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FRANCE - EUROPE



Paris 2024 Olympic Games bid lauded by Macron as chance to uphold 'values'

French President Macron on Tuesday described Paris's bid to host the 2024 Olympics as the best defense against threats to the Games' values of openness, tolerance, and respect for the environment.

"Olympic values are our values. They are threatened, called into question by many today, so it's the best moment to defend them," Mr. Macron told reporters after the city presented its bid to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Paris is competing against Los Angeles, publicly backed by US

President Trump, whom Macron has criticized for taking his country out of the Paris accord on climate change.

Macron was the first head of state to attend the formal presentation of Olympic bids; Mr. Trump was not present.

Paris, which hosted the 1900 and 1924 Games, failed with bids to host the 1992, 2008, and 2012 Olympics.

"You are right to remember that we lost three times. We don't want to lose a fourth one," Macron said.

"I decided from the very beginning of my mandate to back this project and give the maximum to promote this candidature."

The IOC was due to vote later on Tuesday on whether to ratify its executive board's recommendation to award both the 2024 and 2028 Games at the same time, on Sept. 13.

Paris is seen as the favorite to land the 2024 Olympics, with Los Angeles having hinted it would accept 2028.

Los Angeles, like Paris, has already hosted the Olympics twice – in 1932 and 1984.

"I am here to convey a message that the French people are ready," said Macron. "I would not be here if they were not ready."

Paris is proposing a compact Games with almost every venue temporary or already in place. But it still needs to build an athletes' village, the biggest project of the bid.

Macron said Paris would not be leaving any "white elephants" behind.



EN LIGNE - Macron bids to make France first and U.S. second in battle for 2024 Olympics

Just days before President Trump arrives in Paris to celebrate Bastille Day with Emmanuel Macron, the French president headed to Switzerland to explain why the United States should come second — and France should come first.

First, that is, in terms of which country should host the 2024 Olympic Games.

Macron attended a meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne this week, where it was announced that the host cities of both the 2024 and 2028 games would be revealed at the same time later this year.

Such a break from tradition means that both Paris and Los Angeles, the two remaining contenders to host the 2024 games, could be awarded Olympic Games at the same time. The move comes after four other cities dropped bids to host, prompting the IOC to start reforming the process for applicant cities.

[Full IOC approves unprecedented plan to award 2024 and 2028 Games this fall]

In theory at least, the new system might seem fairer: two countries would become "winners," both awarded games but in different years. The mayors of Los Angeles and Paris have suggested they could cooperate to make sure the

bid process worked out for everyone. "We look forward to working together maybe not in competition but collaboration with Paris," Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said Tuesday.

But the reformed process would also mean something else — one country would literally be first and the other country second. And Macron has thrown his weight behind making France the former.

The International Olympic Committee began their official visit to Paris on Sunday, May 14 to evaluate the city's bid for the 2024 Olympics and Paralympics. (Reuters)

The French president's choice to attend the event in Lausanne was unusual. Generally, heads of state only attend the host city vote, which this year will take place in September in Lima, Peru. President Trump was not present in Lausanne this week, though he did offer his support in a message on Twitter: "Working hard to get the Olympics for the United States (L.A.). Stay tuned!"

Though Macron's meetings with the IOC were behind closed doors, he offered a political explanation for why Paris should host the games in comments to reporters in Lausanne. "We need multilateralism, the structures that provide agreement among nations ... and tolerance, which the Olympic movement

illustrates well," Macron said Monday.

The next day, he took the point further. "Olympic values are our values," said Macron. "They are threatened, called into question by many today, so it's the best moment to defend them."

Such comments echoed statements made by Macron at last weekend's Group of 20 meeting that many interpreted as a reference to Trump. "I will not concede anything in the direction of those who are pushing against multilateralism," Macron said last Saturday after referring to "real divisions and uncertainties" in the West.

France's youngest president since Napoleon, the former investment banker came into power earlier this year despite never having held elected office. The 39-year-old now commands a powerful majority in France's parliament and may be able to push through many of the ideas in his self-proclaimed "radical centrist" manifesto.

