military presence on its soil, among others.

"While some of the elements will be very difficult for Qatar to meet, there are significant areas which provide a basis for ongoing dialogue leading to resolution," Mr. Tillerson said. "A productive next step would be for each of the countries to sit together and continue this conversation."

Last week, Mr. Tillerson called for Saudi Arabia and others to issue a list of demands that were "reasonable and actionable," after the U.S. State Department questioned the motives of the Gulf Arab countries' boycotting Qatar.

The Saudis, acting with Egypt, the U.A.E. and others have blockaded Qatar for the past three weeks, closing borders and canceling airline flights while accusing Doha of supporting extremist movements and cultivating ties to Iran.

"We believe our allies and partners are stronger when they are working together towards one goal which we all agree is stopping terrorism and countering extremism," Mr. Tillerson said Sunday. "Each country involved has something to contribute to that effort. A lowering of rhetoric would also help ease the tension."

He said the U.S. supports efforts to mediate the conflict by Kuwait and that the U.S. will remain in close touch with all of the parties. The U.S. has allies on all sides of the conflict, and maintains its largest military facility in the Middle East in Qatar.

Another world leader who has been trying to mediate between its allies is Turkey. On Sunday President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reiterated his nation's support against the demands of its larger Gulf Arab neighbors as against international law.

"We consider these demands are against international law," Mr. Erdogan said in remakes in Istanbul after prayers during the celebration ending the religious fasting month of Ramadan. "It is a breach of Qatar's sovereignty rights."

Turkey has strong trading ties with both Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and it has a longstanding military base agreement with Doha. Mr. Erdogan and his government have said they have no plans to re-evaluate that military relationship, despite pressure from Qatar's neighbors.

The list presented last week also demanded that Qatar cut all ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Lebanese military and political movement Hezbollah and other groups that Saudi Arabia and its allies deem extremist and a threat to their rule. The conditions set forth by Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Egypt and Bahrain add up to a radical overhaul of the longtime pillars of Qatari policy and include measures that Doha has said are nonstarters.

The U.A.E's ambassador to Washington said in an interview Sunday that the onus is on Qatar to de-escalate the crisis.

"This problem requires a diplomatic solution, but the decision to reach a diplomatic solution is on Qatar, it's not on us," said Yousef Al Otaiba, the Emirati ambassador. "We are O.K. with the status quo if Qatar declines to accept the demands."

A spokesman for Qatar's embassy in Washington said, "We appreciate the continued efforts of Secretary Tillerson and the U.S. government, as well as the personal involvement of the Emir of Kuwait in mediating this crisis. We are in the process of reviewing the list of demands and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be issuing a response soon. Our response will adhere to Secretary Tillerson's statement that the list of demands should be reasonable and actionable."

Separately, Qatar's emir spoke by phone to Iran's president on Sunday, according to Iranian state news agency IRNA.

"The blockade of Qatar is not acceptable for us," Iranian President Hassan Rouhani told Qatari emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

"We believe when there is a difference among the regional countries, threat, pressure or sanction are not appropriate ways to settle those differences," he said, according to IRNA.

—Margaret Coker and Aresu Eqbali contributed to this article.

Write to Felicia Schwartz at Felicia.Schwartz@wsj.com

Appeared in the June 26, 2017, print edition as 'U.S. Says Qatar Faces Tough Terms.'

The Washington Post

Tillerson urges Qatar and the Gulf states to negotiate an end to their rift

By Carol Morello

5-6 minutes

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Sunday criticized some of the demands by Saudi Arabia and its allies on Qatar as "very difficult" to meet and urged the countries to tamp down the rhetoric and start negotiating.

The statement by Tillerson was his first response to a sweeping list of 13 demands leaked to the Associated Press on Friday. The ultimatum gave Qatar 10 days to shut down the Arabic news network Al Jazeera, halt all contact with

groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, reduce cooperation with Iran and oust Turkish troops from Qatar. In addition, it would be required to undergo monthly checks to ensure it is complying.

The demands were presented by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, which had earlier imposed a diplomatic and trade embargo on Qatar, through the emir of Kuwait, who is mediating the crisis. They do not specify what further action those countries might take if Qatar doesn't obey.

"While some of the elements will be very difficult for Qatar to meet, there are significant areas which provide a basis for ongoing dialogue leading to resolution," said Tillerson in his statement, which urged the parties to sit down and have a conversation about what he called the "requests."

"We believe our allies and partners are stronger when they are working together towards one goal which we all agree is stopping terrorism and countering extremism," he said. "Each country involved has something to contribute to that effort. A lowering of rhetoric would also help ease the tension."

In Istanbul, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan rejected the demand for the removal of Turkish troops, calling is "disrespectful toward Turkey." His country, he said, in remarks reported by the Associated Press, did not need permission from others when making defense agreements.

The showdown between Qatar and the Arab nations allied against it began two weeks ago.

The anti-Qatar countries claimed Qatar's royal family has been funding terrorism, but the list of demands suggests they are pressuring Qatar as a way of trying to isolate Iran and suppress media in the region that have been critical of governments throughout the Middle East.

The standoff has been awkward for the United States. Qatar hosts the largest concentration of U.S. military personnel, 11,000 people, in the Middle East.

Trump visited Saudi Arabia last month on his first overseas trip and announced a $110 billion deal to sell arms to the country.

Trump has expressed pleasure at the alliance of Arab states, all majority Sunni, against extremist groups and Iran, which is majority Shiite and Saudi Arabia's main regional rival.

Last week, before the anti-Qatar demands became public, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert was unusually blunt in criticizing the group of nations isolating Qatar and effectively dared them to come up with a list of Qatari misdeeds.

Nauert said Washington was "mystified that the gulf states have not released to the public nor to the Qataris the details about the claims that they are making."

The more time goes by, she added, "the more doubt is raised about the actions taken by Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

"At this point we are left with one simple question: Were the actions really about their concerns regarding Qatar's alleged support for terrorism, or were they about the long-simmering grievances between and among the GCC countries?"

The GCC, or Gulf Cooperation Council, includes Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait as well as Qatar. (Oman is also a member.)

Trump, however, has called the Saudi-led action against Qatar "hard but necessary."

Nevertheless, Tillerson's remarks suggest Washington is growing impatient with the bickering and considers it an obstacle to fighting terrorism and uniting in opposition to Iran.

Though Kuwait is officially mediating the dispute, Tillerson has been actively involved making phone calls to the leaders of each country in an effort to break the impasse.

Last week, he canceled a planned trip to Mexico to discuss Venezuela before the Organization of American States so he could call Middle Eastern leaders instead.

Tough Demands on Qatar Unlikely to Resolve Diplomatic Fight

Paul McLeary | 48 mins ago

5-7 minutes

There's finally some movement in the standoff between Arab countries and Qatar — but probably not in the direction U.S. officials were hoping.

Late Thursday, the *Associated Press* reported that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt — which broke off relations with Qatar June 5 — have a list of tough demands for Doha to end the impasse. They include shuttering the government-funded media outlet *Al Jazeera*, cutting ties with Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, and open itself up to be audited, presumably for ties to terrorist organizations. The list also demands that Qatar align itself militarily, politically, socially, and economically with other Gulf States.

The United States was hoping the demands might move crisis resolution along. But the list of thirteen points, which would require a major reversal in Qatari policy, could well have the opposite effect.

The U.S. State Department has been urging a "reasonable" solution to the diplomatic crisis. On Wednesday, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said he was aware a list had been prepared. "We hope the list of demands will soon be presented to Qatar and will be reasonable and actionable," he said. "We support the Kuwaiti mediation effort and look forward to this matter moving toward a resolution."

But the conditions, as reported by *AP*, look anything but reasonable from Qatar's point of view.

The crisis began on June 5, when a handful of Arab states broke ties with Qatar, a Gulf neighbor who has long taken a contrary tack on foreign affairs, propping up Islamist governments in North Africa, seeming to supporting the Muslim Brotherhood abroad, and enjoying cordial ties with Iran.

Qatar counters it has the right to decide what civic institutions it funds (i.e. *Al Jazeera*) and how to chart its own foreign policy.

"We are a sovereign country. We have the right to choose the way we move forward. Their claims are nothing relating to fighting terrorism," Qatar's ambassador to the United States, Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani, told *Foreign Policy* hours before the list was reported.

He also said that Qatar doesn't support the Muslim Brotherhood, contrary to charges made by its Gulf neighbors, but doesn't want to demonize the group, either.

"We share, we understand, the challenges, but we have a different view on addressing them." But, he said, the Muslim Brotherhood is "all over the Arab world. Do we take 50 million people and put them on terrorist lists?"

And as for relations with Iran, which is engaged in a regional power struggle with Sunni states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar has a simple explanation.

"I can tell you why we have relations with Iran. Iran and Qatar share the single largest gas field in the world," al Thani said. Qatar is a major natural gas supplier for many neighbors and for European countries.

Since the crisis began in early June, it has escalated. The United Arab Emirates made the expression of sympathy toward Qatar punishable by law. Saudi Arabia deported 15,000 Qatari camels grazing in its territory. Qatar Airways was blocked from entering Saudi, Egyptian, Emirati, and Bahraini airspace. Food exports to Qatar were stopped at the border.

The U.S. reaction has been confusing. In a series of tweets, President Donald Trump seemed to take credit for and applauded the moves against Qatar, which is home to the main U.S. airbase in the region. Meanwhile, the State Department urged Gulf states to move things along and resolve the situation.

The list of demands reportedly drawn up took almost three weeks to draft. Yousef Al Otaiba, the UAE ambassador in Washington, said earlier this month that the demands were taking so long to draft because "there are four countries involved." He flagged some of the steps that the countries were agreed that Qatar must take, including "expelling terrorists" and "shutting down or reversing media."

Otaiba suggested one explanation for the divergent U.S. responses to the crisis: Different approaches in the White House and the State Department. Trump, Otaiba said, is most concerned with "cutting off terror finance." But Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, he said, want to ensure operations at al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the launchpad for the U.S.-led coalition battling the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

In Doha, officials think the Saudis, Bahrainis, and Emiratis misled the neophyte White House by claiming that it's all about finding a better way to battle terrorism, al Thani said.

"What the others have done is misled the United States, made it seem like [the rift] is an issue about terrorism," he said.

Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt did not immediately respond to request for comment on this point.

"Feel free to ask any officials from the [United States] about terrorist funding coming out of Qatar," Otaiba told FP by phone Friday.

And Qatari officials believe the demands will speak for themselves, in terms of the Gulf states' seriousness about finding a way out of the impasse.

"The international community," al Thani told FP, will "be able to assess if they are ridiculous or they have reason."

This article was updated on Friday, June 23 at 6:34 p.m. to include comments from the UAE ambassador.

Photo credit: SAUL LOEB/AFP/Getty Images

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Saudi Prince's Elevation Plays One Generation Off Another

Summer Said

5-6 minutes

June 25, 2017 11:42 a.m. ET

MECCA, Saudi Arabia—In Islam's holiest city, two views of the new crown prince are emerging, breaking sharply along generational lines.

Like in other Saudi cities, the young here view the 31-year-old Prince Mohammed bin Salman as a breath of fresh air, someone who will take on the conservative religious establishment, tackle corruption and transform an oil-dependent economy. They hope his surprise elevation to crown prince last week will usher in a new era of openness, not only for foreign investors but for the latest Hollywood movies, which are still banned. It is the moment, young Saudis say, to modernize an ancient kingdom.

"We have a crown prince from our generation who is very determined, smart and wants to make real change," said Nader Mohammed, a 20-year-old power engineering student who lives in Mecca. "Saudis need someone to shake them and get the best out of them."

Prince Mohammed's ascent has coincided with the appointment of other young prices to top positions, such as 33-year-old Prince Abdul Aziz Bin Saud Bin Nayef's promotion to interior minister earlier this month, further exciting the youth.

But older Saudis have questioned the wisdom of ousting the former crown prince, Mohammed bin Nayef, a respected yet cautious leader, in favor of his younger, impulsive and largely untested cousin. The move puts Prince Mohammed in a position to take over from his 81-year-old father, King Salman, before he might be ready, they say. And while most Saudis agree change is needed, not many—especially among the older generation—are ready to embrace upheaval.

"For generations Saudi Arabia has been ruled by older and experienced kings and he only surfaced on the scene a couple of years ago," said Abdullah, a 57-year-old gold shop owner in Mecca who refused to provide his full name for fear for his safety. "Do I believe the country needs radical changes? Yes, but experience is essential here."

He added: "I would feel the same way if my son takes over this shop and turns it upside down in a few months."

Khalid al-Hilali, a retired 63-year-old government employee in Mecca, also expressed reservations.

"I like the crown prince and I pledge allegiance to him but I'm worried about the future of Saudi Arabia. He rules in a more forthright way than others in the royal family but he is also confrontational, which could backfire when it comes to politics. We Saudis are used to a different approach."

Prince Mohammed, who has already overseen Saudi Arabia's economy and defense as deputy crown prince, is taking over Mohammed bin Nayef's domestic security portfolio as well.

He was given a new challenge Friday when Saudi security forces foiled a terrorist attack targeting Mecca's Grand Mosque, where worshipers were celebrating the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. A man who was planning the attacks blew himself up in a residential area near the mosque amid clashes with security forces, and five suspects were arrested, the Saudi Interior Ministry said.

"Had they been successful it would have been a disaster that would have severe implications on the kingdom and the royal family," said a former senior adviser to the Saudi government.

King Salman was in Mecca when the attempted attack was carried out, part of a long tradition of Saudi kings spending Ramadan in the holy city.

For now, there are few signs that ambivalence about Prince Mohammed among older Saudis will amount to political unrest.

Outpourings of support, by contrast, have suffused social media. A hashtag in Arabic declaring, "I pledge allegiance to Mohammed bin Salman" spread quickly among Saudi tweeters after his promotion.

Several giant posters bearing a portrait of Prince Mohammed can now be seen in Mecca, Jeddah and the capital Riyadh. One popular caption reads: "We pledge obedience and compliance," part of a traditional oath of allegiance given to a leader in an attempt among local authorities to curry political favor.

While many challenges await the new crown prince—from reviving a sluggish economy to extricating Saudi Arabia from a protracted conflict in neighboring Yemen—some Saudis say their greatest concern is a coming battle.

Those bent on change are bound to collide with those who resist it, namely the country's religious establishment. Even younger Saudis who support Prince Mohammed fear a backlash from religious clerics who have lost influence in recent years as the country has begun to change.

"If they come back," said 36-year-old Ziad, an army officer who didn't want to give his family name, "they will come back with vengeance."

Write to Summer Said at summer.said@wsj.com

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The Washington Post

Editorial : There's reason to doubt Saudi Arabia's charming new crown prince

https://www.facebook.com/washingtonpostopinions

4-5 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 25 at 7:36 PM

MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN, the 31-year-old who last week was named crown prince of Saudi Arabia, has been working assiduously to win friends and influence people in Washington. He's acquired a lot of admirers, including in the Trump White House, by outlining plans to reform and modernize the Saudi economy, loosen domestic social controls and — not least — undertake tens of billions of arms purchases in the United States.

Yet as Prince Salman formally takes position to succeed his 81-year-old father, King Salman, there is growing reason for doubt about his capabilities. His market-oriented economic reforms look stalled. Meanwhile, his aggressive initiatives in foreign affairs are proving self-defeating — and damaging to the interests of the United States.

As defense minister, Prince Salman has been closely associated with Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen, which began not long after his father ascended to the throne in January 2015. In every respect, the campaign has been a failure. It has not achieved the declared aim of driving rebel Houthi forces from the capital, Sanaa, and it has led to severe casualties caused by the bombing of civilian targets. Human rights groups have accused the Saudis and their allies, including the United Arab Emirates, of war crimes.

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Worst, the Saudi coalition has helped create one of the worst humanitarian crises the world has seen in decades. Some 17 million

Yemenis are at risk of famine. A cholera epidemic has infected more than 200,000 people since April, according to the United Nations. On average, according to U.N. reporting, a child dies every 10 minutes in Yemen due to malnutrition, diarrhea and other preventable causes.

Though it long ago became clear that the war is unwinnable, the Saudi leadership persists — and has succeeded in persuading the Trump administration to renew support, including bomb deliveries, that the Obama administration suspended. The Saudis say their Houthi enemies are a proxy for Iran, but many experts believe they overstate that case. Meanwhile, the war detracts from the U.S.-led fight against the Islamic State, from which the Gulf nations have withdrawn resources.

Then there is the blockade of Qatar by four Sunni Arab countries, another Saudi-led initiative, that began June 5. Saudi leaders said their purpose was to end Qatari support for terrorism — a dubious claim that nevertheless won the support of President Trump. Yet not until last Friday, following public criticism from the State Department, did the block-aders present their demands. A number have nothing to do with terrorism: For example, Qatar is to close down the Al Jazeera television network, the Arab world's most popular news outlet, which provides an outlet for critics of the region's dictatorships. The Saudis further demand the closure of a military base in Qatar maintained by NATO member Turkey.

The largest U.S. air base in the Middle East is also located in Qatar and is a hub for operations against the Islamic State. Notwithstanding Mr. Trump's supportive statements, the boycott risks serious harm to U.S. interests. Like the Yemen war, it should give cause for care in embracing the new Saudi crown prince. Though he may be charming, his adventurism makes him a questionable ally.

Can There Be Peace With Honor in Afghanistan?

Paul McLeary | 48 mins ago

12-15 minutes

Over the next few weeks, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is due to provide President Donald Trump with a new strategy for Afghanistan. This will be the latest in a long series, produced on a regular basis since 2001, all with the core objective of preventing the country reverting to a sanctuary for terrorism. Mattis cannot be accused of ramping up expectations for the new approach he is seeking to develop. He describes the current situation as a stalemate, but with the balance having swung to the Taliban. Reversing this, he argues, will require more troops to help develop Afghan capabilities. When asked what it would mean to win, he says violence must be brought down to a level where it could be managed by the Afghan government without it posing a mortal threat.

There are several obstacles to even this modest definition of victory. First, it envisions an Afghan government able to competently deal with groups such as al Qaeda without outside assistance; it envisions, in other words, a government very different than the one Afghanistan has had for some time. Another obstacle is posed by the supporters of the former Taliban government, who are well embedded in Afghanistan and have sympathetic backers in Pakistan. Regardless of the strategy Mattis settles on, the war offers little prospect for a stable end-state in which the Afghan government will be able to think about issues other than security, or U.S. forces can withdraw without having to rush back to repair the damage as the Taliban surge once more.

But Afghanistan is not unique in this regard. The situation in Iraq is similar, as are the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Ukraine, and any number of other international conflicts. We have entered an era of wars that wax and wane in intensity, and at best become manageable, rather than end with ceremonies to conclude hostilities. The challenge posed to traditional notions of war by these endless conflicts has been the subject of much debate. What is long overdue is reflection on the challenge posed to our definition of peace.

Once upon a time the distinction between war and peace was clear-cut.

Once upon a time the distinction between war and peace was clear-cut. Peace ended when war was declared. Almost immediately acts which had previously been considered criminal, harmful and obnoxious became legal and desirable. Trade would be blocked and aliens interned. Neutrals had to pay attention. Eventually the war would end when a treaty was signed, setting the terms for a new peace. The fighting would stop, trade would resume and aliens would be released. Neutrals could get on with their business. As the previous peace had been flawed, for it had ended with war, the new peace must address those flaws. In addition, as wars involve sacrifices and pain, the new peace must provide a degree of reward and compensation. It must represent progress.

It has been a long time since we enjoyed such clarity. Wars are no longer declared. The trend began in the 1930s, including the use of euphemisms for war, as those states which had renounced war as an instrument of national policy (the language of the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact) embarked on invasions. The trend was set by the Manchurian Incident of 1931, when Japan invaded China. The Second World War involved lots of declarations, but few wars have been declared since. In those many contemporary wars that involve civil conflict, formal declarations are obviously irrelevant. Cease-fires and peace settlements are regular but they have a habit of not sticking. Meanwhile, international wars now frequently conclude with no more than a cease-fire agreement (as with Korea in 1953 or Iraq in 1991), explicitly leaving open the possibility that they can resume at a later date.

So, warfare has become less of a separate, marked-off activity, demarcated in time and space, and instead a messy condition, marked by violence, found within and between states. It can involve examples of force that are intense but localized or else widespread and sporadic. Borders have become permeable, so that neighbors move in and out while denying that they are engaged in anything so blatant as aggression. The absence of large-scale hostilities at any particular moment in any particular region does not mean that peace has broken out because they are often on the edge of war. A true peace needs to be for the long-term, with disputes resolved and relations getting closer — not a pause to allow for restocking and some recuperation before the struggle continues.

As the line between peace and war has become blurred, international relations scholars have used a simple measure of 1,000 battle deaths in a given year to mark when the line is crossed into war. A conflict with fewer battle deaths, then, for analytical purposes is not a war but merely a militarized inter-state dispute. With civil wars the threshold is much lower in the key databases than inter-state wars, so fighting can sneak below the required level but then sneak up again. Over long periods countries, such as Afghanistan or Iraq, can experience many different sorts of violence without ever enjoying a lengthy period of tranquility that might deserve to be known as peace. The literature now refers to "war prevention" and "war termination" without requiring any references to the "peace" being left or to which it is hoped to return.

