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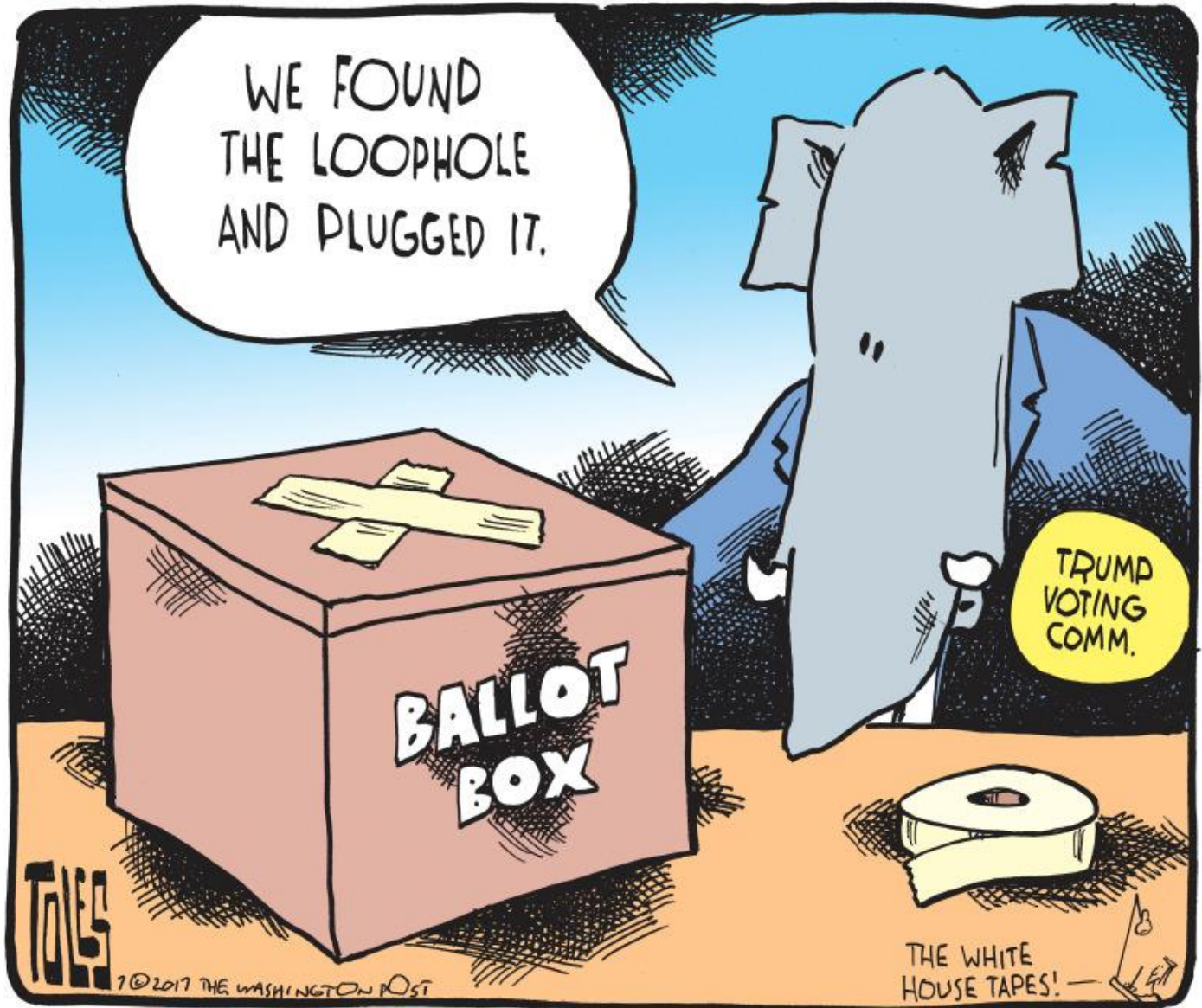
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RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

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FRANCE – EUROPE



France's President Emmanuel Macron' Popularity Plummetts

Tara John

2 minutes

French President Emmanuel Macron's approval rating fell 10% in July, just three months after he swept into power on a tide of antipathy towards mainstream parties.

An IFOP poll, published on Sunday in the *Journal du Dimanche* newspaper, found 54% of people in France were satisfied with Macron in July, compared to 64% in June. The last time a French president had lost that much ground in three months was in 1995, when Jacques Chirac's approval rating fell by 20%, *Journal du Dimanche* reports.

Macron enjoyed strong popularity scores over his handling of

international encounters, particularly for the way he dealt with U.S. President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

The honeymoon period seemed to end after a difficult month, which saw the July 19 resignation of a highly-regarded military chief, General Pierre de Villiers, following a public row over military spending cuts. Macron has also been criticized for making plans to cut

housing benefits and overruling his prime minister by promising to go forward with tax cuts next year, *Reuters* reports.

Weeks after Macron's presidential victory, his fledgling political movement En Marche won a commanding parliamentary majority in June.

CNBC : French President Macron's popularity rating drops

CNBC

4-5 minutes

Etienne Laurent | Reuters

French President Emmanuel Macron walks through the Galerie des Bustes (Busts Gallery) to access the Versailles Palace's hemicycle for a

Bloomberg

Macron's Uphill Battle Against France's Labor Law

@gviscusi More stories by

Gregory Viscusi

8-9 minutes

QuickTake Q&A

By

24 juillet 2017 à 00:00 UTC-4

Emmanuel Macron may have his work cut out for him. Photographer: Christophe Morin/Bloomberg

Are France's strict labor regulations responsible for the country's persistently high unemployment rate? Emmanuel Macron repeatedly said so during his successful presidential campaign, and he set to work on liberalizing French labor law almost as soon as he was sworn in on May 14. The last three presidents also tried to loosen labor regulations, and had to partially backtrack in the face of opposition. Will Macron succeed where others failed?

1. Is French law really to blame for high unemployment?

France's unemployment rate is 9.6 percent -- about double the rates in Germany, the Netherlands, the U.S. and the U.K., though lower than in Spain or Italy. France's labor code runs to 3,000 pages and covers everything from wage negotiations to standards for ventilating offices. Pierre Gattaz, the head of France's main business lobby, has spoken of 1 million jobs being created if France reduces payroll taxes to make its companies more competitive and cuts job protections that Gattaz says make companies afraid to hire.

2. Does everybody agree on that?

No. French unions say making it easier to fire people won't create jobs, and that unemployment results from the tight budget policies forced by EU-imposed austerity. (The austerity argument resonates more in Greece and Portugal, and maybe Italy, than in France, probably the euro zone country that's imposed

special congress gathering both houses of parliament (National Assembly and Senate), near Paris, France, July 3, 2017.

French President Emmanuel Macron's popularity rating has slumped by 10 percentage points this month, according to an Ifop poll on Sunday—the biggest decline for a new president since 1995.

the least-austere measures.) Economists take a middle view. "The level of employment protection in France is one of the strictest across European countries, therefore even minor reforms could improve the competitiveness of French companies," Goldman Sachs wrote in a note to clients July 4. But it warned that "the impact of labor market reforms on the economy has proven to be challenging to identify in the past."

3. What is Macron's plan?

In talks with union and business leaders, Macron and his labor minister, Muriel Penicaud, focused on three main areas: giving individual companies more say on contractual issues such as working hours and pay; merging the myriad workers' councils that proliferate as companies grow (they're why France has so many 49-employee companies); and putting limits on court-imposed severance pay, which are widely viewed as so unpredictable that they discourage companies from hiring people in the first place. As always, the devil is in the details, and there's lots of detail in those three areas. One area that's not up for discussion is France's 35-hour work week, which has been weakened enough over the years that it's no longer seen as a priority.

4. How does Macron plan to get this done?

He wants to avoid taking the usual route, which is sending a formal proposal to parliament, where debate and amendments might well water it down. Instead, Macron and Penicaud -- a former head of human resources at Danone -- met unions and business leaders throughout May to establish what they might and won't accept. On June 28, Macron's cabinet asked parliament to give his government the power to change the country's labor law by decree. Macron's party has an overwhelming majority in parliament, and that law is expected to pass later this month. The government will then resume talks with labor and

The poll, published in the Journal du Dimanche newspaper, said 54 percent of people in France were satisfied with Macron in July, compared with 64 percent in June.

It added the last time a newly elected president had lost ground in that way was Jacques Chirac in 1995. The Ifop poll echoed a similar finding in a recent BVA poll.

business leaders, and publish the decrees in September.

5. How far did previous presidents get?

His three immediate predecessors all viewed France's labor laws as too restrictive. In 2003 and 2005, Jacques Chirac managed to loosen the 35-hour cap on the working week, making it easier and cheaper for companies to add extra hours. In 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy cut taxes on overtime work and made it simpler for individual workers to negotiate their own departures. And Francois Hollande's reforms of 2013 and 2016 made it easier to justify layoffs due to a downturn in business. But attempts by Chirac and Hollande to go further -- Chirac hoped to create a new type of ultra-flexible contract that would apply to young people; Hollande proposed limits on severance pay -- were blocked by public protests. Plus, Sarkozy's five-year term was spent in the shadow of the 2008 global financial crisis, which made it that much harder to propose letting companies fire people more easily.

6. Won't Macron face similar opposition?

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Maybe not. For one thing, he ran openly on a platform of liberalizing the French economy, which was not the case for Chirac and Hollande. Plus, France's unions are divided. The CGT, which grew out of the Communist Party and is France's second largest union, has called for a general strike Sept. 12 to protest Macron's plans. France's largest union, the CFDT, and the third largest, Force Ouvriere, said they will wait to see the decrees in September before deciding what steps to take. The CFDT has taken a more conciliatory position in recent years, and has gained votes in recent worker representative elections.

7. What do polls show?

Macron has had a tough month, marked by a public row over military spending cuts with top armed forces chief General Pierre de Villiers that led to de Villiers' resignation.

Macron also ending up overruling his own prime minister by vowing to press ahead with tax cuts in 2018, while plans to cut housing benefits have also come in for criticism.

They're all over the place, partly because the details aren't yet well-understood. Some polls say the French favor shaking up the labor code, while others say they are opposed to specific measures Macron has proposed.

8. Would labor reform be Macron's signature initiative?

He hopes not. For him, labor laws are just the appetizer. Next up is a reformulation of France's entire system of unemployment insurance and job training to bring it closer to those in many northern European countries. Then he wants to merge France's disparate pension systems, which he counts at 37. The ultimate goal is to win Germany's trust. Reforming the labor market "is crucial for the credibility of Macron abroad -- and particularly with Germany -- to be able to push through his ambitious agenda of a deeper European integration," Olivier Vigna, an economist at HSBC France, said in a note to clients on July 12.

The Reference Shelf

- The International Monetary Fund likes Macron's agenda.
- But France's top military commander is less enthused.
- Unions throughout Europe are seeking a bump in pay.
- Why labor is "the mother of all reforms" in France.
- Macron's mandate has a voter-turnout weakness.
- Latin America needs a Macron of its own, writes Bloomberg View's Mac Margolis.
- A Bloomberg View editorial urges Macron to focus on growth and jobs, not on deficit reduction.



France bringing top Libyan rivals together in new initiative

ABC News
6-7 minutes

French President Emmanuel Macron will host a meeting of the two main rival leaders of chaotic Libya, his office said Monday, to try to "contribute to an end to the Libyan crisis."

The head of Libya's unity government, Fayez Sarraj, and Gen. Khalifa Hifter, the Egyptian-backed commander of Libya's self-styled national army, are to meet on Tuesday outside Paris, the presidential Elysee Palace said.

Libya, split between rival governments and militias, is a breeding ground for Islamic State militants and people-traffickers preying on migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean to Italy.

The two rivals met in May in the [United Arab Emirates](#), and the hosts said the encounter led to a "significant breakthrough." Libya TV said the men agreed on holding presidential and parliamentary elections next year in the fractured country.

The French statement said that France is "trying to facilitate a political entente" in the presence of the U.N. secretary general's newly

appointed special envoy for Libya, Ghassan Salame.

"With this initiative, France wants to facilitate a political entente" and "mark its support for efforts to build a political compromise, under the auspices of the [United Nations](#)," that includes all actors in the fractious country, the president's office said. The challenge, the statement added, is to "build a state capable of responding to the fundamental needs of Libyans" with one regular army.

That is far from the current situation in which rival governments and militias have battled for supremacy since Libya descended into chaos following the 2011 civil war that

toppled and killed dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

A pacified Libya is widely viewed as the key to ridding the country of extremist groups, and arms and people trafficking. France, and Europe, see the return of a stable nation as vital to controlling borders — and cutting off the flow of migrants to Italy and, more broadly, ending its status as a danger zone for Europe.

Fayez is the prime minister of the U.N.-backed government in Tripoli, the Libyan capital, and Hifter, a powerful general backed by Egypt who lived for years in the United States, is fighting Islamic militants.



In France, murder of a Jewish woman ignites debate over the word 'terrorism'

McAuley
8-10 minutes

By James

they are existential. What makes an act of violence a "terrorist" attack? And who decides what is terrorism and what is merely murder?

[Macron hosts Netanyahu, condemns anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism]

Strictly speaking, French law classifies as terrorism any grave act of violence whose individual or collective intent "is to seriously disturb public order through intimidation or terror."

Legally, it is France's chief public prosecutor for Paris who decides whether to launch a terrorism investigation. In the Halimi case, François Molins, who occupies that position, declined to consider it as terrorism — and, initially, as an act of anti-Semitic violence.

The decision sent shock waves through the French Jewish community, Europe's largest. For many, it evinces a political calculus that weighs certain attacks over others.

"It's purely and simply ideological," said Gilles-William Goldnadel, an attorney for the Halimi family and a well-known conservative commentator for France's Le Figaro newspaper. Of Traoré, Goldnadel added: "He had the profile of a radical Islamist, and yet somehow there is a resistance to call a spade a spade."

In general, the definition of the term "radical Islamist" remains a major debate in France.

In this case, neighbors testified that they heard Traoré recite verses from

the Koran in Halimi's apartment. Then, in early June, Libération, a French newspaper, gained access to the police dossier on Traoré, which suggested he had a record of petty crime and violent tendencies almost identical to those that have characterized the profiles of other terrorist suspects.

On a different level, other small-scale incidents — even ones that experts see as comparably minor — have instantly been classified as terrorism. In June, for instance, a man attacked police officers near Notre Dame cathedral in Paris with a hammer. Whereas Traoré is believed to have yelled "Allahu akbar," the assailant in this earlier case yelled, "This is for Syria!" In any case, the Notre Dame incident — in which no one was killed — was considered terrorism.

So was the killing of a police officer on the Champs Élysées on the eve of the French election in late April, as well as an attempted shooting at Paris's Orly Airport in March. But not the slaying of Sarah Halimi.

The office of François Molins did not return a request for comment.

The difference, for some security analysts, is that these other cases were all defined by some discernible motivation of public disturbance, targeting as they did busy thoroughfares and transit hubs.

"The simple fact that someone killed someone else because of confession or religion is not enough," said Jean-Charles Brisard, director of the French Center for the Analysis of Terrorism, a Paris-based think tank. "It needs to have a

certain degree of willingness to disrupt the French public order."

For Sarah Halimi's family, however, that she was thrown off a balcony into a public space presented a dark spectacle meant to be seen — and to pose a clear threat to other Jews. In an interview, Halimi's brother, William Attal, 62, said that the family's principal objective was securing public recognition of the anti-Semitism that, in their eyes, killed their mother, sister and grandmother.

As Attal put it: "I want you to understand that the fight of this family is that people recognize the Islamist, anti-Semitic nature of the assassin, who massacred and killed a Jewish woman, whom he knew was a Jew and whom he knew was alone."

In the French Jewish community, the Halimi Affair provides what many consider yet another example of the French state refusing to acknowledge the realities of contemporary anti-Semitism in France.

[Black Lives Matter movement comes to France. But will it translate?]

For many, this affair harks back to another Halimi Affair, from 2006, when Ilan Halimi, a 23-year-old cellphone salesman who had no relation to Sarah Halimi, was abducted and murdered by the "Gang of Barbarians," a gang of immigrant criminals from the Paris suburbs. They had targeted their victim merely because he was Jewish, which French authorities initially refused to recognize.

"These ostrich politics must stop, and our leaders must become aware of what is happening in the country," read a recent letter signed by 17 prominent French intellectuals in the aftermath of the latest Halimi Affair.

"It's always the same story in France," journalist and public intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy, another advocate of Halimi and her family, said in an interview. "Anti-Semitism is not supposed to exist, especially among minority communities."

On the whole, the recent and widely publicized uptick in Jews leaving France for Israel has slowed, and the number of reported anti-Semitic acts

decreased by nearly 59 percent in 2016, according to the French Interior Ministry.

In general, the wave of terrorist violence that has struck this country in the past two years has not singled out Jews as targets. But scattered instances of anti-Semitic violence have continued to be reported, with victims often identifying their assailants as North African or West African.

France is also home to one of Europe's largest Muslim populations, a group that is repeatedly criticized across the political spectrum, particularly by the staunchly anti-immigrant National Front. Anti-Muslim violence also has

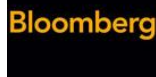
become a reality of modern French life. So as not to channel that rhetoric and to condone that violence, many elected officials are loath to accuse the entirety of a diverse and sprawling community of a blanket charge as severe as anti-Semitism, analysts say.

"It comes from a very good, honorable place of not wanting to overgeneralize, but sometimes it can go too far," said Ethan Katz, the author of an acclaimed book on the history of Jewish-Muslim relations in France and a professor of history at the University of Cincinnati.

"What's a fair critique is that mainstream politicians have not figured out a genuine way to

address, aside from security measures, the legitimate problem of anti-Semitism in France today — including in certain areas of France's Muslim population."

This, for her family and many others, is the tragedy of the Halimi Affair: the effacement of an anti-Semitism that remains a real threat, especially in tense urban areas. In the words of Goldnadel, the lawyer: "Without naming it, there is no chance to escape this sickness."



Editorial: The U.K.'s Brexit Bill Shouldn't Derail Talks

by The Editors
More stories by The Editors

4-5 minutes

Davis and Barnier need to move on to things that matter.

Photographer: Dursun Aydemir/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The first sticking point in Brexit negotiations is the size of the U.K.'s final bill with the European Union. It's a silly dispute that both sides need to get past as quickly as possible so they can move on to more consequential matters.

This needn't be difficult. All it requires is a willingness to compromise -- something neither party, as yet, has shown.

The U.K.'s position has been that it should have to pay little if anything upon exit. Once Britain is no longer in the EU, its

annual budget contributions and any EU spending in return will cease -- and, for the most part, that's that. The EU's position is that the U.K. will continue to owe as much as 100 billion euros to cover a long list of actual and contingent liabilities. Asked to comment on that prospect, British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson responded that Europe can "go whistle" -- a perfect example of how not to proceed.

Britain's financial relationship with the EU is so tangled, and the laws controlling it so opaque, that there's no clear answer to the question of how much the U.K. actually owes. Defensible estimates range from 25 billion euros to 65 billion euros. And those are net long-term figures: The U.K. could continue to receive some reimbursements from the EU even after Brexit, but its upfront payments could indeed run as high as 100 billion euros. The U.K. is at fault in failing to acknowledge that a hefty payment will be owed. The EU is at fault in maintaining that there's one

correct answer, with little room for give and take.

So the scope for compromise is plain. Right now, the U.K. government should make clear -- not least to its own citizens -- that the country does have substantial liabilities to the EU, and that a payment in the tens of billions of euros will be due on exit. The EU should say it's willing to strike a deal on the amount, and stop insisting that the number must be nailed down before more substantive discussions can start.

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The final figure will be more a matter of politics than accounting. The U.K.'s strategic position is weak, so it will have to give more ground than it would like -- and the sooner it gets used to this idea the better. But if the EU decides to drive the hardest

possible bargain, one that British politicians will be unable to sell to their voters, the result could be a shambolic exit that flattens the U.K., inflicts material collateral damage on the EU, and poisons U.K.-EU relations irreversibly. This cannot be in Europe's interest.

As soon as possible, the two sides should agree to agree on a substantial exit payment, and let the details be worked out later. The discussions need to move to future economic relations, where the sums involved for both sides are vastly greater.

--Editors: Clive Crook, Michael Newman.

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Fox : Britain Is Committed to Brexit and Free Trade

Liam Fox

5-6 minutes

July 23, 2017 5:30 p.m. ET

The principles of free trade have underpinned the institutions, rules and alliances that rebuilt the postwar world. They facilitated the fall of Soviet communism. They ushered in 70 years of global prosperity, raising the living standards of hundreds of millions of people. As the United Kingdom looks ahead to a new era of trade and a future outside the European Union, we'll be strengthening ties around the world—especially with our top trading partner and greatest ally, the U.S.

The British government has set up working groups and high-level dialogues in 10 countries that are key trade partners. Our goal is to explore the best ways of improving our trade and investment relationships. On Monday, I will visit my American counterpart, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, for the first meeting of the U.S.-U.K. trade and investment working group. We have two main aims. First, to give businesses on both sides of the Atlantic certainty and confidence. Second, to provide commercial continuity as the U.K. charts a course outside the EU.

The U.K. is prohibited from signing any formal free-trade agreement while we retain EU membership, but we are laying the groundwork for a potential deal with our closest

international partners, identifying areas where we could broaden cooperation and remove barriers to trade.

American politicians and business leaders sometimes ask me whether the U.K.'s recent general election has affected our approach to Brexit, or whether there is any chance the U.K. might change its mind and stay in the EU. No. The government's approach has not changed. The plan to leave the EU that we originally set out is in our national interest. Brexit is going ahead. The democratic choice has been made.

In the June election, more than 80% of voters backed one of the parties that supports Britain's withdrawal from the EU. The Conservative Party, through our agreement with

the Democratic Unionist Party, has secured a legislative majority to provide stable government, uphold the democratic will of the British people, and deliver Brexit.

I believe this offers an unprecedented opportunity for the U.K. If we want to protect jobs and prosperity and watch British businesses expand, we need to engage with the overseas markets that hold the greatest potential. The EU itself estimates that 90% of global growth in the next decade will come from outside Europe. As one of the world's largest economies, the U.K. has the chance to work with old and new partners to build a truly global Britain at the heart of international trade.

The strength of our trade and investment relationship with the U.S. is clear. Exports to the U.K. last year totaled \$555 million from Alabama alone, and \$3.5 billion from Washington state. Such exports supported 1,400 jobs in Alaska and 53,000 in Texas, which I will visit at the end of this week. Together the U.S. and U.K. have around \$1 trillion invested in each other's economies, and this strong trading relationship supports more than one million jobs in both countries.

The fundamentals of the U.K. economy are strong, providing a

solid platform on which to build new trading links. We have reduced the deficit by nearly 75% and cut taxes for millions of working people, and the unemployment rate remains low. The U.K. was the second-fastest-growing economy in the Group of Seven last year. A PricewaterhouseCoopers report from February projects that Britain will hold the G-7 growth title until 2050, outstripping Germany, France and Italy.

The U.K. has long been one of the best places in the world to invest, with regulatory stability, a strong rule

of law, and a low-tax, high-skilled economy. So it's no surprise that Britain has attracted a range of businesses, from Google and Facebook to Pfizer.

I am committed to securing the best possible global trading framework for the U.K. It is a source of great personal pride to lead the Department for International Trade, tasked with upholding Britain's centuries-long tradition of advocating free trade and commerce. In that spirit, I look forward to working together with our American allies to deepen a

relationship based upon not only our shared values of freedom and democracy, but our shared history, culture and economic success.

At times the U.K. and the U.S. can seem very different, yet we are nations built upon a common foundation. As Britain embraces the world, the U.S. will remain our foremost partner in every endeavor.

Mr. Fox is the U.K.'s international trade secretary.



It's Time to Hit Poland in the Pocketbook

Paul McLeary | 2 hours ago

9-12 minutes

With its latest move to purge the country's Supreme Court and turn judges into political appointees, Poland's ruling Law and Justice party has ramped up its assault on democratic checks and balances.

Buoyed by U.S. President Donald Trump's recent visit to Warsaw — during which no mention was made of the nationalist party's defanging of another major court, the Constitutional Tribunal, earlier this year or any of its numerous anti-democratic actions since winning power in 2015 — the government appears to have been emboldened to hasten its march toward authoritarianism.

Its latest parliamentary initiative, likely to be signed into law next week by President Andrzej Duda, would trigger the immediate dismissal of all of Poland's current Supreme Court judges, except those the president decides should stay. Additionally, this month, the government decided that members of the National Council of the Judiciary — a body that picks all of the country's judges — will now be selected by parliament, rather than by other judges as used to be the case. These moves together effectively hand politicians full control over the judicial branch, leaving the path clear for the ruling party to rest assured that whatever bills it passes will essentially be rubber-stamped by Poland's most important courts.

The move prompted nationwide protests and renewed criticism from European Union officials, who have repeatedly castigated Poland's ruling party for undermining democratic institutions and rule of law in the country since it came to power. The first vice president of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, stated in a press

briefing in Brussels that the changes "would abolish any remaining judicial independence and put the judiciary under full political control of the government.... Judges will serve at the pleasure of the political leaders, and be dependent upon them, from their appointment to their pension." He warned that the EU's executive is "very close" to triggering Article 7, a procedure assessing systematic threats to the rule of law and potentially triggering sanctions, including the suspension of Poland's voting rights in the Council of the European Union. Were this to happen, it would set a major precedent and serve as a huge knock to Poland's standing within the EU: No other EU country has ever been subjected to the process.

But sanctions require the consent of all EU members, and Warsaw's European illiberal bedfellow in Budapest is likely to veto any such moves. Hungary's autocratic prime minister, Viktor Orban, has already sent a letter of support to Warsaw expressing dismay that Poland was being "insulted and attacked by the European Commission." And while the U.S. State Department expressed "concern" about the "Polish government's continued pursuit of legislation that appears to limit the judiciary and potentially weaken the rule of law," the White House is unlikely to come out strongly against arguably the most pro-Trump government in Europe.