While Macron invited Trump for a state visit on one of France's most important national holidays — a visit scheduled to include a luxurious dinner at a Michelin-starred restaurant on the Eiffel Tower and a military parade — the pair have often been at loggerheads when it comes to policy. After the United States announced its intention to leave the Paris climate agreements,

Macron released a video calling the move a "mistake" before concluding with the phrase: "Make our planet great again."

During their first meeting in Brussels, the pair also shared a white-knuckle handshake which was widely analyzed. Macron himself later admitted it was a deliberate act, telling French newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche that "it wasn't innocent" and that "one must show that you won't make small concessions, even symbolic ones."

President Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron shared an intense handshake at their first meeting on May 25. (The Washington Post)

Though the economic benefits for Olympic host cities is widely contested, winning the nomination can be an important symbolic victory for world leaders like Macron and Trump.

And for the American leader, a Paris Olympic Games might rub extra salt in the wounds as he has criticized the city a number of times — in February, Trump spoke of the horrors in the French capital, suggesting ominously that a visiting friend had told him "Paris is no longer Paris."

POLITICO Alpha males Trump and Macron stand shoulder-to-shoulder

PARIS — Forget about another bone-crushing handshake between Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron. When the U.S. president visits Paris this week, he will face an even greater display of French muscle: tanks, jeeps and soldiers marching down the Champs Elysées.

Trump — on his first official visit to France, starting Thursday — is due to stand next to French President Emmanuel Macron as he surveys troops on Bastille Day.

The trip's timing, and its military backdrop, is designed to send a double-edged message. On one hand, Trump is being offered a rare privilege. In a two-day visit far grander than that enjoyed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in June, he will have a front-row seat at a celebration of French national pride that asserts the close relationship between France and the U.S.

But if Trump is being drawn so close, it is also because Macron wants to remind him of the United States' role in Europe and France's role as a military power.

A hundred years after the U.S. entered World War I, and one year after a bloody terror attack in Nice, Macron will show Trump that France is a fully operational military force ready to stand by the United States' side as a NATO ally.

It's a re-imagining of Macron's iron-grip handshake from before the NATO summit in May — part affection, part an effort to keep Trump in line.

Divided, but not that divided

Expect the two leaders to catch the world off-guard by showing (wary) unity, not antagonism. "We don't want him [Trump] to isolate himself," an adviser to Macron said. "Our role is to have a restraining function on

him."

There is little doubt that Trump and Macron will find opportunities to underscore their differences during the two days the U.S. leader will be in France.

Macron, who has pledged to "Make Our Planet Great Again," last week announced his country will host a conference on climate change in December. He'll be able to show off his environmental credentials while standing next to the world's climate change black sheep.

The U.S. president, meanwhile, keen to score points with his base back home, will be able to make a show of non-compliance with his well-tailored French host.

To assume that Macron simply wants to antagonize Trump is to oversimplify their dynamic. As arguably the world's most PR-savvy and closely observed leaders, both men will be wary of offering a repeat performance of their standoff at the NATO summit. This time, there will be talk of cooperation on security, trade and innovation, in addition to discussions on climate change, a French presidential adviser said.

For Trump, there is benefit to be had from cozying up to a man whose election win he described as "tremendous." Senior White House officials said security and military issues would be the main focus during Trump's Paris trip, and they expected there would be a long one-on-one session between the two presidents.

"Their relationship is great," Trump's chief economic adviser, Gary Cohn, said after the G20 summit in Hamburg. "Macron personally called the president and invited him, and asked him to come to the 100th anniversary of Bastille Day."

Trump's national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, jumped in to say, "It's Bastille Day and the 100th

anniversary of the entry of American troops into World War I," he said, adding "Sorry, sir" for the interruption.

After being isolated on trade and climate change at last week's G20, Trump could use a friend in Old Europe. And while British Prime Minister Theresa May may be a more natural partner for Trump, her country is heading out of the European Union. Despite Trump's announcement that the U.S. and Britain will move toward a bilateral trade deal "very, very quickly," after Brexit, the bigger trading partner for the United States will be the European Union.