There are still "peacekeeping" missions, meant to sustain a tentative peace, but when these missions have been sent into situations without any peace to keep the term has proved clearly inadequate. Some variations were attempted to recognize this difficulty – such as "'peace enforcement" or "peace support" — until it was accepted that a durable peace might prove to be elusive and so instead the designation became "stabilization operations."

When a war was undertaken for purposes of conquest then success could be measured in terms of territory gained or held. But conquest, pure and simple, is no longer represented as a legitimate objective of war, even when territory is being seized. The old imperialism was also often presented as a civilizing process, and not just about plunder and exploitation. Once the empires were dismantled after 1945 there was no appetite to construct anything comparable. Instead help with "state-building" is offered. "Victory," for which Gen. Douglas MacArthur told us there is no substitute, is another word that has fallen out of fashion, except when talking about a specific battle. President George W. Bush tried "mission accomplished" in Iraq, but it turned out that it wasn't. When describing a desirable situation these days 'order' is used as much as peace.

The concept of peace has become a notable absentee in contemporary strategic discourse.

The concept of peace has become a notable absentee in contemporary strategic discourse.

Even university departments of "peace studies" spend a lot of time talking about conflict and violence and how to stop it. Those working in this tradition are heirs to the idealism that saw war as unnatural and representing the worst of

human nature and national conceits. They continue to oppose militarism and its representations in mainstream thinking. But even within this tradition there has always been a tension between those who are essentially pacifists, so that any violence is retrograde, and those who believe that war can only be banished through the defeat of injustice and the promotion of freedom. On the one hand is the absence of war, the negative peace when hatreds may still simmer and repression may be rife; on the other the more positive peace, which might require taking sides once fighting has begun.

The importance of this distinction is that when we do get around to discussing peace it is largely in positive terms. Peace must be "just and lasting." A coming peace is rarely described in terms that acknowledge the challenges facing war-torn societies as they attempt to recover and reform. The promise, once the "evil-doers" are defeated, is of freedom and democracy flourishing, bringing with them prosperity and social harmony. Even when intervening in societies whose future we cannot (and should not) control the West is reluctant to say that we have done little more than calm things down and made things less bad than they might have been. It is difficult to justify the lives lost and the expenses incurred in the most discretionary intervention by proclaiming a so-so result. Indeed, the temptation is to cover the promised outcome with the full rhetorical sugar-coating. Looking back at the claims made about what could be achieved in Afghanistan and Iraq, the ambition is extraordinary: terrorism defeated, a fearful ideology discredited, whole regions turned toward the path of democracy and away from dictatorship, an end to the drug trade, and so on.

Yet we know, and have been reminded, that the brutality and violence associated with war is not a natural route to a good peace. War leaves its legacy in grieving, division, and bitterness, in shattered infrastructure, routine crime, and displaced populations vulnerable to hunger and disease. There were "good peaces" achieved after 1945 with both Germany and Japan (which is why the wars that led to their defeat were considered unambiguously good). But these required more than military victory. They also demanded the commitment of a considerable amount of civilian planning and resources that would have been quickly lost if the Cold War had ever turned hot.

The astonishing feature of the invasion of Iraq was the refusal to put any effort into what was described as the "aftermath" of the occupation, and the complete lack of preparedness to take advantage of whatever opportunities for a better society that might have been created. If we look back at policy failures here and elsewhere they often lie in the reluctance to make the effort and deploy the resources to address the long-term issues of reconstruction once fighting subsides. In short, there has been no agreed view about the demands of peace.

Thucydides's observation that wars are undertaken for reasons of "fear, honor, and interest" has been quoted by members of the Trump administration. These three words allow for a wealth of interpretation and all can be said to be in play when dealing with the Islamic State or Afghanistan. Of the three, doing justice to fear would require not only the elimination of terrorist sanctuaries in the respective countries, which might be possible, but preventing their return, which seems optimistic. Securing American interests might require the establishment of states that are more stable, and societies that are more free, and less sectarian, internally violent, and corrupt. These are individually matters of degree and also do not come as a package. The tension between social order and individual freedom runs through political theory as well as Western foreign policy and is no closer to resolution. Even the best likely outcomes now will feel unsatisfactory even if further calamities can be avoided.

Which leaves honor as the final path to peace. This is the simplest to achieve as all it requires is acting in a principled way with high standards. It does not preclude a disappointing material outcome. Indeed, when we think of peace with honor, two great failures that come to mind. In 1938 this is what British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain claimed to have achieved when he came back from Munich after meeting with Hitler, as did U.S. President Richard Nixon when talking about the Paris Peace Accords at the start of 1973. Honor means you did what you could, not that you achieved what you set out to achieve.

We talk about peace as a utopian condition, as a set of desiderata for a better world to keep us motivated when times are tough, or when inquiring into the requirements of postwar reconstruction. But the nature of the peace we seek needs to be integrated as a matter of course into any military strategy, and in contemporary conditions requires a renewed commitment to realism. There is no point in describing an attractive future if there is no obvious way to reach it. Military planners should remember that the conduct of a war, as well as the cause for which it is fought, shapes any eventual peace. Opportunities need to be taken to consider what might seriously be achieved through the use of force, nonviolent alternatives that might achieve comparable objectives, and also what can be done with a war that others have started but we wish to see finished.

Si vis pacem, para bellum. "If you want peace, prepare for war," goes the Roman adage. But if you prepare for war then at least think about the peace you want.

Photo credit: JOHN D MCHUGH/AFP/Getty Images

Trump Is Tripping Over Iran and Russia's Red Lines in Syria

Paul McLeary | 46 mins ago

7-9 minutes

In the past five weeks, U.S. forces in Syria have struck directly at the Assad regime and its allies in Syria no less than four times. On May 18, U.S. warplanes struck regime and allied militia forces that breached a 34-mile exclusion zone around a U.S. outpost in southeastern Syria. Then on June 8 and June 20, the United States shot down Iranian-made drones as they approached the outpost.

But the most dramatic event so far was the June 18 downing of a Syrian air force Su-22 by a U.S. Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet. This took place after regime forces attacked a town held by the U.S.-aligned Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) near Tabqa, in northern Syria. The Su-22 dropped bombs near the SDF fighters, ignored U.S. warnings, and was then shot down.

The downing of the Su-22 threatened to bring Washington and Moscow into conflict in the war-torn country. In the aftermath of the incident, Russia announced the end of deconfliction arrangements with U.S. forces and that it had decided to treat future U.S. flights west of the Euphrates River as hostile.

Syria is quickly devolving into a free-for-all.

Syria is quickly devolving into a free-for-all. There is a high possibility of further friction among regional powers, as the Russians, Americans, and their various clients scramble to realize mutually incompatible objectives — specifically in the areas of eastern Syria held by the now collapsing "caliphate" of the Islamic State.

So how did events in Syria reach this pass, in which direct confrontation between United States and Russia is no longer unthinkable? And what might happen next?

Syria has been divided into a number of de facto enclaves since mid-2012. But a series of events over the past 15 months has served to end the stalemate in the country, ushering in this new and dangerous phase.

Russia's entry into the conflict in September 2015 ended any possibility of rebel victory and the overthrow by arms of the regime. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad — with invaluable help from Russia, as well as Iran and its various militia proxies — went on to clear the rebels out of the key cities of Homs and Aleppo. A diplomatic agreement establishing four "de-escalation" zones then consolidated regime control of western Syria.

This development has enabled the regime to divert forces to the effort to reassert control over the east of the country. As it does so, the regime is encroaching on a conflict from which it had previously been largely absent: the war between the U.S.-supported, Kurdish-dominated SDF — along with other, Arab rebel clients further south — and the now retreating jihadis of the Islamic State.

The confluence of interests between Damascus and Tehran on this battlefield is clear. Iran, whose proxies form the key ground forces available to the regime, wants to secure a land corridor through eastern Syria and into Iraq. The Assad regime wants to re-establish a presence on Syria's eastern border.

Regime forces are thus now advancing eastward on two axes: one from the town of Palmyra and the second from south of Aleppo. It was friction along the second axis, as regime forces closed up against areas controlled by the SDF, that caused the events leading to the downing of the Syrian Su-22.

A geographically inevitable contest of wills is developing — between the regime and its associated forces as they drive east into Islamic State territory and U.S.-associated SDF and Arab rebel fighters, who also seek to control the former Islamic State areas. Moscow's forces are an integral part of this regime push east, with Russian air power and Russian-supported ground forces especially present in the Palmyra offensive.

For a while, it seemed as though the United States and its allies had the upper hand. In mid-2016, the United States established a base in the Tanf area at which U.S. and allied special forces personnel have been training the Maghawir al-Thawra (Revolution Commandos) rebel group. This raised the possibility that these Western-supported Arab forces might link up with SDF fighters in the north. Together, they would then clear the Islamic State out of the Euphrates River valley, complete the conquest of Raqqa, and establish that they control the territory in question before regime forces could make an advance.

In order to decisively preempt this possibility, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Hezbollah, and Assad regime and Iraqi Shiite militia forces on June 9 made a lunge for the Syria-Iraq border along a line north of Tanf, effectively dividing U.S.-supported elements from one another. Maghawir al-Thawra was trapped south of the new line established by the regime side, as the SDF still engaged the Islamic State far to the north. The rebels, if they wish to progress further, now need to break through regime lines to do so. That would be inconceivable without U.S. help.

Iranian and pro-Iranian regional media were quite frank about the intentions behind this sudden move. A report in the IRGC-linked *Fars News Agency* described the thinking behind it as follows: "America … wants to link the northeastern part [of Syria, which is controlled by the Kurds] with the southeastern part, which is why it has stepped up its activity in the al-Tanf area." The Syrian army and its allies, the article went on to say, defied American "red lines" in a military advance designed to thwart this strategy.

This is where the war currently stands. The latest reports suggest that the United States is in the process of beefing up its presence in the Tanf area.

A new base is being built at Zakaf, 50 miles northeast of the town, according to pro-U.S. rebels.

A new base is being built at Zakaf, 50 miles northeast of the town, according to pro-U.S. rebels. The United States has moved its High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) into southern Syria for the first time. Capable of firing rockets and missiles to ranges of nearly 200 miles, the system constitutes a significant increase in U.S. firepower on Syrian soil.

So where is it all heading? The downing of the Su-22 may serve, for a while at least, to demarcate the zones of U.S. and Russian air activity over the skies of Syria. But the real contest is the one on the ground. And here, the prize is the eastern governorate of Deir Ezzor, the site of a large part of Syria's oil resources. Does Russian President Vladimir Putin's warning about American air activity west of the Euphrates mean that this area will need to be ceded in its entirety to the regime? Will the United States agree to this?

The Russians have no crucial interest of their own causing them to back the ambitions of the Iranians in the east. But for as long as the going is relatively easy, it appears that Putin also feels no special compunction to rein in his allies. Perhaps both Moscow and Tehran simply assume that American interest in the area is limited and hence that Washington will not take risks in order to counter red lines set down by other players.

The crucial missing factor here is a clearly stated U.S. policy. Trump can either acquiesce to the new realities that Russia seeks to impose in the air, and that Iran seeks to impose on the ground, or he can move to defy and reverse these, opening up the risk of potential direct confrontation. There isn't really a third choice.

Fars News Agency concluded its recent report in the following terms: "The imbroglio in eastern Syria has only begun, and stormy days are ahead of us." In the face of much uncertainty, this point at least seems crystal clear.

DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP/Getty Images

Bovard: Donald Trump is reckless on Syria. It's his worst foreign policy folly.

James Bovard, Opinion columnist
3:15 a.m. ET June 26, 2017

6-7 minutes

Trump said Obama's 'horrendous leadership' on Syria could start World War III. He's made things even worse.

In Raqqa, Syria, on June 6, 2017.(Photo: Youssef Rabie Youseff, epa)

Last year on the campaign trail, crowds roared when Donald Trump denounced his opponent as "trigger-happy" Hillary. But President Trump is rapidly incarnating the vice he condemned. Nowhere is this more evident than in Syria, where Trump's recklessness risks dragging America into a major war.

U.S. policy toward Syria has been a tangle of absurdities since 2012. President Obama promised 16 times that he would never put U.S. "boots on the ground" in the four-sided Syrian civil war. He quietly abandoned that pledge and, starting in 2014, launched more more than 5,000 airstrikes that dropped more than 15,000 bombs on terrorist groups in Syria.

Four years ago, Trump warned in a tweet: "If the U.S. attacks Syria and hits the wrong targets, killing civilians, there will be worldwide hell to pay." But the Trump administration has sharply increased U.S. bombing while curtailing restrictions that sought to protect innocents. A British-based human rights monitoring group estimated Friday that U.S.-led coalition strikes had killed almost 500 civilians in the past month — more than any month since U.S. bombing began. A United Nations commission of inquiry concluded that coalition airstrikes have caused a "staggering loss of civilian life."

The carnage is sufficiently embarrassing that "the Pentagon will no longer acknowledge when its own aircraft are responsible for civilian casualty incidents," Micah Zenko of the Council of Foreign Relations recently noted.

U.S.-led forces are reportedly bombarding the besieged city of Raqqa with white phosphorous, a munition that burns intensely and is prohibited by international law from use against civilians. Deploying white phosphorous to attack Raqqa could be a war crime, Amnesty International warns.

Trump's most dangerous innovation involves direct attacks on Syrian government forces, including last week's shootdown of a Syrian jet fighter. The Russian government, which is backing Syrian President Bashar Assad, responded by threatening to shoot down any aircraft over much of Syria.

After the Syrian government was accused of killing at least 70 civilians with sarin gas in April, Trump speedily ordered the launch of 59 cruise missiles against a Syrian military airfield. Much of the American news media hailed the Syrian missile attack as Trump's finest hour. When he gave the commencement address at Liberty University in May, the audience cheered when Trump was introduced as the man who "bombed those in the Middle East who were persecuting and killing Christians." But America could pay a harsh price for Trump's "virtue signalling" with bombs and missiles.

The biggest delusion driving U.S. policy is the quest for viable "moderate rebels" — which apparently means groups who oppose Assad but refrain from making grisly videos of beheadings. America has spent billions aiding and training Syrian forces who either quickly collapsed on the battlefield or teamed up with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or al-Qaeda-linked forces. Policy is so muddled that Pentagon-backed Syrian rebels have openly battled CIA-backed rebels.

The United States has armed and aided al-Qaeda-linked groups in Syria despite federal law prohibiting providing material support to terrorist groups. A prominent Assad opponent who organized a conference of anti-Assad groups financed by the CIA was recently denied political asylum. The Department of Homeland Security notified Radwan Ziadeh that because he provided "material support" to the Free Syrian Army, he has "engaged in terrorist activity."

By the same standard, thousands of CIA, State Department, Pentagon and White House officials should be jailed. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, has introduced The Stop Arming Terrorists Act to prohibit any funding, support or weapons for al-Qaeda, ISIS and allied terrorist groups.

POLICING THE USA: A look at race, justice, media

Every side in the Syrian conflict has committed atrocities, often with

approval of their foreign patrons. Former CIA officer Phil Giraldi observed, "The Saudis, Qataris, Turks and Israelis are all currently (or have been recently) in bed with terrorist groups (in Syria) that the United States is pledged to destroy." *The Wall Street Journal* reported this month that "Israel has been regularly supplying Syrian rebels near its border with cash as well as food, fuel and medical supplies for years."

The Syrian government has never threatened the United States, and Congress has not approved attacking it. White House spokesman Sean Spicer justified Trump's cruise missile attack because "when it's in the national interest of the country, the president has the full authority to act." But this is a recipe for unlimited power — warring limited solely by self-serving presidential proclamations.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., condemned Trump's attacks on Syrian government forces as "unconstitutional" and a "completely unlawful use of power." Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., concurs: "This is illegal war at this point."

Killing vast numbers of innocent civilians sows the seeds of future terrorist attacks on America. There are no good options for continuing U.S. intervention in Syria. The only question is whether Trump's blundering will turn that war into a catastrophe for Americans as well as Syrians. As Trump tweeted about Obama's Syria policy in 2013: "Be prepared, there is a small chance that our horrendous leadership could unknowingly lead us into World War III."

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump Meets Modi: Does 'America First' Really Mean What Have You Done for Me Lately?

Niharika Mandhana in New Delhi, and Michael C. Bender and William Mauldin in Washington

7-9 minutes

Updated June 24, 2017 10:38 a.m. ET

When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits the White House on Monday for his first meeting with President Donald Trump, a principle that has long underpinned relations will be at stake: that supporting the growth of a strong India is in America's national interest.

Mr. Trump will use the talks to "really expand his knowledge base about India and understand the importance of the Indian relationship," a senior White House official said. The Trump administration, the official said, will "roll out the red carpet" for Mr. Modi, setting an upbeat tone for the meeting.

But differences over immigration, trade and climate—topics that animated Mr. Trump's "America First" slogan—have the potential to strain relations that have been prone to rough patches. If Mr. Trump takes a more transactional stance than his predecessors, ties could hinge on India's ability to create American jobs or contribute more to maritime security.

Since the final years of Bill Clinton's presidency, U.S. leaders have chipped away at the history of distrust with India, which leaned toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War. President George W. Bush broke down barriers by championing a 2008 landmark nuclear agreement with New Delhi. President Barack Obama called the U.S.-India relationship "one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century" and strategic and defense cooperation between the countries grew under him, fueled by a shared wariness of China.

Mr. Trump, in a post-inauguration phone call with Mr. Modi in January, called India a "true friend," the White House said at the time. He sees India as a critical partner for stability and economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region, which is being reshaped by China's rise, the White House official said.

Indian officials said the meeting would be an opportunity for the leaders to get to know each other. Both have promised economic programs rooted in increasing manufacturing in their countries, and have ridden waves of nationalistic sentiment to shake up politics at home.

"A lot depends on what sort of rapport they strike," said Harsh Pant, head of strategic studies at New Delhi-based think tank Observer Research Foundation. "If they don't [develop an understanding], irritants that were pushed aside in recent years could just as easily resurface and overwhelm the relationship."

As a presidential candidate, Mr. Trump assailed the skilled-worker visa program used by hundreds of thousands of Indians employed in the U.S. In office, he has ordered a review, saying the so-called H-1B visas should only be granted to the "most-skilled and the highest-paid" applicants to avoid crowding out American workers.

Indian Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in March said H-1B visas help the U.S. economy to be more competitive and that India had conveyed its views on the subject to the Trump administration.

The White House official said there was no plan to discuss the visas during Mr. Modi's visit, but that issues relating to climate change may arise. Mr. Modi backs the Paris climate agreement Mr. Trump is withdrawing from. Earlier this month, Mr. Trump said India made its participation in the deal contingent on receiving billions of dollars from developed nations, something New Delhi refuted.

U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said Wednesday that officials were working with Indian counterparts to address U.S. concerns about India's intellectual property standards and barriers to foreign direct investment.

"We're hoping that we end up with deliverables," he told the Senate Finance Committee.

Monday's talks will have a particular focus on regional security and defense collaboration, Indian officials said. These were engines of growth under Mr. Obama as New Delhi emerged as a leading buyer of U.S. arms, and China began altering the balance of power in Asia. Although India remains opposed to a formal security alliance with the U.S., Mr. Modi, who built a personal rapport with Mr. Obama, embraced Washington more than Indian leaders before him.

Trump administration officials said they support this burgeoning partnership. "The U.S. is interested in leaning forward in providing high technology, the kind of technology that the U.S. provides to its closest allies and partners," the White House official said.

The U.S. is working on a plan to approve India's purchase of unarmed MQ-9 maritime surveillance drones for the visit, people familiar with the matter said. India has sought the equipment, which is made by General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc., for use by its Navy.

Among other deals up for discussion is Lockheed Martin Corp.'s proposal to move its F-16 aircraft production line to India as part of Mr. Modi's "Make in India" program if it wins a contract to supply the jet fighters to India's air force.

Lockheed's U.S. line is switching over to building more-advanced F-35 aircraft. A Lockheed official said the company has briefed the Trump administration on its proposals.

"F-16 production in India supports thousands of Lockheed Martin and F-16 supplier jobs in the U.S. and creates new jobs and other opportunities in India," the official said. The aircraft faces competition from Swedish defense company Saab AB.

Increasing collaboration on energy projects in India is also expected to be on the agenda.

Mr. Trump is no stranger to India. The Trump Organization has brand-licensing deals involving Indian real-estate development projects.

"I don't know what he's going to do with India," said Rep. Sander Levin, a Michigan Democrat on the House committee that oversees trade. "I do say his investments cast a cloud over anything he does on trade."

The White House didn't respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Trump has said his companies wouldn't do new business deals overseas while he is president. He has handed operations of his business assets to his sons and another executive and said he wouldn't be involved in them, though he still receives the financial benefit of these arrangements.

Mr. Modi's visit comes amid concerns that an inward-looking U.S. is retreating from its global leadership role, ceding space to China. India wants to forestall a unipolar Asia, as it faces territorial disputes with Beijing, China's growing footprint in the Indian

Ocean and its support for India's rival neighbor Pakistan.

India will look to enlist Mr. Trump in its international campaign to put pressure on Pakistan to stop using what New Delhi calls terrorist proxies or allow terrorists to use its soil to attack India, an Indian official said. Pakistan denies it supports anti-India terrorists.