The only player capable of nudging the Polish government to reconsider its assault on democratic institutions remains the European Union. But to get anywhere with Warsaw's current authorities, the EU would need to show far more decisiveness in defending its values than it has so far. Right now, the Polish government simply doesn't believe Brussels has the will or ability to carry out its threats. When, in July 2016, the European Commission issued Warsaw a three-month deadline to address threats to the rule of law or face potential sanctions, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the

ruling party leader and Poland's most powerful politician, dismissively described the ultimatum as "amusing." Indeed, nothing much came of it. The Polish government dismissed the European Commission's recommendations as "political interference" and largely ignored them, leaving the EU only with its so-called "nuclear option" of Article 7.

As long as Kaczynski believes the EU is unable to take any action that could cost him politically, he will continue to ignore protestations at his party's policies. And he is likely to go even further in dismantling any remaining checks and balances he views as standing in the way of his party assuming total control of the Polish state and its institutions. Kaczynski is adept at exploiting genuine public dissatisfaction with many aspects of the Polish state to justify actions he portrays as necessary to eliminate the corrupt "post-communist" system, with its complicit liberal elites, whom he points to as the root cause of all of Poland's ills. For instance, a recent survey revealed that 51 percent of Poles have a generally negative opinion of their justice system, which they see as inefficient and, indeed, sometimes corrupt. Law and Justice therefore argue that its changes to the justice system will make courts more efficient and honest.

But the fact that many Poles are unhappy with their courts does not mean they approve of the specific changes Law and Justice is forcing through. Besides the thousands of people protesting on the streets, a poll released July 20 showed that 56 percent of Poles are against the government's machinations with the Supreme Court, with only 22 percent in favor and 22 percent unsure.

The European Union owes it to this majority of Poles to deploy the only tool at its disposal realistically capable of getting Law and Justice's attention: its purse strings. In the 13 years since it joined the European Union, Poland has received 135.7

billion euros in EU funds, an average of 10 billion euros a year, far more than any other member state. Considering Poland's total budget revenue for 2017 is projected at 77 billion euros, it's clear how significant a role EU funds play in state spending.

As long as that cash flow continues unhindered, Kaczynski and his party couldn't care less what EU officials think about their actions. To them, Brussels is run by fanatical lefties who hate them because they are a conservative party. Their "you are with us or against us" attitude means they have scant regard for opposing opinions, whether from Poles or foreigners. This week, Kaczynski labeled Poland's opposition "scum" during the parliamentary debate over his party's Supreme Court legislation. They will not cease their authoritarian actions unless they perceive a high cost to not doing so.

Cuts in EU funding would force the Polish government to cut back its spending plans significantly, which would more than likely have a negative effect on planned infrastructure projects and the economy in general, a development unlikely to score Law and Justice many points with voters back home. Of course, there is the risk that Poland's ruling party would dig its heels in and portray the country as being unfairly singled out for punishment by Brussels, further escalating the situation. However, in the long run, the public would be bound to start conducting a cost-benefit analysis of its government's policies and their consequences, especially as this would be the first time since it joined the EU in 2004 that Poland's funding would be affected.

In fact, such a move by Brussels is already being floated. This week, Vera Jourova, an EU commissioner, suggested cutting EU funds for Poland, saying, "If a country gets money from the EU, it has to respect the rule of law.... I can't imagine

German or Swedish taxpayers would want their money spent on creating some kind of dictatorship in another EU country.” While unanimous consent is needed for imposing sanctions on an EU member, budgetary negotiations are different: The biggest net contributors to the EU kitty — of which Germany is at the forefront — get a significant say in which of the net beneficiaries get how much, thus making funding cuts a credible threat in a way that sanctions are not.

Realistically speaking, significant cuts would likely be feasible only for funds slated to be allocated to

Poland for the next budgetary period, starting in 2021. However, negotiations for the future budget are already underway, and Law and Justice could be made to start feeling some costs for its actions now to impel it think twice about its policies going forward. Hopefully, the mere credible threat of funding cuts would be enough to make the ruling party reconsider. The fact is, the louder the signals from Brussels of potential financial consequences for the government’s anti-democratic practices, the tougher the questions Law and Justice will face at home. Contrary to popular stereotypes of Poles as sentimental romantics, the average Pole is very pragmatic

when it comes to pocketbook issues directly affecting them: They will not tolerate for long any government they see as costing them money or delaying potential development, were Brussels indeed to wield the financial ax against Warsaw.

Poland’s opposition politicians are well aware that the money argument is the only one capable of moving Law and Justice. They are, however, reluctant to voice this out loud; the ruling party would quickly label them “traitors” — colluding with foreigners to Poland’s disadvantage. Realistically though, without some decisive action from Brussels, Poland under Law and Justice will

continue to drift further away from liberal democracy, further “backwards and eastwards” as Donald Tusk, European Council president and former Polish prime minister, described it. There is much more than money at stake here; after a quarter century of painstaking institution building after the collapse of communism, the very future of Polish democracy is on the line. The European Union needs to act now, for the long-term sake of Poland and for the sake of its own credibility.

Photo credit: ADAM CHELSTOWSKI/AFP/Getty Images



How McKinsey quietly shaped Europe’s response to the refugee crisis

By Isaac Stanley-Becker

7-9 minutes

BERLIN — It was October 2015. With winter approaching and no end in sight to the flow of migrants seeking refuge from the Syrian civil war, Germany needed a solution — fast.

Processing centers for refugees had exceeded capacity. Asylum claims were backlogged. Temporary tent cities would not survive the punishing winter months.

So Germany did what governments increasingly do when facing apparently unmanageable problems. It called in multinational management consulting firms, including New York-based giant McKinsey & Co., to streamline its asylum procedures.

Germany has paid McKinsey 29.3 million euros, the equivalent of nearly \$34 million, for work with the federal migration office that began in October 2015 and continues to this day. The office also brought in two Europe-based firms, Roland Berger and Ernst & Young.

Among McKinsey’s projects has been the development of fast-track arrival centers with the capacity to process claims within days. The company’s work on migration issues also has taken its consultants to Greece and Sweden. This year, McKinsey submitted a bid for a project with the United Nations.

Experts in international law said the German case illustrates risks associated with McKinsey’s input. Today, asylum decisions handed down by the federal migration office come faster but are leaving an increasing number of migrants with fewer rights, above all the right to family reunification, triggering hundreds of thousands of

appeals that have created a new backlog — not in asylum centers, but in German courts.

“We’re not used to seeing business consultants brought into the process,” said Minos Mouzourakis of the Brussels-based European Council on Refugees and Exiles. “McKinsey and others developed a system for more efficient management of asylum cases to make sure that the backlog of cases could be cleared. This led to a substantial number of decisions being taken, but with a significant drop in quality.”

Legal experts said the shift to limited protection, which accompanied the introduction of fast-track asylum centers and expedited denial for certain classes of migrants, is inseparable from the overall drive toward administrative efficiency and control of the movement of migrants — goals championed by the firm.

“This is a very sensitive area of law where you can’t just streamline things, and I’m not sure that McKinsey’s approach is one that systematically takes human rights concerns into account,” said Nora Markard, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Hamburg and director of its refugee law clinic.

Markard observed that more efficient procedures were introduced at the same time that the federal migration office began granting only subsidiary protection — a status that recognizes an asylum seeker may suffer serious harm in his or her country of origin but doesn’t qualify as a refugee — to an increasing number of migrants from Syria, thereby allowing them only a one-year residence permit instead of the three allowed refugees, and denying them the right to family reunification.

“It’s not coincidental that these changes happened at the same

time,” Markard said. “The government had to deal with a very large number of arrivals very quickly, which meant that part of increasing efficiency was limiting entry in any way they could.”

Government officials interviewed were adamant that McKinsey’s work has not involved specifying what sort of sanctuary should be granted. “Absolutely not,” said Andrea Brinkmann, a spokeswoman for the German migration office, when asked whether McKinsey weighed in on the use of subsidiary protection.

With 14,000 employees and offices around the world, McKinsey has advised corporations on everything from aerospace to paper products, and public-sector institutions ranging from schools to the CIA.

A 2016 report, “People on the move: Global migration’s impact and opportunity,” outlines how more efficient integration procedures might boost national economies as well as benefit migrants. Produced by the McKinsey Global Institute, the report applies “the analytical tools of economics with the insights of business leaders” to the international refugee crisis.

One of its authors, Khaled Rifai, a partner in New York, said the company sees the use of “temporary status,” a common shorthand for subsidiary protection, as effective in quickly integrating new arrivals into jobs and housing, but he did not address the denial of the right to family reunification.

“In general, we can say that issuing temporary status that allows people to have access to labor markets, to housing, to health is actually beneficial from an economic perspective in the short term in most cases, and is also beneficial from a social outcome perspective in the long term,” he said.

An economist by training, Rifai said he was “not a humanitarian law specialist steeped in the Geneva Conventions.” He said his interest was personal; he is half-German, half-Syrian.

McKinsey spokesman Kai Peter Rath said he couldn’t confirm the specifics of refugee-related projects.

“I don’t want to call it secret,” he said. “Our policy is if the client wants to talk about it, it’s the decision of the client.”

Public records and interviews with government officials, however, show that McKinsey’s influence on refugee policy spans Europe — a role not widely publicized and surprising to some legal experts.

“It’s the first I’ve heard that McKinsey was involved,” said James C. Hathaway, a professor of refugee law at the University of Michigan.

Some of McKinsey’s earliest work on this issue was with the Swedish Migration Agency in 2008 and 2009, to install “lean management” practices, said Veronika Lindstrand Kant, the agency’s deputy director of operations. Slashing processing times worked until 2015, when the new wave of asylum seekers expanded the caseload. Migrants are again waiting about 500 days for a decision, Lindstrand Kant said. McKinsey was paid more than \$2 million.

Today’s WorldView

What’s most important from where the world meets Washington

In late 2016 and early 2017, the company worked to reduce the backlog of asylum claims in Greece, first with the European Commission, spokeswoman Natasha Bertaud said, and then through a project funded by the European Asylum Support Office. It was paid about \$1 million for the final project, said

Jean-Pierre Schembri, a spokesman for the Malta-based organization.

The company is seeking to expand its reach. This spring, it submitted a bid to the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees for a

project on refugee resettlement. In an email, a project manager in McKinsey's Germany office asked an American legal expert to sign on to its proposal, which was ultimately

not accepted, a UNHCR spokeswoman said.

The expert, who asked not to be identified because she was not authorized to circulate the request, declined to join the project. She said

she was not convinced the company had assembled a team of sufficiently high caliber to tackle resettlement.

Stephanie Kirchner contributed to this report.

The
Washington
Post

Germany and Turkey need each other. But they're on the verge of a breakup.

By Erickson Amanda

6-8 minutes

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

July 22

Turkey and Germany are, nominally, friends.

But if you take even a cursory look at the way the two have been behaving lately, you'd be forgiven for thinking otherwise.

Over the past few months, the two countries have been locked in an increasingly heated war of words and diplomatic slights. It culminated this week with German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel interrupting his North Sea vacation to deliver a strongly worded statement promising to "reorient" the country's Turkey policy. It's not totally clear what that means, but step one is "new travel advisories" discouraging German citizens from visiting Turkey because of "risks." If followed, this could be a big blow to Turkey's travel industry — 4 million Germans visited the country in 2016, more than from any other country.

"The government and the coalition parties will be discussing further consequences," Gabriel said, noting that financial sanctions were also being considered. Others have called for a cancellation of the deal between the European Union and Turkey on refugees. According to Der Spiegel, officials are also considering the suspension of German government loan

guarantees for exports or investments in Turkey.

That statement came after Turkey arrested six human rights activists, including Peter Steudtner from Berlin. An Istanbul court ordered them into pretrial detention. German consulate officials say that they've been prohibited from speaking with the activist, a violation of international law. Steudtner is an Amnesty International representative, in Turkey for the first time at a conference. He was running a training on IT security and nonviolent conflict resolution when he was arrested.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has condemned the decision as "absolutely unjustified," saying "we declare our solidarity with him and all the others arrested. The German government will do all it can, on all levels, to secure his release."

Eight other Germans are also in jail in Turkey awaiting trial, including a journalist. Experts suggest that the arrests are part of a larger effort to force Berlin to deport Turkish citizens in Germany whom Ankara considers terrorists. Germany houses some 3 million people of Turkish origin, including thousands who've applied for asylum since last year's failed Turkish coup. In the aftermath, tens of thousands of people have been arrested and 100,000 have lost their jobs.

Turkey has accused Steudtner and others of plotting to commit acts of terrorism against the state. In reacting to Gabriel's statement, they suggested that Germany is harboring terrorists of its own. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu wrote on Twitter that, "as a country providing shelter to PKK and FETO terrorists in its

own territory, statements by Germany are just double standards and unacceptable." (PKK stands for the Kurdistan Workers' Party and FETO is the Fethullah Terrorist Organization.)

"What we're seeing in Germany at the moment is a crisis of principals," said Chairman of the Commission for Foreign Affairs Taha Ozhan, a member of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AK party. "The question is whether terrorism is supported or not ... the terrorists think, 'Once we get to Germany, we're home safe.' That has to change."

Through a spokesman, Erdogan "strongly" condemned statements that German citizens who travel to Turkey are not safe.

It's a strange slide from friends to frenemies for the two countries. As Der Spiegel explains, "the joint battle against Islamic State, the handling of the refugee crisis and the economic ties between Germany and Turkey are vital to both countries." Germany is one of Turkey's most important trading partners. In 2016, the countries' trade volume hit \$43 billion. Germany invests \$14 billion a year in the country.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

A year ago, the pair pushed through an important deal to help stem the influx of refugees from the Middle East to the European Union. In exchange, Turkey was looking to restart E.U. talks, and to loosen travel restrictions on Turkish citizens

living in the E.U. But both sides say the other hasn't quite lived up to its end of the bargain. In November, the E.U. voted to freeze its membership talks with Ankara.

Other issues have cropped up. In June 2016, German lawmakers voted to recognize the massacre of Armenians by Ottoman Turkish forces during World War I as a genocide. In the buildup to the vote, Erdogan and others warned that it would be a "real test of the friendship."

By March, Erdogan was accusing Merkel of using "Nazi" methods because the German government did not allow rallies in support of changes to the Turkish constitution. Germans said the problem was the appropriateness of the venues. Several Turkish ministers were also barred from speaking in support of the referendum at rallies. In May, Turkey blocked a delegation of German lawmakers from visiting the country's soldiers at an air base. (Germany is part of a coalition of countries that uses that air base to launch attacks on the Islamic State.)

In the past, Merkel's response to provocation has been circumspect. She's urged her government to focus on the big picture and ignore the slights. With Steudtner's arrest, though, it seems like things will be changing. As Gabriel put it:

"We want Turkey to be a part of the West, or at least remain in its current position, but it takes two to tango. I cannot make out any willingness on the part of the current Turkish government to follow this path with us."

INTERNATIONAL

THE WALL
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Editorial : Trump's Syria Muddle

The Editorial Board 5-6 minutes

July 23, 2017 5:26 p.m. ET

Does the Trump Administration have a policy in Syria worth the name? If so it isn't obvious, and its

recent decisions suggest that the White House may be willing to accommodate the Russian and Iranian goal of propping up Bashar Assad for the long term.

Last week the Administration disclosed that it has stopped assisting the anti-Assad Sunni Arab fighters whom the CIA has trained, equipped and funded since 2013. U.S. Special Operations Command chief Gen. Raymond Thomas told the Aspen Security Forum Friday that the decision to pull the plug was “based on an assessment of the nature of the program and what we are trying to accomplish and the viability of it going forward.”

That might make sense if anyone knew what the U.S. is trying to accomplish beyond ousting Islamic State from Raqqa in northern Syria. In that fight the Pentagon has resisted Russia and Iran by arming the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces and shooting down the Syria aircraft threatening them. Mr. Trump also launched cruise missiles to punish Mr. Assad after the strongman used chemical weapons.

The muddle is what the U.S. wants in Syria after the looming defeat of Islamic State. On that score the Trump

Administration seems to want to find some agreement with Russia to stabilize Syria even if that means entrenching Mr. Assad and the Russian and Iranian military presence.

Cutting off the Sunni Free Syrian Army has long been a Russian and Iranian goal. FSA fighters in southern Syria have helped to contain the more radical Sunni opposition formerly known as the Nusra Front and they've fought Islamic State, but they also want to depose Mr. Assad. Not all of the Sunni rebels are as moderate as we'd like, but they aren't al Qaeda or Islamic State. The arms cutoff caught the rebels by surprise and will make our allies in the region further doubt American reliability.

This follows the deal Mr. Trump struck at the G-20 meeting with Vladimir Putin for a cease-fire in southern Syria near its border with Israel and Jordan. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson hailed it as a potential precedent for other parts of Syria, and Administration sources advertised that Israel and Jordan were on board.

But we later learned that Israel is far more skeptical. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a recent

cabinet meeting that “Israel will welcome a genuine cease-fire in Syria, but this cease-fire must not enable the establishment of a military presence by Iran and its proxies in Syria in general and in southern Syria in particular.”

Yet by this point any territory controlled by Mr. Assad will come with Iranian military tentacles. Iran's Hezbollah footsoldiers from Lebanon helped rescue Mr. Assad's military, and they'd love to open another frontline against the Jewish state.

President Trump and Mr. Tillerson may want to negotiate a diplomatic settlement with Mr. Putin on Syria, and no doubt the Russian is pitching his “common front” line against radical Islamists. But CIA Director Mike Pompeo told the Aspen forum on Friday that Russia has done little fighting against Islamic State. Mr. Putin also has no incentive to give ground in Syria while his side is winning.

Russia and Iran know what they want in Syria: a reunified country under Mr. Assad's control. Iran will then get another Arab city—Damascus—under its dominion. It will have another base from which to undermine U.S. allies in Jordan

and attack Israel when the next war breaks out. Russia wants to show the world that its allies always win while keeping its air base and a Mediterranean port.

None of this is in the U.S. interest. The only way to reach an acceptable diplomatic solution is if Iran and Russia feel they are paying too large a price for their Syrian sojourn. This means more support for Mr. Assad's enemies, not cutting them off without notice. And it means building up a Middle East coalition willing to fight Islamic State and resist Iran. The U.S. should also consider enforcing “safe zones” in Syria for anti-Assad forces.

It's hard to imagine a stable Syria as long as Mr. Assad is in power. But if he stays, then the U.S. goal should be a divided country with safe areas for Sunnis and the Kurds who have helped liberate Raqqa. Then we can perhaps tolerate an Assad government that presides over a rump Syria dominated by Alawites. But none of that will happen if the U.S. abandons its allies to the Russia-Assad-Iran axis. And if abandoning Syria to Iran is the policy, then at least own up to it in public so everyone knows the score.



Rogin: The Trump team is repeating Obama's mistakes in Syria

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

5-7 minutes

Trump administration officials consistently point back to the Obama administration's failed Syria policy to justify their approach, which includes teaming up with Russia, accepting the continued rule of Bashar al-Assad and abandoning many of the rebels America supported for years.

But although the Trump team inherited a terrible hand in Syria, the way it is playing it repeats the same fundamental mistakes made by President Barack Obama — and it will likely have the same negative results for the Syrian conflict, as well as for American interests.

Last week at the Aspen Security Forum, CIA Director Mike Pompeo laid out what he sees as U.S. interests in Syria. He said the United States has two principal enemies there, the Islamic State and Iran. In addition to stopping Iran from establishing a zone of control that spans the region, the U.S. goal is “providing the conditions to have a more stable Middle East to keep America safe.”

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President Trump has no choice but to work with Russia in Syria because Obama and then-Secretary of State John Kerry “invited” Putin into Syria in 2013 to work on a chemical weapons deal, according to Pompeo. But there's still no real evidence that Russia wants to fight terrorism there, he said.

“We don't have the same set of interests” in Syria as Russia, said Pompeo. What are the Russian goals in Syria? “They love a warm-water naval port and they love to stick it to America.”

Pompeo is right, but he's not in charge of U.S. Syria policy. That portfolio belongs to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who made completely contradictory remarks in Hamburg this month, right after he and Trump met with Putin to arrange a cease-fire in Syria's southwest.

“Russia has the same, I think, interests that we do in having Syria become a stable place, a unified place,” Tillerson said.

Tillerson's top Middle East official, acting assistant secretary Stuart Jones, also spoke in Aspen and said the United States has

effectively outsourced security in Syria to the Russians by having them police the cease-fire.

“This is a real test of the Russians' ability to lead this process,” he said. “The solution is to put this on the Russians and, if that fails, it's a problem.”

If that sounds familiar, it should. That's almost the same exact formulation Kerry used when he was negotiating Syrian cease-fires with Russia in late 2015 and early 2016. Over and over, Kerry said Russia's willingness to be a constructive partner in Syria must be tested. Over and over, Russia proudly failed that test by helping the Assad regime expand its control and continue its atrocities against civilians.

To be sure, Obama and Kerry made many mistakes. The U.S. effort to train and equip Syrian rebels was poorly executed and may have spurred the Russian military intervention in 2015. The Obama administration deprioritized the push to remove Assad after that and began working on cease-fires with Russia because that offered the best hope of stopping the slaughter.

Many argue that Trump has no choice but to continue that policy. As Jordan's ambassador to

Washington, Dina Kawar, said in Aspen, “What is the alternative?”

Perhaps there is none. But the Trump administration ought not to repeat Kerry's chief mistake, which was to negotiate with Russia without leverage. That's why Trump's reported decision to cut off the CIA program to train and equip some Syrian rebel groups fighting Assad is so shortsighted. Trump is giving up what little leverage he has for nothing in return.

Trump also must not repeat the Obama administration's second mistake, which was to allow Assad and Iran to expand their areas of control. Jones said that the regime and its partners are using the cease-fire in southwest Syria to free up resources to advance in southeast Syria, where the fight for the strategic region around Deir al-Zour is underway.

The Trump administration seems fine with allowing Iran and Assad to take over another large part of Syria. But the Sunni Arabs who live there will not be. “What are we going to do when these people coming back to their homes come under fire from Iranian militias?” asked Andrew Tabler, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Lastly, Trump should increase support to local Sunni Arab communities, if not with weapons than with support for local governance, education and basic

services. Empowering local leaders is a prerequisite for any kind of long-term stability, and it will be crucial if and when a political process emerges.

The Trump administration is not responsible for past American mistakes in Syria, but it is responsible for what the United States does now. Rather than

simply blaming Obama and Kerry for the mess, this administration should learn the lessons of that failure.

The Washington Post Behind the front lines in the fight to 'annihilate' ISIS in Afghanistan (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/max.bea.rak>

9-11 minutes

ACHIN, Afghanistan —A recurring rumble of explosions echoes off the barren, boulder-strewn slopes of the Spin Ghar mountains, each ordnance aimed wishfully at redoubts where Islamic State militants are suspected of hiding. Afghan and U.S. special forces listen in on enemy chatter, intercepting dozens of their radio channels. American AC-130 gunships and F-16 fighter jets whir in circles overhead, at low altitude, waiting for strike orders. Soldiers on the ground man the mortars.

The operation against the Islamic State in Khorasan — or ISIS-K, as the Syria-based group's Afghan contingent is known — is now into its fourth month of unrelenting warfare. The U.S. military has pledged to "annihilate" the group by year's end, and the redoubled assault has contributed to a spike in U.S. airstrikes to levels not seen in Afghanistan since President Barack Obama's troop surge in 2012. One in five of those strikes is against ISIS-K, despite it controlling only slivers of mountainous territory.

The battle is lopsided, but each day the front line here in Achin district moves back only slightly. Both local intelligence officials and the U.S. military believe that ISIS-K is replenishing its stock of fighters almost as quickly as it loses them. A sense that this may be an indefinite mission has set in.

Soon after its founding in 2014, ISIS-K descended into this district and established it as its stronghold. Entire villages emptied as word of the group's mercilessness spread. Fighters infamously strapped defiant local clerics to explosives and filmed their detonations. For nearly three years, ISIS-K held firm not just in the Spin Ghars but in the vacated villages in the fertile valley beneath them.

[Two Americans killed battling ISIS in Syria]

In April, the U.S. military dropped its largest non-nuclear bomb, a MOAB — nicknamed "the mother of all bombs" — on a cave complex in one of Achin's valleys, known as the

Momand. It is unclear how many fighters, if any, were killed. The MOAB — which felt so forceful that "every ant in the valley must've died," said one villager — was followed by weeks of airstrikes on compounds that ISIS-K fighters had held for two years.

On a recent trip up the valley, the bodies of at least four were still there, lying in abandoned fields overgrown with wild cannabis. The corpses were mostly just bones after months in the sun.

Over the past three years, ISIS-K has succeeded in carrying out ghastly attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. But as Islamic State territory in Iraq and Syria is whittled away, coalition forces here are worried that Afghanistan's notoriously ungovernable eastern provinces could become a safe haven for fleeing fighters and a new staging ground for attacks on the West.

"We believe that ISIS-K is not currently able to launch attacks because they are essentially being hunted," said Capt. William Salvin, spokesman for the U.S. military here. But he did not refute the assessment of a local Afghan intelligence officer in Achin, who spoke on a condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media: In terms of numbers, ISIS-K has not been severely reduced. The battle is looking more like one of attrition.

[Head of ISIS in Afghanistan killed in drone strike, U.S. officials say]

While the Pentagon maintains that ISIS-K is down to about 1,000 fighters across Afghanistan, from a high of 2,500 in 2015, the Afghan intelligence officer surmised that there were more than 1,000 in Achin district alone.

The fierce conflict also is scattering fighters across a wider swath of the mountainous east, ensuring a longer, more dispersed mission. Last week, the Pentagon announced that a U.S. drone strike killed Abu Sayed, ISIS-K's leader, or emir. That took place in neighboring Konar province, indicating that the fighting has spread at least that far.

Most of ISIS-K's fighters are thought to be Pashtuns, with few, if any,

coming from Iraq and Syria. According to Salvin, the United States sees ISIS-K as more of an "authorized franchise of ISIS-main" than the Islamic State's operation in Libya, which is more closely tied to the fighting in the Middle East. Instead, Afghan analysts say, ISIS-K derives much of its support from Pakistan's military establishment.

"In Nangahar, it is Pakistan's game," said Davood Moradian, director of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, referring to the province in which Achin is located. Pakistan has launched its own military operation against Islamist militants on its side of the Spin Ghar range, but Moradian was skeptical that they shared the goal of the group's elimination.

"Pakistan's military operation against Daesh" — an alternate name for the Islamic State — "is more of a disciplinary mission: Stop your internal disagreements and concentrate on the target we've agreed upon, namely, the Afghan state," he said.