In normal circumstances, Washington would turn to Germany as the Continent's advocate for transatlantic free trade and partnership. But Chancellor Angela Merkel is trying to keep as much distance as possible from the U.S. president, at least until Germans head to the polls in September. Merkel's Christian Democratic Union recently downgraded its description of the United States from "friend" to "partner."

Meanwhile Trump, bristling at German criticism, has repeatedly lashed out over Berlin's trade and current account surpluses.

Which leaves Macron — who's also been critical of Germany's trade position, and who's vowed to bring French defense spending up to NATO's target of 2 percent of gross domestic product — as the obvious dance partner for the U.S. while Trump is in Europe.

It's a role the French president is happy to take on.

On parade

Trump's visit gives Macron a chance to play to his country's strongest suit and flaunt the one area where his country clearly out-muscles Germany — military might.

By displaying military hardware to Trump, Macron hopes to put France on a level with the United States and send a message to the rest of Europe: I am your new leader and protector.

"Merkel is beholden to German public opinion as long as she is running for election," said the Macron adviser. "We don't have the same constraints, and for us there is freedom to strengthen dialogue and seek areas of understanding, all while clearly stating where we stand apart."

It helps that France and the United States have plenty of areas of policy convergence, including Syria, where Macron and Trump both advocate ceasing hostilities and letting President Bashar al-Assad stay in power. There is also the fight against terrorism, which Macron has proclaimed as his administration's top priority, and will be sure to feature heavily in U.S.-French exchanges exactly one year after the massacre on Nice's beachfront promenade.

Both men come from a business background, and both vaunt an ideology of individualism and personal success which, in Macron's case, grates against domestic egalitarian instincts.

They also share a complex, often strained, relationship with the press. While Macron steers clear of borrowing Trump's "fake news" label to smear media coverage, his government spokesman has taken to lecturing reporters not to "behave as judges" for covering allegations of nepotism concerning one of Macron's chief allies.

The French leader's administration is also waging a war on leakers that echoes the one going on in the White House, with one ministry going as far as to launch a lawsuit to discover the person responsible for leaking papers on labor law reform.

POLITICO Paris, much maligned by Trump, set to welcome him

By Matthew Nussbaum

Since before there was a United States, Americans have had a love affair with Paris. President Donald Trump, who will leave for the French capital on Wednesday, does not share that affection.

Few cities have been the subject of Trump's derision and mockery like Paris. He has painted the city as a dystopian land of terror attacks with radicalized neighborhoods, a city

"so, so, so out of control, so dangerous," as he declared in June 2016.

He also has held it up as a symbol of a global system that takes advantage of the United States and its workers, proudly proclaiming he represents "Pittsburgh, not Paris" as he pulled the U.S. from a global climate deal.

The feeling appears to be mutual. Just 14 percent of people in France have confidence that Trump will "do

the right thing regarding world affairs" according to the Pew Research Center, down from more than 75 percent who had confidence in former President Barack Obama. George W. Bush's numbers were similarly low by the end of his presidency.

Now, Trump heads to the city he says lives "in fear," where he will meet Thursday with a young and dynamic new president, Emmanuel Macron, who has made his

unwillingness to be cowed by Trump abundantly clear.

Trump will also have lunch with military officials, tour the tomb of Napoleon Bonaparte and attend Bastille Day events on Friday, France's major national holiday.

The White House said Trump would discuss Syria and countering terrorism. But coming on the heels of two trips during which Trump was at odds with other world leaders — Macron criticized the United States

over its climate stance during a closed-door meeting at last week's G-20 summit, two people briefed on it said — some observers wonder why the trip is even happening.

"Macron is still fairly popular; he's just been elected. ... But at the same time, I'm pretty sure a majority of people don't understand why he's actually hosting Donald Trump," said Philippe Le Corre, a France expert at the nonpartisan Brookings Institution who previously served with the French Ministry of Defense. "It's also interesting that Trump, who has had two fairly difficult trips to Europe, is actually willing to come to Europe."

"He may like a good parade," Le Corre quipped, noting Trump and Macron are expected to attend a Bastille Day parade together.

The White House has billed the trip as a gesture of allegiance, saying Trump "looks forward to reaffirming America's strong ties of friendship with France, to celebrating this important day with the French people, and to commemorating the 100th anniversary of America's entry

into World War I."