"There are big questions over Trump's strategic vision for Asia," said Mr. Pant. "The future of U.S.-India ties rests on how the answers evolve."

—Paul Sonne in Washington contributed to this article.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Modi : For the U.S. and India, a Convergence of Interests and Values

Narendra Modi

5-6 minutes

June 25, 2017 5:04 p.m. ET

Last June in my address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress, I stated that the relationship between India and America had overcome the "hesitations of history." A year later, I return to the U.S. confident in the growing convergence between our two nations.

This confidence stems from the strength of our shared values and the stability of our systems. Our people and institutions have steadfastly viewed democratic change as an instrument for renewal and resurgence.

In an uncertain global economic landscape, our two nations stand as mutually reinforcing engines of growth and innovation. Confidence in each other's political values and a strong belief in each other's prosperity has enabled our engagement to grow. A vision of joint success and progress guides our partnership.

Our bilateral trade, which already totals about $115 billion a year, is poised for a multifold increase. Indian companies are adding value to the manufacturing and services sectors in the U.S., with total investments of approximately $15 billion and a presence in more than 35 states, including in the Rust Belt. American companies have likewise fueled their global growth by investing more than $20 billion in India.

The transformation of India presents abundant commercial and investment opportunities for American businesses. The rollout of the Goods and Services Tax on July 1 will, in a single stroke, convert India into a unified, continent-sized market of 1.3 billion people. The planned 100 smart cities, the massive modernization of ports, airports, and road and rail networks, and the construction of affordable housing for all by 2022—the 75th anniversary of India's independence—are not just promises of great urban renewal within India. These plans also showcase the enormous fruits of our relationships with enterprising U.S. partners—worth many billions of dollars over the next decade alone—together with concomitant new employment opportunities across both societies.

India's rapidly expanding aviation needs, and our increasing demand for gas, nuclear, clean coal and renewables, are two significant areas of increasing convergence. In coming years, Indian companies will import energy in excess of $40 billion from the U.S., and more than 200 American-made aircraft will join the private Indian aviation fleet.

The combination of technology, innovation and skilled workers has helped forge an exciting digital and scientific partnership between our two countries. The creative and entrepreneurial energy of our engineers, scientists and researchers, and their free movement between both countries, continue to help India and the U.S. retain their innovation edge and maintain competitiveness in the knowledge economy.

A new layer in our engagement is our partnership for global good. Whenever India and the U.S. work together, the world reaps the benefits—be it our collaborative efforts to find affordable vaccines for rotavirus or dengue, our joint studies of gravitational waves, observations of distant planets, establishing norms for cyberspace, providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Indo-Pacific region, or training peacekeepers in Africa.

Defense is another mutually beneficial sphere of our partnership. Both India and the U.S. have an overriding interest in securing our societies, and the world, from the forces of terrorism, radical ideologies and nontraditional security threats. India has four decades' experience in fighting terrorism, and we share the U.S. administration's determination to defeat this scourge.

We are already working together to address the existing and emerging strategic and security challenges that affect both our nations—in Afghanistan, West Asia, the large maritime space of the Indo-Pacific, the new and unanticipated threats in cyberspace. We also share an interest in ensuring that sea lanes—critical lifelines of trade and energy—remain secure and open to all.

The logic of our strategic relationship is incontrovertible. It is further underpinned by faith in the strength of our multicultural societies that have defended our values at all costs, including the supreme sacrifices we've made in distant corners of the globe. The three-million-strong Indian-American community, which represents the best of both our countries, has played a crucial role in connecting and contributing to our societies.

The past two decades have been a productive journey of engagement for our mutual security and growth. I expect the next few decades to be an even more remarkable story of ambitious horizons, convergent action and shared growth.

The U.S. and India are forging a deeper and stronger partnership that extends far beyond the Beltway and the Raisina Hill. That partnership has become our privileged prerogative and our promise for our people and our world.

Mr. Modi is prime minister of India.

The Washington Post

Rogin : Trump meets Modi: Budding romance or one-night stand?

https://www.facebook.com/josh.rogin

5-7 minutes

President Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi would seem to be kindred spirits. But despite a lot of sweet talk as Modi arrived in Washington for a White House meeting Monday, the question remains whether his dalliance with Trump will be a one-night stand or will blossom into a full-on romance.

Trump and Modi are alike in many ways. They both came to power on populist, nationalist waves with promises to confront Islamist terrorism and stand up to China. Both rule large democracies with a clear interest in increasing their security and economic and diplomatic cooperation. Their social media followings currently rank first and second , respectively, among world leaders.

"Under a Trump administration . . . we are going to be best friends," Trump told the Republican Hindu Coalition a month before the election. "There won't be any relationship that will be more important to us."

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

Yet that close relationship has yet to materialize, due to a mix of transition dysfunction, the distractions of the urgent and a shortage of senior Trump administration officials with India experience. The Modi government, unlike some other Asian powers, has not pushed itself in front of the Trump team, instead pursuing a dual-track policy of cautious engagement mitigated by hedging.

Trump's first-ever meeting with Modi comes after his meeting dozens of other world leaders, including the prime minister of Montenegro. Monday's meeting is intended to break through the malaise and get the U.S.-India relationship back on an upward trajectory.

"This is an opportunity for President Trump to reaffirm India's importance to the United States, the fact that the U.S. supports India playing a larger role in the Asia Pacific," a senior administration official said. "President Trump believes a strong India is good for the U.S."

Trump's commitment to building on the momentum in U.S.-India ties established by his two predecessors is significant, as far as it goes. The two sides are working on a joint statement meant to codify shared values and pledge increased strategic cooperation. The fact that Modi will have dinner, not lunch,

with Trump is meant to signal respect, officials said.

But don't expect a lot of deliverables. The meeting was scheduled before the Group of 20 meeting in Germany next month so that Trump and Modi could develop some rapport before seeing each other there.

One big potential announcement is that, after weeks of deliberation, the Trump administration has agreed to sell India almost two dozen Guardian drones, a deal worth more than $2 billion that would represent the first such U.S. sale to a non-NATO ally.

Even that deal is symbolic of how cautiously the U.S.-India relationship continues to be viewed in New Delhi. Modi's government has also been negotiating with Israel to buy drones in case the United States doesn't come though. Modi will visit Israel next week.

Modi has also recently made high-profile visits to Russia, France and Germany. Experts say he's preparing alternatives in case his push to warm ties with Washington under Trump doesn't pan out.

"Modi has invested a huge amount of political capital in the U.S. since he took power," said Bharath Gopalaswamy, director of the South Asia Center at the Atlantic Council. "The Indians still believe that the U.S. leadership in this part of the world is crucial, and they would not prefer any other leaders [in the region]. But they are deliberately keeping their options open."

There are some positive signs coming out of the Trump White House on India. White House official Kenneth Juster will soon be named U.S. ambassador to India, a choice welcomed in New Delhi. Lisa Curtis, the top National Security Council staffer working on South Asia, is a strong supporter of a strong U.S.-India relationship.

The NSC is coordinating a broad interagency South Asia policy review, the goal of which is to regionalize issues such as counterterrorism and the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Those steps, along with the sure-to-be-positive Trump-Modi meeting on Monday, are probably enough to sustain the relationship for now. At some point, for real progress to be made, the two sides will have to tackle their differences, including on H1-B visas, trade irritants and India's approach to intellectual property.

The Trump administration also must settle on its own foreign policy for India to be reassured that strategic interests remain aligned. Does Trump share India's concern about Chinese expansion in South and Central Asia? It's hard to tell. Is Trump prepared to aggressively confront Pakistan on its support for radical groups? Nobody knows.

Modi's task is to convince Trump that spending more time and attention on India fits into his America First agenda. Trump's job is to convince Modi that his bet on the United States will pay off in real ways long after their dinner is over.

Vinograd : Under Trump, fate of Asia rebalance a question

Samantha Vinograd

6-7 minutes

Story highlights

- Samantha Vinograd: After withdrawing from Paris Climate Accords, Trump must convince Asian leaders that America means what it says
- This week's meetings with Prime Minister Modi and President Moon are his opportunity, Vinograd writes

Samantha Vinograd (@sam_vinograd) served on the National Security Council from 2009 - 2013 including as Director for International Economics and the Senior Advisor to National Security Advisor Thomas E. Donilon. The views expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.

*(CNN)*As President Trump prepares to welcome Prime Minister Modi of India and President Moon of South Korea to Washington, he should strongly consider clearly telling both of them that President Obama's Asia rebalance strategy is alive and well.

But two key questions also need to be answered for this Asia rebalance to continue.

Is the Trump administration well-resourced enough to become more deeply engaged with multiple countries in Asia on regional security, economic growth, human rights, and peaceful dispute resolution? And do America's allies and enemies view the United States as a credible partner in executing this strategy?

On the heels of America's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accords, in particular, it is unclear whether the Trump administration will have the credibility to convince Asian leaders that America means what it says. His meetings with Prime Minister Modi and President Moon are the the first opportunity to see how convincing President Trump can be in this respect.

The US can expect to see some new gift-wrapping in public, but President Trump's messages for Prime Minister Modi of India will not be a far cry from those prepared during the last Obama-Modi meeting, aside from his talking points on climate change and immigration. The Asia rebalance in the age of Trump requires a growing relationship with India. There is no shortage of issues to address, from regional stability in Southeast Asia to the US-India bilateral economic relationship.

Making America "great again" means expanding access for US businesses to India. With

almost $115 billion in bilateral trade

last year, it's no secret that American companies can sell a lot of different goods and services to the Asian country. Security-wise, India is, in the words of the Pentagon, Afghanistan's

most reliable partner

. As President Trump prepares to roll out his Afghanistan strategy, he will need to convince Modi to stay engaged over the long term.

President Moon's visit to the White House is both necessary and prudent as well. It's necessary because South Korea is likely seeking a reassurance that the Trump administration will not take any actions that will put millions of South Koreans at risk of a North Korean attack. With this reassurance as a foundation, President Trump should use the US-Korea Summit to allow both national security teams to dive deep into options.

Presidents Trump and Moon should spend their time together thinking about mutual levers to pull with the Chinese to encourage them to meaningfully engage with North Korea. Fully exhausting this option is the most prudent course of action.

Whether because it is impossible to ignore or because President Trump recognizes the direct and imminent risk that North Korea poses to America's national security, his administration has placed heavy focus there. North Korea's unabated rash of missile launches and Otto Warmbier's tragic death are direct signals that the Kim Jong Un feel emboldened.

However, the US has not seen a rush toward one option over another. Wisely, the President publicly acknowledged that he was going to ask the Chinese for help getting the North Koreans to behave, and his administration has avoided any hasty decisions that would have put millions of lives at risk.

Certainly, any discussion of Asia rebalance strategy must involve China. President Obama met with President Xi nine times during his presidency, and President Xi's visit to Mar-a-Lago kicked off his relationship with President Trump.

After heated campaign rhetoric about China's (mis)behavior, including then-candidate Trump's reference to China's "

rape of our country

," the White House has toned down its stance, save for the President's

recent tweet

referencing China's inability to get Kim Jong Un to stop his provocations.

This is a relationship, however, that is going to require repair. China agreed to sign the Paris Climate Accord after intensive negotiations, and the US withdrawal damaged American credibility with the Chinese government. Trust is important in any relationship, and there is uncertainty now about whether the US will hold up its end of any deal.

But the status quo is not tenable. The message that all three leaders must send after this week's meetings is that the US needs to stop giving Kim Jong Un human bargaining chips. President Trump should impose an immediate ban on US travel to North Korea so that Americans can avoid more tragedies.

At the same time, he needs to convince China that the current state of play will adversely impact Chinese interests. Showing the Chinese how military action in the region would upset the (already) unstable environment is a key part of any action plan. He can do this by showcasing the likely disruption of trade and economic flow -- issues that the Chinese care deeply about.

From China to India to Korea and beyond, the Asia rebalance in the age of Trump is at the cusp of its next chapter. President Trump's assurance that this is one Obama-era policy he won't abrogate is critical to achieving America's national security goals in the region.

The New York Times

50 Years After War, East Jerusalem Palestinians Confront a Life Divided

Isabel Kershner

12-15 minutes

The Dome of the Rock at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City. Uriel Sinai for The New York Times

JERUSALEM — The smoky alternative music club in downtown West Jerusalem was packed at 12:45 a.m. when a Palestinian hip-hop duo from East Jerusalem took the stage, rapping about the occupation, the police and love, among other things, mostly in Arabic.

The crowd, familiar with some of the lyrics, chanted along with the rappers, Muzi Raps and Raed Bassam Jabid. But it was a mostly young, Hebrew-speaking Israeli crowd, including soldiers home for a weekend furlough, filling the dance floor.

Such social interaction between Jews and Palestinians is rare here. The Palestinians call it "cultural normalization," and many frown upon it.

Even as Israelis mark the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem in the June 1967 war, the Palestinians and most of the world consider the eastern half under occupation, and the city remains deeply divided. But after five decades, dealing with Israel has become unavoidable for residents of East Jerusalem.

"It's a totally different world, a totally different life," Muzi Raps, whose real name is Mustafa Jaber, said of his friends in West Jerusalem, which is predominantly Jewish. Mr. Jaber, 27, lives a short walk away, in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, across the old pre-1967 armistice line, now an invisible boundary.

People in central Jerusalem passing a billboard promoting luxury apartments. Ariel Schalit/Associated Press

East Jerusalem's 320,000 Palestinians now make up 37 percent of the city's population. Suspended between Israel and the West Bank, where the Palestinian Authority exercises limited control, many of them exist in a kind of political limbo.

Some live a divided life, working in a West Jerusalem cafe or fixing cars by day, then protesting by night. Others put on an inscrutable public front while navigating individual peace accords with Israelis.

By now, half the East Jerusalem Palestinian labor force works in West Jerusalem, according to the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, an independent Israeli study center. And below the surface, the mood of outright defiance seems to be shifting.

More than 5,000 students in East Jerusalem high schools are now studying for the bagrut, the Israeli matriculation examination that eases enrollment in Israeli universities, up from about 1,000 in 2014, according to City Hall. And 26 East Jerusalem schools offer the Israeli curriculum, taught in Arabic, as an option, compared with 161 that teach only the tawjihi curriculum of the Palestinian Authority. The number of Palestinian students registering at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has increased in recent years. Palestinian families applying for Israeli citizenship — a longstanding taboo — rose to a record 1,081 in 2016, up from a few dozen in 2003.

Yet experts on both sides say the reasons for these shifts are often practical, and do not necessarily signal a desire on the part of East Jerusalem's Palestinians to buy into Israeli society.

"There is a serious crisis vis-à-vis 50 years of Israeli control and its system creeping in," said Mahdi Abdul Hadi, the director of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, an independent East Jerusalem research institute. "There is no national leadership or national agenda. Everybody is trying their own way, whether in education, housing, land issues."

"Yes," he added, "some are taking an Israeli passport as a tool of survival. But nobody took their soul."

Days after the club performance in West Jerusalem, Mr. Jaber and I were walking to his home, in a tiny, arched nook off a bustling bazaar in the Muslim Quarter, near a gateway to the Al Aqsa Mosque compound. He had barely walked three steps before two armed Israeli border police officers stopped him and asked to check his identity card.

Israeli police officers on patrol in Jerusalem's Old City. Bryan Denton for The New York Times

Hardly incognito, he was sporting a large "Muzi Raps" pendant on a thick gold chain, a Tupac T-shirt, sneakers and a baseball cap with the saying, "United we stand, drink till we fall."

For Israel, the capture of the Old City, with its ancient holy sites, from Jordanian control was the emotional pinnacle of its swift victory in 1967. It is the nucleus of the city that Israel has declared its sovereign and eternal capital. It is also the hotly contested core of the conflict.

Outside Mr. Jaber's house, the alleys bristled with police cameras. A group of khaki-clad officers stood guard behind protective metal barriers at one of the Stations of the Cross along the Via Dolorosa.

Israeli flags festooned the balconies of apartments scattered through the Muslim Quarter now inhabited by nationalist religious Jews. But when their children return from school, or one of the adults wants to go out, they are escorted by civilian-clothed bodyguards. Flanked from the front and behind, they pass by wall plaques commemorating past and recent Jewish victims of Palestinian knife attacks. Since the fatal stabbing of an Israeli border police officer this month, the Israeli government is considering turning the nearby Damascus Gate into a security zone.

Nawal Eid Hashimeh, a Palestinian woman whose family received eviction orders, outside her house in the Old City last year. Uriel Sinai for The New York Times

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Israel greatly expanded Jerusalem's city limits, taking in some two dozen West Bank villages, and annexed the eastern side of the city in a move that has never been internationally recognized.

It set about building huge Jewish neighborhoods, or settlements, over the lines, creating a patchwork of populations. The Palestinians were granted permanent residency status, making them free to move and work anywhere in Israel and eligible for Israeli social benefits.

Today, East Jerusalem is cut off from the West Bank by an Israeli system of walls, fences and checkpoints that went up in the early 2000s amid the suicide bombings of the second Palestinian intifada. And interviews with dozens of Palestinian residents exposed a fragmented, confused society.

Up to a third of the city's Palestinian residents live in cheaper, often slumlike areas that are technically part of Jerusalem, but that Israel placed beyond the barrier, in a netherworld with an even more uncertain future.

The separation barrier surrounding the Shuafat camp in East Jerusalem. Daniel Berehulak for The New York Times

While the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank demands a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, some of the city's Palestinians describe the Palestinian Authority, which Israel bars from operating in East Jerusalem, as a corrupt and lawless "mafia," and many say they want no part of it.

"We have our rights here, where we live," said Ola Hedra, 35, an English teacher from the A-Tur neighborhood on the Mount of Olives. "Not everything — but it's better than life under the Palestinian Authority."

Ahmad Abu al-Hawa, 21, who works at a family store selling juice, ice cream and cigarettes in A-Tur, shops in West Jerusalem to buy fashionable clothes. But he said he did not know any Israelis, whom he called "our enemy, the occupiers." He said he had close to 20 cousins and friends in prison for throwing stones and firebombs at Israeli forces, a daily occurrence in this tense neighborhood.

Soon after he spoke, one cousin returned after completing a 30-month term and was greeted with loud music, Palestinian flags and posters with his portrait, even though neighbors said the police had warned the family not to celebrate.

The Palestinian residents complain of high taxes and fines and a lack of municipal services. More than 80 percent of the city's Palestinian children live in poverty, according to government statistics, compared with about 30 percent of Israeli children. While permanent residents

can vote in the municipal — but not national — elections, the Palestinians of Jerusalem overwhelmingly boycott the vote for City Hall.

Jerusalem's mayor, Nir Barkat, a conservative and a former venture capitalist, said that he ran the city according to a "philosophy of inclusiveness," and that he was working to deal with the neglect in Arab areas, including a severe shortage of classrooms.

A view of Har Homa, an Israeli settlement in East Jerusalem. Dan Balilty/Associated Press

Palestinian and Jewish residents frequent some of the same city parks and shopping malls in West Jerusalem, and some Israelis have also been reaching across the divide.

Still, the Israeli government has displayed some ambivalence in embracing the Palestinian residents. The rate of applicants from East Jerusalem who were granted Israeli citizenship sharply dropped in the past few years. The Israeli Interior Ministry said individual background checks took time, especially given the application overload.

The ambiguity is mutual.

Muhammad Sbeih, 45, the owner of a pet shop in the Palestinian neighborhood of Beit Hanina, said that his Israeli permanent residency card "does not represent me," and that when he traveled to Ramallah in the West Bank in his Israeli yellow-plated car, "they treat me like I'm Jewish."

Like many East Jerusalem Palestinians, he cherishes his connection to Al Aqsa, among the holiest sites in Islam, and now the essence of many East Jerusalem Palestinians' identity. Mr. Sbeih works as a muezzin at a local mosque and said he would ultimately like to see a caliphate in the area.

"Islam is what's left," he said.

A principal of an East Jerusalem boys' middle and high school, where hand-drawn picture signs at the entrance urge pupils to bring their brains, not guns, will be offering one class teaching the Israeli curriculum starting in September. But the principal said he was offering it to the weaker students because the Israeli bagrut system was more flexible.

Both the Palestinian Authority and many Palestinian parents strongly oppose what they see as an Israeli attempt to "Judaicize" the education system and undermine Palestinian identity. Israel is offering these schools financial incentives.

In middle-class Beit Hanina, the new School of Science and Technology offers only the Israeli curriculum. Muhammad Abu Khdeir, a teacher there and a relative of a Palestinian teenager killed by Jewish extremists in 2014, said: "The problem is we don't know exactly where we are. Are we here or there?"

The Washington Post

Israeli cabinet 'freezes' plan to create egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall

https://www.facebook.com/william.booth.5074?fref=ts

6-8 minutes

JERUSALEM — Israel's government on Sunday nixed an ambitious plan approved last year to allow mixed-gender religious services at the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest prayer site, angering many American Jews, who said they felt insulted and abandoned by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition.

An official from the prime minister's office said Monday that Netanyahu had decided to suspend the plan in an attempt to find a solution that would work for all sides — ultra-Orthodox and more liberal streams of Judaism.

"This is not a symbolic step but a practical move," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press.

Israel's holy Jewish sites are managed by ultra-Orthodox Jews, and in keeping with their traditions, the area for prayer at the Western Wall is divided according to gender. Women are not permitted to read aloud from the Torah, wear prayer shawls or sing there.