Pakistan has always denied playing a destabilizing role in Afghanistan, but its neighbor's ongoing instability has proved hugely lucrative for Pakistan's military, which has ruled the country for almost half its 70-year existence. George W. Bush's and Barack Obama's administrations gave the Pakistanis a combined \$33.4 billion in aid, and there is little evidence their support for Afghan militants has stopped.

Members of the U.S. Congress have been calling for years for a drastic reduction or elimination of security assistance to Pakistan, as well as ending its status as a major non-NATO ally — or even designating it as a state sponsor of terrorism.

[U.S. poised to expand military effort against Taliban in Afghanistan]

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has said that the Trump administration's new Afghanistan strategy, expected this month, will have a "regional component," but it is unclear if that means a curtailment of U.S. aid to Pakistan. In fact, a hostile Pakistan might well pose a greater threat to the U.S. mission here.

Even so, exasperation toward Pakistan runs high here.

"That people are even asking the question 'Should the U.S. stop giving money to Pakistan?' shows the silliness of the discourse in Washington," said Moradian. "It is like asking if we should stop giving heroin to an addict. Of course. It is the very first thing you must do. Otherwise, you will keep fighting permutations of the same adversary here for eternity."

During a recent meeting of his full national security team, President Trump reportedly focused on Pakistan's role in harboring Islamist militants, and national security adviser H.R. McMaster pressed for a more punitive approach.

Among the Momand Valley's former residents, the belief that "Pakistan wants to destroy Afghanistan" is near universal. People eagerly share conspiratorial evidence of Pakistan's hand in their calamity. Daesh leaders all speak Punjabi, one of Pakistan's main languages; their long hair and beards are just wigs supplied by the Pakistani government; one man said that he had seen fighters swimming in the Momand River, and one had a big Pakistani flag tattooed on his biceps.

Many of these people's homes were destroyed by U.S. airstrikes because they were suspected of being used by ISIS-K as hideouts. Most shops in Shadal Bazaar, the valley's main market, were reduced to rubble, too, although the fighting is now far enough into the mountains that some butchers and barbers have dared to rebuild.

[The Islamic State has tunnels everywhere. It's making ISIS much harder to defeat.]

Yet the Momand Valley possesses a mesmerizing beauty that makes those who fled yearn to return. If they do, they will find the evidence of ISIS-K's presence not just in their ruined homes but in the few that were left standing. ISIS-K converted Kitab Gul's home into a prison, for instance, and the disturbingly small cages in which they locked those accused of petty crimes such as smoking cigarettes are still lying about. The Afghan army has requisitioned Gul's home as a lookout post.

Despite the U.S. bombing of their homes, and despite U.S. support for Pakistan, locals were largely positive about the campaign to "annihilate" ISIS-K.



Trump Assigns White House Team to Target Iran Nuclear Deal, Sideline State Department

Paul McLeary | 2

hours ago

8-10 minutes

After a contentious meeting with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson this week, President Donald Trump instructed a group of trusted White House staffers to make the potential case for withholding certification of Iran at the next 90-day review of the nuclear deal. The goal was to give Trump what he felt the State Department had failed to do: the option to declare that Tehran was not in compliance with the contentious agreement.

"The president assigned White House staffers with the task of preparing for the possibility of decertification for the 90-day review period that ends in October — a task he had previously given to Secretary Tillerson and the State Department," a source close to the White House told Foreign Policy.

The agreement, negotiated between Iran and world powers, placed strict limits on Tehran's nuclear program in return for lifting an array of economic sanctions.

On Tuesday, Trump relayed this new assignment to a group of White House staffers now tasked with making sure there will not be a repeat at the next 90-day review. "This is the president telling the White House that he wants to be in a place to decertify 90 days from now and it's their job to put him there," the source said.

FP spoke with three sources who were either invited to take part in the new process or were briefed on the president's decision on certification. All described the new process as a way to work around the State Department, which the president felt pushed certification forward by giving him no other options.

All three sources said Trump specifically asked Tillerson at the previous review to lay the groundwork for decertification — which the sources said Tillerson failed to do.

"They are not Muslim. Their only religion is cruelty, and there is nothing crueler than what they have done to us," said Mir Jamal, a proud but exhausted father of nine who has spent two years loading trucks for meager sums since escaping his village with nothing but the clothes on his back. When fighters swept

Trump "is resolved to not recertify deal in 90 days," said a second source with detailed knowledge of this week's meeting and the aftermath.

The three sources said it's too early to tell how this will play out, stressing that all that is certain is that the staffers have gotten a new assignment and there won't be any more details until after the first meeting, tentatively scheduled for early next week.

Trump's decision follows months of friction between the White House and State Department over how to handle the Iran nuclear agreement, which Trump denounced as a presidential candidate. The administration was mired in similar divisions in April, when it had to decide whether to certify that Iran was complying with the deal. Every 90 days, the United States has to declare whether Iran is abiding by the agreement and whether sanctions that were waived should remain lifted.

On Monday morning, work was on track for the administration to again certify that Iran was meeting the necessary conditions, but the president expressed second thoughts around midday. A meeting between Trump and Tillerson that afternoon quickly turned into a meltdown.

A third source with intimate knowledge of that meeting said Steve Bannon, the White House chief strategist, and Sebastian Gorka, deputy assistant to the president, were particularly vocal, repeatedly asking Tillerson to explain the U.S. national security benefits of certification. "They repeatedly questioned Rex about why recertifying would be good for U.S. national security, and Rex was unable to answer," the source said.

"The president kept demanding why he should certify, and the answers Tillerson gave him infuriated him," the source added.

Tillerson's communications advisor, R.C. Hammond, disputed the account, denying that Tillerson failed to deliver what the president had asked for or that he would be sidelined. "That wouldn't match up

into the valley, Jamal's brother and elderly father stayed behind to protect their home. They were caught. His brother's forearm was burned with embers from a fire, and he was waterboarded. His father was pitilessly beaten and now barely speaks.

with the conversations the president and secretary had," he said.

"Not everybody in the room agreed with what the secretary was saying," Hammond added. "But the president is certainly appreciative that someone is giving him clear, coherent information."

While Trump has spoken highly of Tillerson in the past, the source close to the White House said, the president was frustrated that the secretary failed to provide him the option not to certify.

"This is about the president asking Tillerson at the last certification meeting 90 days earlier to lay the groundwork so Trump could consider his options," the first source said. "Tillerson did not do this, and Trump is infuriated. He can't trust his secretary of state to do his job, so he is turning to the few White House staffers he trusts the most."

Hammond dismissed this. "Fiction can be fun when you're an anonymous source," he said.

At the previous review in April, Trump had asked Tillerson for specific preparations, which included speaking with foreign allies and to make sure they were on board. "Literally Tillerson did none of this," the source said. "Simply, [Trump] no longer trusts the State Department to do the work he orders them to do, in order to provide him the options he wants to have."

The two other sources declined to go into specifics about what Tillerson did not do, only stressing that Trump no longer has faith in the secretary, who simply did not carry out an assignment from him.

But it was not only Tillerson who argued for certifying that Iran was living up to the deal. Defense Secretary James Mattis, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford, also backed the move.

One White House official acknowledged the president's deep frustration at the options he was presented on the nuclear deal but

"My father had red cheeks. He prayed five times a day. He had a big chest, and he farmed late into his life," said Jamal, fighting back emotion. "How can we ever accept Daesh?"

argued that it was not fair to say Tillerson and the State Department were solely at fault. The White House National Security Council also bears responsibility for overseeing policymaking and preparing options for the president.

"I wouldn't put all the blame on them," the official said of the State Department.

Trump, however, was clearly upset that Tillerson told him he had no choice but to certify Iran was in compliance, according to the source, and asked White House staffers to take over. Withholding certification "wasn't a real option available to me," Trump reportedly told the staffers. "Make sure that's not the case 90 days from now."

Trump may still choose to certify Iran's compliance at the next deadline, a source said, but he does not want to be in the position of where he was this week, when he was told that he had to certify because no other option was available.

"He may not decertify, though I think he will," the source said. "But he wants to make sure he never, ever, ever hears again that he can't do it."

The three sources told FP that, as of Friday, several NSC staffers are expected to be involved including top Middle East advisor Derek Harvey; Joel Rayburn, the director for Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and Syria; Michael Anton, who handles strategic communications; and Victoria Coates, who works as Anton's deputy on strategic communications. Bannon and Gorka, who are both regarded as Iran hawks, are also expected to take part.

Anton, who serves as the NSC spokesman, declined to comment.

Career diplomats at the State Department, who were involved in the negotiations and the initial implementation of the deal under former President Barack Obama, have argued that the agreement is vital as it blocks Iran's path to a nuclear weapon. And they say the benefits outweigh the risks and uncertainties of entering into a confrontation with Tehran over the

issue while also avoiding a rupture with European allies that are committed to the deal and that will oppose reimposing sanctions lifted under the accord.

Although most of Trump's deputies endorsed certifying that Iran was abiding by the deal, one senior figure has emerged in favor of a more aggressive approach — CIA Director Mike

**The
Washington
Post**

These are the suicide cars and trucks that made the battle of Mosul so bloody (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/tgibbonsneff>

2-3 minutes

To carry out some of its bloodiest attacks, the Islamic State has weaponized everyday vehicles — from sedans to tractors — for use as precision-guided munitions.

The militants deployed a steady stream of these suicide car bombs as the U.S.-led coalition began its

Pompeo. At White House deliberations, the former lawmaker opposed certifying Iran while suggesting Congress weigh in on the issue, officials and sources close to the administration said. As a congressman, Pompeo was a fierce critic of the deal.

The CIA declined to comment about Pompeo's stance on certifying Iran.

campaign to push the militants out of Iraq and Syria. Earlier this month, soon after Iraqi forces declared that they had retaken the city of Mosul, police put some of the confiscated vehicles on display.

The vehicles were primarily used in two ways in Mosul. First, as a defensive tool: If advancing Iraqi forces broke through a certain barrier, they often were met with a barrage of the vehicles. The second use of the car bombs was more offensive in nature. They usually led

The move to sideline Foggy Bottom will likely confirm the worst fears of State Department officials, who expected some form of backlash from the White House given Trump's stance during the 2016 campaign and the appointment of those seen as Iran hawks.

Tillerson is "trying to be a counterweight against the hard-liners, trying to save the [nuclear

deal], but how long can that last?" one senior State Department official told FP, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The White House, they see the State Department as 'the swamp.'"

Photo credit: BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP/Getty Images

would drop bombs to destroy parts of the road, making the vehicles swerve and slow down as they approached Iraqi lines.

The vehicles were anything but inconspicuous, so the terrorist group has since started painting the armor to make them blend in. In Syria, some have been seen with the shell of a vehicle bolted over the armor to make car bombs harder to spot.

the militants' attacks and, more often than not, were parked in alleys and garages to be used to ambush unsuspecting forces.

The homemade armor schemes protected the driver and the explosives arranged in the rear from small arms and rocket fire, forcing Iraqi troops to use heavier and subsequently slower weapons to target them. U.S. airstrikes were often unable to target the vehicles as they sped through the narrow streets of Mosul. Instead, aircraft

**The
New York
Times**

How Trump Got It Wrong in Saying The Times 'Foiled' Killing of ISIS Leader

Michael R. Gordon

9-12 minutes

President Trump at the commissioning ceremony for the Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier in Norfolk, Va., on Saturday. Hilary Swift for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — President Trump wrongly tweeted on Saturday that The New York Times had "foiled" an attempt by the United States military to kill Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State.

"The Failing New York Times foiled U.S. attempt to kill the single most wanted terrorist, Al-Baghdadi," the president wrote. "Their sick agenda over National Security."

Mr. Trump's statement appeared to be based on a report by Fox News; he is known to be an avid viewer, and a version of the story was broadcast about 25 minutes before he posted. The report said that The Times had disclosed intelligence in an article on June 8, 2015, about an American military raid in Syria that led to the death of one of Mr. Baghdadi's key lieutenants, Abu Sayyaf, and the capture of his wife, who played an important role in the group.

That Fox News report cited comments by Gen. Tony Thomas, the head of the United States Special Operations Command, in an

interview conducted Friday by the network's intelligence correspondent, Catherine Herridge, at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado.

General Thomas said that a valuable lead on Mr. Baghdadi's whereabouts "was leaked in a prominent national newspaper about a week later and that lead went dead." He did not name The Times.

But a review of the record shows that information made public in a Pentagon news release more than three weeks before the Times article, and extensively covered at the time by numerous news media outlets, would have tipped off Mr. Baghdadi that the United States was questioning an important Islamic State operative who knew of his recent whereabouts and some of his methods of communication. Further, the information in the Times article on June 8 came from United States government officials who were aware that the details would be published.

A White House spokesman had no comment on Mr. Trump's tweet. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said on Friday that he believed Mr. Baghdadi, whose possible death has been the subject of repeated rumors, was still alive.

Here are the facts.

What happened in 2015 that led to the controversy?

Delta Force commandos conducted a raid in Syria on May 16, 2015, on the residence of Abu Sayyaf, the Islamic State's top financial officer and a close associate of Mr. Baghdadi. The commando raid was the first in Syria against the militant group, also known as ISIS or ISIL, and a trove of information was harvested from cellphones, laptops and other materials. Abu Sayyaf was killed, and his wife, Umm Sayyaf, was captured and flown out of the country for questioning.

That day, the Pentagon announced that the raid had taken place and that Umm Sayyaf had been detained.

"Last night, at the direction of the commander-in-chief, I ordered U.S. Special Operations Forces to conduct an operation in al-Amr in eastern Syria to capture an ISIL senior leader known as Abu Sayyaf and his wife, Umm Sayyaf," Ashton B. Carter, the defense secretary at the time, said in a statement.

"Abu Sayyaf was involved in ISIL's military operations and helped direct the terrorist organization's illicit oil, gas and financial operations as well," Mr. Carter added. "Abu Sayyaf was killed during the course of the operation when he engaged U.S. forces. U.S. forces captured Umm Sayyaf, who we suspect is a member of ISIL, played an important role in ISIL's terrorist activities, and may have been complicit in what appears to have

been the enslavement of a young Yazidi woman rescued last night."

Until the raid, the American military had little knowledge about how the Islamic State leadership worked, and officials were eager to highlight the intelligence breakthrough.

The raid was covered extensively by the Western news media when it was announced, and accounts citing the Pentagon appeared the next morning on the front pages of dozens of newspapers, including The Times.

In the article cited by Fox News and published more than three weeks after the raid, The Times reported new details, including that as much as seven terabytes of data had been seized, which, with information from Umm Sayyaf, provided new insights into how Mr. Baghdadi operated and tried to avoid detection.

For example, the article noted that regional emirs in his organization were required to hand over cellphones before being driven to meetings with Mr. Baghdadi so their movements could not be tracked. Wives of the Islamic State leaders, the article noted, also played an important role in passing information to minimize the risk that the group's communications would be intercepted.

What did General Thomas say?

SOCOM: Policing the World Video by The Aspen Institute

At his appearance on Friday at the security conference, General Thomas was asked whether American forces had ever been close to capturing or killing Mr. Baghdadi.

“There were points in time when we were particularly close to him,” he responded. “Unfortunately, there were some leaks about what we were up to about that time. When we went after Abu Sayyaf, the oil minister who was very close to him, one of his personal confidants, he didn’t live, but his wife did. And she gave us a treasure trove of information about where she had just been with Baghdadi in Raqqa, days, if not within days, prior. And so that was a very good lead. Unfortunately, it was leaked in a prominent national newspaper about a week later and that lead went dead.”

The account by General Thomas — who at the time of the raid was the head of the secretive Joint Special Operations Command, whose commandos target Islamic State leaders in Syria and Iraq — was imprecise in two aspects.

The Pentagon itself provided the confirmation on May 16, 2015, that Abu Sayyaf’s wife had been captured.

And the Times account was published not a week later, but 23 days after the Pentagon statement.

That gap matters because Mr. Baghdadi is almost certain to have taken precautionary steps, such as changing his pattern of behavior, shifting his location and adopting new procedures for communicating with other Islamic State commanders, in the days after the May 16 raid and the capture of a close associate — that is, well before the publication of the Times article on June 8.

The Pentagon raised no objections with The Times before the article was published, and no senior American official had complained publicly about it until now. Some officials expressed hope at the time that some of the details in the article would sow fear in the ranks of the Islamic State by demonstrating that the United States could penetrate the group’s secrecy.

What does the military say?

It is clear that Mr. Baghdadi would have known almost immediately from his own sources or from the Pentagon announcement and news media coverage of it that Umm Sayyaf was being held by the United States and was undergoing interrogation.

That raises a number of questions about why General Thomas pinned blame on what he viewed as a leak

to a newspaper. If the military wanted to exploit the information from Umm Sayyaf about Mr. Baghdadi’s movements, why did the Pentagon rush to announce her capture on the day of the raid?

If the military gleaned intelligence from Umm Sayyaf about Mr. Baghdadi’s likely whereabouts, why did it not act in the three weeks after the May 16 raid? Did she initially refuse to cooperate? If so, that would have meant that the information she eventually provided would have been less timely.

Asked for comment, Kenneth McGraw, a spokesman for the Special Operations Command, declined to say which information in the Times article, if any, was a source of concern.

General Thomas “did not name a specific publication or a specific article in his remarks,” Mr. McGraw wrote in an email. “It would be inappropriate for me to make any further comment.”

Citing the need to protect classified information, Mr. McGraw also declined to say whether the Islamic State leader could have been expected to adopt new precautions soon after Umm Sayyaf’s capture or why the military did not go after him soon after the May 16 raid if information about his movements and patterns of behavior was likely to be perishable.

“Any intelligence used in the decision-making process would still be classified and not releasable,” Mr. McGraw wrote. “Any intelligence about Baghdadi’s behavior or new precautions he may have taken would still be classified and not releasable.”

Mr. McGraw also noted that the decision to immediately issue a news release confirming the capture of Umm Sayyaf was made by the Defense Department, not the Special Operations Command.

Former Obama administration officials said there were a number of reasons the Pentagon announced the raid and the detention of Umm Sayyaf. The White House, they said, had to notify Congress under the War Powers Resolution about the operation, which was the first Special Operations raid against the Islamic State in Syria. Further, the mission was mounted from Iraq, so the Iraqis also needed to be informed.

As a matter of policy, they said, the United States also needed to tell the International Red Cross that it had a detainee.

Mr. Carter, they said, also believed the American people should be informed about the first attempt to go after a member of Mr. Baghdadi’s inner circle. Nor did the Pentagon want to be accusing of capturing an important figure and covering it up.



Diehl: Why a referendum won’t solve Iraqi Kurdistan’s problems

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

6-7 minutes

There’s a lingering impression in Washington that Iraqi Kurdistan is what it was five years ago, before the rise of the Islamic State: a peaceful, prospering, emerging pro-Western democracy whose aspirations for full independence from Iraq are increasingly hard to ignore.

Unfortunately, a great deal has changed since then, thanks to war, the U.S. retreat from the region and the Kurds’ own dysfunctions. As the Islamic State slowly crumbles to its south and west, Kurdistan is politically and economically broken. President Masoud Barzani remains in office four years after his term ended, and parliament has not met in almost two years. The government is deeply in debt and can scarcely afford to pay the three-quarters of the workforce who are state employees. The army and

security services are divided into rival factions.

Barzani’s reaction to this distress has been to schedule a referendum on Kurdish independence for Sept. 25. The initiative has been rejected not just by the Iraqi federal government, but also by Kurdistan’s powerful neighbors Iran and Turkey, as well as the United States. More significantly, it is being viewed even by staunchly pro-independence Kurds as evidence that the region’s politics have reached a dangerous dead end.

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The referendum is “an excuse by Kurdish leaders to remain in power,” says Shaswar Qadir, the owner of Kurdistan’s independent NRT television network. “The younger generation doesn’t know anything about their fight in the mountains against Saddam Hussein. So the old leaders need another excuse to run the country for another 26 years.”

Those bitter words reflect Qadir’s perspective as one of a rising generation of Kurds — and Iraqis — struggling over how to create stable political institutions and a working economy amid the mess of sectarian conflicts, extremist movements and corrupt establishments littered across the post-Islamic State landscape. Their challenge, like it or not, is “nation-building” — and they desperately need U.S. help.

An independent television network is, at least, a place to start. While most Iraqi media are controlled by the government or political parties, Qadir is one of Kurdistan’s few self-made magnates: Born in the city of Sulaymaniyah, he started peddling electronic games as a teenager and became one of Kurdistan’s largest real estate developers before founding NRT in 2011, at the age of 32.

Launched under the slogan “courage, balance, truth,” the network saw its first office attacked and burned within a week of opening; Qadir blames militants from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

(PUK), one of the region’s two historical political forces. Two years later he survived an assassination attempt. Kurdish authorities have closed NRT’s offices and arrested its journalists on multiple occasions. Yet it has persisted and flourished: It now has two Kurdish channels, an Arabic channel covering all of Iraq, and an English-language website.

As Qadir sees it, Kurdistan’s focus should be on reconciling its feuding factions and building a viable foundation for the economy and a democratic political system, rather than grand gestures such as the independence referendum. “We don’t have an economy,” he told me during a visit to Washington last week. “We have one oil pipeline. We don’t have a judicial system. We don’t have a united army. We don’t have a parliament.”

A referendum, Qadir says, might prompt Turkey to shut down that pipeline, through which Kurdistan exports the relative trickle of petroleum that is its only reliable revenue. It also might cause the Turks and Iran to back opposing factions of the army, which is

divided between the PUK and Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, triggering a resumption of the civil war they fought in the 1990s.

"What kind of Kurdistan would we have?" Qadir asked. "Would we have South Korea or South Sudan?"

The right course, he says, is not a referendum but a free and fair election for a new parliament,

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Israel Installs Security Cameras at Jerusalem Shrine

Rory Jones
6-7 minutes

Updated July 23, 2017 9:35 p.m. ET

Israel is doubling down in its standoff with Palestinian and Muslim religious authorities over the use of metal detectors at one of Jerusalem's holiest shrines, installing additional cameras at the site after a weekend of bloodshed over the issue.

Israeli police on Sunday added the surveillance equipment to the existing metal detectors at the main entrance to boost security at the ancient shrine compound known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and Jews as the Temple Mount, an Israeli official said.

Israel first installed the detectors last week after Arab gunmen shot and killed two Israeli policemen at the site, located in Jerusalem's Old City. That attack led Israeli authorities to close the Temple Mount to all Muslim men under the age of 50 during the following week's Friday prayers. The tension over the site then sparked violence across the city.

"The checkpoints will stay," Tzachi Hanegbi, a minister in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, told Army Radio. "The government of Israel isn't willing to put up with acts of murder."

Jason Greenblatt, the U.S. envoy leading efforts to reopen peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, left for Israel Sunday night "to support efforts to reduce

something that is due by November but that, like the presidential vote, is likely to be postponed. Qadir freely admits his interest: If an election is held, he intends to form his own electoral list and make a bid to become prime minister. His aim is to mobilize Kurdistan's post-Hussein generation, which has no recollection of the existential threat the Iraqi dictator once posed to the Kurdish nation, and which wants a

tensions in the region," a senior administration official said.

Waqf, the Islamic religious authority that administers the Temple Mount, has called on Muslims not to visit the site until the cameras are removed and accuses Israel of trying to take control of the area. Only Muslims are allowed to pray on the compound, but Jewish groups are lobbying for that right.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said on Friday that the Palestinian Authority will cut all ties with Israel until the issue is resolved. A Palestinian official on Sunday said the suspension included security cooperation, but offered no details on how ties would be severed.

Attempts by the Palestinian Authority to cut ties with Israel would only damage that body's own security and economic interests, Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman warned on Sunday.

In governing parts of the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority is deeply intertwined with Israel, which transfers a large portion of the Authority's monthly revenue in taxes and other duties.

Security services from both sides work closely together and thousands of Palestinians cross to Israel from the West Bank each day for work, making a permanent break in ties unrealistic.

The latest confrontation at the Temple Mount strikes at the heart of a longstanding dispute over who holds ultimate sovereignty over it.

Israel captured the area from Jordan in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war,

pragmatic government that can provide still-missing basic services, such as reliable electricity.

One goal of Qadir's visit to Washington was to revive U.S. interest in promoting Kurdish democracy, which all but evaporated during the Obama administration. "The United States didn't focus on those issues, and that undermined all that we

but allowed Waqf, a Jordanian religious authority, to continue to administer the site. Palestinians, meanwhile, want the compound as part of the capital of a future independent state.

"We oppose all means Israel implements at the entrance to the Al Aqsa Mosque, including metal detectors," Waqf said on Sunday, referring to the mosque that stands atop the Temple Mount. It asked Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and other Arab nations to lobby Israel to back down from its additional security measures.

The quartet of diplomatic representatives on Israeli-Palestinian peace, including the United Nations, European Union, U.S. and Russia, also called on all sides to refrain from provocative actions and to de-escalate tensions.

Israeli security forces on Friday clashed with thousands of Palestinians protesting the metal detectors, arguing that they don't provide additional security and undermine the shrine's holiness. Three Palestinians were killed, Palestinian authorities said.

The metal detectors are a symbol of wider Palestinian grievances over a lack of movement toward statehood, and fears Israel is attempting to change longstanding agreements over accessibility to the Temple Mount, said Mitchell Barak, a political analyst at Jerusalem-based Keevoon Global Research.

"Palestinians think that Israel is trying to change the status quo," said Mr. Barak, who has worked with Mr. Netanyahu. "Israel is exercising its sovereignty and

accomplished since 2003," he said. Persuading the Trump administration to make Kurdish elections a priority is a tall order. Yet Congress might listen to Qadir's compelling point: "The more we have free and fair elections," he says, "the less chance we will get into instability and violence."

sending a message [to Palestinians] that you have to walk through our metal detectors."

Meanwhile, Jordan's domestic security agency said two Jordanians were killed and an Israeli was wounded by gunfire on Sunday in a residential building in the heavily fortified Israeli Embassy compound in the capital Amman, the Associated Press reported. The agency said that before the shooting, Jordanians had entered the building for carpentry work. One of the Jordanians killed was a physician at the scene, it said. The Israeli Foreign Ministry had no comment.

Also on Friday, a Palestinian assailant mounted a bloody stabbing attack on an Israeli family in a West Bank settlement in response to the dispute over the Temple Mount, according to Israeli authorities and a Facebook post by the attacker that detailed his motives. He stabbed a father and his two adult children as they ate dinner, killing all three, Israeli authorities said.