To be sure, even if the two country's leaders hardly see eye to eye, many see room for the friendship between the nations to continue.

"The French-American relationship has always been strong," said Jean-Marc Gaultier, president of the French-American Chamber of Commerce. While Macron and Trump have "different styles," Gaultier said he sees Macron's invitation as "a sign that he wants to get along with President Trump."

France's military, which Trump will see on display at the parade, could prove a basis of understanding for the two leaders. Trump has long agitated for NATO members to spend at least 2 percent of their GDP on defense, per a 2014 agreement, and to do more in the fight on terrorism. The White House was already signaling ahead of the trip that France is something of an exemplar on that front.

"France is currently spending 1.8 percent of its GDP, so it's very close to the 2 percent target that was agreed at Wales in 2014," a senior

administration official said on Tuesday, adding that the White House expects the French to meet the target. "France is far and away one of the largest and strongest military members of the alliance," spends "an awful lot" on defense now and "carries a heavy load in the counterterrorism fight."

But Trump's own harsh words toward France could undercut any sense of solidarity. In the past, he has slammed France as weak on counterterrorism.

"France is no longer France," he said in July 2016.

"France is a disaster," he told a crowd that September.

And in a March 2016 interview, he made the unsubstantiated claim that parts of Paris are under Sharia law, referring to discredited claims of "no-go zones" where many citizens and law enforcement won't travel.

"You have sections of Paris where the police don't want to go there and probably have areas where they probably practice Sharia law," he said.

Protesters are expected to demonstrate against Trump, though it is unclear to what extent. Even if there is a certain disdain for Trump, there could still be respect for his position, Le Corre said.

"People respect the fact that the U.S. came and rescued France twice," he said. "There is certainly this chemistry between the two nations."

The French-American relationship goes beyond the heads of state. Americans from Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson to Ernest Hemingway and Jacqueline Kennedy have extolled the French capital, and it remains a popular tourist destination.

Whether Macron and Trump can tap into that chemistry remains to be seen. Their initial meeting included a now-infamous handshake, in which they seemed to grip too hard and hold on too long. The 39-year-old Macron later said the strained greeting was no accident: He called it a "moment of truth."

POLITICO Berlin advises UK to 'do your homework' on Brexit – POLITICO

Janosch Delcker

5-6 minutes

BERLIN — Germany's position on Brexit — that there can be no discussion of the future U.K. relationship with the EU until the divorce is settled — will remain unchanged no matter who wins September's election, according to the country's minister of state for European affairs.

"I can only hope that by fall of this year, we make substantial progress," Michael Roth told POLITICO. "Otherwise, no negotiations on the future status of the United Kingdom towards the European Union can begin."

In March, Britain officially launched a two-year negotiation period over its departure from the European Union, pitting its own desire for future trade deals and cooperation against consensus among the remaining 27 EU members that the U.K. must not be allowed to cherry-pick regarding its future relationship.

So far, however, Britain has failed to provide the European Commission with a consistent negotiating position, Roth said in an interview at the foreign ministry in Berlin.

"First of all, it needs to be clarified where we stand when it comes to financial obligations that Great

Britain has to fulfill beyond Brexit" — *Michael Roth*

"You're expecting to get forward-looking answers from me, which are very difficult for me to give," he said, "because so far, it's remained completely unclear where this is supposed to be going for the Brits."

"This makes it damned difficult for us," he added. "We are excellently prepared. Our negotiating mandate is very detailed, transparent and verifiable. However, what's still missing is a corresponding answer, and this is something only London can give."

No Brexit bill — yet

Take the so-called bill for Brexit.

The German foreign ministry, where Roth is one of two deputies to Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, will not release any estimates on how much they believe to meet its liabilities until certain basic principles of the separation are agreed.

"First of all, for example, it needs to be clarified where we stand when it comes to financial obligations that Great Britain has to fulfill beyond Brexit," said Roth. "Once we've talked about those core elements we can fill the variables with concrete numbers."

That's regardless of what's happening in German politics, he said.