Non-Orthodox streams of Judaism, including the Reform and Conservative denominations that are prevalent in the United States, allow men and women to pray side by side, and female rabbis regularly lead services.

Reform and Conservative Jewish leaders in the United States and Israel have long pressed for an area of the Western Wall where fathers can stand beside daughters and mothers beside sons for prayer and religious services.

A 2016 plan approved by the government to provide such an area was described as a "fair and creative solution" by Netanyahu.

"It's a place that is supposed to unite the Jewish people," he said at the time.

[Israel to create a new egalitarian prayer plaza at Western Wall]

According to a study by the Pew Research Center published in March 2016, more than half of American Jews identify themselves as either Reform or Conservative, while only about 10 percent observe Orthodox practices. In Israel, only a small minority are affiliated with the non-Orthodox movements.

Sunday's decision to cancel the new Western Wall arrangement has drawn denunciations from liberal Jews in Israel and the United States. It also appeared to threaten Netanyahu's fragile coalition, with Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman — head of a faction that represents secular Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union — vowing to fight back.

"It actually causes terrible harm to Jewish unity and to the alliance between the State of Israel and Diaspora Jewry," Israeli media quoted him as saying.

Writing in the Jerusalem Post, editor in chief Yaakov Katz commented: "Sunday will go down in history as a shameful day for the State of Israel, another nail in the coffin of Israel's failing relationship with Diaspora Jewry."

"Netanyahu's office made sure to issue a statement that Sunday's cabinet decision was not to cancel the previous deal but merely to freeze it. This is a sham," Katz wrote. "The deal had already been frozen for the last 18 months and wasn't moving forward. By taking the decision Sunday, Netanyahu is simply signaling to Diaspora Jewry that at the end of the day, his political survival is more important than Israeli-Diaspora relations."

The prime minister said in a statement that he would seek an alternative solution, appointing senior minister Tzachi Hanegbi to look into it.

"The prime minister's decision came from the realization that over the last year and a half nothing has progressed with this plan, so another solution needs to be found," Hanegbi said.

"We are not going to quietly accept this. It is so insulting, I know there will be a series of responses," said Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union of Reform Judaism, which represents 1.5 million Reform Jews in 900 synagogues in the United States and Canada.

The decision "delegitimizes the overwhelming majority of Jews on the planet," Jacobs said.

Natan Sharansky, the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel who formulated the original plan, said he was deeply disappointed. "Five years ago, the prime minister asked me to bring all the sides together to create a solution where there would be one wall for one people," he said.

[Israeli court allows non-Orthodox prayer by women at Western Wall]

Anat Hoffman, chair of Women of the Wall, a feminist group that has been pushing for a solution at the site, described Netanyahu's decision as "shameful."

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

"It's a terrible day for women in Israel when the prime minister sacrifices their rights while kowtowing to a handful of religious extremists, who want to enforce their religious customs while intentionally violating the rights of the majority of the Jewish world," she said.

Even though the new prayer space had been approved by the government, the plan stalled because of ultra-Orthodox opposition. In September, Israel's Reform and Conservative movements, together with Women of the Wall, filed a legal petition to force the government to divide the plaza.

The Israeli daily Haaretz on Sunday quoted Interior Minister Aryeh Deri, chairman of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, as saying that the original plan was approved "because the Haredi parties did not pay attention to its details," a reference to the ultra-Orthodox parties.

In Deri's view, the Reform movement's decision to file a

petition shut the door to a compromise, Haaretz reported.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Fuel Truck Explodes in Pakistan, Killing More Than 130 People

Qasim Nauman

4-5 minutes

Updated June 25, 2017 1:18 p.m. ET

At least 138 people were killed and nearly 150 others injured after gasoline spilling from an overturned fuel truck caught fire in central Pakistan on Sunday, officials said.

The truck was traveling on a highway around 300 miles south-southwest of the capital Islamabad when it flipped over, spilling its contents, police said. The truck was carrying thousands of gallons of gasoline north from the southern port city of Karachi.

Traffic officials closed the highway 1.5 miles on either side of the overturned truck and warned passersby to stay away, but a large crowd, including residents of nearby villages, gathered to try to scoop up the fuel, local government officials and police said.

The fire erupted around 6 a.m. local time, according to rescue workers. Local government officials said hundreds of people were at the site when the spill ignited.

"We warned them, we told them this oil can catch fire any second but a lot of people still came," said Imran Shah, a highway police spokesman. Buckets and other containers were seen lying on the ground in footage from the scene aired on Pakistani television.

The fireball engulfed the crowd and vehicles nearby, killing at least 138. At least 145 more were injured, including dozens with serious third-degree burns, said Jam Sajjad Hussain, a spokesman for the government's Rescue 1122 in Punjab province, where Bahawalpur is located.

The deadly accident forced Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to cut short a private visit to the U.K. He was expected to return to Pakistan Sunday night.

"This tragedy has saddened the entire nation a day before Eid," Mr. Sharif said in a statement, referring to the festival marking the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Mr. Hussain, the rescue-service spokesman, said dozens of motorcyclists stopped on the side of the road and were among those gathering spilled fuel.

"We found a lot of destroyed motorcycles. They were parked and there were no bodies next to them," Mr. Hussain said.

The provincial government said 75 motorcycles and three cars were destroyed by the fire.

Footage and images aired on local television channels showed thick black smoke and flames rising from the accident site. A stretch of road was blackened by the fire and the charred frames of burned vehicles and the overturned fuel truck could be seen.

"At first, we couldn't understand what had happened. There were so many people and so much smoke," said Muhammad Zubair, local head of Edhi Foundation, a private charity that provides emergency services. "Everything was on fire, and it was difficult to get our ambulances in and out because traffic was choked on the highway."

A large crowd ignored repeated pleas from the highway police to move away.

"There were hundreds of people around the tanker. What could a few [policemen] do other than guide them? They couldn't remove them by force," said Shaukat Hayat, head of the National Highways and Motorway Police.

The accident overwhelmed local hospitals, which officials said weren't equipped to deal with an accident of this scale. Military and government helicopters were deployed to transport the seriously injured to hospitals in other cities with specialized burn-treatment units.

Government officials said an investigation was under way to determine what caused the truck to overturn, and how the fire started.

Pakistan has millions of people living near or below the poverty line so it is unsurprising so many would rush to try to save a few rupees by scooping up the spilled fuel. Local officials said many of the victims were low-income farm laborers from the nearby villages, and brought any container they could find to store the gasoline, including cooking pots and empty plastic soda bottles.

"Farm laborers in a rural area like this start their day very early, after dawn, and the accident occurred at a short walking distance from the nearby villages," said local police official Jam Sajid. "That's why word of the [fuel] spill spread very quickly and people arrived, despite warnings."

Appeared in the June 26, 2017, print edition as 'Scores Die After Fuel Truck Flips in Pakistan.'

The New York Times

White House Pushes Military Might Over Humanitarian Aid in Africa

Helene Cooper

9-11 minutes

President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti welcoming Defense Secretary Jim Mattis at the Presidential Palace in Ambouli, Djibouti, in April. Pool photo by Jonathan Ernst

MUA MISSION, Malawi — If ever there was an example of American and African military bonhomie, it was at a recent summit meeting here over glasses of South African Pinotage and expectations of Pentagon largess.

Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, vice chief of staff of the United States Army, gave the African generals advice from his days in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Maj. Gen. Joseph P. Harrington, the head of United States Army Africa, gave a shout-out to the West African military leaders who helped prod the former Gambian president, Yahya Jammeh, out of office after he lost his bid for re-election last year. Lt. Gen. Robert Kariuki Kibochi, the commander of the Kenyan Army, got understanding nods from the Americans when he made clear how much blood African peacekeepers put on the line.

But even here, among men who have been given every reason to expect that they will be receiving more money from the Trump administration, there is unease that the additional American heft may come at a steep price. Pentagon officials are themselves concerned that shifting to a military-heavy presence in Africa will hurt American interests in the long term by failing to stimulate development. An absence of schools and jobs, they say, creates more openings for militant groups.

"We have statements out of Washington about significant reductions in foreign aid," Gen. Griffin Phiri, the commander of the Malawi Defense Forces, said in an interview during the African Land Forces Summit, a conference of 126 American Army officers and service members and their counterparts from 40 African nations. "What I can tell you is that experience has shown us that diplomacy and security must come together." He bemoaned "mixed messages" coming out of Washington.

Actually, the message is not so mixed, foreign policy experts say. If Congress passes Mr. Trump's proposed Pentagon budget for the 2018 fiscal year — it calls for an additional $52 billion on top of the current $575 billion base budget — the United States will spend more money on military affairs in Africa but reduce humanitarian and development assistance across the continent. The Trump budget proposes cutting aid to Africa to $5.2 billion in the 2018 fiscal year from $8 billion now, a stark drop. Even some of the money still in the Trump proposal would shift to security areas from humanitarian and development, foreign policy experts say.

"We are radically narrowing the definition of why and how Africa matters to U.S. national interests," said J. Stephen Morrison, senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Gone are the days, he said, when human rights, development, economic growth and humanitarian relief dominated the American agenda on the continent.

The Pentagon has not yet specified how much money will go to African militaries, but officials say there will be more of it for training programs, joint exercises and counterterrorism efforts. There may also be more funding for Camp Lemonnier, the American base in Djibouti, where visitors are greeted with a video of American and East African troops parachuting out of planes and rolling on the dirt together, to the screaming howls of AC/DC's "Thunderstruck."

The Trump administration has proposed slashing programs that buy antiretroviral drugs for people who are infected with H.I.V., the virus that causes AIDS, by at least $1.1 billion — nearly a fifth of their current funding. Researchers say the cuts could lead to the deaths of

at least one million people in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. Over all, Mr. Trump's budget submission would reduce State Department funding by roughly a third and cut foreign assistance by about 29 percent.

Mr. Trump's proposal would also move away from traditional development assistance programs in favor of so-called Economic Support Funds, short-term investments based on national security calculations.

The White House has yet to nominate someone for the post of assistant secretary of state for African affairs — the top administration envoy to the continent. Mr. Trump has made only a handful of calls to African leaders since taking office, and the National Security Council still doesn't have a director for African affairs.

Mr. Trump's secretary of state, Rex W. Tillerson, reinforced the view on the continent that the Trump administration puts a low priority on diplomacy when in April he backed out of a planned meeting with the chairman of the African Union, Moussa Faki Mahamat, at the last minute. The aborted meeting, first reported by Foreign Policy magazine, left the chairman fuming.

In addition, two big think tanks, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the United States Institute of Peace, are facing the complete elimination of federal funding for their Africa programs under Mr. Trump's proposed budget.

And yet over at the Pentagon, it is a different story. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis wasn't on the job three months before he took his first trip to the continent, arriving in Djibouti on a bright Sunday in April for meetings with President Ismail Omar Guelleh. In Chad in March, American Special Forces were conducting training exercises with service members from 20 African countries.

Last month, Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, the head of the Pentagon's Africa Command, was in Tripoli, Libya, in the first high-level visit by an American official since the 2012 attacks on the American Consulate in Benghazi. General Waldhauser huddled with Fayez Serraj, the leader of Libya's new government of national accord, as the Defense Department — now the lead agency for diplomacy in Africa — wrestled with the idea of how to reach a political solution to the chaos in Libya.

And at the African Land Forces Summit in Malawi, held over two days in May, the American military spent $1.2 million flying in and housing African military leaders. The Americans hired buses to take the African commanders to their hotels and brought in National Guard and reserve officers from all over the United States to chat with their counterparts.

The American military leaders are among the first to sound alarms about the proposed cuts in humanitarian funding, worrying that the reductions could put in place conditions that lead to more conflict, which might then mean more military intervention.

In testimony submitted to the Senate Armed Services Committee this month, a long list of retired American military officers, including Gen. Stanley McChrystal, Gen. David H. Petraeus and Adm. Michael Mullen, said foreign aid cuts hurt the Pentagon. "We are part of a long history of U.S. military leaders who have noted how much more cost-effective it is to prevent a conflict than to end one," the officers wrote.

Or as Mr. Mattis told Congress in 2013, when he was a general overseeing American military operations in the Middle East as head of United States Central Command, "If you don't fully fund the State Department, then I need to buy more ammunition.''

Military leaders today echo Mr. Mattis's sentiment.

"We recognize the limits of military power, and how important it is to leverage all elements and capabilities that our interagency and nongovernmental organizations bring to bear in Africa and around the world," General Harrington told the opening session of the conference in Malawi.

Gen. Carter Ham, a former commander of Africa Command, said in an interview that cuts in foreign aid would lead to the need for more increases in military spending. "Insecurity in Africa, which adversely affects the United States, stems in my view from loss of hope," he said.

He offered an example: "If you're a young Muslim man in northeastern Nigeria, and you look at your government and say, my prospects for a job are pretty slim, there's no education or health care, and then suddenly some guy comes along and offers me money, prestige, a gun and a girl, a purpose, that becomes attractive," he said, referring to the many young men who have been coaxed into joining the militant group Boko Haram.

On the closing day of the African Land Forces Summit, the assembled African generals listened intently as one American diplomat posed a central question.

"How do we operate in an environment when we are willing to send peacekeepers," asked Alexander M. Laskaris, a State Department official with Africa Command, "but we're not willing to take the steps necessary to make peace?"

Correction: June 25, 2017

An earlier version of this article gave an incorrect rank for Joseph P. Harrington, the head of United States Army Africa. He is a major general, not a brigadier general.

The Washington Post

Diehl : No one is paying attention to the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II

https://www.facebook.com/jackson.diehl

5-7 minutes

The never-ending circus that is Donald Trump's presidency has sucked attention from all kinds of issues that desperately need it, from health-care reform to the creeping expansion of U.S. engagement in Syria. Still, it's shocking that so little heed is being paid to what the United Nations says is the worst humanitarian crisis since 1945: the danger that about 20 million people in four countries will suffer famine in the coming months, and that hundreds of thousands of children will starve to death.

Not heard of this? That's the problem. According to U.N. and private relief officials, efforts to supply enough food to stem the simultaneous crises in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Nigeria are falling tragically short so far, in part because of inadequate funding from governments and private donors. Of the $4.9 billion sought in February by the U.N.'s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for immediate needs in those countries, just 39 percent had been donated as of last week.

That resource gap could be attributed to donor fatigue, or to the sheer size of the need. But, in part, it's a simple lack of awareness. "We can't seem to get anyone's attention to what's going on," says Carolyn Miles, the president and chief executive of Save the Children.

Evening Edition newsletter

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"I've never seen anything quite like this," says David Beasley, the former South Carolina governor who heads the U.N. World Food Program. "The last eight to 10 months the world has been distracted. It's all Trump, Trump, Trump . . . and here we are in crisis mode."

The statistics that Miles and Beasley reel off certainly ought to command attention. For example: 1.4 million children are at risk of starvation in the four countries, of whom 600,000 "could die in the next three to four months," according to Beasley. In Yemen, where hunger stalks 17 million people, only 3.3 million are being provided with full rations, compared with the 6.8 million the WFP wanted to feed this month. Meanwhile, a cholera epidemic has erupted, infecting more than 200,000 people so far. Miles says another child is infected every 35 seconds.

There's been some progress: In the South Sudanese state of Unity, which surpassed the U.N. standard for a famine designation earlier this year, the alert was lifted last week following some large and timely food deliveries. In Somalia, too, relief operations have been more effective than during the last declared famine, in 2011. And yet the overall situation in both countries is still frightening. Fully 50 percent of South Sudan's population, or 6 million people, are expected to be "severely food insecure" in the coming weeks, an increase of 500,000 over May.

In Somalia, the failure of spring rains may push the country into famine status by next month, Miles says. Yet the WFP says it might have to cut off 700,000 Somalis from aid in the next few weeks if more funding does not come through.

Notwithstanding the anti-foreign aid posture of the Trump administration, the United States is not the problem here. By early June Washington had pledged nearly $1.2 billion in relief to the four countries, including a supplement of $329 million announced on May 24. There's more coming, thanks to a bipartisan coalition in Congress, spearheaded

by Republican Sen. Lindsay O. Graham, that inserted $990 million for famine relief into this year's budget.

Aid officials said getting the money from Washington is a slow process, thanks to the failure of the new administration to fill key posts at the U.S. Agency for International Development. And for the year beginning in October, Trump's budget proposes a drastic cut of $1 billion in food aid. But Graham and other key legislators have already made clear that it won't happen. "For all the chaos," Beasley told me, "Democrats and Republicans still come together for hungry children."

The WFP leader is more impatient with other nations — especially the Persian Gulf states that have done so much to create the crisis in Yemen. Saudi Arabia, which led the military intervention that has devastated an already poor country since 2015, is partially blockading the vital port of Hodeida, through which 70 percent of Yemen's food is imported. So far this year the Saudis promised $227 million in famine relief to Yemen but delivered only about 30 percent of that. The United Arab Emirates isn't even on OCHA's list of donors. "The Saudis," says Beasley, "ought to fund 100 percent of humanitarian needs in Yemen. No question."

Famines used to attract broad interest in the West. Rock stars led relief campaigns, and television networks produced special documentaries. U.S. nongovernmental organizations are looking for ways to similarly galvanize the country this summer. Millions of lives may depend on whether they can find a way to command attention in the age of Trump.

Editorial : We're closer than ever to eradicating Polio — and yet there's Syria

https://www.facebook.com/washingtonpostopinions

11-13 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 25 at 7:37 PM

WONDERFUL AS it is to recall the glories of the manned space program — the exhilaration and sense of infinite possibilities for humanity — there were also setbacks, disasters and disappointments. Something similar is happening now with polio and the world's longest and most ambitious quest to eradicate the poliovirus, which is highly contagious, largely strikes children under 5 years old and can cause permanent paralysis. Thanks to vaccination, the eradication effort is closer to success today than at any time in 30 years. Yet all of a sudden, a new outbreak has appeared in Syria. Is the goal about to be lost?

Not exactly, but the mixture of optimism and worry is warranted. As recently as the mid-1980s, polio paralyzed more than 350,000 children a year in 125 countries where it was endemic. As Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates pointed out recently, that's 40 cases an hour. By contrast, so far this year, the last three endemic countries have reported a total of only six cases of wild poliovirus, fewer than at any moment ever: four in Afghanistan and two in Pakistan, and none so far this year in Nigeria. This is an extraordinary accomplishment by people, biomedicine and philanthropy. Just a few years ago, Pakistan, for example, appeared to be spinning out of control, with vaccination workers murdered while on the job, and whole sectors beyond reach of immunization. Globally, some 16 million people are walking today who might otherwise have been afflicted with paralysis from polio, Mr. Gates noted.

The numbers are so low today that eradication may indeed be within reach, if there is not another setback in the remaining endemic countries. For this, immunization and surveillance must be sustained. On June 12, philanthropists and governments once again backed the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a public-private partnership aimed at the second-ever eradication of a disease, after smallpox. At the Rotary International convention in Atlanta, $1.2 billion was pledged. Up to $150 million raised in the next three years by Rotary International, which has been at the forefront of the battle since 1985, will be matched two-to-one by the Gates Foundation, which pledged a total of $450 million, including the match. The remaining will come from other donors, all to make sure there is no relapse and a final fight to the finish.

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The one dark spot is Syria, where a fresh outbreak has paralyzed 17 children, most from Mayadin, south of Deir al-Zour, and one child from Raqqa, where the Islamic State is headquartered. This is the second polio outbreak of the war. It was caused by a weakened form of the virus from the polio vaccine itself, which in rare cases mutates and becomes virulent against the unvaccinated, spreading through contaminated sewage or water. The real culprit is the upheaval of war. Fortunately, there is an effective vaccine and a fair amount of experience in extinguishing such an outbreak, and with enough effort and immunization, it can be contained.

The moonshot may yet succeed.

ETATS-UNIS

Where Trump Zigs, Tillerson Zags, Putting Him at Odds With White House (UNE)

David E. Sanger, Gardiner Harris and Mark Landler

12-15 minutes

Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, right, with Wilbur Ross, the commerce secretary, this month at a news conference at the White House. Al Drago/The New York Times

WASHINGTON — When Rex W. Tillerson, the former chief executive of Exxon Mobil, arrived in Washington five months ago to become the secretary of state, his boosters said he brought two valuable assets to a job that had usually gone to someone steeped in government and diplomacy: a long history managing a global company, and deep relationships from the Middle East to Russia that enabled him to close deals.

But his first opportunity to use that experience — as a behind-the-scenes mediator in the dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia — has put Mr. Tillerson in exactly the place a secretary of state does not want to be: in public disagreement with the president who appointed him.

Mr. Tillerson tried to position himself as an intermediary and sought for all sides to put their demands on the table. But President Trump openly sided with the Saudis, first on Twitter, then again at a news conference. Mr. Trump called Qatar a "funder of terrorism at a very high level" just as the State Department was questioning whether the Saudis were using the terrorism charge to cover for "long-simmering grievances" between the Arab nations.

Some in the White House say that the discord in the Qatar dispute is part of a broader struggle over who is in charge of Middle East policy — Mr. Tillerson or Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law and a senior adviser — and that the secretary of state has a tin ear about the political realities of the Trump administration. Others say it is merely symptomatic of a dysfunctional State Department that, under Mr. Tillerson's uncertain leadership, does not yet have in place the senior political appointees who make the wheels of diplomacy turn.