Mr. Netanyahu on Sunday said authorities would demolish the home of the assailant and take action against Palestinians who incited violence or praised such attacks.

—Eli Stokols
contributed to this article.

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

Appeared in the July 24, 2017, print edition as 'Israel Boosts Security at Jerusalem Shrine.'

The New York Times

Mosque Crisis and Jordan Attack Raise Fears of Escalating Violence in Israel

Isabel Kershner
7-9 minutes

been installed. Atef Safadi/European Pressphoto Agency

Israeli police officers outside the Lion's Gate entrance to the Aqsa Mosque compound, where new metal detectors and cameras have

JERUSALEM — The Israeli security cabinet convened for urgent discussions late Sunday, amid fears that a standoff over Israel's placement of metal detectors at

entrances to the sacred Aqsa Mosque compound could result in a long wave of violence.

After a weekend of bloodshed, Palestinian Muslims continued their protest by refusing to enter the compound.

Later, there were indications that the violence may have spread to Jordan, the custodian of the shrine and an important regional ally of Israel.

Jordan's official news agency, Petra, and Jordan's Public Security Directorate reported on Sunday

night that two Jordanians had been killed and one Israeli had been wounded in a shooting inside the Israeli Embassy compound in Amman, the Jordanian capital. The agency, citing the Security Directorate, said the two Jordanians had entered the embassy's compound to do carpentry work. There was no information from officials in Israel, where there was a news blackout on the report.

Also on Sunday, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority clarified that his decision to freeze contacts with Israel over the metal detector crisis included suspending security coordination with its security forces.

The system of tight security cooperation is unpopular with many Palestinians. But it has helped anchor the authority's control in parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and Israeli officials say the program has helped thwart many terrorist attacks.

"Things will be very difficult," Mr. Abbas said on Sunday, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, "and we do not gamble with the fate of our people." But Mr. Abbas added that a firm position would hopefully result in the removal of the metal detectors as well as the cessation of Israeli military incursions into West Bank cities — a longer-standing demand.

One of the new security cameras installed at the entrance to Al Aqsa Mosque. Mahmoud Illean/Associated Press

The crisis over the metal detectors is the latest, symbolic manifestation of a struggle over ownership and control of the

contested holy site, revered by Jews as the Temple Mount and by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary. Israel introduced the electronic gates more than a week ago at two entrances to the sacred esplanade and closed other access points for Muslims.

It was a hurried response to a brazen attack on the morning of July 14, when three armed Arab citizens of Israel emerged from Al Aqsa Mosque and fatally shot two Israeli Druze police officers who were guarding the compound.

Israel insisted that the new security measure did not mean any change to the delicate, decades-old status quo governing the running of the site. But that did not convince the Palestinians or other Arab governments, including Jordan.

The Israeli cabinet met hours after the funerals of three Israeli victims of a terrorist attack on Friday night in the West Bank settlement of Halamish. Yosef Salomon, 70; his daughter, Chaya Salomon, 46, a teacher; and his son, Elad Salomon, 36, a father of five, were stabbed to death by an attacker identified as Omar al-Abed, 19, a Palestinian from a neighboring village who entered the house.

Elad Salomon's wife, Michal, managed to escape upstairs with their children and hid them in a bedroom. The carnage ended when an off-duty soldier in a house across the street heard the family's screams and shot Mr. Abed through a window, wounding him. The attacker was treated in an Israeli hospital and is in custody.

"Yosef, Chaya and Elad were murdered by a beast incited by Jew-

hated," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said on Sunday. "The home of the loathsome terrorist will be demolished as soon as possible."

Ismail Haniya, the senior leader of Hamas, the Islamist movement that controls Gaza, called Mr. Abed's father and praised the attacker as a "hero," officials in Gaza confirmed.

Israel introduced the electronic gates more than a week ago. Mahmoud Illean/Associated Press

Earlier Friday, three Palestinians, two of them in their late teens, were shot dead in clashes with Israeli security forces that broke out after the Muslim noon prayer in and around East Jerusalem. Palestinian medics reported that a fourth Palestinian was killed in clashes on Saturday in the town of Al-Azariya on the eastern edge of Jerusalem. He was identified as Yousef Abbas Kashour, 21.

Mr. Netanyahu was about to board a plane for Europe last Saturday night when he announced that he had instructed that metal detectors be placed at the entrances to Al Aqsa. He also said Israel would install security cameras on poles outside the compound that would "give almost complete control over what goes on there."

He said he had made the decision after a discussion with the top security leadership. Tension built over the following days, but the cabinet chose to leave the metal detectors in place.

Yoav Galant, the Israeli minister of housing and construction and a general, was one of a minority of ministers who had voted to remove

them. He said he did so because the Palestinians were using them to whip up emotions against Israel and because the equipment was impractical, as the tens of thousands of Muslims who come to pray at Al Aqsa on Fridays would not have been able to pass through the security check in a reasonable amount of time.

Envoys of the so-called Quartet of Middle East peacemakers, made up of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations, issued a statement on Saturday urging all sides to "demonstrate maximum restraint, refrain from provocative actions and work toward de-escalating the situation."

In Jerusalem's Old City on Sunday, Muslim men laid their prayer mats on the ground near the Lion's Gate, a few yards from the metal detectors, and performed noon prayer in the sweltering heat, under the gaze of armed Israeli police officers. Young boys handed out bottles of mineral water. A group of women laid down mats and prayed separately a few yards away; some had brought picnics.

Worshippers said they viewed the metal detectors as an Israeli provocation, and a humiliation.

"As long as the metal detectors are there, we won't enter," said Musa Basit, 55, a teacher of Islamic law at Al-Quds University. "If they take them down, we'll go in. Things have to go back to how they were 10 days ago."

Clashes resumed at the Lion's Gate after nightfall.



Two ultra-Orthodox feminists challenge Israel's political landscape

By Ruth Eglash
7-8 minutes

MODIIN, Israel — They are ultra-Orthodox feminists and liken their group to the suffragist movement.

Esty Shushan and Estee Rieder-Indursky have been fighting for the past five years for women's rights within their strictly conservative ultra-Orthodox, or Haredi, community.

Now they are trying to draw worldwide attention.

"As Haredi women, we face many battles. It took me awhile to realize that fighting those battles starts up there," said Shushan, sporting a stylish *sheitel*, Yiddish for the wig that married ultra-Orthodox

women wear to cover their hair as a sign of modesty.

By "up there" she does not mean God, Rieder-Indursky explained, but rather the ultra-Orthodox decision-makers and leaders who do not allow women in the political sphere.

The two women lead a nonprofit organization called Nivcharot, or "the elected women." Their goal is to pressure the Haredi leadership to give women a voice.

The fight sometimes gets ugly, they say.

During the last election, they lobbied against ultra-Orthodox parties, decrying their refusal to allow women to have a role. They handed out provocative fliers, asking women to refrain from voting until they were represented, and they clandestinely pasted posters

on billboards in the most religious neighborhoods.

In one of the posters, they criticized women for asking for political representation, realizing that by attacking their own message they would raise curiosity and the posters probably would not be torn down.

More recently, they petitioned Israel's Supreme Court, arguing a party that discriminates against women should not be afforded legitimacy in the political system.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews make up about 10 percent of Israeli society. Two political parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism, represent the population, with 13 Haredi members in Israel's 120-seat parliament and three government ministers. None are women.

The parties are run along strict lines set by their spiritual leaders, and their positions on many issues are dictated by the Torah. The Haredi electorate votes for one of the two parties according to instructions from religious leaders, who have made clear that women should not be involved in politics.

Before the creation of Israel, ultra-Orthodox women stayed home and raised children while the men worked.

In recent years, however, as the community has struggled with poverty and many men spend their days studying the Torah, women have been allowed, even encouraged, by spiritual leaders to work outside the home.

Nurit Stadler, a professor of sociology and anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,

said the participation of women in the labor market laid the foundation for the debate about women's rights in the community.

"There is a problem when women take on a role like that. They change the way they dress, they go out of the house and face an atmosphere of pollution. It's a provocation," Stadler said. Women are exposed to new ideas and suddenly start seeing the world in a different light.

That is what happened to Shushan and Rieder-Indursky.

Before becoming political activists, they worked for Haredi newspapers. Shushan was a columnist, and Rieder-Indursky was a political reporter.

Both used male pseudonyms.

"My editor was happy I wanted to write. He said my writing was good but asked me not to use my name because 'You know, the men will not accept the opinions of a

woman,'" Shushan said.

Working from home, she had no problem keeping her identity secret and was grateful to be earning an income while still being able to air her views.

For Rieder-Indursky, it was trickier. As a political reporter, she had to interview people, among them former Israeli prime ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert.

"Whenever I would get to an interview, people were always shocked to discover that I was actually a woman," she said. "One surprised foreign diplomat even told me: 'I expected many things but never did I expect to meet the Haredi Claudia Schiffer.'"

For Shushan, the novelty of working without credit or recognition for her ideas wore off quickly. In 2012, she quit the newspaper and turned to the only platform where she felt free to express herself: Facebook.

She set up numerous groups that reached thousands in her

community and turned a taboo subject of women in politics into a focal point of the 2015 general election.

Rieder-Indursky reached a similar conclusion soon after: "It took me longer to see, but now all I see is Haredi women's voices silenced in our community."

The two Haredi parties did not respond to phone calls and text messages seeking comment.

Although Shushan and Rieder-Indursky have succeeded in bringing the issue to the fore, they face immense social pressure to stop. Because they are often labeled troublemakers or crazies, their families also pay a price, they said.

Shushan, a mother of four, was forced to obtain a court order to keep her daughter in an ultra-Orthodox school that viewed her mother's activities as undesirable.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

Rieder-Indursky said her son often returns from his yeshiva begging her to stop.

Israel Cohen, a journalist and commentator for the Haredi website Kikar Shabat, said the women are seen as extreme by the Haredi mainstream.

"There are already Haredi women who are close to the decision-makers. They operate quietly and within the Haredi mainstream without being elected," he said. "These women are coming and demanding change and in that way, there will be pushback and nothing will change."

But the women are determined. "In my opinion, this change will happen, the question is just when?" Rieder-Indursky said. "How do I know it will happen? Because it has happened all over the world. It's just a matter of time."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Across Russia, Protesters and Kremlin Backers Seek the Upper Hand

James Marson

5-6 minutes

Updated July 24, 2017 2:38 a.m. ET

IZHEVSK, Russia—Hundreds of people joined a protest last month in this city 600 miles east of Moscow. Authorities gave the protest a permit—then filed a misdemeanor charge when the rally began seven minutes early, an organizer said.

In out-of-the-way places like Izhevsk, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's protest movement is running into efforts by the Kremlin and its allies to nip that movement in the bud.

"They don't threaten to kill you; they play dirty tricks from all sides," said Sergei Urban, who heads Mr. Navalny's office in Izhevsk, one of many Mr. Navalny has opened across Russia in advance of a potential presidential campaign next year.

Protest leaders face fines and jail time for minor infractions, relatives of activists receive warnings from bosses, and students are told not to attend rallies, according to opposition supporters. After an earlier protest in March, Mr. Urban said his brother was warned by a colleague in local law enforcement that Mr. Urban "should stop this nonsense."

Leonid Kondakov, head of domestic political affairs for the local

administration in Izhevsk, said there are no official commands to pressure Mr. Navalny's supporters. "Some people may be taking things too far, but it doesn't come from authorities," he said.

But Mr. Kondakov said young people should work with authorities to solve problems. "We want to encourage people in the right direction," he said.

Mr. Navalny's online investigations of official corruption have reinvigorated Russia's opposition, which has long been divided and under pressure from authorities. He has used the internet to circumvent state-controlled media, which largely ignores the movement.

He has also traveled around the country visiting supporters. Nearly 1,000 people showed up for a meeting he held in Izhevsk on June 10, Mr. Urban said, two days before nationwide protests, including the one in Izhevsk.

The movement has energized Russia's youth, who make up the bulk of protesters. "It's our future. If our whole country is covered in the filth of corruption, how will we live?" said Maria Lumpova, a 21-year-old student at Udmurt State University in Izhevsk.

But Mr. Navalny faces hurdles in his potential long-shot campaign against Russian President Vladimir Putin in next year's elections.

Mr. Navalny has been convicted of embezzlement, a decision he has called politically motivated. People convicted of serious crimes are barred from running for president under Russian law. Mr. Navalny is still hoping to run.

And his movement is encountering other challenges. The June 12 protest was one of the largest in Izhevsk that Mr. Urban and other local activists can recall. But protests are still relatively small.

Opposition leaders say people are preoccupied with their own problems, as living standards have fallen in recent years, and are influenced by Russian state-controlled television, which frequently cites the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria as a warning of where protests can lead.

"Apathy is the main problem. People are told: 'You in any case won't be able to change anything. What can you do? It's all pointless,'" said Timofei Klabukov, a 33-year-old entrepreneur in Izhevsk and a supporter of Mr. Navalny.

Activists are also under pressure. Oleg Vasiliev, an organizer of the June protest in Izhevsk, said police filed a misdemeanor charge against him for starting the rally early. He said the rally started sooner than anticipated because the march beforehand lasted only three minutes instead of 10, as stipulated in the permit.

Mr. Vasiliev said a court will consider the charge against him on Monday, as well as another for not halting the protest after someone allegedly called "Putin is a thief," which apparently went beyond the bounds of the official topic of the protest—corruption—and may be considered slanderous. He said he is resigned to paying a fine of as much as 10,000 rubles, around \$167, as he can't afford a lawyer. Regional police didn't respond to a request for comment.

Opposition offices across the country, including in Izhevsk, have been raided by police and had materials confiscated.

Mr. Urban said that reaching out to local authorities has helped avoid more-serious problems that have affected activists in other cities, including one who was attacked with a knife and another whose car was torched in June.

Pro-Kremlin groups are also mobilizing. When Mr. Navalny visited Izhevsk in June, several dozen protesters, including military veterans and former border guards, gathered outside his local office and chanted, "Navalny, get out of Izhevsk!"

"No one paid us to do it," said Alexander Kiselev, a leader of Patriots of the Border, a border-guard veterans organization. "We were expressing our position."

Write to James Marson at james.marson@wsj.com

In China, Herd of 'Gray Rhinos' Threatens Economy (UNE)

Keith Bradsher
and Sui-Lee Wee

11-13 minutes

The headquarters of Anbang Insurance Group, whose chairman was detained last month. Jason Lee/Reuters

SHANGHAI — Let the West worry about so-called black swans, rare and unexpected events that can upset financial markets. China is more concerned about “gray rhinos” — large and visible problems in the economy that are ignored until they start moving fast.

The rhinos are a herd of Chinese tycoons who have used a combination of political connections and raw ambition to create sprawling global conglomerates. Companies like Anbang Insurance Group, Fosun International, HNA Group and Dalian Wanda Group have feasted on cheap debt provided by state banks, spending lavishly to build their empires.

Such players are now so big, so complex, so indebted and so enmeshed in the economy that the Chinese government is abruptly bringing them to heel. President Xi Jinping recently warned that financial stability is crucial to national security, while the official newspaper of the Communist Party pointed to the dangers of a “gray rhinoceros,” without naming specific companies.

Chinese regulators have become increasingly concerned that some of the biggest conglomerates have borrowed so much that they could pose risks to the financial system. Banking officials are ramping up scrutiny of companies' balance sheets.

The turnabout for the first generation of post-Mao Chinese capitalists, once seen as exemplars of the country's ingenuity and economic prowess, has been swift.

Last year, the chairman of Anbang, a fast-growing insurer that paid \$2 billion for the Waldorf Astoria in New York, held court at the luxurious hotel, wining and dining American business leaders. Last month, the chairman, Wu Xiaohui, was detained by the Chinese police, for undisclosed reasons.

Borrowed Fortunes

Deal making in China has skyrocketed in the last few years, as Chinese companies look beyond

their borders. The spending spree has been funded by debt, prompting regulators to scrutinize aggressive acquirers.

Fosun, run by a professed “Warren Buffett of China,” made multibillion-dollar deals for Club Med, Cirque du Soleil and other brands. The company was recently forced to deny speculation that its chairman, Guo Guangchang, who was briefly held by officials in 2015 for unknown reasons, was in custody again.

Founded as a regional airline, HNA evolved into a powerhouse, with stakes in Hilton Hotels, Deutsche Bank and the airport ground services company Swissport. European regulators are scrutinizing the conglomerate, while one big Wall Street bank, Bank of America, has decided not to do business with HNA.

Dalian Wanda went head-to-head with American entertainment giants, promising a year ago to defeat Disney in China. Now, the Chinese company is in retreat, selling off its theme parks and hotels.

“The downside of these new companies is that there was no one with the political or regulatory strength who could control these companies,” said Brock Silvers, the chief executive of Kaiyuan Capital, a boutique investment banking advisory service in Shanghai.

The gray rhinos have a common characteristic: a lot of debt and many deals.

For years, China's banks readily doled out loans, eager to keep pumping money into the economy. They doubled down after the global financial crisis in 2008, to prop up growth and push down the value of the currency.

The conglomerates, with their stellar reputations and strong profits, were at the front of the lending line. HNA has secured a \$90 billion credit line from state-controlled banks. Anbang spent more than \$10 billion in three years, deals that were financed mostly by selling so-called wealth management products — opaque investments promising high rates and low risk.

President Xi Jinping during a news conference in Berlin this month. He recently warned that financial stability is crucial to China's national security. Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters

With state money in hand, companies looked beyond their borders, at the urging of the

government. Over the past five years, Wanda, Anbang, HNA Group and Fosun have made at least \$41 billion of overseas acquisitions, according to Dealogic, a research firm.

The country's debt levels soared. In 2011, total credit extended to private, nonfinancial companies was about 120 percent of economic output in China. It is now 166 percent.

“The Chinese government played the role of an indispensable enabler,” said Minxin Pei, a professor at Claremont McKenna College in California who studies Chinese politics. “If you look at how they got so big, it's all through taking on debt.”

By 2015, China's economy was losing steam. And the government, which had been looking for ways to reinvest all the dollars pouring into the country, suddenly needed to prevent all the money from flowing out. Beijing had to dip deep into its pockets to keep the currency from sinking.

The government started taking a closer look at the most prolific deal makers. In December, four big Chinese regulators, in a rare joint statement, warned about “irrational” investments in overseas real estate, entertainment and sports, calling the areas rife with “risks and hidden dangers.”

Some of the conglomerates' purchases appeared to fit that description.

Wanda paid a hefty \$3.5 billion last year for Legendary Entertainment. The studio had produced blockbusters like “300” and “Godzilla” only to follow with flops like “Warcraft” and “The Great Wall.”

HNA Group, the parent company of Hainan Airlines, began as a regional airline and grew into a global powerhouse. Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Fosun bought Britain's Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club. It was among a number of Chinese deals for soccer teams, including AC Milan, Inter Milan and FC Sochaux.

Anbang was in a protracted battle for the Starwood hotel chain, bidding up the price and drawing scrutiny. It eventually walked away from Starwood, which Marriott purchased for \$13 billion.

In recent months, the political and regulatory environment has quickly shifted. Chinese officials have also become preoccupied with preventing any disruption to the Communist Party's next congress, where the leadership is selected every five years. In the lead-up to the event this fall, the government is putting a premium on stability.

The climate has put a chill on big deal makers. Fosun has nearly stopped its frenetic deal making. HNA's purchases have also slowed.

Both companies said their finances remain in good shape. “We maintain strict control over our financial risk and continue to improve our debt and cash flow,” Fosun said in a statement.

HNA said that its ratio of debt to assets had declined over the last seven years. “HNA Group is a financially strong company with a robust, diversified balance sheet that reflects our continued growth and engagement across the capital markets,” the company said. On its relationship with Bank of America Merrill Lynch, the conglomerate said, “With the exception of some modest asset-backed financing provided to some of our leasing subsidiaries, where business continues as usual, HNA Group has never engaged B.A.M.L. for any significant business.”

Nanchang Wanda Park theme park in Jiangxi Province. After promising to defeat Disney in China, the Chinese company is selling off its theme parks and hotels. Mark Schiefelbein/Associated Press

Wanda announced this month that it would sell \$9.3 billion worth of hotels and theme parks to Sunac China, another real estate developer. But then Wanda was forced to scrap the original deal and split the portfolio between Sunac and another Chinese buyer, R & F Properties.

“Everyone is concerned about Wanda Commercial's debt problems,” Wang Jianlin, the chairman of Dalian Wanda Group, said about the group's main real estate subsidiary at a news conference on Wednesday.

In early May, Chinese insurance regulators, worried about Anbang's precipitous growth, halted sales of two investment products. Since then, Anbang's lifeblood — the sale of wealth management products — has slowed to a trickle.

Anbang said that operations were normal and that it had ample cash. The company's longtime chairman, who has been on leave since his detention, has not been publicly charged with any crimes.

The Chinese giants now look more like gray rhinos. The term itself comes not from biology but from an

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

O'Grady: Trump and the Nafta Talks

Mary Anastasia O'Grady

5-6 minutes

July 23, 2017 5:34 p.m. ET

No part of Donald Trump's 2016 run for president excited crowds more than his rants against Mexico, his promises to "build the wall" along the southern border, to make the neighbors pay for it, and to rewrite or scrap the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement.

Rhetorically, President Trump has not stepped back very far from all that. He now says that he will build the wall first and figure how to get the money from Mexico later.

He understands that he won the presidency partly by making outrageous statements that kept him constantly in the news. But now that the serious business of negotiation on trade is beginning, it appears that much of the craziness has been set aside.

Mexico and Canada have agreed to return to the Nafta negotiating table, and most of the objectives outlined in the U.S. Trade Representative's summary, released last week, are aimed not at destroying the 24-year-old pact but modernizing it. In many cases the U.S. is asking to open markets further on a reciprocal basis.

One objective is freer trade in agricultural products, which suggests that Canada's protected

anonymous business book that has become somewhat popular this year in China.

People's Daily, the main newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, used the term last week in a strong warning after President Xi expressed concern about debt. "Risks in the financial sector are

dairy and poultry markets will be on the table. The document also says the U.S. will aim for greater ease at the borders by "streamlining" customs procedures. A specific goal is to raise the value of goods that can enter duty-free in express-mail shipping to \$800 from \$50. The USTR doesn't make a big point of it, but this mail would presumably include products made in China.

Unfortunately some items on the Trump wish list would take the region backward economically.

It's hardly surprising that the administration has made it a priority to eliminate trade deficits with Mexico and Canada. It has the same wrongheaded obsession globally. But as the Journal explained in a March 10 editorial, "How to Think About the Trade Deficit," a current-account deficit—which includes trade—doesn't matter because it means there is a capital-account surplus. The dollars Americans spend on foreign-produced goods and services eventually must return to the U.S., usually via investments in U.S. assets.

Trade deficits with Mexico and Canada are even less relevant. In the introduction to its summary, the USTR claims that "trade deficits have exploded." Yet the trade deficit with Nafta partners is less than 13% of the total U.S. trade deficit, while Nafta represents 30% of total U.S. trade. Canada and Mexico are the largest export markets for the U.S., and the trade deficits are nowhere proportional. It is also worth noting

sophisticated," said the unsigned commentary.

"Therefore, precautionary measures should be taken to prevent not only 'black swan' but also 'gray rhino' events."

The concern facing these conglomerates is whether they can manage their high-priced expansions well enough to earn the

that the U.S. has had a surplus in services with Mexico averaging about \$9 billion a year over the past three years.

On the goods side—despite all the griping about deficits with Mexico and Canada—continental free trade makes U.S. exports more attractive globally. By putting production facilities in all three Nafta countries, American auto manufacturers, for example, can turn out cars and trucks that compete on price and quality all over the world.

This reduces the overall U.S. trade deficit. All things being equal, the deficit would go down even more if all markets were further opened to U.S. exports. It follows that the ideal U.S. policy for an administration concerned about trade deficits would be to work to reduce all barriers to trade.

In a world of increasingly interconnected commerce supported by free-trade agreements, American protectionists have come to rely heavily on antidumping and countervailing duties. Under Nafta, when exporters are alleged to be selling unfairly—leaning on government subsidies or pricing a product below market to destroy competitors—any of the three countries can apply duties as a remedy.

But under Nafta's Chapter 19, exporters can appeal those duties to an international arbitration panel. The USTR says it wants to eliminate Chapter 19 and instead

profits needed even to repay loans issued at low rates. If regulators or banks take more decisive actions to rein in credit, the rhinos could become endangered.

"When that stops, there will be a reaction," Mr. Silvers said. "Whether that will be a crash or something modulated over time is hard to see."

send disputes to domestic courts. In the U.S. that would be the Court of International Trade, where the Trump administration and its supporters undoubtedly feel American companies could expect a more favorable outcome than at a Nafta panel.

Yet this would also mean that when Canada and Mexico slap antidumping duties on American products, exporters will have to go to domestic courts in those countries. The result is likely to be rising protectionism in all three markets and sand in the gears of the integrated North American economy.

This can only increase divisions, beyond economics, among the three countries at a time when a strong North American alliance is crucial to U.S. leadership in the hemisphere. Mexico has adopted a welcome human-rights policy by taking a strong position against the Venezuelan dictatorship. The U.S. should do what it can to build on this common ground.

The USTR's objectives are largely constructive. But Trump protectionists have planted a few land mines in the otherwise valuable agenda. Americans have to hope that Canada and Mexico will defend the interests that all three partners have in a free and prosperous North America.

Write to O'Grady@wsj.com.

The New York Times

President Bachelet of Chile Is the Last Woman Standing in the Americas

Ernesto Londoño

10-13 minutes

SANTIAGO, Chile — No one relished the milestone more than President Michelle Bachelet of Chile.

For a few years, she and two other female leaders presided over much of South America, representing more than half of the continent's population.

Their presidencies — in Argentina, Brazil and Chile — made the region an exemplar of the global push for a more equitable footing for women in politics. And their moment came long before the United States, often regarded as less sexist than Latin America, even came close to electing a female president.

But now, with one of her counterparts impeached and the other fighting corruption charges, Ms. Bachelet finds herself in an unsettling position: the last female

head of government standing in the Americas.

And in a few months, she will be gone, too.