In September, Germans will elect a new parliament, and Roth's Social Democrats — currently junior partners in Angela Merkel's "grand coalition" government — are determined to push the long-term chancellor out of office. In, however, the SPD's candidate currently lags more than 15 percentage points behind the conservative Merkel.

Neither the campaign nor the election outcome will have an impact on the country's position, Roth said.

"Brexit is one of the issues where the Social Democrats and [Merkel's conservatives] are in agreement — despite the election," he said. "This will not change, no matter what formation will govern Germany after this fall."

Forget 'divide and rule'

Don't expect Germany to backstab the European Commission, which is in charge of negotiating with the U.K. for the remaining 27 member countries, said Roth, making it clear that Berlin will stand up to any potential British attempt to "divide and rule" the EU27.

"After all, the Commission doesn't negotiate for itself but at the behest of 27 member countries," he said. "We all have promised each other and sealed it with a handshake ... that there won't be any side negotiations — which, at the end of the day, would weaken us all."

"My unsolicited advice to the British side would be to engage less in reading the coffee grounds" — *Michael Roth*

Roth declined to go into detail about what future deals between the EU and the U.K. could look like, but emphasized the "outstanding role" that the European Court of Justice plays in the European Union.

"In the EU, we need to accept and implement its decision," he said. "This will be a particularly critical aspect of the negotiations with the United Kingdom — and I doubt that we, as the European Union, will have much leeway."

Germany's position on Brexit has not changed since the day the Brits voted to leave, Roth said — and he rejected talk in Britain that Germany's carmakers, eager to protect their sales, are lobbying for a deal handing Britain substantial access to the EU market.

"I consider this quite erroneous," Roth said.

"My unsolicited advice to the British side would be to engage less in reading the coffee grounds," he added, "and instead do its homework and tell us with which concrete goals and what negotiating mandate they would like to go into the next talks."

How 'Brexit' Could End the European Parliament's 'Traveling Circus'

STRASBOURG, France — For years, British politicians have campaigned to end the European Parliament's expensive and much-ridiculed monthly commute between its two homes, in Brussels and in Strasbourg, France.

Now they may finally be close to getting their wish of scrapping the so-called traveling circus — but only because Britain is leaving the European Union.

Under proposals now circulating, the European Parliament would concentrate its work in Brussels and abandon the monthly chore of packing up the contents of lawmakers' offices, trucking them 220 miles to Strasbourg, then bringing them back a few weeks later.

To compensate Strasbourg for the loss of the parliamentary sittings, which bring lawmakers and valuable business to hotels and restaurants, the city would host the European Medicines Agency. That organization is in London but, with Britain planning to quit the European Union in the process known as Brexit, it will need a new base. Moving it to Strasbourg would provide a juicy inducement to France to agree to the proposals.

Though far from a done deal, the need to relocate the medicines agency, the British withdrawal from the bloc and the recent election of the reform-minded Emmanuel Macron as president of France have created a historic opportunity, said Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, a European lawmaker from Sweden who is the chairwoman of a campaign group called Single Seat, which advocates one venue for the Parliament.

"We are convinced that a change in the seat for the European Parliament would be a very concrete way to show the citizens that we work for them," said Ms. Corazza Bildt.

In recent decades, British lawmakers of all

stripes have criticized the traveling circus. They include fierce critics of European integration, like Nigel Farage, the former leader of the U.K. Independence Party, and pro-European politicians, such as Nick Clegg, the former deputy prime minister.

Negative publicity surrounding the European Union — much of it inflated or plain erroneous — helped its critics to persuade Britons to vote in a referendum last year to leave.

But the decision appears to have united the 27 other member states and helped to stabilize the European project.

It would be a further irony if Britain's departure were to help heal the running sore about Strasbourg's role.

"It is one of the few positive things in an otherwise lose-lose 'Brexit' situation," said Ms. Corazza Bildt, of the possibilities now opening up. "We don't want a symbol of peace to become a symbol of waste," she added.

Her comments highlight the extent to which the Parliament's seat in Strasbourg has become associated with the most idealistic and the most extravagant facets of the European Union.

To many in France and Germany, the location in a city once fought over regularly by their two nations is a physical symbol of the reconciliation that European integration was intended to foster.