But criticism from Mr. Trump's aides is not Mr. Tillerson's only problem. In recent days, each of his top priorities has hit a wall. His effort to enlist China to force North Korea to give up its nuclear and ballistic missile programs has gone nowhere, as the president himself acknowledged last week. The Russians, angry about a congressional move to impose new sanctions, disinvited one of his top diplomats — leaving that crucial relationship at its lowest point since the Cold War.

And in Congress, where Mr. Tillerson once found members willing to give deference to his efforts to reorganize and shrink the State Department, there is now anger and defiance about the extent of those plans.

In a remarkable series of hearings this month, Senator Bob Corker, Republican of Tennessee and the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, declared Mr. Tillerson's proposal for a 30 percent cut in the department's budget a "waste of time" that he would not even review, and he expressed disbelief that the reorganization plan for the department would not be ready until the end of the year, at the earliest.

"It's not that he's a weak secretary of state or a strong one — he's in a different category," said Robert Kagan, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who is writing the second volume of his history of American foreign policy. "I have a hard time thinking of one who has come in with little foreign policy experience and has less interest in surrounding himself with the people who know something about the regions and issues that he has to deal with."

In fact, Mr. Tillerson's determination to rationalize the State Department structure, which many applaud, and his refusal to appoint under secretaries and assistant secretaries until he has it all figured out have created policy gridlock. Three foreign ambassadors — one from Asia and two from Europe — said they had taken to contacting the National Security Council because the State Department does not return their calls or does not offer substantive answers when it does.

Mr. Tillerson, for example, recently shut down the office of the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan — whose role had been diminished since Richard Holbrooke had the job during President Barack Obama's first term — and has yet to appoint an assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, at a time when the Taliban's return and Pakistan's instability are major concerns.

When he attended a series of recent meetings on Afghanistan, Mr. Tillerson was accompanied by only his chief of staff, Margaret Peterlin, who is a former United States Patent and Trademark official and technology executive with no diplomatic experience.

There is also no one in line for the Asia policy job, just when there is talk about whether the North Korea crisis will be defused by negotiation or steam toward conflict.

Through it all, Mr. Tillerson, a Texas native and an engineer by training, has remained publicly stoic, proceeding at his own pace, though colleagues from his Exxon days say they have seen little evidence he is finding much joy in the job.

Running one of the world's largest oil and gas companies, Mr. Tillerson had complete authority. At the State Department, he finds himself negotiating with other power centers — from a White House with conflicting factions and priorities to the Defense Department — and managing a bureaucracy that largely cringes at the president's approach to the world. Some senior diplomats have resigned over the administration's policies, and many have signed letters of protest.

Accustomed as he is to having the final word, it was clearly jarring for Mr. Tillerson, during a recent trip to Australia and New Zealand, to be out of sync with Mr. Trump's tweets on the Qatar crisis. "I'm not involved in how the president constructs his tweets, when he tweets, why he tweets, what he tweets," the secretary said.

Foreign governments do not know whether to believe Mr. Tillerson's reassuring words or Mr. Trump's incendiary statements. But there is also evidence of more substantive disagreements between Mr. Tillerson and the small cadre of White House officials who have taken a strong interest in setting Middle East policy, starting with Mr. Kushner.

In dealing with the Saudi leadership, which Mr. Tillerson knows well, Mr. Kushner argued for cultivating Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the 31-year-old son of King Salman, who was emerging as a rival to the crown prince at the time, Mohammed bin Nayef.

Mr. Tillerson warned against showing favoritism in the succession, and viewed the treatment of the young Prince Mohammed during a White House trip as too lavish. Mr. Kushner, it turned out, was betting on the right horse: The son displaced Mohammed bin Nayef last week as the crown prince, and will probably be the leader of Saudi Arabia for decades to come.

The rift widened when Mr. Kushner and Stephen K. Bannon, Mr. Trump's chief strategist, argued for backing Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other countries that had imposed an embargo on Qatar, ostensibly to punish it for financing the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist groups. Mr. Tillerson, who had relationships in Qatar dating from his time as the chief executive of Exxon Mobil, argued for the United States to take a neutral position in the dispute in order to keep the Gulf Cooperation Council, a loose association of mostly Sunni Arab nations, together.

But the secretary's efforts to play peacemaker were undercut by Mr. Trump's statement. When the administration pressed Saudi Arabia and Egypt to draw up a list of demands for Qatar, a senior official said, Mr. Tillerson asked Qatar to do the same. Officials at the White House were nonplused.

Mr. Tillerson does have his supporters, such as James Jay Carafano, a vice president of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. "Frankly, the biggest criticisms really amount to he works for Trump and he doesn't act like Kerry or Clinton," he said. "He doesn't like pandering to the media, and he is perplexed by Trump's tweeting. That's pretty vapid stuff."

But usually by this point in their tenure, secretaries of state have made their focus clear. Hillary Clinton focused on the empowerment of women; John Kerry focused on a nuclear deal with Iran and a failed effort at Middle East peace; and Condoleezza Rice made the spread of American democracy the theme of her term. If Mr. Tillerson has a larger vision beyond shrinking and reorganizing the State Department, he has offered no hint.

His rough beginning has led to a quiet effort by senior Republican officials from past administrations — including Henry A. Kissinger, Ms. Rice and Robert M. Gates, a former defense secretary — to reach out with advice. He has been told to lean more on the experience of career professionals, to become more confident in taking initiatives separate from a White House preoccupied by investigations and, above all, to move more quickly.

The closest Mr. Tillerson has come to articulating a strategic vision for his tenure came during a session with department employees in early May. In a freewheeling talk, operating without notes, Mr. Tillerson ran through each region of the world where the State Department is active — including the Middle East, Europe and Asia, touching on China and North Korea — asking how to "advance our interests in Afghanistan" and how to keep terrorism from spreading through North and Central Africa.

"Let's talk first about my view of how you translate 'America First' into our foreign policy," he said, and then went on to describe an era in which American economic and security interests would be paramount.

To many in the department, Mr. Tillerson's speech was notable for what it did not include. Over the previous five presidencies, questions of how to use American influence to advance the rights of minorities around the world, to negotiate a new arms control deal or to set norms of behavior for nations that attack each other with cyberweapons had become the focus of American diplomacy. Not anymore.

And when Mr. Tillerson spoke of human rights, it was to caution that while the United States always treasures "freedom, human dignity, the way people are treated," those values would often not be reflected in policies. Values, he warned, cannot be allowed to "create obstacles to our ability to advance our national security interests, our economic interests."

The issue became pointed during a congressional hearing this month, when Mr. Tillerson conceded that during dealings with Russia's leaders, he had never discussed the torture and murder of gay men in Chechnya. "Those are on our pending list," he said.

When asked to specifically condemn such targeted attacks in Russia, he said, "That is our position globally." And when pressed further, he snapped, "Last time I checked, Russia is part of the globe."

To many State Department employees, Mr. Tillerson is something of a phantom who says little in staff meetings, rarely leaves his seventh-floor office — where he is surrounded by Ms. Peterlin and a small group of protective aides — and does not solicit their views.

Since he became secretary, the torrent of words that once flowed from the State Department in daily briefings, speeches and statements — helping to refine and set policy in embassies around the world — has slowed to a trickle. Mr. Tillerson has rarely held "background" briefings with reporters to explain his positions.

His reticence has become so well known that even the president gently ribbed him about it when the

two were in Saudi Arabia, volunteering the secretary to conduct a briefing where no American reporters were present.

Mr. Tillerson's aides say his approach is as refreshing as the new décor in the State Department's seventh-floor offices, where the art and colors of the American West now hang, rather than paintings of long-dead diplomats.

"He thinks like a cowboy," Mr. Tillerson's strategic adviser, R. C. Hammond, said recently. Likening words to ammunition, Mr. Hammond added, "You carry a revolver with only six shots, and you don't waste your bullets."

Senate Leaders Try to Appease Members as Support for Health Bill Slips (UNE)

Robert Pear and Thomas Kaplan

10-13 minutes

Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the majority leader, has only days before Congress's recess to wheel, deal and cajole his colleagues to support a bill that has grown less popular with more exposure. Doug Mills/The New York Times

WASHINGTON — Senate Republican leaders scrambled Sunday to rally support for their health care bill as opposition continued to build inside and outside Congress, and as several Republican senators questioned whether it would be approved this week.

President Trump expressed confidence that the bill to repeal the guts of the Affordable Care Act would pass.

"Health care is a very, very tough thing to get," Mr. Trump said in an interview shown Sunday on Fox News. "But I think we're going to get it. We don't have too much of a choice because the alternative is the dead carcass of Obamacare."

With Democrats solidly opposed to the legislation, Senate Republicans must find the votes from within. They can afford to lose only two votes, but five Republican senators have announced that they cannot support the health care bill as drafted, and others have expressed concerns.

Senate leaders have been trying to lock down Republican votes by funneling money to red states, engineering a special deal for Alaska and arguing that they could insure more people at a lower cost than the House, which passed a repeal bill last month.

But as more analysis of the bill reached state officials, especially in places that expanded Medicaid access under the Affordable Care Act, misgivings grew. Senator Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican and doctor who is considered a critical vote, said he remained undecided. Louisiana, with its high levels of poverty, recently expanded Medicaid.

"There are things in this bill which adversely affect my state, that are peculiar to my state," Mr. Cassidy said on CBS's "Face the Nation."

The bill was drafted in secret, mainly by the Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who unveiled it on Thursday. Mr. McConnell wants a vote this week, before lawmakers take a break for the Fourth of July holiday.

Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, opposes the bill, saying it does not do enough to lower health costs. Al Drago for The New York Times

Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas, usually a reliable vote for Senate Republican leaders, said on Fox News, "I just don't know whether the votes will be there by the end of the week."

Over the weekend, senators and their aides were poring over the bill, drafting possible amendments, preparing speeches and compiling personal stories from constituents whom they portrayed as either beneficiaries or victims of the Affordable Care Act.

But the bill's supporters were battling an internal threat: reluctant Republicans. Senator Ron Johnson of Wisconsin said Sunday that "there's no way we should be voting" on the legislation this week. "No way."

"I have a hard time believing Wisconsin constituents or even myself will have enough time to properly evaluate this for me to vote for a motion to proceed," Mr. Johnson said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

And Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine, said on ABC's "This Week": "It's hard for me to see the bill passing this week, but that's up to the majority leader. We could well be in all night a couple of nights."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Business and the National Retail Federation have all said they support the bill. Thomas J. Donohue, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, said it would "help stabilize crumbling insurance markets" and eliminate "ill-conceived Washington mandates and taxes."

But much of the nation's $3 trillion health care industry opposes the bill. And Mr. McConnell has done little to woo the health care stakeholders whom Mr. Obama courted assiduously from his first months in office.

The concerns expressed by outside groups also appear to be growing. Top lieutenants in Charles G. and David H. Koch's political network sharply criticized the legislation over the weekend, saying it was insufficiently conservative and did not do enough to rein in the growth of Medicaid. And a number of Republican governors have joined doctors, hospitals and patient advocacy groups in opposing the bill, in part because of its cuts to Medicaid.

Mr. McConnell has only a few days to wheel, deal and cajole reluctant senators to get behind legislation that has grown less popular with more exposure. He has considerable firepower to win votes by guaranteeing amendments that would address the concerns of individual Republican senators, and by playing on their loyalty to him and to conservative voters still demanding an end to the Affordable Care Act. At the same time, Democrats say, he has striking liabilities. Mr. Trump has endorsed the bill, and Democrats say they will take every opportunity to link the legislation to an unpopular president.

And the Democratic wall of opposition is backed by less partisan voices. Senators are being flooded with appeals like this from the advocacy arm of the American Cancer Society: "Cancer is scary enough. Don't take away our coverage."

The American Childhood Cancer Organization, a charitable group formed by parents, is mobilizing a small army of grass-roots lobbyists with the message that the bill, with its deep cuts to Medicaid, "will threaten the lives of children battling cancer."

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops said the Senate bill was "unacceptable as written" and would "wreak havoc on low-income families." At the same time, the bishops said they liked two sections that seek to "prohibit the use of taxpayer funds to pay for abortion or plans that cover it."

Republicans are finding allies to be few and inconstant. Mr. Trump has said he is "very supportive" of the Senate bill. But that support will be of limited help to Mr. McConnell. Few senators feel loyal to Mr. Trump, whose erratic message has often weakened his influence on Capitol Hill.

After pushing for passage of the House repeal bill, he criticized it as "mean" several weeks later. A spokeswoman, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said last week that Mr. Trump did not necessarily support cuts to Medicaid, even though his budget and the Senate bill would make such cuts.

Kellyanne Conway, a top adviser to Mr. Trump, claimed on Sunday that the Senate bill did not actually cut Medicaid. Ms. Collins said, "I respectfully disagree with her analysis."

So far, five Republican senators have announced that they cannot support the bill as drafted: Dean Heller of Nevada, who says it cuts coverage too deeply, and four conservatives — Rand Paul of Kentucky, Ted Cruz of Texas, Mike Lee of Utah and Mr. Johnson — who say it does not do enough to lower health costs. Other Republicans, like Ms. Collins and Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, have expressed misgivings, and Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska declined to say Sunday how he would vote.

Senator Lisa Murkowski, Republican of Alaska, said any legislation must recognize her state's high health care costs, where premiums average about $1,000 a month for an individual. J. Scott Applewhite/Associated Press

Senate leaders, trying to muster support, are looking for ways to address a conspicuous omission: The bill requires insurers to accept anyone who applies, but repeals the mandate for people to have coverage and does not replace it with anything. So people could wait and buy insurance only when they need it. Insurers say they need large numbers of healthy people to help pay for those who are sick.

Republicans said they might revise their bill to establish a six-month waiting period for people who go without insurance and then want to sign up, in the belief that this would encourage consumers to maintain continuous coverage.

The House bill has an incentive, imposing a 30 percent surcharge on premiums for people who have gone without insurance. But the Congressional Budget Office said this provision could backfire. As a result of the surcharge, it said, two million fewer people would enroll, and the people most likely to be deterred are those who are healthy.

The Senate's answer also has potential problems. For someone with cancer, a six-month waiting period could be a death sentence.

The Senate fight is happening amid a striking shift in public opinion. Fifty-one percent of Americans now have favorable views of the Affordable Care Act, according to a monthly tracking poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation. "That's the first time in our 79 tracking polls over seven years that this share has topped 50 percent," said Craig Palosky, a spokesman for the foundation.

Medicaid is by far the largest program of federal grants to the states, and state officials are always trying to tweak the formula for distributing that money to their advantage.

The House and Senate bills would convert Medicaid from an open-ended entitlement program to a system of per-capita payments for beneficiaries. A novel feature of the Senate bill would redistribute federal Medicaid money from higher-spending states like New York to lower-spending states like Alabama.

One noteworthy exception to this provision is tailor-made for Alaska. "This paragraph shall not apply to any state that has a population density of less than 15 individuals per square mile," it says.

Only five states — Alaska, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming — meet that criterion, and Alaska's two Republican senators have expressed concern about the bill's potential effects on their state, where medical costs are exceptionally high.

Ms. Murkowski said federal legislation must recognize Alaska's high costs. Premiums on the insurance exchange there average about $1,000 a month for an individual, according to federal data. But the special provision may not be enough to win Ms. Murkowski's vote. She is also concerned about two other sections of the bill: one that would cut federal funds for the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act and one that would block federal Medicaid payments to Planned Parenthood.

The Washington Post

Senate Republicans face key week as more lawmakers waver in support for health-care bill (UNE)

https://www.facebook.com/costareports

10-12 minutes

Senate Republicans are facing down an increasingly daunting challenge to secure the votes necessary to pass legislation to dramatically change President Barack Obama's signature health-care law, and several senators said they would like more time to debate and tweak the plan as GOP leaders push for a vote this week.

At least five Republicans have already come out against their party's bill — which can only afford to lose two votes — and over the weekend, more began expressing serious reservations and skepticism about the proposal.

The mounting dissatisfaction leaves Senate Republican leaders and the White House in a difficult position. In the coming days, moves to narrow the scope of the overhaul could appeal to moderates but anger conservatives, who believe the legislation does not go far enough to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare.

A key moment will arrive early this week when the Congressional Budget Office releases an analysis of the bill that estimates how many people could lose coverage under the Republican plan, as well as what impact it might have on insurance premiums and how much money it could save the government.

The stalled Republican effort to pass a sweeping rewrite of the Affordable Care Act was further threatened Sunday when Republican senators from opposite sides of the party's ideological spectrum voiced their disapproval, imperiling hopes for a Senate vote this week and President Trump's chance to fulfill a core campaign pledge.

What the Senate bill changes about Obamacare

Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) on Sunday expressed deep concerns about how the bill would cut expanded Medicaid funding for states, a key pillar of the Affordable Care Act that several centrists in the Senate are wary of rolling back, saying on ABC's "This Week" that she worries about "what it means to our most vulnerable citizens."

Collins also said she is concerned about the bill's impact on the cost of insurance premiums and deductibles, especially for older Americans.

"I'm going to look at the whole bill before making a decision," she said, later adding, "It's hard for me to see the bill passing this week."

Underscoring the challenge facing Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), speaking on the same Sunday show, also voiced concerns with the bill — but for entirely different reasons.

Paul — who, along with fellow Republican Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin and Mike Lee of Utah, has already said he cannot support the current bill — rejected the Republican plan as not fiscally austere enough but said that in the face of an impasse, he could support legislation that simply repeals Obama's health-care law.

"I've been telling leadership for months now I'll vote for a repeal," Paul said. "And it doesn't have to be a 100 percent repeal. So, for example, I'm for 100 percent repeal, that's what I want. But if you give me 90 percent repeal, I'd probably vote for it. I might vote for 80 percent repeal."

But simply repealing Obamacare or large parts of the law without making any other changes to the nation's health-care system is not a realistic political possibility at the moment.

McConnell and his team remain convinced they must call a vote soon to avoid having health-care discussions dominate the summer, when they aim to move on to retooling tax legislation. In their circle, further talks are also seen as an opening for others to bolt.

"It's not going to get any easier," Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn (R-Tex.) told reporters on the sidelines of a three-day seminar organized by billionaire industrialist Charles Koch in Colorado Springs. "And, yes, I think August is the drop deadline, about August 1."

As senators took to the airwaves Sunday, there were developments behind the scenes as GOP leaders made calls and worked to cobble together votes. But no firm decisions on vote-winning revisions were made.

There was new talk among key GOP figures about wooing moderates by altering the bill's Medicaid changes, according to two people involved who would not speak publicly. By tweaking how federal funding is determined for Medicaid recipients and linking aspects to the medical component of the consumer price index, there is a belief that some moderates could be swayed, because they want assurances that funding would keep up with any rises in the cost of care, the people said.

Then would come the tightrope: If some senators can be persuaded to support revisions to the Medicaid portion of the bill, several conservatives are warning that unless their amendments are also included, they are unlikely to support the legislation. The hope is that a combination of those Medicaid changes and amendments from conservatives could pave the way to passage.

Progress in these conversations could postpone a vote for a couple weeks until after the Fourth of July holiday, the people said, but Senate leadership and the White House want to move this week if they can.

The administration itself, meanwhile, is sending mixed signals. An allied leadership PAC is launching an intensive advertising campaign against centrist Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.), a no vote, to pressure him to support the bill. On "This Week," Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, said Trump "is working the phones, he's having personal meetings, and he's engaging with leaders."

Still, the president's own support for the legislation has at times been lukewarm. Over the weekend, he acknowledged he once called the initial Republican bill, which originated in the House, "mean" in a private meeting, but also urged senators on Twitter to pass it.

Trump's aides have seemed to signal that the White House is more likely to support the final Senate

proposal over the original House bill going forward, and speaking this weekend on "Fox & Friends," Trump said, "I want to see a bill with heart."

Conway added that "the president and the White House are also open to getting Democratic votes," and asked, "Why can't we get a single Democrat to come to the table, to come to the White House, to speak to the president or anyone else about trying to improve a system that has not worked for everyone?"

But Democratic support seems unlikely. Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), speaking on "This Week," said Democrats would only sit down with Republicans if they stop trying to repeal Obamacare. In an interview with The Washington Post, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) spoke of trying to postpone a vote on the bill to mount a stronger fight against it.

"One of the strategies is to just keep offering amendments, to delay this thing and delay this thing at least until after the July Fourth break," Sanders said. "That would give us the opportunity to rally the American people in opposition to it. I think we should use every tactic that we can to delay this thing." In fact — despite Trump's campaign promise he would not cut Medicaid — the Senate bill includes deep cuts to projected spending on the program, deeper even than the House bill over the long run, and is expected to leave millions without or unable to afford health insurance.

On Sunday, there were attempts to tamp down criticism of the effect the Senate bill would have on Medicaid. Speaking on CBS's "Face the Nation," Sen. Patrick J. Toomey (R-Pa.), claimed the Republican plan "will codify and make permanent the Medicaid expansion," and added, "No one loses coverage." His comments echoed those by Conway, who told "This Week," "These are not cuts to Medicaid."