After Ms. Bachelet's term ends next year, none of the countries in North or South America are expected to have female presidents, a notable turnaround in a part of the world where, until recently, women have been elected to lead influential democracies.

"Perhaps we had a cycle of hyper-abundance," she said during a recent interview at the presidential palace in Santiago.

The end of the Bachelet era is raising troubling questions for advocates of women's rights who had hoped that the region's recent track record of electing women was a lasting step toward gender equality.

Dozens of countries around the world, including Chile, have adopted

quota systems in an effort to increase the representation of women in government. Yet progress has been stubbornly slow. A goal set by the United Nations in the 1990s to have at least 30 percent of lawmakers in national legislatures be women remains elusive; today, just over 23 percent of legislators are women.

"It's three steps forward and six steps back," said Lakshmi Puri, the deputy executive director of U.N. Women, a United Nations agency once led by Ms. Bachelet that was established in 2010 to promote women's rights.

"In all of these countries where there have been such leaps forward on gender equality, the tide could easily recede," Ms. Puri said.

The three powerful female presidents in South America — Ms. Bachelet, Dilma Rousseff in Brazil and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina — came to office with the endorsement of popular male incumbents at a time when leftist parties promising to create more equitable societies appealed to voters.

But the standing of the three presidents — and the perception of their parties — suffered as the end of a commodities boom hurt regional economies and a series of corruption scandals called into question their integrity and leadership.

"They're all flawed leaders in their own way," said Shannon K. O'Neil, a Latin America expert at the Council on Foreign Relations. She noted that none of the presidents managed to get ahead of the corruption sweeping the region, leaving their parties, to varying degrees, tainted by scandal.

Presidents often see their support plunge while in office. But the three female presidents say their gender exposed them to particularly virulent backlashes.

Two young girls from the Democratic Republic of Congo during a speech that Ms. Bachelet gave to refugees living in Chile at the presidential palace in Santiago last month. Meridith Kohut for The New York Times

Ms. Rousseff said she had been called a cow "about 600,000 times," and attributed her downfall partly to misogyny.

"They accused me of being overly tough and harsh, while a man would have been considered firm, strong," Ms. Rousseff said. "Or they would say I was too emotional and fragile, when a man would have been considered sensitive. I was seen as someone too obsessed with work,

while a man would have been considered hard-working."

Ms. Rousseff's successor, Michel Temer, appointed an all-male cabinet. And Brazil's Congress remains one of the region's most heavily male, with only 11 percent of the lawmakers women.

Chile's president, Ms. Bachelet, 65, is a pediatrician and single mother who began her government career as an adviser in the Health Ministry, rising quickly to become the nation's first female health minister in 2000 and then its first female defense minister in 2002.

She won her first presidency handily in 2006, succeeding a political ally, Ricardo Lagos. Ms. Bachelet was not the region's first female head of state, but she was widely regarded as the first to be elected on her own merits, without riding the coattails of a politically powerful husband. The watershed moment inspired women across Latin America.

After the celebrations on the night of her victory in 2006, Ms. Bachelet returned home haunted by a fleeting encounter on the campaign trail.

"If you're elected, my husband will never hit me again," a voter told Ms. Bachelet. It was a sobering feeling, she said, that she had become "a repository of the dreams and aspirations of so many people who had great expectations for my government."

During her first four-year term, Ms. Bachelet steered legislative efforts to curb workplace discrimination, to protect victims of domestic violence and to expand health care for women, arguing that it was much more than a matter of fairness.

"I always make a soccer analogy," Ms. Bachelet said. "If, of the 11 players, we only had half in the field, we would never win a game. The country, in order to develop, needs the skills of men and women."

When she left office in 2010, Ms. Bachelet, who was not eligible to run for a second consecutive term, was tapped to serve as the inaugural executive director of U.N. Women. She took star power to a new agency that funded poverty-fighting initiatives and pushed to get more women elected.

But its ambitions were limited in part by an inability to raise enough money. Despite the close relationship between Ms. Bachelet and Hillary Clinton, then the American secretary of state, the United States has been a marginal funder of U.N. Women, providing between \$4.5 million and \$7.6 million annually since 2009.

Ms. Bachelet soon returned to politics, winning the presidency again in 2013. During her second term, she created a ministry of women and gender equality, and passed an electoral change requiring that at least 40 percent of candidates for elected office be women. Before stepping down, she is seeking to partly decriminalize abortion, a proposal that Congress is considering.

Still, Ms. Bachelet said she would leave office with plenty of unfinished business. Only 16 percent of Chilean lawmakers are women. Beyond that, Chilean women earn roughly 32 percent less than men, are more likely to be unemployed and are less likely to get loans.

"The hardest thing to change is the culture," Ms. Bachelet said.

Just last month, Sebastián Piñera, the conservative former president who is now the front-runner in the race to succeed Ms. Bachelet, came under fire after the release of a video in which he made a joke about rape as he sought to fire up a crowd at a rally.

President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil in March 2016, five months before she was removed from office. Ms. Rousseff said she had been called a cow "about 600,000 times," and attributed her downfall partly to misogyny. Tomas Munita for The New York Times

Ms. Bachelet fumed. "To joke about that is to belittle all of us and that is unacceptable," she wrote on Twitter.

While sexism may remain in Chilean politics, Virginia Guzmán, a sociologist at the Center for the Study of Women in Santiago, said Ms. Bachelet's presidencies had left an indelible mark. Women are still underrepresented in politics, she said, but they have gained clout in other spheres, including unions and student movements.

"She will be remembered as someone who tried to steer the country toward becoming more democratic in important ways," Ms. Guzmán said.

While Ms. Bachelet was popular during her first term, she said, she felt she was held to a different standard than male politicians. When her predecessor choked up in public, Ms. Bachelet said, he was hailed as a sensitive man.

"If I became emotional, if my eyes welled up, I was seen as a woman who is unable to control her emotions," she said.

It irked her that when editorial writers would criticize her decisions, they surmised that she had acted

on the misguided advice of male advisers. "There's difficulty in understanding that as a woman, one has the ability to think, to make autonomous decisions," Ms. Bachelet said.

The former female presidents of Argentina and Brazil, though different from Ms. Bachelet in tactics and style, spoke similarly of being subject to gender-based criticisms, and often to far cruder attacks.

Mrs. Kirchner of Argentina, who stepped down in 2015 because of term limits, was often called a "yegua," or female horse, a slang term that means whore. Some critics of Ms. Rousseff of Brazil had lewd stickers of the president, legs spread, plastered on their cars where a gas pump would be inserted.

And when female politicians complain about double standards in politics, they are often accused of playing the "gender card," argued Farida Jalalzai, a professor at Oklahoma State University who published a book last year about Latin America's female presidents.

"It's not even subtle — it's overt," she said. "It's a backlash to try to keep them in their place."

The percentage of female lawmakers around the world has climbed in the past two decades — to about 23 percent from 11.7 percent in 1997 — but progress has plateaued, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a group that promotes cooperation among legislative bodies.

"It will take another 50 years to reach parity if we continue with this kind of rhythm," said Zeina Hilal, who studies gender and politics at the union. She said women struggled to raise money, to break into party leadership positions and to overcome the bias of voters who question the ability of women to lead.

Iván Aleite, a driver in Santiago, said he could not wait for Ms. Bachelet's term to end. Her declining popularity as a result of a sluggish economy and judicial inquiries into questionable business deals by her son and daughter-in-law, he said, are indicative that women are unfit to run the country. "I have a theory about why Donald Trump got elected," he said. "Americans saw the results of women presidents around the world, and the truth is that, with the exception of Angela Merkel, none of them has had the wherewithal to govern."

Ms. Jalalzai has heard similar arguments from voters across Latin America. But if Mr. Trump's

presidency turns out badly, she argued, "people aren't going to say

he was a horrible president because he was a man."

The New York Times

Henry Fountain

10-12 minutes

When the *Crystal Serenity*, a 1,000-passenger luxury liner, sails in August on a monthlong Arctic cruise through the Northwest Passage, it will have a far more utilitarian escort: a British supply ship.

The Ernest Shackleton, which normally resupplies scientific bases in Antarctica, will help with the logistics of shore excursions along the route from Alaska to New York through Canada's Arctic Archipelago.

But the escort ship will also be there should the *Serenity* become stuck in ice or if something else goes wrong. The Shackleton can maneuver through ice and will be carrying emergency water and rations for the liner's passengers and 600 crew members, gear for containing oil spills and a couple of helicopters.

As global warming reduces the extent of sea ice in the Arctic, more ships — cargo carriers as well as liners like the *Serenity* taking tourists to see the region's natural beauty — will be plying far-northern waters. Experts in maritime safety say that raises concerns about what will happen when something goes wrong.

At the Marine Exchange of Alaska in Juneau, Shelby Martin monitors ship traffic through the state's waters. Michael Penn for The New York Times

"It's what keeps us up at night," said Amy A. Merten, who works on maritime response issues at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Although nations with Arctic lands, including the United States, have agreed to assist each other in the event of disaster, there is very little emergency infrastructure in either American or Canadian Arctic waters, or in Russia along what is known as the Northern Sea Route.

Dr. Merten and others give *Crystal Cruises*, the *Serenity's* owner, high marks for its preparations, and the ship, with the Shackleton tagging along, made its first Northwest Passage cruise last summer without incident. Edie Rodriguez, *Crystal's* president, said the company spent three years getting ready for that first Arctic voyage. "Most important, it was about preparedness and safety," she said.

With More Ships in the Arctic, Fears of Disaster Rise (UNE)

But what keeps Dr. Merten and other experts on edge is the possibility that a ship that is less prepared could have a problem that would require an extensive search-and-rescue operation.

There are relatively few government icebreakers or cutters in the region, and a long-range airlift by helicopters would be extremely difficult. So an emergency operation would most likely rely heavily on other commercial ships that happen to be in the area. A rescue could take days.

"There's just no infrastructure for response," Dr. Merten said. "Things could be O.K. But it would be a difficult situation."

Among the problems that might befall ships in the Arctic, much of which is still poorly charted, is a grounding that in the worst case could lead to the breaking up and sinking of a ship. In addition to the obvious risk to lives, such an event could cause a spill of thousands of gallons of fuel — thick, heavy oil in the case of most cargo ships — that could be next to impossible to recover.

Mechanical failure, fire or a medical emergency are concerns as well.

Although the Arctic has not been the site of a major disaster involving a cruise ship in recent years, a smaller liner, the *Explorer*, sank off the Antarctic Peninsula in 2007 after striking an iceberg. Fortunately, several other ships were within 100 miles of the stricken ship, and the 150 passengers and crew were rescued after five hours in lifeboats.

Lt. Ryan Butler, chief of inspections for the Coast Guard in Juneau, with crew members of the *Crystal Serenity* as they tested equipment before a Northwest Passage cruise last summer. Jon-Paul Rios/U.S. Coast Guard

Commercial ships in northern waters have occasionally run into trouble, sometimes with deadly results. In December 2004, the *Selendang Ayu*, a 740-foot Malaysian ship carrying soybeans and more than 1,000 tons of fuel oil, suffered an engine failure, drifted and eventually ran aground and broke apart in the Aleutian Islands in Alaska. Six crew members died when a Coast Guard helicopter that had just picked them up was swamped by a wave.

Sea ice, which completely covers the Arctic Ocean in winter, gradually melts in the spring and reaches its

minimum extent in September. That minimum has declined by about 13 percent per decade compared with the 1981 to 2010 average, according to NASA. Scientists say warming, which is occurring faster in the Arctic than any other region, is largely responsible.

As climate change continues, more of the Arctic will be open to ships, and for longer. Some scientists predict that the region could be completely ice-free in summers by the 2030s or 2040s.

But the amount of activity over all in the region is still small, and a huge rush to the Arctic is not expected anytime soon. Even as ice coverage continues to shrink, conditions will remain variable enough that no shipping company with tight deadlines will try regular Arctic service.

"It only takes a little bit of ice to ruin your day," said Timothy Keane, senior manager for Arctic operations for Fednav, a bulk shipping operator based in Montreal. "So if ice is in a particular area that you need to go, you're still blocked from getting there."

But in September, Russia will start shipping liquefied natural gas to Europe and Asia from Siberia, using 1,000-foot tankers that, by turning around and moving stern-first, can churn through ice up to seven feet thick.

And while the *Crystal Serenity*, with its casino and other amenities, was not built with polar cruising in mind, more than two dozen smaller ships, designed to carry up to 200 passengers and handle moderate ice conditions, are under construction around the world.

Any ship that sails through coastal waters in Alaska, Canada and other Arctic territory is subject to government inspection — to make sure it has the required safety equipment, for instance.

Selendang Ayu, a Malaysian cargo ship, was pounded by waves off Unalaska Island in 2004. Six crew members died when a rescue helicopter that had picked them up was overcome by waves. U.S. Coast Guard

But the United States Coast Guard has only two working heavy icebreakers, and has not built a new one in four decades. In a May speech, President Trump said "we're going to build many of them." Although money for design work has been allotted, the source of

funding for actual construction is still unclear.

The amount of shipping in the Arctic is currently so small that it is difficult to justify the presence of additional icebreakers or naval cutters in the region, or a helicopter base that could aid ships far from land.

"You need investment and you need infrastructure to cover this gap," said Lawson W. Brigham, a former captain of Coast Guard icebreakers who is now on the faculty at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

Russia is better prepared, with several dozen icebreakers and more on the way. The Russian military is also building Arctic bases that, while they have been seen in the West as an unwanted military expansion into the region, will have search-and-rescue capability

But even in the Russian Arctic most of the focus is on ports, said Mikhail Grigoriev, an Arctic shipping expert who is the director of Gecon, a Russian consulting firm. "Sea routes are very poorly developed," he said, "and the time of approach of rescue vessels is considerable — up to several days."

Given the lack of infrastructure, many experts argue that the focus should be on preventing accidents — through better training and certification of mariners, and safety requirements for ships. A new Polar Code, developed by the International Maritime Organization, sets some safety standards, but critics say it does not go far enough and includes almost no environmental protections.

Even relatively simple monitoring of ships can reduce the potential for disaster. Ed Page, a former Coast Guard captain, runs a private-public partnership, the Marine Exchange of Alaska, that uses a network of radio receivers to watch over ships around Alaska. Exchange operators can contact vessels that are getting too close to shore — a ship should usually be far from land, so that in the event of a mechanical problem, it has time for repairs without running aground — and have them change course.

Captain Page acknowledged that if something went disastrously wrong with a ship within the 1.5 million square miles of ocean his network covers, "it would be ugly."

"But we should stop worrying about what we're going to do when things go wrong," he said. "We should prevent things from going wrong."

ETATS-UNIS

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.

Natalie Andrews

7-9 minutes

White House Signals Support for Bill on Russia Sanctions (UNE)

Michael C.
Bender and

special counsel appointed by the Justice Department to handle the Russia probe, and his attorneys have conflicts of interest that would taint the investigation.

Updated July 23, 2017 8:06 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The White House on Sunday indicated President Donald Trump was likely to support legislation that would punish Russia for interfering in the 2016 election, after months of questioning assertions about Moscow's involvement.

The Trump administration's response to the sanctions bill is being closely watched, because a failure to sign it could prompt criticism that Mr. Trump is siding with President Vladimir Putin amid investigations into the Russian interference in the election and into possible ties between Mr. Trump's associates and Russia.

Mr. Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr., his son in law, Jared Kushner, and his former campaign chairman Paul Manafort are scheduled to appear before Senate committees this week in connection with Russia. The House is scheduled to vote on the sanctions package on Tuesday.

"We support where the legislation is now," White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said on ABC's "This Week." Ms. Sanders had said previous versions of the bill contained provisions that eroded the president's power to conduct diplomacy.

Ms. Sanders's boss, Anthony Scaramucci, struck a more cautious tone. On CNN's "State of the Union," he said Mr. Trump "hasn't made the decision yet to sign that bill" but suggested he wasn't sure what would happen because it his "second or third day on the job." Mr. Scaramucci was named the White House's new communications director on Friday.

The Trump team's messages have diverged at times, not just on the sanctions bill but also the president's inquiries about pardons and whether Robert Mueller, the

In an interview following Mr. Scaramucci's CNN appearance, Ms. Sanders said there was no discrepancy between her comments and Mr. Scaramucci's. She said the administration supported the bill but wouldn't commit to signing it until a final version passes Congress. "There could still be more changes," she said.

Congressional negotiators reached a deal late Friday to advance the bill, so such changes are unlikely.

Mr. Trump has questioned the findings of the U.S. intelligence community that Russia meddled in the 2016 presidential election, and Russia has denied the accusations. Investigators are also looking into any potential collusion between Trump campaign associates and the Russians, and the president has said no such collusion occurred.

In an interview last week, John Dowd, one of the main outside lawyers representing Mr. Trump in the Russia investigation, dismissed the notion that the Trump team would try to undermine Mr. Mueller's investigation by highlighting alleged conflicts of interest, calling it "collateral nonsense."

On Sunday, Jay Sekulow, another member of Mr. Trump's legal team, said on ABC's "This Week" that Mr. Trump's attorneys are "always looking at the issue of potential conflicts."

Mr. Sekulow also disputed a report that the president has been asking advisers about his authority to pardon former campaign officials, family members and himself.

"We have not, and I continue to not, have conversations with the president of the United States regarding pardons," Mr. Sekulow said. "Pardons have not been discussed, and pardons are not on the table."

Speaking around the same time on Fox News Sunday, Mr. Scaramucci said he had talked to the president in the White House about his power to pardon officials as it related to the Russia probe. "I'm in the Oval Office with the president last week, we're talking about that," Mr. Scaramucci said. "He brought that up" while saying he doesn't need to be pardoned, Mr. Scaramucci said.

"There's nobody around him that has to be pardoned," Mr. Scaramucci added. "He was just making the statement about the power of pardons. So now all of the speculation and all the spin and, 'Oh, he's going to pardon himself and do all this other nonsense.' The president does not need to pardon himself."

Mr. Trump tweeted about the Russia investigation Sunday afternoon, saying "As the phony Russian Witch Hunt continues, two groups are laughing at this excuse for a lost election taking hold, Democrats and Russians!" He added, "It's very sad that Republicans, even some that were carried over the line on my back, do very little to protect their president."

On Monday, Mr. Kushner, the president's son-in-law and senior adviser, will meet with the Senate Intelligence Committee behind closed doors. On Wednesday, Donald Trump Jr. and Mr. Manafort, Mr. Trump's former campaign chairman, are scheduled to meet privately with the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The three men, part of the Trump campaign's inner circle, attended a meeting with Russians during the campaign. The person arranging the meeting told Mr. Trump Jr. that the Russians could provide negative information on Democrat Hillary Clinton as part of Moscow's effort to help Mr. Trump get elected.

The White House says nothing of significance occurred at the meeting. "It was a nonevent," Mr. Scaramucci said Sunday on CNN. "It had no impact on the campaign."

The House is slated to vote Tuesday on a package of sanctions

against Russia, Iran and North Korea, according to guidance released by House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.). The new Russian sanctions, which passed the Senate last month in a 98-2 vote, have been held up in the House over disputes about a provision that would have prevented the House minority from introducing legislation to block the president if he chose to remove the sanctions.

On Sunday, Ms. Sanders said on ABC's "This Week" that necessary changes had been made to the legislation.

"Look, the administration is supportive of being tough on Russia, particularly in putting these sanctions in place," she said. "The original piece of legislation was poorly written, but we were able to work with the House and Senate... And we support where the legislation is now."

The new deal is a compromise between Republican and Democratic leaders. It also makes some concessions to oil-and-gas companies. The compromise legislation, which must pass the House and Senate, would tighten restrictions on the extension of credit to Russian entities and limit Russian businesses in the energy and defense sectors from partnering with U.S. citizens. It also would require the president to seek Congress's permission to relax any sanctions against Russia.

The European Union raised alarm over the sanctions deal, urging Congress to coordinate with its G-7 partners. An EU spokesperson said in a statement Saturday that the bill could have "unintended consequences" for Europe's "economic and energy security interests."

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The
New York
Times

Mr. Trump's Russian Base Beyond the Kremlin

Francis X. Clines
4-5 minutes

Mikhail Rubinsteyn at his cafe in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. Victor J. Blue for The New York Times

No American should have a keener sense of the dark intrigues that

underpin Kremlin politics than Mikhail Rubinsteyn, who arrived from Russia almost four decades ago as Brighton Beach was morphing into Brooklyn's bastion for refugees from the Moscow regime.

"Putin? Meddle in American politics?" Mr. Rubinsteyn asked in wonderment at his popular Brighton Beach cafe. "Absolutely not. Fake news from Democrats," he said, echoing the all-purpose dismissal

crafted by his beloved President Trump, whose émigré support remains firm in the community. Very firm, Mr. Rubinsteyn said, despite the increasing reports of Russia cyber-scheming in America before the election to help Mr. Trump.

"This is America," he said. "To have something believed in this country, you have to prove it." He is a refugee from a time in Moscow when democratic rights and impulses were furiously stifled by the Kremlin, much as they are now.

The puzzle in Brighton Beach is much the same as in other parts of the Trump base: Why is there no great alarm from President Trump or his supporters about the brazen Russian intrusion into American politics that has been certified by American intelligence agencies? The question is even starker when posed to old Soviet émigrés who should know better as they enjoy

the well-stocked shops and flowing freedom along Brighton Beach Avenue.

People enjoying conversation and the evening light on the boardwalk. Victor J. Blue for The New York Times

"Putin was in the army," said Vlad, a Russian Army veteran who finds that reason enough to trust Russia's autocratic president. This, despite the Russian leader's deep credentials with the K.G.B. and the suspicious deaths of politicians and journalists who dared to challenge his regime. "He's controlled the situation in Russia," said Vlad, declining to give his last name. "Putin and Trump — these guys make decisions," he added admiringly.

This "strong man" endorsement can be heard repeatedly in the community, but there is much more complexity to Brighton Beach these

days, according to Sam Klinger, a sociologist who is director of Russian Jewish community affairs for the American Jewish Committee. A refusenik who managed to flee the Soviet Union 27 years ago, Mr. Klinger notes that the community has traditionally been pro-Republican at the presidential level, so the Trump victory was expected even as it fell a bit short of Mitt Romney's 2012 vote.

"Anything that remotely smells of Communism they hate," Mr. Klinger said, noting how even the focus on government service proposals by Democrats can be mistrusted. Thus, partisan zealots labeled Hillary Clinton not just the familiar Trumpian "crook," but a "socialist" as well — the hated S-word in Brighton Beach.

"A Byzantine Empire," Mr. Klinger politely summarized, emphasizing how much Brighton Beach shifted in

recent years with younger émigrés from far more regions of the former Soviet Union who arrived more freely and for many different reasons. He said many feel that contemporary Russia, whatever it has become, is not the old Soviet Union. "Some are very much afraid of Russia, while others think it should be engaged," he said, just as there are sharp differences about how far to trust Mr. Putin.

The signs of change are clear along the boardwalk, where some early refugees, so pioneering in the Gorbachev era, now sit and stare at the ocean from perches in the Garden of Joy Adult Day Care Center.

"Listen," Mr. Rubinsteyn said amid the buzz in his cafe. "People I know a long time from Russia, they don't care what's going on in Russia," he said of forgiving and forgetting the old world. "I wish Russia the best."

**The
New York
Times**

White House Signals Acceptance of Russia Sanctions Bill (UNE)

Peter Baker and
Andrew Higgins

8-10 minutes

President Trump at Joint Base Andrews on Saturday. Hilary Swift for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — The White House indicated on Sunday that President Trump would accept new legislation curtailing his authority to lift sanctions on Russia on his own, a striking turnaround after a broad revolt by lawmakers of both parties who distrusted his friendly approach to Moscow and sought to tie his hands.

If it passes, as now seems likely, the measure will represent the first time that Congress, with both houses controlled by fellow Republicans, has forced its will on Mr. Trump on a major policy matter. That it comes on an issue as fraught as Russia illustrates how investigations into possible collusion between Moscow and Mr. Trump's team during last year's election have cost him politically.

The legislation may also have long-term consequences for the American relationship with Russia and for the power of the presidency. Once sanctions are written into law, they are much harder to lift, even long after the circumstances prompting them have changed, which is one reason European allies opposed the bill. And presidents from both parties have long resisted Congress's inserting itself into the process of determining foreign policy through mandatory sanctions.

But Mr. Trump found himself in a no-win position, as lawmakers eager to punish Russia for its interference in the election and its aggression toward its neighbors dispensed with the usual partisan divide. Mr. Trump, who has made it a priority to establish warm relations with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, lashed out in anger at both parties on Sunday.

"As the phony Russian Witch Hunt continues, two groups are laughing at this excuse for a lost election taking hold, Democrats and Russians!" Mr. Trump wrote on Twitter. He then added, "It's very sad that Republicans, even some that were carried over the line on my back, do very little to protect their President."

The outburst contrasted with the efforts of his staff to argue that the sanctions measure had been improved. With little chance of blocking it, the White House was left to declare that changes to the original legislation made in an agreement announced over the weekend were enough to satisfy the president's concerns.

"The administration is supportive of being tough on Russia, particularly in putting these sanctions in place," Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the new White House press secretary, said on "This Week" on ABC. "The original piece of legislation was poorly written, but we were able to work with the House and Senate, and the administration is happy with the ability to do that and make those changes that were necessary, and we support where the legislation is now."

Still, there seemed to be confusion among the president's advisers. Anthony Scaramucci, the new White House communications director, said on another show that the president had not decided whether to sign the measure. "You've got to ask President Trump that," he said on "State of the Union" on CNN. "It's my second or third day on the job. My guess is he's going to make that decision shortly." He added, "He hasn't made the decision yet to sign that bill one way or the other."

That seemed mainly to reflect the fact that Mr. Scaramucci was still getting up to speed in his new role. "My bad," Mr. Scaramucci said by text when asked about the different comments. "Go with what Sarah is saying as I am new to the information."

Privately, other White House officials said that although the president would not publicly commit to signing the bill until seeing the final version, they saw no politically viable alternative if it arrived at his desk as currently written. So Ms. Sanders seized on the changes made to lay the predicate for his expected signature.

In reality, while the changes made the measure somewhat more palatable to the White House and to energy companies that objected, they mainly provided a way for the president to back down from a confrontation he was sure to lose if the sanctions bill reached the floor of the House. The Senate passed the original version of the bill, 97 to 2, and the new version, which also includes sanctions on Iran and

North Korea, may come to a vote in the House as early as Tuesday.