A European Parliament session in Strasbourg. The French government maneuvered in 1992 to enshrine the monthly plenary sessions in Strasbourg in European Union treaties, and there can be no change without Paris's approval. Jean-Francois Badias/Associated Press

Estimates of the expense of the commute vary, but the European Court of Auditors, the bloc's spending watchdog, has identified it as \$130 million annually. Campaigners point to the

environmental cost of 19,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emitted per year and to the loss of thousands of working hours for lawmakers and staff members because of the commute.

Moving the Parliament to Strasbourg full-time would be difficult because other European bodies that the lawmakers scrutinize are in Brussels.

For the situation to change, several obstacles would have to be overcome.

The French government maneuvered in 1992 to enshrine the monthly plenary sessions in Strasbourg in European Union treaties, and there can be no change without Paris's approval.

France has resisted every previous attempt to amend the rules, and last week Nathalie Loiseau, a French minister for European affairs, told reporters that there was "no ambiguity" over her country's support for Strasbourg as the Parliament's seat.

However, Ms. Corazza Bildt believes that Mr. Macron, an advocate of modernization, might be to offer France not only the medicines agency, but also something of greater political significance — perhaps a new military planning headquarters, or the right to host occasional European Union summit meetings.

"The ball is in the court of the Élysée," she said, referring to the French president's office. "The decision belongs to France, what we are asking for is dialogue."

For the city of Strasbourg, there could be benefits. The Parliament brings visitors to the city for only a few days every month, requiring large numbers of hotel rooms and taxis that are not needed for much of the rest of the year.

By contrast, the European Medicines Agency, which oversees the approval of drugs across Europe in much the same way that the Food and Drug Administration does in the

United States, has around 890 staff members and hosts a steady stream of meetings of experts. On most weekdays, those activities fill around 350 London hotel rooms.

For the medicines agency, relocating to Strasbourg could complicate life because the city's transport links are poorer than those of London. (Members of the European Parliament have managed there for decades, of course, albeit while often grumbling.)

When laying down the criteria to be considered when relocating agencies — the European Banking Authority, also in London, will need to move as well — the European Council, which represents the member governments, said accessibility was a priority.

That included "the availability, frequency and duration of flight connections from the capitals of all E.U. member states to the airports close to the location; the availability, frequency and duration of public transportation connections from these airports to the location; as well as the quality and quantity of accommodation facilities."

Other national governments have their eyes on the medicines agency, too. Several cities have made clear their desire to host it, with formal submissions requested by the end of the month and a decision expected by the end of the year.

And few things energize European leaders as much as the competition to host agencies, which bring both prestige and cash for local economies.

In 2001, Silvio Berlusconi, then the prime minister of Italy, blocked plans to locate the European Food Safety Authority in Finland, while promoting an alternative site in the Italian city of Parma. He told fellow leaders: "Parma is synonymous with good cuisine. The Finns don't even know what prosciutto is."

Two years later, the agency moved to Parma.

"That has to change!" declared Gerd Müller, Germany's development minister, in February.

This humble introspection may help explain why German Chancellor Angela Merkel was so successful at the Group of 20 summit on July 7-8



How Germany forced a rethink of Africa

The Christian

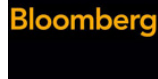
both. If nothing is done, officials warn, millions more could arrive in coming years. Yet rather than simply seek solutions in Africa to this flood of humanity, Germany decided last year to first tally up its own indifference toward the continent.

Among the 400,000 companies in Germany, fewer than 1,000 invest in Africa, officials found. And Germany's trade with Africa amounts to only 2 percent of its total foreign trade.

July 11, 2017 — Just this year alone, an estimated 400,000 African migrants will flee to Germany, escaping either war or poverty, or

in winning support from most of the world's wealthiest nations for a major boost in private investment for Africa. Dubbed the "Merkel Plan" (a play on America's Marshall Plan that revived postwar Germany), the initiative aims to shift global thinking about the business opportunities in Africa. Only then can investment in both entrepreneurs and infrastructure rise, helping to create jobs and discourage migration.