The legislation does not outright abolish the expansion of the program, under which 11 million Americans in 31 states have gained coverage since 2014. Instead, the bill would gradually eliminate the generous federal funding that has propped up the expansion, leaving states without enough money to pay for all their current beneficiaries.

Johnson, the senator from Wisconsin who surprised some fellow Republicans by co-signing a letter asking for more changes to the bill, said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that there was no hurry to vote before the end of June.

"There's no way we should be voting on this next week. No way," Johnson said. "I have a hard time believing Wisconsin constituents or even myself will have enough time to properly evaluate this, for me to vote for a motion to proceed."

At the same time, Johnson said he was not a pure "no" on the bill.

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), who criticized the secretive process by which the new bill was crafted and had preferred his own compromise to extend most of the Affordable Care Act, struck a similar tone on "Face the Nation." After saying he was undecided, he clarified that small changes could win his vote.

The Daily 202 newsletter

PowerPost's must-read morning briefing for decision-makers.

"There are things in this bill that adversely affect my state that are peculiar to my state," Cassidy said. "If those can be addressed, I will. If they can't be addressed, I won't. So right now, I am undecided."

Progressive activists spent the weekend warning that Republicans such as Johnson and Cassidy could vote for the bill with minor tweaks. In Columbus, Ohio, at the second of three rallies Sanders and MoveOn.org organized to pressure swing-state Republican senators, MoveOn's Washington director, Ben Wikler, warned a crowd of at least 1,000 activists that the protests of Senate Republicans might amount to nothing more than theatrical posturing.

"This is the week when Mitch McConnell and Republicans are going to introduce these tiny amendments and Republicans are going to say, 'Oh, the bill is fixed! Oh, I can vote for it now!' " Wikler warned. "Are we going to let him get away with that?"

And looming over the discussions is another challenge: the Republican-controlled House, where any revised Senate bill would head and its ultimate fate would be decided. According to a White House official, Trump advisers are keeping in close touch with the conservative House Freedom Caucus — which helped tank the White House's initial health-care push — as the Senate considers the bill, making sure that whatever ends up passing could pass muster with House conservatives.

David Weigel reported from Columbus, Ohio. James Hohmann in Colorado Springs contributed to this report.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

GOP Senators Lay Out Demands on Health Bill (UNE)

Louise Radnofsky

8-10 minutes

Updated June 26, 2017 2:37 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—Senate Republican leaders pushing for a vote this week on a bill to rework the U.S. health-care system juggled objections from all corners of the GOP caucus over the weekend, with issues such as Medicaid and insurance regulations remaining key holdups.

The Senate's draft health-care bill, released last week, would overturn large swaths of the 2010 Affordable Care Act and put GOP measures in its place. But with Democrats unified in opposition, Republicans can lose no more than two votes in their 52-member caucus, and by Sunday at least eight Republican senators had publicly sounded misgivings about the bill.

Demands for getting on board include adding funds for particular areas, such as opioid treatment. But GOP senators are particularly divided over the bill's cuts to Medicaid, the federal-state health program for the poor that covers one in five Americans.

In addition, four conservative senators object to the bill's retention of requirements for insurers to cover patients at the same price regardless of their medical history and with set benefits packages. Those provisions have created new consumer protections but also driven up premiums for younger, healthier people in particular, which the senators have cited as a primary concern.

"It's going to be a challenge," Sen. Pat Toomey (R., Pa.) said Sunday on CBS , about ameliorating centrists' concerns over the Medicaid changes in the bill. Of the insurance regulations, he acknowledged, "Some of my conservative friends…are concerned that the bill doesn't go far enough."

The Congressional Budget Office is expected to produce a formal estimate Monday of the existing legislation's effects. The GOP could then hold a procedural vote Tuesday or Wednesday, and a final vote later in the week, if consensus comes quickly. If the negotiating process is drawn out and requires new, complex changes, the timetable would likely shift.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) has said he wants to see a vote on the legislation's passage late Thursday or early Friday, before Congress's July 4 recess. If he is successful in garnering at least 50 votes, with Vice President Mike Pence breaking a tie, the House could then take up the Senate legislation, or the two chambers could try to reach a compromise. The House passed its own health bill last month.

If the effort fails, it would plunge the party's seven-year campaign promise to repeal the ACA into uncertainty and potentially put lawmakers at odds with a president, Donald Trump, who is anxious for a major legislative win.

By late Sunday, it was clear that enough Republican senators had publicly put their votes in play to require more negotiations.

Sen. Luther Strange of Alabama said Sunday on Fox News that he is "not there yet" in supporting the plan, adding that he was "very strongly optimistic" that the bill could be passed.

Meanwhile, Democrats and backers of the legislation they consider the core achievement of former President Barack Obama were trying to sway more centrist Republicans from the new legislation.

Republicans "have, at best, a 50-50 chance of passing this bill," Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Sunday on ABC. "The bill is just devastating" and "that's what's making it so hard for them to pass."

Medicaid in particular is a tricky issue because GOP-controlled states split almost down the middle over whether to expand eligibility for the program—to millions of low-income, childless adults for the first time—using federal funding under the ACA. Concerns about cuts to Medicaid prompted Nevada Republican Dean Heller to say Friday he couldn't support the bill.

Their demands are pitted against those of GOP-led states that opted not to expand their program, citing fiscal concerns about its sustainability.

Of the conservative senators upset about the GOP bill's retention of

insurance regulations, at least one, Rand Paul of Kentucky, is already seen as an unreliable vote even if he is mollified. Another, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, signaled Sunday that he wanted more time to find a solution.

"What I'd like to do is slow the process down, get the information, go through the problem solving process, actually reduce these premiums that have been artificially driven up because of Obamacare mandates," he said on NBC.

Some centrist Republicans also remain wild cards for a variety of reasons.

Susan Collins of Maine, who had previously expressed worries about the bill's cuts to Medicaid, said Sunday it would be difficult to see a bill emerging that she could support.

"I'm very concerned about the cost of insurance for older people with serious chronic illnesses, and the impact of the Medicaid cuts on our state governments," Ms. Collins said on ABC.

Mr. McConnell and his caucus are up against one particularly hard-to-move force: the July 4 holiday. If the bill is passed by the time they leave for a weeklong recess, they will likely face criticism from Democrats and other supporters of the ACA. If the bill isn't passed, they would likely hear it from the Republican base about their commitment to delivering on campaign promises.

Mr. Heller's bind in Nevada is a particular example of the multiple forces at work on senators: Late Friday, the America First Policies nonprofit, launched by Trump allies to bolster the president's agenda, said it would launch a seven-figure ad campaign against him. Mr. Heller is up for re-election in 2018.

The White House has made clear that, as in the House of Representatives, it doesn't intend to forgive members who don't back the bill; meanwhile, vulnerable members who vote for it can expect to get support from the president.

At the same time, the president has taken a largely hands-off role to date, in contrast to his team's approach in passing legislation in the House. That could change in coming days and had already stepped up by the end of the week, when Mr. Trump called Mr. Paul and Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, the White House said.

"We have a few people that…want to get some points; I think they'll get some points," Mr. Trump said of the GOP holdouts during a Fox News interview that aired Sunday. "I don't think they're that far off….I think we're going to get there."

Mr. Pence will attend his regular policy lunch in the Senate on Tuesday and is expected to talk up the health bill while traveling in the middle of the week, but he will be back in Washington at the end of the week, when his tiebreaking vote could be required.

The health-care bid wouldn't necessarily be derailed if Mr. McConnell balks at a vote ahead of the recess, GOP strategists inside and outside of the administration have said. Members of Senate leadership have often stated their goal as making progress before the July 4 holiday, and completion after.

"I think August is the drop-dead line, about Aug. 1," said Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, speaking to reporters in Colorado at a retreat hosted by GOP megadonor Charles Koch.

Even if the Senate passes the health bill, another big question is whether the House would pass it. When GOP House members were wrangling to eke out a bill they could agree on, they declined to say what they would do if their delicate compromise was subsequently upended.

—Kristina Peterson, Byron Tau and Rachel Witkowski contributed to this article.

Write to Louise Radnofsky at louise.radnofsky@wsj.com

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The New York Times

Sen. Johnson : Where the Senate Health Care Bill Fails

Ron Johnson

6-7 minutes

Protestors against the Republican health care bill outside the Capitol on Wednesday. Aaron P. Bernstein/Reuters

Speaking at a rally for his wife's presidential campaign last year, Bill Clinton called Obamacare "the craziest thing in the world." As he put it, "The people who are out there busting it, sometimes 60 hours a week, wind up with their premiums doubled and their coverage cut in half."

Mr. Clinton was right, and it's why Republicans have been pushing to repair the damage done by Obamacare for so long. Our priority should be to bring relief, and better, less expensive care, to millions of working men and women.

Unfortunately, the Senate Republican alternative, unveiled last week, doesn't appear to come close to addressing their plight. Like Obamacare, it relies too heavily on government spending, and ignores the role that the private sector can and should play.

As an accountant with more than 30 years' experience in manufacturing, I assure you the private sector is much more effective at solving problems. Concepts like the "KISS" principle ("keep it simple, stupid"), pursuing continuous improvement and root-cause analysis are core ideas in private-sector problem-solving. From what I've seen in six years in office, these concepts are foreign to government.

The decades-long health care debate is an example. Layer upon layer of laws, rules and regulations have made our health care-financing system a complex mess, separating patients from direct payment for health care.

As a result, patients neither know nor care what things cost. We have virtually eliminated the power of consumer-driven, free-market discipline from one-sixth of our economy.

The primary goals of any health care reform should be to restrain (if not lower) costs while improving quality, access and innovation. This is exactly what consumer-driven, free-market competition does in other areas of our economy. Look no further than how laser eye surgery went from exotic to affordable during the years it was not covered by most insurance.

Washington believes that the solution to every problem is more money. But throwing more money at insurers won't fix the lack of consumer-driven competition, combined with government mandates that artificially drive up the cost of care and insurance.

Obamacare imposes enormous taxes and plans to spend nearly $2 trillion over the next 10 years to decrease the number of uninsured, mostly through Medicaid but also through taxpayer-subsidized exchanges. In doing so, Obamacare has largely destroyed an already struggling individual health insurance marketplace. It does this by mandating high-cost provisions as standard for every insurance policy, then forcing a small percentage of the population to shoulder the cost. These are the people Mr. Clinton was talking about.

Prior to Obamacare, the individual market was already challenged by unequal tax treatment, which forced the forgotten to pay for insurance with after-tax dollars. The simple solution would have been to equalize the tax treatment, but President Obama chose to spend trillions and artificially increase premiums unaffordably. The result: Too many of those individuals who are "busting it" and who responsibly carried insurance can no longer afford it, have dropped coverage, are paying a penalty and are taking a huge risk.

Once again, a simple solution is obvious. Loosen up regulations and mandates, so that Americans can choose to purchase insurance that suits their needs and that they can afford.

Like many other senators, I had hoped that this was where things were headed during the last several weeks as the Republican bill was discussed. We're disappointed that the discussion draft turns its back on this simple solution, and goes with something far too familiar: throwing money at the problem.

The bill's defenders will say it repeals Obamacare's taxes and reduces Medicaid spending growth. That's true. But it also boosts spending on subsidies, and it leaves in place the pre-existing-condition rules that drive up the cost of insurance for everyone.

Instead, we should return more flexibility to states, to give individuals the freedom and choice to buy plans they want without Obamacare's "reforms." And we should look to improve successful models for protecting individuals with pre-existing conditions, models underway prior to Obamacare, such as those in Maine and Wisconsin.

Only then can the market begin to rein in the underlying cost of health care itself and reduce the cost of taxpayer subsidies.

We are $20 trillion in debt. The Congressional Budget Office projects an additional $129 trillion of accumulated deficits over the next 30 years. A truly moral and compassionate society does not impoverish future generations to bestow benefits in the here and now.

Republican leaders have told us the plan unveiled last week is a draft,

open to discussion and improvement. I look forward to working with Senate leadership and the president to improve the bill so it addresses the plight of the forgotten men and women by returning freedom and choice to health care.

The Washington Post

Dionne Jr.: The Senate's three big lies about health care

http://www.facebook.com/ejdionne

6-7 minutes

To succeed in gutting health coverage for millions of Americans, Senate Republican leaders need to get a series of lies accepted as truth. Journalists and other neutral arbiters must resist the temptation to report these lies as just a point of view. A lie is a lie.

Lie One: *Democrats and progressives are unwilling to work with Republicans and conservatives on this issue.* "If we went and got the single greatest health-care plan in the history of the world, we would not get one Democrat vote," President Trump told an Iowa crowd last Wednesday.

In fact, Democrats, including President Barack Obama when he was in office, have said repeatedly that they would like to work with Republicans to improve the Affordable Care Act. Senate Democratic leader Charles E. Schumer's office put out a list of such offers, including a June 15 letter from Schumer to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell calling for a cross-party meeting to "find a way to make health care more affordable and accessible."

Evening Edition newsletter

The day's most important stories.

But Democrats can never be complicit in a wholesale repeal of Obamacare that would take health coverage away from millions of Americans.

This first lie is important because it rationalizes the Republican claim that the bill has to be draconian because it can't pass without support from the party's most right-wing legislators. "This is not the best possible bill," said Sen. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.). "It is the best bill possible under very difficult circumstances."

But those "circumstances" have been created by the GOP itself. A completely different coalition is available, but Republicans don't want to activate it because they are hellbent on repealing Obamacare. Why?

This brings us to Lie Two: *This bill is primarily about improving health care for American families.* No, this effort is primarily about cutting taxes. When it comes to health care, the main thing the bill does is take money away from providing it to pay for the tax reductions it contains and for future bonanzas the Republicans have promised.

The tax cuts in this legislation alone would amount to some $700 billion over a decade, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. About $33 billion of this would go to tax cuts conservatively averaging $7 million every year to each of the 400 highest-income families in the country. What could $33 billion buy? The CBPP reports it would be enough to pay for the expansion of Medicaid in Nevada, West Virginia, Arkansas and Alaska. Talk about income redistribution.

A telltale: One of the main Republican complaints about Obamacare has been that the deductibles and co-pays under ACA policies are too high. But the Republican bill only makes this problem worse.

As the New York Times' Margot Sanger-Katz wrote: "Many middle-income Americans would be expected to pay a larger share of their income to purchase health insurance that covers a smaller share of their care."

If this bill were truly about health care, Republicans would take all the tax cuts out and use that money to ease the pain their bill would cause. But they won't, because the tax cuts are the thing that matters to them.

Lie Three: *The Senate bill is a "compromise."* Really? Between whom? The House wants to destroy Obamacare quickly, the Senate a bit more slowly while also cutting Medicaid more steeply over time. This is only a "compromise" between two very right-wing policies.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) unveiled the legislation that would reshape a big piece of the U.S. health-care system on Thursday, June 22. Here's what we know about the bill. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) unveiled the legislation that would reshape a big piece of the U.S. health-care system on Thursday, June 22. Here's what we know about the bill. (Monica Akhtar/The Washington Post)

(Monica Akhtar/The Washington Post)

Imagine you are negotiating with two creditors who say you owe them $1,000 and you insist you owe nothing. The first creditor wants the money quickly. The second says you can take a bit little longer, but you have to pay $1,200 — and he has the nerve to call this a "compromise." Nowhere in this deal is your position taken into account. Welcome to the logic of the Senate health-care bill.

I hope I never have to write about Lie Four, which would be Republican senators who surely know better — including Susan Collins, Dean Heller, Lisa Murkowski, Jeff Flake, Shelley Moore Capito and Rob Portman — justifying their votes for this monstrosity by claiming that it's the best they could do.

Heller signaled doubts about the proposal on Friday, which is a step in the right direction. But only by killing this bill would these senators open the way for reasonable fixes to the ACA. Do they really want to say someday that one of their most important votes in the Senate involved taking health care away from millions of Americans? I would like to believe they are too decent for that. I hope I'm not lying to myself.

Read more from E.J. Dionne's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The $1.5 Trillion Business Tax Change Flying Under the Radar

Richard Rubin

9-11 minutes

Updated June 25, 2017 8:18 p.m. ET

Republicans looking to rewrite the U.S. tax code are taking aim at one of the foundations of modern finance—the deduction that companies get for interest they pay on debt.

That deduction affects everyone from titans of Wall Street who load up on junk bonds to pay for multibillion-dollar corporate takeovers to wheat farmers in the Midwest looking to make ends meet before harvest. Yet a House Republican proposal to eliminate the deduction has gotten relatively little sustained public attention or lobbying pressure.

Thanks in part to the deduction, the U.S. financial system is heavily oriented toward debt, which because of the tax code is often cheaper than equity financing—such as sales of stock. It also is widely accessible. In 2015, U.S. businesses paid in all $1.3 trillion in gross interest, according to Commerce Department data, equal in magnitude to the total economic output of Australia.

Getting rid of the deduction for net interest expense, as House Republicans propose, would alter finance. It also would generate about $1.5 trillion in revenue for the government over a decade, according to the Tax Foundation, a conservative-leaning think thank.

The plan would raise money to help offset Republicans' corporate tax cuts and reduce a "huge bias" toward debt financing, said Robert Pozen, a senior lecturer at MIT's Sloan School of Management. That bias, he said, hurts companies built around innovation, which tend to not have the physical assets that banks usually require as collateral.

"What we're proposing is to take the tax preference from the source of funds—borrowing—and take that preference to the use of funds—business investment and buildings, equipment, software, technology," Rep. Kevin Brady (R., Texas), the author of the plan, said at The Wall Street Journal CFO network conference this month.

In a world with no interest deduction, debt-fueled leveraged buyouts by private-equity titans could become more expensive to finance and junk bonds less appealing. "That's not necessarily bad for society," said David Beim, a retired Columbia University finance professor. "We have too much systemic financial risk in our economy."

The dollar size of repealing the net-interest-expense deduction is even larger than another controversial proposal being pushed by House Republicans known as border

adjustment, which would tax imports and exempt exports. The border adjustment plan has been under attack from retailers and Republican senators, whose resistance has put it on the brink of failure. But the idea of eliminating or limiting the interest deduction has generated less vocal opposition, giving it a real chance of passage, perhaps in a scaled-back form.

Republicans are aiming to agree on a framework for tax policy by September and send a bill to President Donald Trump this year. It will be an uphill fight fraught with intraparty political divides, and companies who want to keep the interest deduction will have plenty of clout.

For some debt-reliant businesses, the interest deduction's demise could be a blow. Crop growers who depend on bridge loans to work through seasonal business fluctuations could face higher tax bills.

Andy Hill, who farms corn and soybeans on about 600 acres in north-central Iowa, said he pays less than $10,000 a year in interest on a line of credit between $100,000 and $200,000. That loan helps him bridge gaps between his expenses and his income, between when he needs to buy seed and fertilizer and when he sells his crops.

"[Losing the ability to deduct interest] wouldn't put me in the red by any stretch of the imagination, but it makes it very debilitating as far as household income," said Mr. Hill, who added that he has reached out to both of his senators and his House member about the issue.

Midsize businesses may also get squeezed.

"The people that utilize debt, they utilize it because they don't have the cash and they don't have the access to equity," said Robert Moskovitz, chief financial officer of Leaf Commercial Capital, which finances businesses' purchases of items like copiers and telephone systems. "A dry cleaner in Des Moines, Iowa? Where is he going to get equity? He can't do an IPO."

The idea behind the Republican plan is to pair the elimination of this deduction with immediate deductions for investments in equipment and other long-lived assets. Party leaders expect the capital write-offs would encourage more investment and growth and greater worker productivity, but not the debt often associated with it.

From an accounting standpoint, the tradeoff could hurt companies' reported earnings because immediate expensing would just shift the timing of deductions and the loss of the interest deduction would be a permanent change.

Dennis Kelleher, chief financial officer of CF Industries Holdings Inc., a fertilizer manufacturer, said at a conference in May that the most important thing for the company would be a lower corporate tax rate.

"I don't think that's a good thing," he said of repealing the interest deduction. "I suspect that won't happen because it would be rather destabilizing, just to the capital markets generally."

Unlike border adjustment, the idea of accelerating investment write-offs has broad support from conservative groups, such as the National Taxpayers Union, and some support from Democrats, including Jason Furman, who was President Barack Obama's chief economist. It was a move in the opposite direction, toward longer depreciation schedules, that helped doom a Republican tax plan in 2014.

The tax code treats equity financing more harshly than debt. While interest is deductible, dividend payments typically aren't. Corporate profits can thus be subject to two layers of tax—once at the business level and then when they go to shareholders in the form of dividends.

That means the effective marginal tax rate on equity-financed corporate investments is 34.5%, according to a report released by the Treasury Department this year in the waning days of the Obama administration. The corresponding rate for debt-financed investment is negative 5%. That subsidy for corporate debt "potentially creates a large tax-induced distortion in business decision making," the report says.

But borrowing and deducting interest are deeply ingrained in American corporate finance as a normal cost of doing business. Dislodging the traditional practice will be challenging. Some firms might look to borrow offshore instead to reap tax benefits elsewhere.

"I don't even think people think about it much," said MIT's Mr. Pozen. "It's clear that they're going to finance it by debt if they have a big acquisition or a big project."

Because so much is at stake for so many sectors, writing the law could get messy. Mr. Brady said small businesses and utilities could get exceptions or specialized rules, as could debt-financed purchases of land, which wouldn't be eligible for immediate investment write-offs.