"In the end, the administration will come to the conclusion that an overwhelming majority of Congress has, and that is that we need to sanction Russia for their meddling in the U.S. election," Senator John Thune, Republican of South Dakota, said on "Fox News Sunday." "That, I think, will pass probably overwhelmingly again in the Senate and with a veto-proof majority."

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin, Democrat of Maryland and a longtime leader in pressing for more sanctions on Russia, particularly for human rights abuses, put it bluntly on the same program. "If he vetoes the bill," Mr. Cardin said, "we will override his veto."

Russia has bristled at American sanctions for years, particularly since the United States began imposing them under President Barack Obama in 2014 after Moscow's annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine. Donald Trump Jr., the president's eldest son, said Russian visitors with Kremlin ties raised separate human rights sanctions at a meeting during last year's campaign, and his father said Mr. Putin raised them with him this month during a summit meeting in Germany.

The Kremlin said over the weekend that it took an "extremely negative" view of the new congressional measure but sought to dismiss the impact of its provisions. Russian news outlets noted on Sunday that the bill appeared less severe than feared.

"Vesti Nedeli," the flagship news program of Rossiya 1, a state-owned television channel, gave only a brief summary of the new legislation, focusing instead on the Obama administration's seizure in December of two Russian diplomatic compounds in Maryland and New York.

Although many sanctions laws passed by Congress give the president the authority to waive their provisions if he deems it in the national interest, lawmakers this time tried to limit Mr. Trump's latitude. To lift sanctions related to Ukraine, Mr. Trump would have to certify that conditions prompting them had been reversed. To lift sanctions over Russian cyberattacks, he would have to provide evidence that Russia had

tried to reduce such intrusions. And Congress would have at least 30 days to vote on any changes he sought.

Mr. Trump came to office seemingly determined to lift at least some sanctions on Russia. In the early days of his administration, a plan was drafted to reverse measures taken by Mr. Obama in his final weeks in office in retaliation for Russia's meddling in the election. The plan discussed by Mr. Trump's aides was throttled after Republican congressional leaders warned against it.

Administration officials now say that Mr. Trump supports the array of sanctions on Russia, particularly stemming from Ukraine, and will not cancel them until Moscow reverses

course there. Still, Russia has demanded the return of the two diplomatic properties, and the Trump administration has not ruled that out.

The stand-down on the sanctions fight came at the start of a week in which Donald Trump Jr.; the president's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner; and his former campaign chairman, Paul J. Manafort, are all set to talk with congressional investigators. White House aides on Sunday sought to explain the president's assertion on Twitter on Saturday that he has the "complete power to pardon" his relatives and advisers — and possibly himself.

Jay Sekulow, a private lawyer representing Mr. Trump, said the

president was simply asserting his authority after The Washington Post reported that he was discussing it. But Mr. Sekulow denied that pardons were being considered. "We're not researching the issue, because the issue of pardons is not on the table. There's nothing to pardon from," he said on ABC.

Yet Mr. Scaramucci acknowledged that the president had raised the matter. "I'm in the Oval Office with the president last week; we're talking about that," Mr. Scaramucci said on Fox. "He brought that up. He said, but he doesn't have to be pardoned. There's nobody around him that has to be pardoned. He was just making the statement about the power of pardons."

**The
Washington
Post**

Trump's new team offers muddled messages on sanctions, pardons (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/nakamuradavid>

8-10 minutes

Anthony Scaramucci, the newly appointed White House communications director, said on July 23 that "the president does not need to pardon himself" because "he hasn't done anything wrong." Anthony Scaramucci, the newly appointed White House communications director, says President Trump "does not need to pardon himself." (Video: Bastien Inzaurrealde/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

The White House offered conflicting views Sunday of whether President Trump supports the Russia sanctions legislation in Congress, with his top spokesmen contradicting one another just days after launching plans for a more effective messaging strategy.

If Trump was hoping his communications shake-up would bring a fresh approach for a White House that has struggled to respond to a constant state of turmoil, the debut of the team on the Sunday political talk shows was a rough one. Adding to the confusion, one of Trump's lawyers appeared to contradict his new top spokesman on whether Trump has been discussing his power to issue presidential pardons.

Trump's top communication aides set out to try to present a united front two days after the president added New York financier Anthony Scaramucci as communications

director and promoted Sarah Huckabee Sanders to press secretary after Sean Spicer resigned unexpectedly. Trump has fumed for months over the FBI probe into his campaign's contacts with Russia, angered that the nonstop media coverage has overshadowed his achievements and stalled his agenda.

But the key spokesmen appeared to be operating from different playbooks. Featured on competing Sunday shows, Sanders and Scaramucci contradicted one other on the Russia sanctions bill that congressional leaders announced over the weekend.

"The administration is supportive of being tough on Russia, particularly in putting these sanctions in place," Sanders said on ABC's "This Week." "We were able to work with the House and Senate, and the administration is happy with the ability to do that and make those changes that were necessary, and we support where the legislation is now."

Asked about the sanctions almost simultaneously on CNN's "State of the Union," Scaramucci noted he'd only been on the job for a few days.

"You've got to ask President Trump that. My guess is that he's going to make that decision shortly," he said, adding that as far as he knew Trump "hasn't made the decision yet to sign that bill one way or the other."

The result was a team that still looked uncertain about how to characterize the president's position on a significant matter that has been central to his first six months in office. The White House had opposed Congress's initial attempt

to impose additional economic sanctions on Moscow for its meddling in the 2016 presidential campaign, raising questions over Trump's relationship with the Kremlin amid the mounting FBI probe.

Later Sunday, a senior administration official, asked by The Washington Post to clarify the White House's position, said that the bill's latest version included additional economic sanctions on North Korea and addressed economic concerns raised by the U.S. business sector.

"The administration supports sanctions on Russia and Iran and supports the direction the bill is headed, but won't weigh in conclusively until there is a final piece of legislation and no more changes are being made," the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to explain the president's thinking.

Trump brought Scaramucci, who had been a fierce defender of the president on cable news shows, into the West Wing to help shore up a press shop that he believed was doing a poor job of defending him and explaining his message to the public. Among the president's strategies to recover his momentum is a trip to Youngstown, Ohio, for a campaign-rally style speech on Tuesday ahead of an expected Senate vote on efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

However, historians said presidents often make the mistake of conflating a messaging problem with their real challenge — a political crisis. Trump, consumed with rage over the FBI probe, has lashed out time and again on social media and in

interviews, causing himself new legal and political problems.

By late Sunday afternoon, Trump made clear that he does not intend to mute his attacks on his rivals.

"As the phony Russian Witch Hunt continues, two groups are laughing at this excuse for a lost election taking hold, Democrats and Russians!" he wrote on Twitter shortly after arriving back at the White House after spending the morning at Trump National Golf Club in Loudoun County.

Scaramucci has no communications experience, and his past political associations did not make him an obvious ally for Trump. He was a fundraiser for President Barack Obama's campaign in 2008, and he supported Republicans Scott Walker and then Jeb Bush in the 2016 campaign, before jumping to Trump after his earlier favorites dropped out of the GOP primary race.

After taking the White House job, Scaramucci announced he would delete hundreds of tweets that showed he had criticized Trump and held liberal views on gun control, immigration and other issues.

Though he won some good reviews from reporters after fielding questions in the White House briefing room Friday, he took some heat on social media Sunday when he made an awkward joke on CNN asking Sanders for them to keep using the same "hair and makeup person" — which some viewers took as a comment on her appearance.

Scaramucci later clarified his statement, saying he was referring to his look and not Sanders's.

Sanders said in an email to The Washington Post that Scaramucci was complimenting the makeup artist for doing a good job.

"Nothing else should be read into it," she said.

Yet Trump reportedly admired Scaramucci's forceful appearances on cable news shows defending the administration and was particularly impressed that he had forced CNN to retract a story that erroneously connected him to a Russian investment fund.

Spicer was said to have lobbied against Trump's hiring of Scaramucci and resigned in protest after the hiring Friday.

The role of the White House communications director has traditionally been to develop longer term strategies for winning public support for the president's policies and agenda, while the press secretary responds to news events in real time.

On that score, Scaramucci has not had much time to add his influence. And it was not just on the Russia sanctions bill that the White House's messaging was muddled Sunday.

Last week, the Post reported that Trump and his legal team were exploring his powers to pardon aides, family members and, potentially, even himself as special counsel Robert S. Mueller III

continues to oversee the Russia probe. On Saturday, Trump wrote on Twitter that he has "complete power to pardon," an assertion that some interpreted to mean his advisers had said he could, in fact, pardon himself.

On "This Week," one of Trump's attorneys, Jay Sekulow, described that tweet as "rather unremarkable."

"The president has the authority to pardon," Sekulow said, though he emphasized that Trump's legal team has not even discussed that question with the president.

"We have not, and I continue to not, have conversations with the president of the United States regarding pardons," Sekulow said.

Sekulow's comments, however, seem at odds with other members of Trump's team. On "Fox News Sunday," Scaramucci said he and the president had, in fact, discussed last week how far his pardoning authority extends.

"I'm in the Oval Office with the president last week, we're talking about that — he brought that up," Scaramucci said. But he added that Trump made clear that he "doesn't have to be pardoned. There's nobody around him that has to be pardoned. He was just making the statement about the power of pardons."



Local governments keep using this software — but it might be a back door for Russia (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/byaaroncdavis>

10-13 minutes

Local and state government agencies from Oregon to Connecticut say they are using a Russian brand of security software despite the federal government's instructions to its own agencies not to buy the software over concerns about cyberespionage, records and interviews show.

The federal agency in charge of purchasing, the General Services Administration, this month removed Moscow-based Kaspersky Lab from its list of approved vendors. In doing so, the agency's statement suggested a vulnerability exists in Kaspersky that could give the Russian government backdoor access to the systems it protects, though they offered no explanation or evidence of it. Kaspersky has strongly denied coordinating with the Russian government and has offered to cooperate with federal investigators.

The GSA's move on July 11 has left state and local governments to speculate about the risks of sticking with the company or abandoning taxpayer-funded contracts, sometimes at great cost. The lack of information from the GSA underscores a disconnect between local officials and the federal government about cybersecurity.

Interviews suggest that concerns in recent months from Congress and in the intelligence community about Kaspersky are not widely known among state and local officials, who are most likely to consider purchasing the Russian software. Those systems, while not

necessarily protecting critical infrastructure, can be targeted by hackers because they provide access to troves of sensitive information.

U.S. intelligence chiefs in May told a Senate panel that they wouldn't use the company's software during a broader hearing investigating Russia's alleged meddling in the U.S. presidential election. It was not the first time Congress had heard that message: A former U.S. official told The Washington Post that congressional staff was advised by law enforcement in late 2015 to stop meeting with Kaspersky representatives over national security concerns.

"People need to know that they can trust software updates," said Joseph Lorenzo Hall, chief technologist at the Center for Democracy and Technology, a digital advocacy group. About the GSA's decision, he said: "We need more public information."

In the weeks since Kaspersky's delisting, The Post found that it continues to be used on government computers in jurisdictions ranging from Portland, Ore., to Fayetteville, Ga., where an official said they have a year-to-year contract.

Kaspersky also has been purchased for use by the federal government in recent years, including the Bureau of Prisons and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Both agencies said last week that they needed additional time to determine whether the software is still in use.

To identify the agencies, The Post reviewed state, local and federal government websites to obtain documents that listed Kaspersky or

its programs, including city council agendas, annual agency reports and government procurement records. Officials interviewed in nine jurisdictions all said they had purchased or supported software made by Kaspersky within the past two years. Nearly all said they had no immediate plans to replace the software.

"We use it, and I think it works well," said John Morrisson, systems manager for the Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services. "I don't have any problems, and we don't have any viruses. And it's doing the job I require of it."

Morrisson said the concerns about Kaspersky are speculative, but he said he would consider jettisoning the Russian brand if specific vulnerabilities are identified.

In the District, a spokesman for the city's chief technology officer said that most city agencies use anti-virus software made by McAfee, a Kaspersky competitor. But District employees who connect to the network remotely are allowed for now to use home computers equipped with Kaspersky.

In Picayune, Miss., Kaspersky is scheduled to be installed soon as the firewall on a new wireless system for all public schools. Network administrator Jason Wheat said he hadn't seen the news about the GSA's decision or received any warning from the state about not using Kaspersky. But he said he wasn't worried about the software because employee Social Security numbers are stored on a separate server maintained by the state.

In Oregon, Kaspersky is used with other anti-virus software by Portland city government to scan for

malicious emails. Connecticut's public defender said that as of early 2016 its office had hundreds of computers that ran Kaspersky. And San Marcos, Tex., last month approved a \$92,744 contract for Kaspersky's anti-virus protection; a spokeswoman said the city has held a contract with Kaspersky for many years and renewed the software in June before the delisting notice was issued by the U.S. government.

In announcing its decision, the GSA said that its mission is to "ensure the integrity and security of U.S. government systems and networks" and that Kaspersky was delisted "after review and careful consideration." The action removed the company from the list of products approved for purchase on federal systems and at discounted prices for state governments.

The GSA included a reference to "System of Operational-Investigative Measures," or SORM — a national Russian electronic eavesdropping network that the U.S. government publicly warned about in advance of Americans traveling to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

At the time, the State Department advised travelers to assume that cellphones could be turned into listening devices and laptops could be infiltrated if connected to Russian networks. The GSA statement this month said "applicability" of SORM to Kaspersky "supported GSA's decision to exercise the cancellation clause."

A former senior U.S. law enforcement official, who works in cybersecurity and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said he thinks that the reference to SORM indicates the "GSA is saying there is

some kind of vulnerability that gives the [Russian] government access.”

Representatives for the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security referred questions about Kaspersky to the GSA, which declined to comment beyond the original statement.

Kaspersky officials declined interview requests, referring reporters to a statement denying wrongdoing that was issued after the GSA's announcement.

“Kaspersky Lab has no ties to any government, and the company has never helped, or will help, any government in the world with its cyberespionage efforts,” the company said. “Kaspersky Lab, a private company, seems to be caught in the middle of a geopolitical fight where each side is attempting to use the company as a pawn in their political game.”

Kaspersky Lab was founded in 1997 by Eugene Kaspersky, a decade after he had graduated from a KGB-supported cryptography school and had worked in Russian military intelligence agencies.

The company became an international success, sometimes promoting Kaspersky's background in Russian intelligence. By 2010, it claimed to be the most widely used anti-virus software in Europe. In the United States, for example, Kaspersky was among the anti-virus software

packaged with computers sold at Best Buy. Today, Kaspersky boasts 400 million users and 270,000 corporate clients worldwide.

Kaspersky has tried to advance the company into potentially lucrative government markets. The company created a subsidiary, Kaspersky Government Security Solutions, or KGSS, and began hosting an annual cybersecurity summit in Washington.

In 2015, the keynote address at the annual conference was delivered by Michael Flynn, then the recently departed head of the Defense Intelligence Agency who would go on to briefly become President Trump's national security adviser. Flynn was paid more than \$11,000 for the appearance, which he initially failed to disclose this year when he joined the White House.

The company never became a major player in U.S. government markets. Popular American firms, often with executives who had their own ties to U.S. intelligence agencies, routinely beat out Kaspersky for the largest federal contracts and defense work.

Three current and former defense contractors told The Post that they knew of no specific warnings circulated about Kaspersky in recent years, but it has become an unwritten rule at the Pentagon not to include Kaspersky as a potential vendor on new projects.

Another former U.S. official said some congressional staffers were warned by federal law enforcement officials as early as November 2015 not to meet with employees from Kaspersky over concerns of electronic surveillance.

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the matter.

Skepticism of Kaspersky became public in May when a panel of U.S. intelligence community leaders testified before Congress that they wouldn't use the firm's software on their own computers. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) noted the widespread use of the software and asked, “Would any of you be comfortable with the Kaspersky Lab software on your computers?”

“A resounding no from me,” said acting FBI director Andrew McCabe. CIA Director Mike Pompeo, Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats and National Security Agency Director Adm. Michael S. Rogers also said they would not use Kaspersky.

National News Alerts

Major national and political news as it breaks.

The government's unease about Kaspersky follows the conclusion by U.S. intelligence agencies that Russian President Vladimir Putin last year ordered a campaign of

cyberattacks to undermine the election. The Justice Department has named a special counsel to investigate possible coordination between Trump's associates and Russian officials during the campaign.

James Lewis, a cybersecurity expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said “it's difficult, if not impossible” for a company like Kaspersky to be headquartered in Moscow “if you don't cooperate with the government and the intelligence services.”

Kaspersky has worked to protect its image since the GSA decision. It said this month that it would be willing to turn over its software source code to federal investigators.

The Senate Armed Services Committee this month unanimously adopted an amendment by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) that would force the government to strip Kaspersky from any government systems connected to defense networks. In a statement, Shaheen said the Trump administration and Congress should go further and require all government systems to drop Kaspersky.

“The ties between Kaspersky Lab and the Kremlin are very alarming,” Shaheen said.



Kushner to face intel committee on Monday behind closed doors

By Devlin Barrett
7-9 minutes

again in private — by the House Intelligence Committee the following day.

Kushner is not the only one close to the president facing greater scrutiny from Congress. The Senate Judiciary Committee had planned to question Donald Trump Jr. and former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort this week, but that has been delayed indefinitely while the committee continues to negotiate with the men's attorneys for documents and information.

Looming over all those discussions is the probe by Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III — a criminal investigation to see if there was coordination between agents of the Russian government and advisers to Trump during the campaign. That probe is also looking into possible financial misdeeds by Manafort and others, according to people familiar with the inquiries.

[Trump team seeks to control, block Mueller's Russia investigation]

Some lawyers not involved in the case expressed surprise that, given the potential legal pitfalls of the

criminal investigation, Kushner or any other Trump advisers would take the risk of talking to Congress, given that such statements could be used against them later by criminal prosecutors.

“It's a very difficult tightrope to walk,” said Justin Dillon, a former federal prosecutor now in private practice. “He has to balance the political fallout from taking the Fifth Amendment with the potential criminal fallout of talking.”

Dillon predicted anything Kushner tells the committee will be shared with Mueller.

The Kushner interview also comes after the president and his legal team have discussed his power to pardon those close to him and even himself. After a Washington Post report on those conversations, the president tweeted this weekend that he has “complete power to pardon.”

Dillon said the possibility of a future pardon could affect Kushner's overall legal strategy.

“No one who has paid any attention to this administration should doubt

that if Kushner ever needs a pardon, he will get one,” he said.

Through lawyers and his spokesman, Kushner has long insisted he did nothing wrong. Kushner attorney Abbe Lowell has said his client “is prepared to voluntarily cooperate and provide whatever information he has on the investigations to Congress.” He said Kushner “appreciates the opportunity to assist in putting this matter to rest.”

Kushner is expected to answer the committee's questions and not invoke his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, according to a person familiar with Kushner's thinking.

Kushner is not expected to be under oath during his questioning Monday — but that arrangement still poses significant legal risks to someone under investigation.

In 2009, baseball player Miguel Tejada pleaded guilty to the crime of making misrepresentations to Congress when he denied having conversations with another player about steroid and human growth

With some of the closest members of President Trump's campaign slated to testify before Senate committees investigating its ties with Russia, here's what lawmakers want to ask Trump's son, son-in-law and former campaign manager. Here's what lawmakers want to ask Trump's son, son-in-law and former campaign manager. (Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

(Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

Congressional investigators will question senior White House adviser Jared Kushner on Monday as the multiple probes into contacts between Russia and the Trump campaign intensify and focus more directly on those closest to the president.

Kushner is scheduled to meet behind closed doors with the Senate Intelligence Committee on Monday, then be questioned —

hormone. That interview with committee staffers took place behind closed doors, and Tejada was not under oath at the time.

Kushner is likely to face extensive questions about meetings he attended with Russian government officials or people connected to the Russian government.

In June 2016, he attended a meeting at Trump Tower in New York arranged by his brother in law, Donald Trump Jr., on the premise that a lawyer had damaging information about Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. That meeting is also being investigated by the FBI and Mueller.

[Here's what we know so far about Team Trump's ties to Russian interests]

Washington lawyer Karina V. Lynch said Sunday that she has been hired to help represent the president's oldest son, Donald Trump Jr.

Lynch previously served as legal counsel to investigative committees on Capitol Hill, including serving as investigative counsel to Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa), who pressed for Trump Jr. to testify behind closed doors this week to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Lynch said she will supplement rather than replace Alan Futerfas, who has handled Trump Jr.'s response to the revelation about the June 2016 meeting.

Investigators have also been interested in meetings Kushner had in December — after Trump's

election but before he was sworn in as president. That month, he met with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, and then later met with Sergey Gorkov, head of Vnesheconbank, which has been under U.S. sanctions since 2014.

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

The bank has said the session was to talk to Kushner about his family's real estate business. The White House has said the meeting was unrelated to business and was part of Kushner's busy diplomatic schedule.

Kushner's meetings with foreigners, and Russians in particular, have become a sticking point for his security clearance process.

Three times since January, Kushner has filed updates to his national security questionnaire, to add previously undisclosed meetings with foreign officials. Such mistakes can have significant legal and career consequences for government employees, because it is a crime to submit false information on such forms.

One update added more than 100 calls or meetings with representatives of more than 20 countries, most of which came during the presidential transition, according to one of Kushner's lawyers, who have said he did nothing wrong and his meetings simply reflect his role as Trump's principle adviser on foreign policy issues.

POLITICO Kushner defends his Russia contacts: 'I did not collude'

By Annie Karni

9-11 minutes

"I had no improper contacts" with Russia, he says. | AP Photo

In his prepared statement to Congress, the president's son-in-law recounts but downplays four meetings with Russians.

In his first public defense of his meetings with Russian officials during Donald Trump's campaign and transition, Jared Kushner is presenting his encounters with those operatives as innocent interactions, according to testimony submitted ahead of a high-stakes, closed-door grilling session before the Senate Intelligence Committee on Monday.

In an 11-page opening statement provided to reporters in advance of his 10 a.m. appointment with the panel, which is part of the ongoing investigation into possible collusion between Russian officials and the Trump campaign, Kushner — now a senior White House adviser — attempts to exonerate himself, writing: "I did not collude, nor know of anyone else in the campaign who colluded, with any foreign government."

Story Continued Below

Instead, the powerful son-in-law paints a picture of himself as a loyal, overworked, under-experienced senior adviser to his father-in-law during a novice campaign that was never staffed up to win.

The former real estate developer also blames the glaring omissions on his security clearance forms — which did not originally include

several meetings with Russian officials that have since come to light — on an honest mistake made by his assistant at the time. And like others in the Trump orbit who met with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak before Inauguration Day, Kushner also said he had trouble remembering the official after their first brief, previously unreported encounter at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. — the same event where Attorney General Jeff Sessions met with, but didn't remember, the Russian ambassador.

"I am not a person who has sought the spotlight," Kushner says in his opening statement, according to a copy provided to POLITICO. But he explains that after Trump clinched the Republican nomination, his father-in-law asked Kushner to be the point of contact for foreign governments, and he was in touch with emissaries from 15 different countries, including Russia. To put his hectic life and schedule into context — and explain away his presence at a meeting where a Russian lawyer was hawking opposition research about Hillary Clinton — he also writes that he typically received about 200 emails a day during the campaign, and often didn't read through every exchange.

In his opening testimony, he walks through each of his four meetings with the Russians, downplaying all of them to brief, pro forma interactions that lead to no follow-ups.

"I had no ongoing relationship with the Ambassador before the election, and had limited knowledge about him then," he writes of Kislyak, with whom he reportedly tried to set up a communications backchannel

during the transition. "In fact, on November 9, the day after the election, I could not even remember the name of the Russian Ambassador."

Trying to prove his point, he adds: "when the campaign received an email purporting to be an official note of congratulations from President Putin, I was asked how we could verify it was real. To do so I thought the best way would be to ask the only contact I recalled meeting from the Russian government, which was the Ambassador I had met months earlier, so I sent an email asking Mr. [Demetri] Simes [the publisher of a foreign policy magazine], 'What is the name of the Russian ambassador?'"

Kushner also responds to a Reuters report that he had two follow-up calls with Kislyak. "A comprehensive review of my landline and cell phone records from the time does not reveal those calls," he says of the reported calls in April and August of 2016.

His second interaction with a Russian official was the now infamous Donald Trump, Jr. meeting with the Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, that June.

Kushner claims he had no idea what he was walking into. An email from his brother-in-law reminds him of the time change to 4 p.m. for the Trump Tower meeting, and Kushner writes that it was not abnormal to pop into each other's offices for meetings. "That email was on top of a long back and forth that I did not read at the time," he writes. "Documents confirm my memory that this was calendared as 'Meeting: Don Jr. Jared Kushner. No one else was mentioned.'"

The meeting, where Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, Trump, Jr., and campaign operative Paul Manafort and four other people were discussing Russian adoptions and were gathered to exchange information about Hillary Clinton, was outside of his purview, he writes.

"I actually emailed an assistant from the meeting after I had been there for ten or so minutes and wrote 'Can u pls call me on my cell? Need excuse to get out of meeting,' Kushner writes. "No part of the meeting I attended included anything about the campaign, there was no follow up to the meeting that I am aware of, I do not recall how many people were there (or their names), and I have no knowledge of any documents being offered or accepted."

His third and final contact with a potential Russian agent, he claims, was a hoax email he received from a hacker trying to obtain Trump's tax returns.

During the transition, he said, his only meeting with Kislyak lasted 23 minutes.

"I stated our desire for a fresh start in relation," he says of the meeting where Kushner reportedly tried to set up a backchannel of communication. It was Kislyak, Kushner writes, that brought up U.S. policy in Syria, and said "he wanted to convey information from what he called 'his generals,'" Kushner writes. "He said he wanted to provide information that would help inform the new administration. He said the generals could not easily come to the U.S. to convey this information and he asked if there was a secure line in the transition office to conduct a conversation."

Former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn and Kushner explained to him that there was not. "I believed developing a thoughtful approach on Syria was a very high priority given the ongoing humanitarian crisis," he explains. "and I asked if they had an existing communications channel at his embassy we could use where they would be comfortable transmitting the information they wanted to relay to General Flynn. The Ambassador said that would not be possible and so we all agreed that we would receive this information after the Inauguration."

Kushner said he declined two attempts by Kislyak in December for a follow-up, eventually sending his assistant instead. It was there that Kislyak recommended that Kushner sit down with Sergey Gorkov, the head of a Kremlin-linked Russian bank. All that was exchanged, he said, was a

humble piece of art and a bag of dirt from the Belarus village where his grandparents were born.

"There were no specific policies discussed," he said. "We had no discussion about the sanctions imposed by the Obama Administration. At no time was there any discussion about my companies, business transactions, real estate projects, loans, banking arrangements or any private business of any kind."

The Putin-linked bank, however, has provided a different explanation. The Washington Post reported that the bank claimed the meeting was part of a new business strategy and that it was held with Kushner in his role as the head of his family's real estate business, Kushner Companies.



Reynolds: Forget Russia. I'd fire Jeff Sessions over civil forfeiture.

Glenn Harlan Reynolds, Opinion columnist

4-5 minutes

Published 5:00 a.m. ET July 24, 2017 | Updated 8:37 a.m. ET July 24, 2017

Once in America, we had a presumption of innocence. Now all it takes is the feds having a 'suspicion' for them to take your stuff.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions on July 21, 2017. (Photo: Matt Rourke, AP)

Attorney General Jeff Sessions wants to steal from you.

Oh, he doesn't call it that. He calls it "civil forfeiture." But what it is, is theft by law enforcement. Sessions should be ashamed. If I were president, he'd be fired.

Under "civil forfeiture," law enforcement can take property from people under the legal fiction that the property itself is guilty of a crime. ("Legal fiction" sounds better than "lie," but in this case the two terms are near synonyms.) It was originally sold as a tool for going after the assets of drug kingpins,

but nowadays it seems to be used against a lot of ordinary Americans who just have things that law enforcement wants. It's also a way for law enforcement agencies to maintain off-budget slush funds, thus escaping scrutiny.

As Drug Enforcement Agency agent Sean Waite told the *Albuquerque Journal*, "We don't have to prove that the person is guilty. ... It's that the money is presumed to be guilty."

"Presumed to be guilty." Once in America, we had a presumption of innocence. But that was inconvenient to the powers that be.

The problem is pretty widespread: In 2015, *The Washington Post* reported that law enforcement took more stuff from people than burglars did.

And it's not only a species of theft; it's a species of corruption. Starting in 1984, law enforcement agencies were allowed to retain the assets they seized instead of paying them into the general treasury. Not surprisingly, this has led to abuses in which law enforcement targets individuals based on how much money it can get and how easily it can get it, not on their status as criminals. What's more, by retaining

As for the confusion about his security clearance forms, he blames the omissions on an assistant.

"[People at my New York office] sent an email to my assistant in Washington, communicating that the changes to one particular section were complete; my assistant interpreted that message as meaning that the entire form was completed," he writes. "At that point, the form was a rough draft and still had many omissions including not listing any foreign government contacts and even omitted the address of my father-in-law (which was obviously well known). Because of this miscommunication, my assistant submitted the draft on January 18, 2017."

Kushner is so rarely heard from in public that when he spoke, briefly, at a tech conference earlier this summer, many people joked they didn't know what his voice sounded

like. "It has been my practice not to appear in the media or leak information in my own defense," Kushner notes in his testimony. But it won't be his last time on the stand.

Kushner, who will face a second grilling by the House on Tuesday, has been preparing for both sessions with his lawyers. He claims, at the end of his lengthy statement: "I had no improper contacts. I have not relied on Russian funds to finance my business activities in the private sector. I have tried to be fully transparent with regard to the filing of my SF-86 form, above and beyond what is required."

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these assets, law enforcement agencies have money to do things that the legislatures haven't chosen to fund. That undermines democracy.

As deputy Ron Hain of Kane County, Ill., put it, according to *The Post*: "All of our hometowns are sitting on a tax-liberating gold mine."

In one case, law enforcement seized a student's luggage and money because the bags smelled like marijuana. In another, officers seized a man's life savings because the series of deposits from his convenience store looked to them like he was laundering money.

Of course, it's especially easy to be suspicious of people when those suspicions let you transfer their bank accounts into yours.

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

Some states have required that people be convicted of a crime before the government can seize their assets, but the feds have no such requirement. Congress should enact one. As the editors of *National Review* write:

"This is almost certainly unconstitutional, something that

conservatives ought to understand instinctively. Like the Democrats' crackpot plan to revoke the Second Amendment rights of U.S. citizens who have been neither charged with nor convicted of a crime simply for having been fingered as suspicious persons by some anonymous operative in Washington, seizing an American's property because a police officer merely suspects that he might be a drug dealer or another species of miscreant does gross violence to the basic principle of due process."

They're right, and Congress should act.

In the meantime, Sessions is doing exactly the wrong thing by doubling down on asset seizure. The message it sends is that the feds see the rest of us as prey, not as citizens.

The attorney general should be ashamed to take that position. And, really, he should just be gone.

Glenn Harlan Reynolds, a University of Tennessee law professor and the author of The New School: How the Information Age Will Save American Education from Itself, is a member of USA TODAY's Board of Contributors.



Senate Republicans Unsure of What Health-Care Measure They Will Vote On

Natalie Andrews, Stephanie Armour and Kristina Peterson

5-7 minutes

July 23, 2017 6:07 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—Senate Republicans are expected to vote as early as Tuesday to begin debate on their sweeping health-care legislation—but they don't

know yet what measure they will be voting on.

Some senators said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) has told them they would know before the vote whether they would be asked

to allow debate on some version of a bill to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, or legislation that would repeal the ACA with a two-year expiration date.

GOP leaders' current strategy is to lean heavily on lawmakers to at least vote to allow debate on the bill, in the hopes that amendments and other tweaks could yield an agreement.

But the plan carries some risk. If the "motion to proceed" fails, it would mark a defeat for President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans, and could end their current efforts to overhaul the ACA, also called Obamacare, a seven-year Republican campaign promise.

There has been little evidence that senators who opposed the latest version of the bill earlier this month have reversed course.

Sen. Rand Paul (R., Ky.), a leading conservative, dismissed the Republican bill Sunday on CNN's State of the Union as a "porkfest" that bails out insurers. He said he would vote to begin debate as long as there would be an opportunity to vote on a repeal measure.

Mr. McConnell's challenge is that with a narrow 52-48 majority, he can afford to lose no more than two Republican senators, with Vice President Mike Pence breaking a 50-50 tie if necessary. Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) announced recently he has brain cancer, and the timing of his return to Congress remains uncertain, making the math

even more precarious.

Mr. McCain tweeted on Friday that he would "support whatever health-care plan" Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, a Republican, endorses. Mr. Ducey criticized a version of the GOP health plan in June for not doing enough to help his state's Medicaid population.

Republican leaders are urgently trying to win back defectors among the conservative and centrist wings of their party. Negotiations with centrists like Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, for example, are focusing largely on possible changes to soften the impact of the bill's Medicaid cuts, but so far none of the holdouts have announced a change of heart.

Sen. Bob Corker (R., Tenn.), who supports opening debate, said recently he was concerned about Republican leaders' moves to appease the reluctant senators.

"It's feeling like a bazaar, like.... we're throwing money in a lot of different directions but potentially not moving in a place that's coherent," Mr. Corker told reporters recently.

Sen. Susan Collins (R., Maine) said on Sunday on CBS's Face the Nation that senators had no idea what they would be voting on Tuesday. "I don't think that's a good

approach to facing legislation that affects millions of people and one-sixth of our economy," she said, calling for hearings on the bill.

Mr. Trump, urging Republicans to unify, tweeted Saturday that "The Republican Senators must step up to the plate and, after 7 years, vote to Repeal and Replace."

The president is traveling to West Virginia on Monday with Ms. Capito, but the audience is 40,000 Boy Scouts and it is unclear if he will talk about health care. Republicans say their effort, which aims to cut back on the ACA's insurance regulations and significantly cut the Medicaid program, would lower premiums and give consumers more choice.

Democrats say it would leave many more Americans uninsured. The Nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that under the GOP bill, about 22 million fewer people would have coverage by 2026 relative to the current law, and a repeal bill would leave an estimated 32 million fewer people insured.

Democrats are criticizing both the process and the content of the Republican effort, including the fact that no female senators were included in an initial GOP Senate working group, though Mr. McConnell later broadened the

conversation to include all 52 Senate Republicans. Three female GOP senators—Ms. Collins, Ms. Capito and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska—have since emerged as strong opponents of the repeal-only option.

"It was a pretty stupid thing to just put men in that room. That likely comes with consequences," said Sen. Chris Murphy (D., Conn.).

Mr. Murphy noted that the women senators' resistance matched their constituents' concerns. "Lisa, Susan and Shelley would be your natural opposition to this kind of bill, given the states they come from," he said.

Other GOP women senators noted that not all of them were opposing the procedural motion.

"Three out of five. Two of us aren't," said Sen. Deb Fischer (R., Neb.), referring to herself and Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa.

Write to Natalie Andrews at Natalie.Andrews@wsj.com, Stephanie Armour at stephanie.armour@wsj.com and Kristina Peterson at kristina.peterson@wsj.com

Appeared in the July 24, 2017, print edition as 'Uncertainty Surrounds Health-Care Bill.'



Republicans are in full control of government — but losing control of their party (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/costareports>

11-13 minutes

Six months after seizing complete control of the federal government, the Republican Party stands divided as ever — plunged into a messy war among its factions that has escalated in recent weeks to crisis levels.

Frustrated lawmakers are increasingly sounding off at a White House awash in turmoil and struggling to accomplish its legislative goals. President Trump is scolding Republican senators over health care and even threatening electoral retribution. Congressional leaders are losing the confidence of their rank and file. And some major GOP donors are considering using their wealth to try to force out recalcitrant incumbents.

"It's a lot of tribes within one party, with many agendas, trying to do what they want to do," Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-N.J.) said in an interview.

The intensifying fights threaten to derail efforts to overhaul the nation's tax laws and other initiatives that GOP leaders hope will put them back on track. The party remains bogged down by a months-long health-care endeavor that still lacks the support to become law, although Senate GOP leaders plan to vote on it this week.

With his priorities stalled and Trump consumed by staff changes and investigations into Russian interference in last year's election, Republicans are adding fuel to a political fire that is showing no signs of burning out. The conflict also heralds a potentially messy 2018 midterm campaign with fierce intra-party clashes that could draw resources away from fending off Democrats.

"It's very sad that Republicans, even some that were carried over the line on my back, do very little to protect their President," Trump wrote on Twitter Sunday afternoon, marking the latest sign of the president's uneasy relationship with his own party.

Winning control of both chambers and the White House has done little to fill in the deep and politically damaging ideological fault lines that plagued the GOP during Barack Obama's presidency and ripped the party apart during the 2016 presidential primary. Now, Republicans have even more to lose.

"In the 50 years I've been involved, Republicans have yet to figure out how to support each other," said R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr., the founder of the *American Spectator*, a conservative magazine.

On Capitol Hill, Republicans are increasingly concerned that Trump has shown no signs of being able to calm the party. What Rep. Charlie Dent (R-Pa.) called the "daily drama" at the White House flared again last week when Trump shook up his communications staff and told the *New York Times* that he regretted picking Jeff Sessions to be his attorney general.

"This week was supposed to be 'Made in America Week' and we were talking about Attorney General Jeff Sessions," Dent grumbled in a

telephone interview Thursday, citing White House messaging campaigns that were overshadowed by the controversies.

[At the White House, an abrupt chain reaction: Spicer out, Scaramucci and Sanders in]

As Trump dealt with continued conflicts among his staff — which culminated Friday in press secretary Sean Spicer resigning in protest after wealthy financier Anthony Scaramucci was named communications director — he set out to try to resolve the Senate Republican impasse over health care.

The president had a small group of Republican senators over for dinner last Monday night to talk about the issue. But the discussion veered to other subjects, including Trump's trip to Paris and the Senate's 60-vote threshold for most legislation, which Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has said he will not end. That didn't stop Trump from wondering aloud about its usefulness.

"He asked the question, 'Why should we keep it?'" recalled Sen.

James Lankford (R-Okla.), who attended the dinner.

Two days later, some Republican senators left a White House lunch confused about what Trump was asking them to do on health care. Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said the next day that while the president "made very clear" that "he wants to see a bill pass, I'm unclear, having heard the president and read his tweets, exactly which bill he wants to pass."

The White House says the president prefers to "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare. McConnell has also raised the prospect of moving to only repeal the law. Neither option has enough votes. Nevertheless, McConnell plans to hold a vote early this week and bring the push to fulfill a seven-year campaign promise to its conclusion, one way or the other.

"One of the things that united our party has been the pledge to repeal Obamacare since the 2010 election cycle," said White House legislative affairs director Marc Short. "So when we complete that, I think that will help to unite" the party.

Trump's allies on Capitol Hill have described the dynamic between the White House and GOP lawmakers as a "disconnect" between Republicans who are still finding it difficult to accept that he is the leader of the party that they have long controlled.

"The disconnect is between a president who was elected from outside the Washington bubble and people in Congress who are of the Washington bubble," said Sen. David Perdue (R-Ga.), who works closely with the White House. "I don't think some people in the Senate understand the mandate that Donald Trump's election represented."

Trump issued a casual threat at the Wednesday lunch against Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.), who has not embraced McConnell's health-care bill. "Look, he wants to remain a senator, doesn't he?" Trump said in front of a pack of reporters as Heller, sitting directly to his right, grinned through the uncomfortable moment.

Heller is up for reelection in a state that Trump lost to Hillary Clinton and where Gov. Brian Sandoval (R) was the first Republican to expand Medicaid under the ACA. Heller later brushed the moment off as "President Trump being President Trump."

But some donors say they are weighing whether to financially back primary challengers against Republican lawmakers unwilling to support Trump's aims.

"Absolutely we should be thinking about that," said Frank VanderSloot, a billionaire chief executive of an Idaho nutritional-supplement company. He bemoaned the "lack of courage" some lawmakers have shown and wished representatives would "have the guts" to vote the way they said they would on the campaign trail.

[Trump threatens electoral consequences for senators who oppose health-care bill]

It's not just the gulf between Trump and Republican senators that has strained relations during the health-care debate. The way McConnell and his top deputies have handled the legislation has drawn sharp criticism from some GOP senators.

"No," said Sen. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), when asked last week whether he was happy with the way leadership has navigated the talks.

As he stepped into a Senate office building elevator the same day, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) would not respond to reporter questions about how good a job McConnell has done managing the health-care push. He flashed a smile as the door closed.

McConnell has defended his strategy, saying the process has been open to Republican senators, who have discussed it in many lunches and smaller meetings. Still, when it came time to write the bill, it was only McConnell and a small group of aides who did it. There was no outreach at all to Democrats, who have been united in their opposition.

In the House, the prospect of passing a 2018 budget this summer and a spending bill with funding for the Mexican border wall that Trump

has called for remain uncertain, even though Republicans have a sizeable majority in the chamber. GOP disagreements have continued to erupt during Speaker Paul D. Ryan's (R-Wis.) tenure. There are also obstacles in both chambers to achieving tax reform, which is expected to be among the next significant GOP legislative undertakings.

Trump critics said the ongoing controversies over Russian interference in the 2016 election and probes into potential coordination with the president's associates would make any improvement in relations all but impossible in the coming months, with many Republicans unsure whether Trump's presidency will survive.

"The Russia stories never stop coming," said Rick Wilson, a vocal anti-Trump consultant and GOP operative. "For Republicans, the stories never get better, either. There is no moment of clarity or admission."

Wilson said Republicans are also starting to doubt whether "the bargain they made — that they can endure Trump in order to pass X or Y" — can hold. "After a while, nothing really works and it becomes a train wreck."

[It's an insane process: How Trump and Republicans failed on their health-care bill]

Roger Stone, a longtime Trump associate, said Trump's battles with Republicans are unlikely to end and are entirely predictable, based on what Trump's victory signified.

"His nomination and election were a hostile takeover of the vehicle of the Republican Party," Stone said. He added, "When you talk to some Republicans who oppose Trump, they say they will keep opposing him but can't openly say it."

Some Republican lawmakers have been pained to talk about the president publicly, fearful of aggressively challenging their party leader but also wary of aligning too closely with some of his controversial statements or policy positions. Instead, they often attempt to focus on areas where they agree.

"On foreign policy, I think he very much is involved in a direction that's far more in alignment since he's been elected with a bulk of the United States Senate than during the campaign," said Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Amid the discord, there are some signs of collaboration. The Republican National Committee has worked to build ties to Trump and his family. In recent weeks, Trump's son Eric, his wife, Lara, and RNC chairwoman Ronna Romney McDaniel, among other committee officials, met at the Trump International Hotel in Washington to discuss upcoming races and strategy.

That meeting followed a similar gathering weeks earlier at the RNC where Trump family members were welcomed to share their suggestions, according to people familiar with the sessions who were not authorized to speak publicly.

The Daily 202 newsletter

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

Yet the friction keeps building. Among Trump's defenders, such as VanderSloot, who said the president is "trying to move the ball forward," there are concerns he is picking too many fights with too many people. "I think he's trying to swat too many flies," VanderSloot said.

The broader burden, some Republicans say, is to overcome a dynamic of disunity in the party that predates Trump and the current Congress. During the Obama years, it took the form of tea party-vs.-establishment struggles, which in some cases cost Republicans seats or led them to wage risky political feuds.

"There was a separation between Republicanism and conservatism long before he won the White House," said former Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele. "The glue has been coming apart since Reagan."

Kelsey Snell contributed to this report.

Read more at PowerPost



Krugman : Health Care Is Still in Danger

Paul Krugman
5-7 minutes

last week. Tom Brenner/The New York Times

Will Senate Republicans try to destroy health care under cover of a constitutional crisis? That's a serious question, based in part on what happened in the House earlier this year.

As you may remember, back in March attempts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act seemed dead after the Congressional Budget Office released a devastating assessment, concluding that the House Republican bill would lead to 23

million more uninsured Americans. Faced with intense media scrutiny and an outpouring of public opposition, House leaders pulled their bill, and the debate seemed over.

But then media attention moved on to presidential tweets and other

People protesting the Republican health care proposal on Capitol Hill

outrages — and with the spotlight off, House leaders bullied and bribed enough holdouts to narrowly pass a bill after all.

Could something similar happen in the Senate? A few days ago the Senate's equally awful version of repeal and replace — which the C.B.O. says would leave an extra 22 million people uninsured — seemed dead. And media attention has visibly shifted off the subject, focusing on juicier topics like the Russia-Trump story.

This shift in focus is understandable. After all, there is growing evidence that members of the Trump inner circle did indeed collude with Russia during the election; meanwhile, Trump's statements and tweets strongly suggest that he's willing both to abuse his pardon power and to fire Robert Mueller, provoking a constitutional crisis, rather than allow investigation into this scandal to proceed.

But while these developments dominate the news, neither Mitch McConnell nor the White House have given up on their efforts to deprive millions of health care. In fact, on Saturday the tweeter-in-chief, once again breaking long-

established rules of decorum, called on the audience at a military ceremony, the commissioning of a new aircraft carrier, to pressure the Senate to pass that bill.

This has many people I know worried that we may see a repeat of what happened in the spring: with the media spotlight shining elsewhere, the usual suspects may ram a horrible bill through. And the House would quickly pass whatever the Senate comes up with. So this is actually a moment of great risk.

One particular concern is that the latest round of falsehoods about health care, combined with the defamation of the C.B.O., may be gaining some political traction.

At this point the more or less official G.O.P. line is that the budget office — whose director, by the way, was picked by the Republicans themselves — can't be trusted. (This attack provoked an open letter of protest signed by every former C.B.O. director, Republicans and Democrats alike.) In particular, the claim is that its prediction of huge losses in coverage is outlandish, and that to the extent that fewer people would be covered, it would be due to their voluntary choices.

In reality, those C.B.O. predictions of coverage losses are totally reasonable, given the Senate bill's drastic cuts to Medicaid — 26 percent by 2026, and even deeper in the next decade. You have to wonder how someone like Senator Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia could even consider supporting this bill, when 34 percent of her nonelderly constituents are on Medicaid. The same goes for Jeff Flake of Arizona, where the corresponding number is 29 percent.

And on those claims that it's O.K. if people drop coverage, because that would be their own choice: It's crucial to realize that the Senate bill would degrade the quality of subsidized private insurance, leading to a huge rise in deductibles.

Current law provides enough in subsidies that an individual with an income of \$26,500 can afford a plan covering 70 percent of medical expenses, which, the C.B.O. estimates, implies an \$800 deductible. The Senate bill reduces that standard of coverage to 58 percent, which would raise the implied deductible to \$13,000, making the insurance effectively

useless. Would deciding not to buy that useless insurance really be a "choice"?

By the way, remember when Republicans like Paul Ryan used to denounce Obamacare because the insurance policies it offered had high deductibles? It's hypocrisy all the way down.

In short, the Senate bill is every bit as cruel and grotesque as its critics say. But we need to keep reminding wavering senators and their constituents of that fact, lest they be snowed by a blizzard of lies.

I'm not saying that everyone should ignore Trump-Putin-treason and all its ramifications: Clearly, the fate of our democracy is on the line. But we mustn't let this mother of all scandals take up all our mental bandwidth: Health care for millions is also on the line.

And while ordinary citizens can't yet do much about the looming constitutional crisis, their calls, letters, and protests can still make all the difference on health care. Don't let the bad guys in the Senate do terrible things because you weren't paying attention!



Durenberg: Resist the bullying. Don't vote for mystery health bill.

David Durenberger,

Opinion contributor

6-7 minutes

Published 3:15 a.m. ET July 24, 2017 | Updated 4:27 a.m. ET July 24, 2017

There will be no do-overs on this. Take it from me: a no vote this week is the only one that will be defensible in the years to come.

Former senator David Durenberger, R-Minn., in 1993. (Photo: AP)

What do you do when you are a U.S. senator and the president wants you to vote for a health care bill that could radically change health care?

You ask questions. You hold hearings. You understand what it would mean to your constituents. You listen to those who know the system. And when it doesn't add up, you vote against it.

The year was 1979, and I was a freshman Republican senator from Minnesota. Inflation was driving the already high costs of health care through the roof. President Carter wanted to use Medicare and Medicaid to limit increases in

hospital budgets in the face of rapidly inflating costs.

Ultimately, I decided to vote against it as it would end up hurting the people of my state and was inconsistent with my beliefs. And then, after the vote, we — Democrats and Republicans — launched an effort to learn how best to change the cost curve of the entire health system by focusing on how we pay for Medicare.

This week, the Senate once again is set to vote on a health care bill that will radically change how people get coverage and who can afford their care. But unlike normal times, Senators, you are being asked to approve a Motion to Proceed to a vote:

- Without knowing what will be in the bill you would vote on.
- Without knowing what the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office will say about the impact of major amendments and the final bill on coverage and premiums.
- With full knowledge that the Senate parliamentarian, who

rules on what can and can't be allowed in a budget bill, has said that the Senate must remove provisions intended to prevent an insurance market death spiral of sicker patients driving up costs.

- Without knowing the details of the secret state Medicaid waivers the Trump administration insists will make the bill work.
- Without knowing how your own state budget will be impacted.
- Without knowing how you will defend the provisions you will only learn about later, including the payoffs and other things that will be sneaked into the bill at the last minute.
- Without even knowing which bill you are being asked to vote on, what the defining amendments will be and how much time you will have when being pressed for a final vote you'll be stuck with. Forever.

A vote in these circumstances will rightly provoke anger and distrust unlikely to abate. Take it from me: A no vote on the Motion to Proceed this week is the only one that will be defensible in the years to come.

I have had my arm twisted by the best of them — presidents and Senate leaders and party whips alike. I know how uncomfortable it can be. Usually, they were able to attempt a convincing argument about what is good about the bill for the country or my state. But I never would have voted for something so far reaching without knowing the answer to all the questions above.

Never in all my years did I experience the level of bullying we see today. It doesn't look good in Minnesota, and I suspect it doesn't look any better in your state.

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

I know that some of you ran for office vowing to repeal the Affordable Care Act, hoping to improve coverage and decrease costs. As public opinion polls tell us, voters do not believe this bill does the job. The good news is we haven't run out of time to ask questions and to work together to fix what needs fixing if we take the time to return to regular order and hold hearings.

Seven years ago, Democrats supported a bill far from Democratic orthodoxy. It did not provide for single payer, nor Medicare for all. Not even a public option. They handed Republicans a chance to build a health system that plays to our unique strengths as a nation, not to our weaknesses.

As someone whose efforts earned the support of both Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush to reduce health care costs without leaving anyone behind, I know our party can do much better. But it should be obvious to all of you listening to your constituents that voting on

this hodgepodge of mysterious bills is not the way.

Because there are no do-overs. The vote for the Motion To Proceed is likely a vote for final passage, and the House clearly stands ready to pass the Senate bill unchanged.

There is no making good on all of the issues later. Once the funds for health coverage are gone, it will take new tax increases to replace them. And what's the likelihood that will happen?

There will be no hiding this vote. Let me assure you, as the official scorekeeper, the CBO will eventually score the entire bill, and

that's what your vote will be evaluated on.

For those who worry about re-election politics, I can assure you that going into a campaign confident that you've done what's best for every one of your constituents, not just for those who want to stick you with a stale slogan, is the best medicine you'll ever have prescribed for you.

David Durenberger, a Republican senator from Minnesota from 1978 to 1995, is a former chairman of the Senate Finance subcommittee on health. He retired in 2014 as chairman of the National Institute of

Health Policy at the University of St. Thomas.

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Democrats Bustos, Cicilline, Jeffries : Our plan for a better deal

Cheri Bustos, David Cicilline and Hakeem Jeffries

5-6 minutes

Story highlights

- House Democrats: Our constituents want a fighting chance at a brighter future for themselves and their families
- Our new economic agenda will work to create higher wages, lower costs and the tools Americans need to succeed

Reps. Cheri Bustos, David Cicilline and Hakeem Jeffries serve as co-chairs of the House Democratic Policy & Communications Committee. Bustos represents Illinois 17th Congressional District, Cicilline represents Rhode Island's 1st Congressional District and Jeffries represents New York's 8th Congressional District. The views expressed in this commentary are their own.

(CNN)Not a day goes by without another allegation or reckless tweet fueling the dysfunction of a deeply divided Republican Congress that fails to govern while hardworking families across the country are left behind. Mired in controversy, Washington Republicans are unable to uphold the basic bargain they made with the American people when they were elected: to fight to create new good-paying jobs and support sustained economic growth.