The administration, including a president who has proclaimed himself the "king of debt," has been wary of repealing the interest deduction but hasn't drawn a hard line, according to multiple statements. Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin has said his preference is to keep it. Resistance could build among Republicans in Congress and among real-estate firms and the agriculture industry, which have formed a coalition to fight the proposal. Yet financial markets so far have registered little reaction to the prospect of the interest deduction going away. One reason: The tax change most likely would apply to new loans only.

Junk-rated bonds, issued by companies that typically carry a large amount of debt, have returned 4.6% this year—better than the 4.3% returns of investment-grade bonds, according to Bloomberg Barclays data.

Without repealing the interest deduction, Republicans' hopes of providing full and immediate deductions for capital investment are dim. They probably wouldn't have enough money to offset the upfront fiscal cost of accelerating those deductions.

The plus for the GOP is that this issue is more familiar and less black-and-white than the complex border adjustment plan. Limits on interest and accelerated write-offs could be dialed to a politically comfortable spot. If Republicans can't stomach full repeal of the interest deduction and immediate write-offs, they could try something short of that with, say, half of capital expenses being deductible and half of interest being deductible.

Andrea Auerbach, head of global private investment research at Cambridge Associates, which advises institutions that invest in private equity, said the industry would survive a tax overhaul that removes the interest deduction.

"The effects will reverberate for sure," especially among larger firms that rely more on debt, she said. "But debt is still going to be cheaper than equity, so I don't think it's going away."

—Sam Goldfarb contributed to this article.

Write to Richard Rubin at richard.rubin@wsj.com

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The New York Times

Bloomberg's Next Anti-Washington Move: $200 Million Program for Mayors

Alexander Burns

8-9 minutes

Michael R. Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York, speaking last month in San Francisco. He has embraced a public role since the election as a kind of elite-level organizer against certain policies of the Trump administration. Kelly Sullivan/Getty Images for Sierra Club

Michael R. Bloomberg will throw his financial might into helping beleaguered American mayors, creating a $200 million philanthropic program aimed at backing inventive policies at the city level and giving mayors a stronger hand in national politics.

Mr. Bloomberg intends to announce the initiative on Monday in a speech to the United States Conference of Mayors in Miami Beach, where he will castigate federal officials and state governments around the country for undermining cities. He plans to describe the program, called the American Cities Initiative, as a method of shoring up the global influence of the United States despite turmoil in Washington.

A wealthy former mayor of New York who seriously explored running for president in 2016 as an independent, Mr. Bloomberg, 75, has embraced a public role since the election as a kind of elite-level organizer against certain policies of the Trump administration.

In an interview, Mr. Bloomberg said his city-focused initiative would serve in part as an extension of his advocacy for national policies that address climate change, gun violence, public health and immigration. That largely liberal agenda is aligned with the growing aspirations of big-city mayors, who are mainly Democrats and who have vowed to check conservative mandates emerging from Washington by using their power at the local level.

After President Trump announced last month that the United States would withdraw from the Paris climate accord, Mr. Bloomberg helped marshal an alliance of American cities and private companies to support participation in the pact, and offered to pay out of his private philanthropy for the American share of a United Nations budget to coordinate the deal.

The American Cities Initiative, Mr. Bloomberg said, will reward cities for addressing such large-scale issues.

"You can argue that if people in cities use less energy, the coal-fired power plants outside the cities would pollute the air less," he said. "You can make the case that immigration is a city issue, because that's where a lot of people live and work."

But Mr. Bloomberg, speaking by telephone from the Manhattan offices of his media company, said the program would also focus on less contentious subjects related to making government effective, despite interference or fiscal pullback at the state and federal level. Cities, he said, must increasingly "replace Washington and, in some cases, state governments, to provide services."

"It's really efficiency in government, how you marshal resources and how you deal with the public, explain to them, bring them along," Mr. Bloomberg said, describing the focus of the American Cities Initiative.

A signature component of the proposed Bloomberg initiative will be a "Mayors Challenge," through which city executives will be invited to compete for six- and seven-figure grants from Bloomberg Philanthropies, awarded to mayors who draw up compelling proposals for policy experimentation. Mr. Bloomberg's foundation has run similar competitions in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson of Gary, Ind., whose city has received money from Mr. Bloomberg's foundation in the past, said new grants could help address an issue closer to the ground level of government: removing or replacing vacant commercial buildings throughout the city. Ms. Freeman-Wilson said state and federal officials appeared to have little interest in facilitating such actions.

"They don't have any sense of what we're confronted with," she said.

Mr. Bloomberg said the project's $200 million budget would be spread out over three years, to start with, and could grow over time.

In a reflective aside, Mr. Bloomberg also appeared to acknowledge that he might have more success shifting public opinion on big issues by working through city governments. As a political donor, he has made gun control his central cause, with mixed electoral success, and has also backed campaigns supportive of an immigration overhaul and environmental regulation. Though he is not a member of a political party, Mr. Bloomberg endorsed Hillary Clinton in last year's presidential race and denounced Mr. Trump at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia.

One lesson of that election, Mr. Bloomberg suggested, might be that elites have done too much to change "the moral and social fabric of the country" without explaining the changes to ordinary people.

"I'm certainly as guilty as anybody," he said. "Maybe that's one of the lessons of the Trump victory — that we've not really talked to lots of people in this country, particularly in the Midwest, where Donald Trump did very well."

Mr. Bloomberg's announcement in Miami Beach comes at a pivotal moment for the Conference of Mayors, which faces sky-high and mostly self-imposed political expectations: Many of its prominent members have promised in sweeping language to counteract the influence of the federal government under Mr. Trump.

And with the Republican Party, which is anchored in the country's rural areas and outer suburbs, controlling Washington and most state governments, many mayors have few natural allies to secure financial support and policy cooperation for their cities.

In addition to advancing an ideological agenda that clashes with the social character of many big cities — on issues like climate and immigration — the Trump administration has proposed deep cuts to government agencies that municipalities rely on, including major grant programs in the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The new president of the mayors' group, Mayor Mitch Landrieu of New Orleans, has pledged to be a forceful champion for city priorities and to coordinate political action between mayors. Mr. Landrieu, who is a Democrat, has a warm relationship with Mr. Bloomberg.

As part of its introduction, the American Cities Initiative will give a six-figure grant to the mayors' conference to coordinate mayoral advocacy in the national news media, advisers to Mr. Bloomberg said.

Mr. Landrieu said in an interview that mayors would have to collaborate more closely, on both policy and politics, to make up for the absence of support — or outright meddling — from state and federal authorities. Until a friendlier environment develops at the national level, he said, mayors will have to work together "without a federal framework."

Mr. Bloomberg and his money would help facilitate that, Mr. Landrieu said.

"We're moving to a different model in this country, and it's really going to be nonideological," he said. "It's going to be problem-solving driven."

Mr. Landrieu said the conference would continue to lobby state and federal lawmakers for city priorities, as it has done for years.

But Mr. Bloomberg expressed no particular optimism that the Trump administration could be swayed to take a more accommodating view of urban policy. Asked if he had made an appeal to the New Yorker in the White House, Mr. Bloomberg said he had spoken only once to Mr. Trump since his election, describing it as a "pleasant conversation."

"He gave me his private cellphone number, and I haven't called him," Mr. Bloomberg said. "He has mine and he hasn't called me."

The Washington Post

Kushner firm's $285 million Deutsche Bank loan came just before Election Day (UNE)

By Michael Kranish

12-15 minutes

One month before Election Day, Jared Kushner's real estate company finalized a $285 million loan as part of a refinancing package for its property near Times Square in Manhattan.

The loan came at a critical moment. Kushner was playing a key role in the presidential campaign of his father-in-law, Donald Trump. The lender, Deutsche Bank, was negotiating to settle a federal mortgage fraud case and charges from New York state regulators that it aided a possible Russian money-laundering scheme. The cases were settled in December and January.

Now, Kushner's association with Deutsche Bank is among a number of financial matters that could come under focus as his business activities are reviewed by special counsel Robert S. Mueller III, who is examining Kushner as part of a broader investigation into possible Russian influence in the election.

The October deal illustrates the extent to which Kushner was balancing roles as a top adviser to Trump and a real estate company executive. After the election, Kushner juggled duties for the Trump transition team and his corporation as he prepared to move to the White House. The Washington Post has reported that investigators are probing Kushner's separate December meetings with the Russian ambassador to the United States, Sergey Kislyak, and with Russian banker Sergey Gorkov, the head of Vnesheconombank, a state development bank.

The Deutsche Bank loan capped what Kushner Cos. viewed as a triumph: It had purchased four mostly empty retail floors of the former New York Times building in 2015, recruited tenants to fill the space and got the Deutsche Bank loan in a refinancing deal that gave Kushner's company $74 million more than it paid for the property.

The White House, in response to questions from The Post, said in a statement that Kushner "will recuse from any particular matter involving specific parties in which Deutsche Bank is a party." Kushner and Deutsche Bank declined to comment.

Deutsche Bank loans to Trump and his family members have come under scrutiny. As Trump's biggest lender, the bank supplied funds to him when other banks balked at the risk. As of last year, Trump's companies had about $364 million in outstanding debts to the bank.

Democrats from the House Financial Services Committee wrote on March 10 that they were concerned about the integrity of a reported Justice Department investigation into the Russian money-laundering matter "given the President's ongoing conflicts of

interest with Deutsche Bank," citing "the suspicious ties between President Trump's inner circle and the Russian government." The Justice Department did not respond to a question about whether it is following up on the money-laundering settlement that Deutsche Bank reached with New York state regulators in December.

On May 23, the Democratic members asked Deutsche Bank to disclose what it had learned in its internal review about whether Trump may have benefited from the improper Russian money transfers. The bank refused, citing U.S. privacy laws. The Democratic letter also raised the possibility that the bank had conducted a similar review of Kushner — without mentioning his name — by referring to a review of accounts "held by family members, several of whom serve as official advisers to the president."

The Democrats wrote that it was important to learn more about Deutsche Bank loans to Trump and family members to determine whether they were "in any way connected to Russia."

What you need to know about Jared Kushner's ties to Russia. What you need to know about Jared Kushner's ties to Russia. (Thomas Johnson/The Washington Post)

(Thomas Johnson/The Washington Post)

The refinancing loan with Deutsche Bank is mentioned in documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission as part of a public offering of mortgage-backed securities. It states that Kushner and his brother, Joshua, "will be guarantors" under what was called a "nonrecourse carve-out." Such guarantees require more than a loan default to kick in. They are commonly known as "bad boy" clauses, a reference to how a lender could seek to hold the guarantor responsible for the debt under circumstances that might include fraud, misapplication of funds or voluntary bankruptcy deemed inappropriate. The terms of the guarantee, which generally are not secured by collateral**,** are negotiated between lender and borrower.

"The way to look at this is, so long as you're not a 'bad boy' and don't do anything wrong, you have nothing to worry about," said James Schwarz, a real estate lawyer who is an expert in such clauses. "To the extent you would do something fraudulent, then you have things to worry about."

The corporate loan and Kushner's personal guarantee are not mentioned on his financial disclosure form, filed with the Office of Government Ethics. Blake Roberts, a lawyer who represented Kushner on the matter, said in a statement to The Post that Kushner's form "does not list the loan guarantee" because the disclosure relied on "published guidance" from OGE that he said "clearly states that filers do not have to disclose as a liability a loan on which they have made a guarantee unless they have a present obligation to repay the loan."

The Post sent the language cited by Kushner's lawyer to Don Fox, a former general counsel and acting OGE director. After reviewing the wording, he said in an interview that he would have advised Kushner to disclose the personal guarantee of the $285 million corporate loan because of its size and possible implications.

"If I were still at OGE and somebody came to us with that set of facts, I would say, 'By all means, disclose it,' " he said, referring to "the spirit of the law."

After being informed of Fox's statement, Roberts contacted Fox to present his view that no disclosure was required. Fox said in a follow-up email to The Post that even if OGE "advised there was no requirement to disclose," he would not have argued that point but "I would have nonetheless recommended Jared over report in this instance given the magnitude of the contingency and the public interest in liabilities — actual and potential — to Deutsche Bank."

Separately, Kushner disclosed that he and his mother have a personal line of credit with Deutsche Bank worth up to $25 million.

The Deutsche Bank deal was one of the last Kushner orchestrated before joining the White House. It is among the dozens of complex transactions that he was involved with during his decade in the real estate business.

Although Kushner divested some properties in an effort to address potential conflicts, he retains an interest in nearly 90 percent of his real estate properties, including the retail portion of the former New York Times headquarters, and holds personal debts and loan guarantees.

The deal that led to the Deutsche Bank loan is rooted in a holiday party held in late 2014 at the Bowlmor bowling alley, which is located in the retail portion.

At the party, Kushner decided that the four retail floors of the building, while rundown, could be transformed into a thriving tourist destination, according to his associates.

The building passed through several owners after the newspaper sold the property for $175 million in 2004 to Tishman Speyer. Tishman sold it three years later for $525 million to a company called Africa-Israel Investments. (Those transactions prompted Trump a few months ago to poke fun at the Times, tweeting that the "dopes" at the newspaper "gave it away.")

Africa-Israel's decision to purchase the building was made by its chairman, an Uzbek-born Israeli citizen, Lev Leviev. He is one of the world's wealthiest men, known as the "King of Diamonds" for his extensive holdings in Africa, Israel and Russia. He was then expanding his real estate holdings in New York City.

Leviev told the New York Times shortly after the building's purchase that he was a "true friend" of Russian President Vladimir Putin, largely through his work with an influential Jewish organization in the former Soviet Union. The newspaper wrote that he kept a photo of Putin in his office in Israel. Leviev's company said in a statement to The Post that Leviev "does not have a personal relationship" with Putin but has met him "on a few occasions." Leviev's statement said he was referring to his belief that "Mr. Putin has been a 'true friend' to the Jewish people in Russia."

In 2008, a year after the building's purchase, Leviev invited Trump to his Madison Avenue store, an ultra-high-end establishment called Leviev Jewelry, where they were photographed together, according to the Leviev statement. Leviev hoped to work with Trump on Moscow real estate deals, according to an article in Kommersant, a Russian newspaper. The Leviev statement said that the two "never had any business dealings with one another, contrary to speculation."

Six years later, Kushner saw an opportunity for his own company.

Leviev, whose company was having financial difficulties, according to an Israeli press account, sold the building's 12-floor office portion for $160 million, a transaction that did not involve the four retail floors.

Leviev's daughter, Chagit, took charge of her father's U.S. subsidiary and set out to find a buyer for the retail portion of the building. The company said it would entertain offers no lower than $300 million.

Kushner's company offered $265 million, which was rejected. Kushner himself then negotiated with Chagit Leviev and others in 2015 and succeeded with a $296 million offer, according to an official involved in the matter.

"It was a very hard back-and-forth New York negotiating style," said Kushner's broker, Lon Rubackin. Leviev's partner in the deal, Five Mile Capital, did not respond to a request for comment.

Few knew it at the time, but the negotiations were nearly consummated when Kushner and his wife, Ivanka Trump, ran into Chagit Leviev on May 4, 2015, at an after-party for a Metropolitan Museum of Art gala — an encounter that was memorialized in a picture posted on Instagram.

"Such a pleasure seeing - @jaredckushner and his stunningly beautiful wife @ivankatrump last night [at] the #metballafterparty," Chagit Leviev wrote.

The deal was signed a week later and closed in October 2015. The Leviev company said in a statement to The Post that Kushner simply made the highest offer and "there was no political element to the transaction."

Kushner took over a property that was only 25 percent leased, according to a company official. His company recruited tenants, offering some a year's free rent to lock in long-term contracts, according to an SEC filing. As a result, the building was nearly fully leased, with higher rents, including new tenants such as National Geographic.

The strategy paid off when Kushner's company went to Deutsche Bank for refinancing. An appraisal cited in SEC filings for the package of mortgage-backed securities placed the value at $470 million, a 59 percent increase in a year. The bank declined to release the appraisal, but a person involved in the deal said that such a rapid increase was unusual when New York real estate was rebounding from recession, and credited Kushner for finding stellar tenants.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

In a statement, Kushner Cos. President Laurent Morali said the property's value increased sharply "for a simple reason: the building's dramatic turnaround. We had a vision for the property when we purchased it that no one else had, and are proud to say that we executed on it."

Kushner's company took out $370 million in new loans in October

2016, giving it $74 million more than the purchase price a year earlier. Along with $285 million from Deutsche Bank, Kushner's firm received $85 million from SL Green Realty, where Kushner had once worked as an intern. SL Green spokesman Rick Matthews said the deal made sense because the building has been mostly leased, giving it "increased value."

The Deutsche Bank loan was delivered just before the bank — which has long been under investigation by federal and state authorities — agreed to pay a $7.2 billion U.S. penalty in December for mortgage securities fraud in its packaging of residential mortgages. The bank also paid a $425 million New York state fine in January for failing to properly track large transfers from Russia.

Democrats on the House Financial Services Committee wrote in their March 10 letter that because "press reports indicate" the Justice Department is continuing to investigate the money- laundering case, they are "concerned about the integrity of this criminal probe" in light of Trump's "ongoing conflicts of interest with Deutsche Bank." Bloomberg News has reported that the Justice Department has requested records related to money laundering from Deutsche Bank as part of a probe.

Alice Crites and Steven Rich contributed to this report.

The Washington Post

Democrats field a glut of House candidates in 2018 but remain divided on how to win

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

10-12 minutes

DALLAS — The largest number of Democratic congressional candidates in decades is putting into play dozens of House districts across the country, raising the possibility of a bitterly contested midterm election cycle next year as the party and its activists try to take advantage of President Trump's unpopularity to win a majority in the House.

Yet these candidates and their supporters are also waging a battle among themselves about what the Democratic Party should stand for. After a string of defeats in special elections this year, activists across the country are pitted against Washington-based leaders and strategists about what the message and the tactical plan should be to win the 24 seats needed to take control of the House.

Democrats as well as independent observers believe that figure is attainable given historical trends, Trump's and the congressional GOP's sustained unpopularity and the ballooning number of candidates with gold-plated résumés willing to run.

What they don't agree on is how to do it — by exciting the base with a liberal economic message and fiery candidates in the model of Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), or by keeping the party's doors open to moderates and independents with centrist contenders, ideally with business or military experience.

Following this year's losses, neither faction can say they've proved how to win.

"I think there is a massive amount of demoralization with the American people with the Democratic Party, with the Republican Party," Sanders said on "Meet the Press" on Sunday. "What the Democrats have got to say is that, 'We will be on the side of the working class in this country.' "

The battle over the path forward is raging across the country in dozens of races. Several districts that had seen only token candidates, or no candidates at all, in the past are suddenly packed with mostly first-time Democratic contenders with a broad variety of backgrounds and qualifications. Among them: veteran Jason Crow in Colorado, stem-cell researcher Hans Keirstead in California, Democratic State Sen. Jennifer Wexton in Northern Virginia, former gubernatorial aide Gareth Rhodes in Upstate New York and former sneaker company executive Chrissy Houlahan in Pennsylvania.

Democrats can exceed their past performance in at least 70 House districts across the country controlled by Republicans, primarily because more Democrats registered to vote, said Rep. Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.), chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, in a memo to his colleagues last week.

Luján added that the party is not struggling to recruit candidates.

"In recent cycles, candidate recruitment meant dialing the phone and asking people to run. This cycle, it's about answering the calls when they come in," said Nathan Gonzales, editor of Inside Elections, a nonpartisan newsletter that tracks congressional races.

Yet Democrats remain skittish about their chances, given their poor record so far this year. Candidates and strategists watched warily last week as one of their own, 30-year-old Jon Ossoff, lost an exorbitantly expensive and closely watched special election in suburban Atlanta to Republican Karen Handel. After starting his race vowing to "make Trump furious," he avoided attacks on the president during the general election, believing that a less partisan message would win over independents.

It didn't. And party leaders found themselves trying to explain how the party fell short in a wealthy suburban district they believed they could win — and how they are still well-positioned for next year.

"The national environment, unprecedented grass roots energy and impressive Democratic candidates stepping up to run deep into the battlefield leave no doubt that Democrats can take back the House next fall," Luján wrote in his memo.

In many swing districts across the country, the glut of Democratic candidates is setting up primary fights in expensive media markets that will draw resources away from defeating Republican incumbents.

In Northern Virginia, at least seven Democrats are planning to run against Rep. Barbara Comstock (R-Va.) in a district that Hillary Clinton won by 10 points. At least seven are also running against Rep. John Faso (R-N.Y.), who represents most of New York's Hudson Valley. At least four are considering runs against Rep. Daniel Donovan (R-N.Y.) on New York's Staten Island, while least a dozen are mulling bids to replace retiring Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) of Miami.

Gonzales said that the emerging dynamic for Democrats mirrors what happened to Republicans during the tea party wave of 2010. "They're going to have some expensive and ugly primaries, but that also doesn't mean they can't take back majorities in Congress," he said.

Here in Dallas, first-time candidate Colin Allred, a former NFL linebacker for the Tennessee Titans and civil rights attorney, is running against Rep. Pete Sessions (R-Tex.) in a district where Clinton narrowly won last year and Sessions faced just token opposition. Allred has spent the past six weeks hosting "Coffee with Colin" at local coffee shops on Thursday nights and Saturday afternoons, which he says draw as many as 60 people.