The simple truth is the economy isn't working the way it should; incomes and wages are not keeping up with the cost of living.

Wage stagnation, underemployment, the exploding cost of a college education and the erosion of pensions are leaving many without hope. From rural towns to inner cities, millions can no longer achieve the American dream. Meanwhile,

Washington special interests

and powerful corporations have acquired more and more wealth.

The three of us represent very different districts in Rhode Island, New York and Illinois. Despite the clear regional differences, what we hear from our constituents is the same: They are tired of this rigged system. What they want most is a fighting chance at building a brighter future for themselves and their families. And what they need is a better deal.

On Monday, House and Senate Democrats will come together to unveil

A Better Deal: Better Jobs, Better Wages, Better Future

, a bold economic agenda that works for all Americans to bring higher wages, lower costs and the tools Americans need to succeed.

Democrats will deliver real solutions, lasting economic growth and take significant action to improve the lives of the American people.

This agenda was created from the ground up across both the House

and the Senate, and includes input from across the entire ideological spectrum. By listening to all voices, the agenda reflects the beautiful mosaic and diversity of our country - as well as the hopes, dreams and aspirations of its people.

Through A Better Deal, we will create opportunities for those who need them most, not just those at the very top. We'll make government responsive to all hardworking Americans, not just a select few. And we'll make certain that if you work hard that you can support your family, that you can retire with the security and dignity that you've earned, and that your children can get the skills and knowledge they need to secure good-paying jobs in their hometowns.

For Democrats, this is our collective vision. This is not a slogan. It's who we are and what we intend to accomplish for the American people.

First, our plan starts by creating millions of good-paying, full-time jobs by directly investing in our crumbling infrastructure -- and putting people back to work building our roads and bridges. To help our small businesses thrive, we will prioritize entrepreneurs over giving tax breaks to special interests. We will fight for a living wage -- so parents don't have to work three or four jobs just to pay rent. And we will keep our promise to millions of workers who earned a pension, Social Security and Medicare so they can retire with dignity.

Second, we will lower the crippling cost of prescription drugs and the

cost of an education that leads to a good job with a college degree or a technical skill. And we will crack down on monopolies and the concentration of economic power that has led to higher prices for consumers, workers and small businesses -- and make sure Wall Street never endangers Main Street again.

Third, we will offer new tax incentives to employers to invest in their workforce through training and education. To make sure our country stays on the cutting edge, we will bring high-speed Internet to every community in America and offer an apprenticeship to millions of new workers. We will encourage innovation, invest in advanced research and ensure start-ups and small businesses can compete and prosper. By making it possible for every American to get the skills, tools and knowledge to find a job or to move up in their career, we'll not only improve individual lives, we'll also stay competitive in the global economy.

The choice we face is simple. We can continue down this path of a rigged system and allow Washington to turn a blind eye to painful economic realities that so many Americans are facing. Or we can stand on the side of the American people. We can invest in hardworking families and build an economy that puts Americans first -- defined by better jobs, better wages and a better future.



Democrats Pitch Populist Election Agenda

Natalie Andrews

July 23, 2017 7:19 p.m. ET

5-6 minutes

Democrats are launching a new policy agenda focused on the economy that seeks to bridge gaps

with voters amid polls showing most Americans don't know what the party stands for.

The proposals are in large part a response to Hillary Clinton's demoralizing loss to Donald Trump, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said Sunday, adding that

his party was too cautious and "namby-pamby" in 2016.

"When you lose an election with someone who has, say, 40% popularity, you look in the mirror and say, 'What did we do wrong?'" the New York senator told ABC's "This Week." "And the number one thing that we did wrong is we didn't tell people what we stood for."

The agenda, dubbed "A Better Deal" and scheduled to be rolled out Monday, is the result of months of polls and research. Democrats plan to hold an event in the district of Rep. Barbara Comstock, a Virginia Republican sitting in a district that Democrats see as vulnerable in 2018.

With a focus on winning congressional seats next year, the Democrats' new agenda has a distinctly populist tone, though it includes ideas the party's centrists can get behind as well, such as lower prescription-drug costs and improved access to broadband in rural areas. It also calls for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage and more regulation of Wall Street.

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I., Vt.) called for the \$15 minimum wage during

the presidential campaign, a higher rate than urged by Mrs. Clinton.

Among the most vexing issues for Democrats and Republicans is health care, given the widespread agreement that President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act can be improved and the GOP's struggle to craft a replacement.

"Many things are on the table," Mr. Schumer said. "Medicare for people above 55 is on the table. A buy-in to Medicare is on the table. Buy-in to Medicaid is on the table. On the broader issues, we will start examining them once we stabilize the system."

Medicare is the health-care program for people age 65 years and older, while Medicaid serves the poor and disabled.

The question is whether the "Better Deal"—an echo of Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal"—can unite the Democratic factions against a party led by a president who wrote "The Art of the Deal."

The Democrats' plan will compete against House Republicans' "A Better Way" agenda, which promotes conservative proposals

such as deregulation and a hawkish national security stance.

Since the election, Democrats have debated whether to move in a more populist direction, in a nod to the success of Mr. Trump and Mr. Sanders, or to focus on winning back the traditional Democratic base that powered Mr. Obama to two presidential victories.

"It will only be as good as we are disciplined," said Sen. Chris Murphy (D., Conn.). "Our failing historically has been to focus on very targeted demographic messages, cultural issues, rather than broad-based economic themes."

Republicans hold a narrow two-vote lead in the Senate. But they have few vulnerable members in that chamber, while 10 Democratic senators are facing re-election campaigns in states Mr. Trump won.

In the House, Democrats would need to take 24 seats to win the majority. To do that, the party is targeting 23 districts that Mrs. Clinton won as a starting point, as well as hoping to pick up ones that Mr. Trump won by a slim margin.

The Republican Senate campaign committee responded to the new agenda. "Democrats are struggling to find a message, but even if they do finally find a message that works, the odds of a Democrat-controlled Senate are still slim," the committee said in a news release.

The Senate and House Democratic campaign arms were involved in crafting the new message, but not all Democrats campaigning in 2018 are lining up behind the agenda.

Democrat Rep. Beto O'Rourke, who is challenging Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas for his seat in 2018, said he can speak only for his state.

"I'm focused on Texas, and the people I want to represent and the people I serve today," Mr. O'Rourke said. "I think we make a mistake anytime we allow somebody from another part of the country to dictate a message to our part of the country."

Write to Natalie Andrews at Natalie.Andrews@wsj.com

Appeared in the July 24, 2017, print edition as 'Democrats Pitch Populist Election Message.'

**The
New York
Times**

Chuck Schumer: A Better Deal for American Workers

Chuck Schumer
6-7 minutes

Chris Gash

Americans are clamoring for bold changes to our politics and our economy. They feel, rightfully, that both systems are rigged against them, and they made that clear in last year's election. American families deserve a better deal so that this country works for everyone again, not just the elites and special interests. Today, Democrats will start presenting that better deal to the American people.

There used to be a basic bargain in this country that if you worked hard and played by the rules, you could own a home, afford a car, put your kids through college and take a modest vacation every year while putting enough away for a comfortable retirement. In the second half of the 20th century, millions of Americans achieved this solid middle-class lifestyle. I should know — I grew up in that America.

But things have changed.

Today's working Americans and the young are justified in having greater doubts about the future than any generation since the Depression. Americans believe they're getting a raw deal from both the economic

and political systems in our country. And they are right. The wealthiest special interests can spend an unlimited, undisclosed amount of money to influence elections and protect their special deals in Washington. As a result, our system favors short-term gains for shareholders instead of long-term benefits for workers.

And for far too long, government has gone along, tilting the economic playing field in favor of the wealthy and powerful while putting new burdens on the backs of hard-working Americans.

Democrats have too often hesitated from taking on those misguided policies directly and unflinchingly — so much so that many Americans don't know what we stand for. Not after today. Democrats will show the country that we're the party on the side of working people — and that we stand for three simple things.

First, we're going to increase people's pay. Second, we're going to reduce their everyday expenses. And third, we're going to provide workers with the tools they need for the 21st-century economy.

Over the next several months, Democrats will lay out a series of policies that, if enacted, will make these three things a reality. We've already proposed creating jobs with a \$1 trillion infrastructure plan;

increasing workers' incomes by lifting the minimum wage to \$15; and lowering household costs by providing paid family and sick leave.

On Monday we are announcing three new policies to advance our goals.

Right now, there is nothing to stop vulture capitalists from egregiously raising the price of lifesaving drugs without justification. We're going to fight for rules to stop prescription drug price gouging and demand that drug companies justify price increases to the public. And we're going to push for empowering Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices for older Americans.

Right now our antitrust laws are designed to allow huge corporations to merge, padding the pockets of investors but sending costs skyrocketing for everything from cable bills and airline tickets to food and health care. We are going to fight to allow regulators to break up big companies if they're hurting consumers and to make it harder for companies to merge if it reduces competition.

Right now millions of unemployed or underemployed people, particularly those without a college degree, could be brought back into the labor force or retrained to secure full-time, higher-paying work. We propose giving employers, particularly small

businesses, a large tax credit to train workers for unfilled jobs. This will have particular resonance in smaller cities and rural areas, which have experienced an exodus of young people who aren't trained for the jobs in those areas.

In the coming months, we'll offer additional ideas, from rebuilding rural America to fundamentally changing our trade laws to benefit workers, not multinational corporations.

We are in the minority in both houses of Congress; we cannot promise anyone that this Congress will begin passing our priorities tomorrow. But we have to start raising our voices to present our vision for the country's future. We will seek the support of any Republicans willing to work with us, but more important, we must start rallying the American people to support our ideas.

In the last two elections, Democrats, including in the Senate, failed to articulate a strong, bold economic program for the middle class and those working hard to get there. We also failed to communicate our values to show that we were on the side of working people, not the special interests. We will not repeat the same mistake. This is the start of a new vision for the party, one strongly supported by House and Senate Democrats.

Our better deal is not about expanding the government, or moving our party in one direction or another along the political spectrum. Nor is it about tearing down government agencies that work,

that effectively protect consumers and promote the health and well-being of the country. It's about reorienting government to work on behalf of people and families.

Americans from every corner of this country know that the economy isn't working for them the way that it should, and they wonder if it ever will again. One party says the answer is that special interests

should continue to write the rules and that government ought to make things easier for an already-favored few.

Democrats will offer a better deal.

**The
Washington
Post**

Editorial: Mr. Trump's election commission is fully transparent about its purpose: Voter obstruction

<https://www.facebook.com/washingtonpostopinions>

11-14 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).

July 23 at 6:17 PM

AT THE inaugural meeting of President Trump's already embattled voter integrity commission last week, one member, Maine Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap, expressed relief that despite bitter controversy over the panel's mission, at least no one had questioned the legitimacy of the 2016 presidential election. A few hours later, the

commission's vice chairman, Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, questioned the legitimacy of the 2016 presidential election.

In an appearance on MSNBC, Mr. Kobach, a Republican titan of voter suppression who has been repeatedly sued for his relentless efforts to cull voters from the rolls of his home state, was asked if he believed that Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes, as the official tally indicates. "You know," said Mr. Kobach, "we may never know the answer to that question."

In fact, not a speck of evidence exists to cast doubt on the official tally of the popular vote, nor, for that matter, on the electoral vote. Still, the offhand remark was in keeping with Mr. Kobach's years-long effort, along with that of other Republicans, to erode public confidence in American elections to provide a pretext for tough state laws whose real goal is to obstruct voting by minorities and young people, who tend to support Democrats.

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Formed by Mr. Trump after he falsely asserted that 3 to 5 million votes were cast illegally in the 2016 election, the commission includes members, in addition to Mr. Kobach, known for their histories of voter obstruction. One, former Ohio secretary of state J. Kenneth Blackwell, a Republican, is notorious for trying to reject registration forms submitted on paper that was too thin, and for trying to impede voter registration drives. Another, Hans Von Spakovsky, a former Justice Department official, led a failed attempt to purge voter rolls in Missouri.

At the commission's meeting, some officials talked sense. Alan King, a probate judge who oversees elections in Jefferson County, Ala., which includes Birmingham, stressed the importance of new funding for modern voting equipment. Another, Mr. Dunlap, described an investigation into allegations of double-voting by 300 out-of-state students attending Maine colleges, but also registered

at home; it turned out they had only voted once.

No doubt, voter lists nationwide must be kept clean and up-to-date. But glitches, inconsistencies and double registrations — often caused by people who move from one state to another, or whose names remain on the rolls posthumously — are not the sinister indication of fraud that champions of suppression like Mr. Kobach pretend. The relentless suggestions to the contrary, even in the absence of proof of any widespread illegal voting, has had the intended effect: Americans' confidence in the honesty of elections has fallen steadily for almost a decade, according to a Gallup poll, and sharply last year as Mr. Trump harped on alleged vote "rigging."

An honest election commission would make constructive suggestions for systemic improvements while at the same time debunking the patently phony idea that fraud is common. In this case, however, Mr. Kobach and his allies have an all-too-transparent agenda.

**The
New York
Times**

Blow: The Kook, 'the Mooch' and the Loot

Charles M. Blow

6-7 minutes

Anthony Scaramucci, the new White House communications director, speaking at a briefing on Friday. Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times

On Friday, a "president" with no political experience brought on a communications director with no communications experience.

Trump tapped Anthony Scaramucci, a Wall Street snake investment huckster, to be the new communications director, a move that caused Press Secretary Sean Spicer, who The New York Times reported "vehemently disagreed with the appointment," to resign.

So, let me get this straight: Spicer was just fine with regularly walking out to that podium to spew and spin Trump's lies, but hiring "the Mooch,"

as Scaramucci is known, was the back-breaker? O.K., whatever, Sean.

This illustrates best what is wrong with this communications shop, and by extension, this administration: No one is concerned with the truth; they are only concerned with their own trajectories.

Nothing about this White House communications department was ever about communicating. On the contrary, it has always been about deception, concealment and equivocation. Informing the public was never the mission. Flattering Trump was the mission. But in the end, Trump will never be satisfied, because successful communications for him is to get people to buy his pack of lies, and that isn't really working the way it once did.

Nothing will change with the arrival of the Mooch Communications Office because nothing has

changed about the kook in the Oval Office. (Some may find that descriptor harsh, but I find no appellation too coarse to express my outrage over Trump's character, behavior and agenda. If anything, no word feels grave enough to properly express it.)

Trump is suffering horrendous approval ratings, an impotent legislative agenda and his irrepressible impulse to shove his foot in his mouth. There is no real way to better package this disaster.

For that reason, I found this shake-up far less interesting than the developments last week about the inexorably advancing Russia investigation.

Maybe it's just me, but I'm not interested in palace intrigue; I'm interested in the increasing possibility of prison and maybe even impeachment.

Think about all that happened last week: Donald Trump Jr. and the

former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort were invited to testify in open session before the Senate Judiciary Committee about that shady meeting they had in Trump Tower with a Russian lawyer. And Trump gave an astoundingly bizarre interview to The New York Times in which he publicly slammed his own attorney general, Jeff Sessions, for recusing himself from the Russia investigation and drew a "red line," warning that Mueller should not investigate the Trump family's business dealings.

Reuters reported: "The Russian lawyer who met Donald Trump Jr. after his father won the Republican nomination for the 2016 U.S. presidential election counted Russia's F.S.B. security service among her clients for years, Russian court documents seen by Reuters show."

The Times also reported: "Banking regulators are reviewing hundreds of millions of dollars in loans made

to Mr. Trump's businesses through Deutsche Bank's private wealth management unit, which caters to an ultrarich clientele, according to three people briefed on the review who were not authorized to speak publicly."

The Times report continued: "Separately, Deutsche Bank has been in contact with federal investigators about the Trump accounts, according to two people briefed on the matter. And the bank is expecting to eventually have to provide information to Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel overseeing the federal investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

5-7 minutes

July 23, 2017 5:29 p.m. ET

Having so far failed to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, the best way forward for Republicans would be to work with Democrats to improve the marketplaces set up by the 2010 law. While legislation could help, all that really is needed for the marketplaces to succeed is for the Trump administration to do no harm. This means continuing to implement the law without actively undermining it.

The health-care marketplaces are stabilizing on their own now that insurers have made a one-time adjustment to bring premiums in line with claims costs. In 2014, when the marketplaces first opened for business, insurance companies generally underpriced their offerings. Since then states like Arizona, which had some of the lowest prices to start, have seen the largest premium increases. States like Ohio, where initial offerings were more accurately priced, have seen more-moderate increases. Overall, premiums in 2017 are within 1% of the projections made by the Congressional Budget Office in 2009.

President Trump and other critics argue the marketplaces are entering a "death spiral"—that is, a vicious circle of rising

The New York Times

5-6 minutes

Rose Wong

Not only did NBC report that "Marc Kasowitz is no longer leading the president's group of private lawyers," Politico reported that Mark Corallo, spokesman for the Trump legal team, resigned because he "was concerned about whether he was being told the truth about various matters."

If people on Trump's legal payroll are worried that they aren't being told the truth, how worried should the rest of us be? Very, I would venture.

Then there was the Washington Post report: "Some of President Trump's lawyers are exploring ways to limit or undercut" Mueller's Russia investigation, "building a case against what they allege are

his conflicts of interest and discussing the president's authority to grant pardons, according to people familiar with the effort."

The Post continued: "Trump has asked his advisers about his power to pardon aides, family members and even himself in connection with the probe, according to one of those people."

I understand the press giving a lot of attention to the drama of changing press people, but that doesn't even register against the import of what's happening on the Russia investigation front.

All those things that have never made sense — Trump's warm-and-fuzzies for Vladimir Putin, the mass

amnesia about meetings with Russians by people connected to the Trump campaign, Trump's prickly protectiveness about releasing financial details and documents, including his tax returns — must be made to make sense.

Mueller will not be threatened, the investigation will not be closed or constricted and the truth will be known. Incriminating personal communications are often hard to find, but financial records are often also kept by third parties and tell their own story.

As they say, follow the money.

Furman : Congress Won't End ObamaCare, So Here's How to Mend It

Jason Furman

premiums and an increasingly sicker pool of enrollees. But nothing remotely close to that has happened, largely because more than 80% of marketplace enrollees receive a subsidy that covers premium increases, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. Enrollment changes have been about the same, on average, in states with large premium increases and states with flat or declining premiums. This follows several years in which the risk pool has remained stable or even improved, as proven by claims costs, young adults' share of marketplace enrollment, and risk scores.

Several insurers have withdrawn from some markets—or the marketplaces entirely—but there remains a powerful incentive for insurers to stay or return. The amount insurance companies spend on health costs relative to premium revenue, known as the medical-loss ratio, has fallen sharply in 2017, according to a recent analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation. This suggests insurers are becoming more financially secure. The return to sustainable pricing means more insurers will want to enter the marketplaces, expanding competition and choice for consumers.

Congress should have a simple test before considering any reforms to the current system. At a minimum, the changes shouldn't increase the

number of uninsured or the budget deficit, and they shouldn't make health insurance pricier for broad groups of Americans.

Some sensible reforms have already been offered. Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine has supported establishing a system that would reimburse health insurers for large losses from very sick enrollees. House Democrats have suggested targeted subsidy increases to increase affordability. A public option in parts of the country without sufficient competition would also help. I recommend strengthening the individual mandate by increasing the penalty for going without coverage, though neither party seems likely to consider the idea. While even the less controversial proposals may not be viable in Congress, they aren't the difference between the marketplaces surviving or dying.

Contrary to the president's apocalyptic rhetoric—or even the fears of some Affordable Care Act supporters—the law is holding up. How exactly can Mr. Trump do no harm? The administration should ensure that insurance companies continue to be reimbursed for the cost-sharing subsidies they provide for households with incomes up to 250% of the federal poverty line, which is about \$60,000 for a family of four. The president should also order his subordinates to continue enforcing the individual mandate

and to avoid making large, abrupt changes to the marketplaces.

The "do no harm" principle extends beyond the individual market, where about 1 in 6 Americans get their health care, according to the Census Bureau. To cut cost growth and improve quality, the administration will have to use other tools—many of them bipartisan—that have been created by Congress in recent years. These include delivery-system reforms in Medicare, which shift to payment models that reimburse providers based on outcomes and quality rather than inputs and quantity. A Republican Congress under the leadership of Speaker John Boehner already expanded these reforms after they were originally passed as part of the Affordable Care Act. The "Cadillac tax," which encourages insurance companies not to offer overly expensive care, should also stay. Neither of these policies requires congressional action. The administration simply has to implement the law as written.

In "King Lear," the Duke of Albany warned that in "striving to better, oft we mar what's well." When it comes to health-care reform, not heeding the Bard's words could lead to a real-life tragedy.

Mr. Furman, a professor of practice at the Harvard Kennedy School, was chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2013-17.

Editorial : California Shows How States Can Lead on Climate Change

The Editorial Board

California, which has long been a pioneer in fighting climate change, renewed its commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions last week by extending, to 2030, its cap-and-trade program, which effectively puts a price on

emissions. It's a bold, bipartisan commitment that invites similarly ambitious policies from other states, and it sends a strong signal to the world that millions of Americans regard with utmost seriousness a threat the Trump administration

refuses to acknowledge, let alone reckon with.

The cap-and-trade program, which had been set to end in 2020, is the most important component of California's plan to reduce planet-warming emissions by 40 percent

(from 1990 levels) by 2030. The extension, along with a companion bill to reduce local air pollution, was passed by a two-thirds majority of the State Legislature, including eight crucial votes from Republicans. They defied a Republican president who has not only reneged on America's global climate commitments, but has tried to undo every climate policy put into place by former President Barack Obama.

The hope among those who care about climate is that a combination of market forces, wider use of cleaner fuels and aggressive actions by businesses, states and cities can fill the gap left by Mr. Trump's disappearance from the battlefield. There are many positive signs. Nearly 30 states require their utilities to seek at least some of their power from renewable sources; cities, prodded by former mayors like Michael Bloomberg, have increasingly been sharing ideas about emissions-cutting practices. More and more businesses are committing themselves to using renewable fuels.

And always, it seems, there is California, ready to take the lead until there are more responsible adults in the White House.

California's cap-and-trade program requires power plants, natural gas utilities, fuel distributors and industries to buy permits to pollute, which decline in quantity over time. The idea is to put a price on emissions and, thus, discourage businesses and individuals from burning fossil fuels and encourage them to switch to cleaner sources of energy. The California program is linked with a cap-and-trade system in Quebec; Ontario will join next year. (A carbon tax is another way to put a price on greenhouse emissions; British Columbia, Finland and Ireland use this approach.)

Cap and trade is not a new idea; Congress and President George H. W. Bush used it successfully to reduce power plant emissions of sulfur dioxide, a major cause of acid rain. Congress considered a cap-and-trade program to address greenhouse gases; the House approved such a program in 2009, but the Senate did not.

California held its first auction of emission permits in 2012, and the state is well on its way to meeting its goal of reducing emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 with no obvious harm to its economy, which is booming. The state is using some of the money its cap-and-trade system generates to pay for a high-speed rail line connecting Los Angeles and San Francisco, which over time could help significantly reduce emissions from the transportation sector.

While there was broad support for the extension, some environmental groups like the Sierra Club California and a few Democrats opposed the legislative package for what they argued were unnecessary concessions to the oil and gas companies. The legislation is not perfect, but its benefits far outweigh its costs, and the country is better off for having it.

Attention now turns to the Northeast, where nine states, including New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts, are part of what is known as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which, like California's effort, is a market-

based cap-and-trade program that goes beyond state boundaries. So far, R.G.G.I., as it known for short, has helped reduce emissions from power plants in the region by 40 percent between 2008 and 2016, according to the Acadia Center, a research and public interest group. States are now negotiating the future of the program beyond 2020.

The time has come to set a much more ambitious emission reduction target than the current rate of 2.5 percent per year. The time has also come for New Jersey to rejoin the group. Gov. Chris Christie took the state out of the agreement a few years ago, apparently because he thought that complying with it would be too expensive. But Mr. Christie is on his way out, and the Democratic and Republican candidates to succeed him want New Jersey to get back in. Virginia might also participate if the Democratic candidate for governor wins there in November — one more sign that Mr. Trump may be going one way, but America is going the other.



Editorial : Texas, stop trying to pass this bathroom bill

<https://www.facebook.com/washingtonpostopinions>

3-4 minutes

By Editorial Board

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

July 23 at 6:18 PM

THERE WAS a sigh of relief when Texas lawmakers adjourned in May without adopting harmful legislation that would have restricted bathroom use for transgender residents. The relief, though, was short-lived. A mean-spirited effort, enabled by Gov. Greg Abbott (R), is now

underway to ram the measure through a special legislative session. If it succeeds, not only will transgender people who live in Texas be hurt but so will the state's standing and economy.

The legislation would restrict bathroom use in government buildings and public schools based on the sex listed on a person's birth certificate. The proposals — Senate Bill 3 and Senate Bill 91 — would also overturn local nondiscrimination ordinances aimed at allowing transgender people to use public bathrooms of their choice. The legislation won swift approval Friday from a Senate committee and the full Senate is likely to follow suit, given that its presiding officer, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick (R), has championed the issue and engineered the special session by holding hostage bills

needed to keep some state agencies operating.

In the House, the principled and reasoned opposition of Speaker Joe Straus (R) helped scuttle the measure during the regular session but how successful he will be in the coming days is unclear. He told Lawrence Wright in the New Yorker that he thinks most Republicans in the House don't want to vote for the bathroom bill but there is the fear of primary challenges from the right, which has made the bathroom bill a rallying cry.

Such political calculation seems to explain Mr. Abbott's embrace of the legislation after months of being coy. But Texas's business community, including chief executives of companies with a major presence in the state, have lined up against the legislation, citing concerns about the ability to

recruit talent and investment. A similar law in North Carolina resulted in boycotts and relocation of major sporting and entertainment events, costing the state hundreds of millions of dollars. Even consideration of the Texas bathroom bill has already led to about \$66 million in lost convention business, according to testimony Friday at a public hearing that preceded the committee vote by convention officials from the state's big cities.

North Carolina eventually backed down and partially repealed its discriminatory law. Do Texas legislators really want to create a similar backlash? Will they do what's right and smart or will they have to learn the hard way?