Allred believes the contest will be shaped by economic concerns, health care and other "kitchen table issues." That means focusing on solutions — not on lobbing attacks against Trump or Republicans.

"I've never gotten a question on Russia," Allred said. "I get very few questions about Trump, period." That's because for many people here, Trump "is an ever present issue."

He added: "People in this area that I talk to have come to terms with Trump and are now interested in the next step, and they want a vision for the future."

Ed Meier, a former State Department official and another first-time candidate, is also planning to run against Sessions. How Meier and Allred will distinguish themselves from each other is less clear. Both were born and raised in the district and did stints in the Obama administration. Neither would draw distinctions with the other on policy or personality.

And other local Democrats are still mulling a run, meaning the field could become even more crowded soon.

"The Trump administration is coming in and is working to tear down the progress that happened in the Obama administration," Meier said. "We as Democrats need to come back and build back better, build back stronger, be bolder with what our agenda looks like."

Other factors that could play a role in that contest are race and minority outreach. The Democratic Party has long tried to recruit more candidates of color, such as Allred, to help draw out the party's base of voters. Which candidate is able to raise more money will also play a role.

Jesse Hunt, national press secretary for the National Republican Congressional Committee, warned that the crowded fields will cause "a natural gravitational pull to the left" that results in Democratic candidates being less palatable to voters in GOP-held districts.

"Any appearance of putting their thumb on the scale for their more establishment-friendly candidate is

only going to further enrage the base voters who were wronged in the last cycle," Hunt said.

In Dallas, Allred and Meier are running in the 32nd Congressional District, which stretches from city neighborhoods to the suburbs, combining mom-and-pop diners, Paneras, mostly white enclaves and other areas packed with Jewish, Latino, Muslim and black families.

Allred, 34, held several roles in the Obama administration, including in the White House Counsel's Office and as an aide to former Housing and Urban Development secretary Julián Castro. Meier, 40, is an earnest dad who wears hipster glasses and worked at the State Department managing the logistics of the U.S. military drawdown in Iraq. He also worked on the transition team for a Clinton presidency that never happened.

Allred said he believes Democrats have a chance here in part because Clinton won the Sessions district "with zero organization here and zero money."

Meier said he has heard from Clinton, who is urging former supporters and staffers to run for office. He said he would welcome her to the district.

"She won the district by two points over Donald Trump and could be a tremendous asset," he said. "It might be nice," he added, for her to help raise money as well.

Texas's 7th District, a wealthy and diverse stretch of Houston suburbia, resembles the one where Ossoff lost in Georgia — and popped onto the Democrats' 2018 map after Clinton beat Trump by 1.3 points.

Laura Moser, a progressive activist who launched the group Daily Action to stop Republicans and Trump, moved back to run in the 7th District from Washington this month — despite her view that she's not the D.C. establishment's dream candidate.

"They have very conventional ideas of who can win — business people who've been on this path for a long time," Moser said in an interview at her new home. "I'd say this: I did not get any encouragement from the DCCC."

She also faces lots of competition. James Cargas, an environmental attorney, raised less than $100,000 for his third bid against Rep. John Abney Culberson (R-Tex.) last year — and lost the race by single digits. A total of six competitors have jumped in to grab the baton, but he hasn't dropped it, arguing that he's been hardened by five lonely years on the trail.

"There's 700,000 eligible voters in this district," Cargas explained. "You can't just meet 'em once — you have to meet them multiple times. That takes retail and hard work."

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Young candidates are taking on more than Republican opponents. In the wake of Ossoff's loss, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is once again in the crosshairs of ambitious younger House Democrats already talking openly about the possibility of challenging her ahead of next year's elections to remove the subject of tens of millions of dollars in attack ads that continue to work well for Republicans.

Asked about Pelosi, several of the new candidates sought to minimize her importance.

"I've taken hundreds of questions from hundreds of folks and nobody has ever brought up Nancy Pelosi. No one brings her up," Allred said.

Weigel reported from Houston. Jenna Portnoy in Washington contributed to this report.

Read more at PowerPost

Cary : Democrats will keep failing until they do their own autopsy

Mary Kate Cary, Opinion contributor 6:00 a.m. ET June 26, 2017

5-6 minutes

Why have a serious examination of what's gone wrong when you can keep tweeting #Resist, marching in pink hats and cheering on Alec Baldwin?

Top Democratic House leaders Nancy Pelosi and Steny Hoyer, March 24, 2017, Washington(Photo: Chip Somodevilla, Getty Images)

Roughly 80%of us now live in states either partially or totally controlled by Republicans. Two-thirds of our nation's governors are now Republican — tying a 94-year-old record — and an all-time high 69 of 99 state legislatures now have Republican majorities. In half of our 50 states, both the state legislature and the governorship are controlled by Republicans. And that's aside from the fact that Republicans control Congress and the White House and have appointed a majority of justices on the Supreme Court.

After four straight losses in recent special elections for congressional seats, on top of more than 1,030 seats lost nationally by Democrats in state legislatures, governorships and Congress since 2009, the Democratic National Committee needs to figure out the cause of what can only be called the party's slow death.

It's time for the DNC to perform an autopsy.

The Republicans did the same thing in 2012 when they published the Growth and Opportunity Project — affectionately known around Washington as "The Autopsy." And while not everyone agreed with its recommendations, the authors were well-respected GOP leaders who called for changes to the party's messaging, demographic outreach, use of new technology and data, number of debates and primary schedule. The guy who ordered the autopsy is now White House chief of staff.

Sally Bradshaw, one of the co-authors, said in 2012, "We have become expert at how to provide ideological information to like-minded people but, devastatingly, we have lost the ability to be persuasive with or welcoming to those who don't agree with us on every issue."

Say what you want about Donald Trump — who was not a fan of the report's recommendations and disagrees with many traditional Republican policies — but he brought millions of new voters to the GOP. He knew how to connect with the people he called "forgotten" Americans, many of whom had never voted Republican. Republican turnout in the primaries set a new record.

The massive loss of Democratic seats across the nation has meant the left is now without a pipeline of quality candidates. Exhibit A: Jon Ossoff, the progressive candidate in the Georgia special election, didn't even live in the district in which he was running. Apparently, there was no one in the district to recruit. Exhibit B: Rob Quist, the Democrat in May's special election in Montana, was a banjo-playing songwriter who has performed at a nudist camp. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

The Democrats also have a policy problem. In an era of vicious attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, staggering national debt and menacing actions by North Korea, they only seem to want to talk about abortion rights, transgender bathrooms and gun control. Rich Lowry observed in *Politico*that if Democrats had to choose between opposing an actual coup against Trump and endorsing a ban on abortion after 20 weeks, "they'd probably have to think about it." I think he's right.

While 58% in a recent *Washington Post-ABC News* poll say Trump is "out of touch with the concerns of most people," an even higher percentage — 67% — say Democrats are. That includes 44% of Democrats themselves.

Here's another disconnect: The average age of the Democratic leadership in the House is 76; for Republicans, it's 49. A recent headline from the liberal *Huffington Post*: "Democratic leadership looks like old Soviet Politburo." That headline has the added benefit of being true: The average age of the Politburo before its collapse was only 70. Having California Rep. Nancy Pelosi as the face of the Democratic Party is not a great strategy for winning the youth vote.

But I have a feeling there won't be any autopsy from the DNC. Instead, New Mexico Rep. Ben Ray Lujan, head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, predicted in a staff memo last week that Democrats would take the full House back in 2018. I am not making this up.

POLICING THE USA: A look at race, justice, media

Why have a serious examination of what's gone wrong when you can keep tweeting #Resist, marching in pink hats, and cheering on Alec Baldwin? The left will keep Pelosi and New York Sen. Chuck Schumer in charge, they'll keep widening the disconnect with the middle class by fighting for policies that expand government and slow the economy, and they'll keep whistling past the graveyard.

The longer it takes for Democrats to call the coroner, the better for Republicans.

Mary Kate Cary, a former White House speechwriter for President George H.W. Bush, is a senior fellow for presidential studies at the University of Virginia's Miller Center. Follow her on Twitter: @mkcary

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : Trump's 'Tapes' Trick

June 25, 2017 5:10 p.m. ET 172 COMMENTS

3 minutes

He took his sweet time, but President Trump admitted late last week that he doesn't have tapes of his conversations with former FBI Director James Comey in the White House. Most Trump watchers had concluded as much, but the episode is still worth highlighting as an illustration of how Mr. Trump undermines his credibility as Commander in Chief when he plays social-media troll.

"James Comey better hope that there are no 'tapes' of our conversations before he starts leaking to the press!," Mr. Trump tweeted on May 12, three days after firing Mr. Comey. We now know this was a bluff, perhaps intended to coax Mr. Comey to keep quiet about his conversations with Mr. Trump.

The White House refused for weeks to confirm or deny if such tapes existed, and on Thursday Mr. Trump finally ended the suspense with a pair of tweets declaring that, "With all of the recently reported electronic surveillance, intercepts, unmasking and illegal leaking of information, I have no idea . . . whether there are 'tapes' or recordings of my conversations with James Comey, but I did not make, and do not have, any such recordings."

Mr. Trump's suggestion that someone else might have taped those conversations looks like more misdirection because it's highly unlikely that the National Security Agency or anyone else is taping the President in the Oval Office. If someone is taping without Mr. Trump's knowledge, the U.S. has bigger problems than presidential trolling.

But we do know that Mr. Trump's original "tapes" tweet caused Mr. Comey, by his own testimony to Congress, to leak via a buddy a memo of one conversation with Mr. Trump. Mr. Comey said his goal was to trigger the appointment of a special counsel to investigate Mr. Trump, and he succeeded. Far from keeping Mr. Comey quiet, Mr. Trump's "tapes" tweet led to the creation of a mortal threat to his Presidency.

The episode is further proof that the biggest obstacle to an effective Trump Presidency is Mr. Trump. The tweeting by itself isn't the problem. The problem is that he thinks he can use the platform to spread misinformation as often as he tries to communicate facts about his agenda. He shouldn't be surprised if Americans conclude they therefore can't believe him even when he is telling the truth.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Mukasey : Trump, Mueller and Arthur Andersen

Michael B. Mukasey

6-8 minutes

June 25, 2017 5:05 p.m. ET

What exactly is Special Counsel Robert Mueller investigating? The basis in law—regulation, actually—for Mr. Mueller's appointment is a finding by the deputy attorney general that "criminal investigation of a person or matter is warranted."

According to some reports, the possible crime is obstruction of justice. The relevant criminal statute provides that "whoever corruptly . . . influences, obstructs or impedes or endeavors [to do so], the due and proper administration of the law under which any pending proceeding is being had," is guilty of a crime. The key word is "corruptly."

President Trump's critics describe two of his actions as constituting possible obstruction. One is an alleged request to then-FBI Director James Comey that he go easy on former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who was under investigation for his dealings with Russia and possible false statements to investigators about them. According to Mr. Comey, Mr. Trump told him, "I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go," because "he is a good guy."

An obstruction charge based on that act would face two hurdles. One is that the decision whether to charge Mr. Flynn was not Mr. Comey's. As FBI director, his job was to supervise the investigation. It is up to prosecutors to decide whether charges were justified. The president's confusion over the limits of Mr. Comey's authority may be understandable. Mr. Comey's overstepping of his authority last year, when he announced that no charges were warranted against Hillary Clinton, might have misled Mr. Trump about the actual scope of Mr. Comey's authority. Nonetheless, the president's confusion could not have *conferred* authority on Mr. Comey.

The other is the statutory requirement that a president have acted "corruptly." In *Arthur Andersen LLP v. U.S.* (2005), the U.S. Supreme Court accepted the following definition: that the act be done "knowingly and dishonestly, with the specific intent to subvert or undermine the integrity" of a proceeding. Taking a prospective defendant's character into account when deciding whether to charge him—as Mr. Comey says Mr. Trump asked him to do—is a routine exercise of prosecutorial discretion. It is hard to imagine that a properly instructed jury could decide that a single such request constituted acting "corruptly"—particularly when, according to Mr. Comey, Mr. Trump also told him to pursue evidence of criminality against any of the president's " 'satellite' associates."

The second act said to carry the seed of obstruction is the firing of Mr. Comey as FBI director. The president certainly had the authority; it is his motive that his critics question. A memorandum to the president, from the deputy attorney general and endorsed by the attorney general, presented sufficient grounds for the firing: Mr. Comey's usurpation of the prosecutor's role in the Clinton matter and his improper public disclosure of information unfavorable to Mrs. Clinton. But the president's detractors have raised questions about the timing—about 3½ months into the president's term. They have also cited the president's statement to Russian diplomats days afterward that the firing had eased the pressure on him.

The timing itself does not suggest a motive to obstruct. Rather, coming a few days after Mr. Comey refused to confirm publicly what he had told Mr. Trump three times—that the president himself was not the subject of a criminal investigation—the timing suggests no more than an understandable anger. The statement to Russian diplomats, which might have been intended to put the Russians at ease, collides with the simple fact that an investigation—conducted by agents in the field—proceeds regardless of whether the director continues in office, and thus hardly suggests the president acted "corruptly."

One of Mr. Mueller's early hires among the dozen-plus lawyers already aboard has a troubling history with the word "corruptly." Andrew Weissmann led the Enron prosecution team that pressed an aggressive interpretation of "corruptly," which permitted a conviction even absent the kind of guilty knowledge the law normally associates with criminal charges. As a result, the accounting firm Arthur Andersen was convicted. By the time the conviction was reversed on appeal to the Supreme Court in 2005—in large part due to the erroneous application of "corruptly" in the statute at issue—Arthur Andersen had already ceased operation.

What if—for some reason not apparent to the public now—Mr. Mueller were to conclude that the president did act "corruptly"? Could he initiate a criminal prosecution? The Office of Legal Counsel at the Justice Department, which sets policy for the department and other agencies of government, has already opined more than once—starting in 1973, during Watergate—that the answer is no. It would offend the Constitution for the executive branch to prosecute its head.

What else might Mr. Mueller do? Some have suggested that if he finds criminal activity occurred he could report his findings to the House so as to trigger an impeachment proceeding, as Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr did in 1998. But the law under which Mr. Starr was appointed has lapsed, and the regulations governing the special counsel provide for only two kinds of reports—either to Justice Department leadership when some urgent event occurs during the investigation, or to the attorney general to explain the decision to prosecute or not. Reports of either type are to be treated as confidential.

Mr. Mueller could simply take the bit in his teeth and write a public report on his own authority, or write a confidential report and leak it to the press. If he did either, he would be following Mr. Comey's lawless example.

Or if, as appears from what we know now, there is no crime here, Mr. Mueller, notwithstanding his more than a dozen lawyers and unlimited budget, could live up to his advance billing for integrity and propriety and resist the urge to grab

a headline—not necessarily his own urge but that of some he has hired.

Hold fast. It may be a rough ride.

Mr. Mukasey served as U.S. attorney general (2007-09) and a U.S. district judge (1988-2006).

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Editorial : The Missile Defense Imperative

June 25, 2017 5:12 p.m. ET 176 COMMENTS

5-6 minutes

Liberal opposition to missile defense has persisted since the 1980s, but the politics may be changing with technological progress and the rising threat from North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un's nuclear weapons. Congress has an opportunity this summer to notch a rare bipartisan deal that enhances U.S. security.

Kim has already overseen more nuclear and missile tests than his father and grandfather combined, and the Defense Intelligence Agency warns that "if left on its current trajectory" Pyongyang will develop a capacity to hit Japan, Alaska, Hawaii or even the U.S. West Coast. The Trump Administration is pleading with China to stop the North, but Chinese leaders never seem to act and they're even trying to block regional missile defenses in South Korea.

Meanwhile, the U.S. last month successfully tracked and shot down a mock intercontinental ballistic missile, akin to a bullet hitting a bullet. The Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD)—first fielded in 2004 but untested since 2014—has a success rate of nine in 17 intercept trials. But even the failures show the GMD is increasingly effective.

Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan wants to build on this progress with an amendment that would fund a more integrated system, add new interceptors and sensors and increase research. The legislation has united conservatives such as Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio and liberal Democrats such as Gary Peters and Brian Schatz, no small feat in the Trump era.

Systems like the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense at sea and the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (Thaad) on the ground can shoot down regional threats within earth's atmosphere. Only the GMD can hit long-range threats targeting all 50 states, bringing the missiles down in space. All of these systems have separate radars, which have to be coordinated to get a complete picture of a target. The bill aims to create a better integrated system that provides what Mr. Sullivan calls "an unblinking eye."

This would include advanced space-based sensors. An improved system in space could provide a persistent picture—from launch to interception. If the systems can communicate more efficiently, military brass can make better choices faster.

By the end of 2017 there will be 40 ground-based interceptors at Alaska's Fort Greely and four at California's Vandenberg Air Force Base, where the May test was conducted. The bill provides for 28 more interceptors for Fort Greely. Extra interceptors mean more tests and more available to take out threats. This is crucial as the North builds mobile launchers and tries to develop multiple warheads on a single missile.

Some Senators suspect that the Sullivan amendment is little more than home-state pork, but all states would benefit from preventing an attack and the fact of geography is that the trajectory of intercontinental missiles usually requires them to fly over Alaska. The Pentagon is studying whether to place another interceptor site in the Midwest or East Coast.

Opponents say missile defenses are too expensive given that interception might fail, so better to trust arms control and the deterrence of mutual-assured destruction. But arms talks with North Korea have been a fool's errand since negotiator Robert Gallucci and Bill Clinton bought its promises in 1994.

Even a 50% chance of interception might increase deterrence by making the success of an enemy first strike more doubtful. North Koreans or other rogues also may not be rational actors who fear their own annihilation. U.S. leaders have a moral obligation to do more than let Kim Jong Un hold American cities hostage, and without defenses a pre-emptive military strike might be the only alternative.

The price for the space-based system is classified but no doubt expensive, and it's difficult to score technologies still under development. But Congress ought to be able to find money to save Seattle from annihilation while arming U.S. troops against conventional threats. If it can't, voters should at least be able to see who voted against their protection.

The Senate will take up the National Defense Authorization Act in the coming weeks. Mr. Sullivan's missile-defense amendment would be a down payment on a safer America in an ever more dangerous world.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Massie : Congressman, Defend Thyself

Thomas Massie

4-5 minutes

June 25, 2017 5:07 p.m. ET

When Republican lawmakers came under fire during a June 14 baseball practice in Virginia, they were trapped by a tall fence with one exit. Thanks to armed officers guarding House Majority Whip Steve Scalise, only five people were wounded.

But although members of the congressional leadership are provided security details, the rest of us have to count on luck. "When congressmen and senators are off the Capitol Hill campus, we are still high-profile targets, but we have zero protection," Rep. Mo Brooks of Alabama told John Lott of the Crime Prevention Research Center.

Mr. Lott, who worked with me on this article, and I have talked to some of the congressmen and staffers who were there during the attack. They uniformly want to change the District of Columbia's gun-control laws.

Rep. Steve Pearce of New Mexico described to me how a security officer's shots put the attacker into a defensive position, causing him to come out from behind a wall to fire before taking cover again. Had the attacker "taken even six steps forward," Mr. Pearce said, he would have seen several exposed people concealed from his line of sight.

At least five congressmen at the baseball practice have concealed handgun permits in their home states. At least one aide also has a permit. Others may be reluctant to announce publicly that they do, since part of the benefit of carrying a concealed weapon is that potential attackers do not know who is armed. That's why uniformed police have an almost impossible job stopping terrorist attacks. A uniform is like a neon sign flashing: "I have a gun. Shoot me first."

In 2015 the Daily Caller surveyed 38 conservative members of Congress, asking whether they held a concealed-carry permit. Thirty declined to answer. Of the eight who did respond, six had permits. Jerry Henry, executive director of Georgia Carry, says that as of last year nine of the 10 Republican congressmen from his state had a concealed-carry permit.

An aide says that when Rep. Barry Loudermilk is speaking at public events in his district, "they always have someone with the congressman who is carrying." Likewise, when I'm home in Kentucky, my staff and I carry weapons.

But the District of Columbia's gun regulations meant no one had a permitted, concealed handgun at the congressional baseball practice. Virginia, where the attack occurred, honors permits from any other state. But as Mr. Brooks explained: "My residence is in the District of Columbia, which means that it would have been illegal for me to take my weapon with me to the ballpark—about a 9-mile bike ride—and it would have also been illegal for me to come from Virginia back into D.C. with my weapon."

Both Rep. Brooks and the Loudermilk aide say they believe the attack could have been ended much earlier. The aide, who asked to be unnamed, has received active-shooter training and remained behind a car 15 to 20 yards from the attacker. He believes he could have shot the attacker from his position and ended the attack "probably four minutes earlier."

Mr. Brooks believes he was much better-positioned than the two officers guarding Mr. Scalise, who were on the opposite side of the field: "If I had a weapon in my backpack in the dugout, I would have had an opportunity to stop him."

That's why I have introduced legislation to allow people with concealed handgun permits from any state to carry their permitted firearms into the District of Columbia. It's a miracle that only five were wounded at the Republicans' baseball practice. Next time the results might be even more devastating.

Mr. Massie, a Republican, represents Kentucky's Fourth Congressional District and is chairman of the Second Amendment Caucus.