"We must change the lenses with which we look at



Giugliano : European Central Bank Is Better Flexible Than Sorry

The European Central Bank is unnerving markets by remaining vague over the future of its bond-buying scheme. Yet, if investors listened carefully, they would detect an emerging framework for understanding what guides policy makers.

The first principle is that the ECB has gone "data dependent" over its quantitative easing. Whereas previously central bankers had said that bond purchases would continue until the end of 2017, for now they appear more reluctant to tie their hands over what will happen next. It will take at least until September before central bankers make clear whether they will reduce the pace of asset purchases from 60 billion a month.

This decision reflects an open debate within the governing council about how much weight to give conflicting indicators. For example, while economic activity and confidence remain strong and unemployment continues to fall, the recovery has had only a limited impact on prices: at 1.3 percent, inflation is still below the ECB's target just below 2 percent.

This does not mean investors have nowhere to look. In fact, two sets of indicators stand out. The first is the labour market: There is no sign that

Africa, from the traditional development mind-set to an investment mind-set," says Akinwumi Adesina, president of the African Development Bank.

Germany's approach is to have G20 countries set a few models for Africa by partnering with the most reform-minded countries, such as Ghana, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, and Tunisia. Money will be given to fight corruption, curb capital flight, and improve tax systems – all necessary to reduce business risk in Africa.

wages are rising fast, as they would if the labour market were overly tight. That suggests that unemployment still has further to fall without stoking inflation, which in turn makes it less urgent for the ECB to tighten its monetary policy.

The other indicator is the price of oil: While the ECB is primarily concentrating on core inflation -- which ignores volatile items such as energy -- this distinction can often be artificial. Were energy prices to resume their fall, as they did last week, there will inevitably be spillovers to core inflation, which will make the ECB more prudent about exiting QE.

The second principle investors should note is that the ECB may well be creative in how it tapers QE. This means deviating from the textbook of the U.S. Federal Reserve, which cut back its asset monthly purchases by roughly \$10 billion (8.7 billion euros) after each Federal Open Market Committee Meeting between the end of 2013 and 2014. In a recent interview with two European newspapers, Benoit Coeure, an executive board member, pointed to the decision the ECB took last December to scale back asset purchases while extending their horizon, as a possible model for the future. The ECB could therefore announce that QE will be reduced to, say, 40 billion

"We're trying to put the spirit of partnership into the foreground," said Ms. Merkel.

For all its troubles, from famine to dictatorships, Africa remains a gold mine as a potential workforce. By 2050, it will be home to more than one-quarter of the global population. Half of its 54 countries have reached middle-income status. And compared with Asia and Latin America, Africa has the largest share of adults running or starting a new business.

euros a month but extended for another six months. This would bring the central bank closer to the termination of net asset purchases, while giving the euro zone economy more time to recover.

One problem with this strategy is that the ECB has committed to purchasing sovereign bonds in accordance with its so-called capital key, which determines how much each country contributes to the central bank and is used to work out how much of each country's bonds can be purchased. This means buying sizeable amounts of German or Dutch sovereign bonds, even though these have become scarcer - partly because of other rules constraining the central bank purchases. While the ECB can introduce some flexibility to the rules, this will be politically difficult to sell in capitals such as Berlin.

But what, it's worth asking, about the impact of political events on the ECB's decision to taper QE? The biggest worry is of course, Italy, which will hold a general election in the spring of 2018. The three-ways split in Italy's politics between the center-left, center-right and the populist Five Star Movement, means the vote is unlikely to produce a stable government. This could spook markets, causing a rise in the spread between Italian and German sovereign bonds. Would an Italian

Such opportunities explain why Germany calls its plan "Compact with Africa." Both sides must be responsible to act. Mass migration may have pushed Germany to focus on the continent's crises. But it also looked at its past neglect of Africa – and the potential for investment.

crisis send data-driven banking out the window?

That's unlikely. As the euro zone's third largest economy, Italy obviously can't be ignored when it comes to decisions about tapering. However, all indications from Frankfurt are that the central bank will take its decisions on the basis of economic considerations alone. As ECB President Mario Draghi said in his last press conference, the central bank's mandate "is specified in terms of price stability. It's not specified in government budget support or other considerations."

Were Italy to run into trouble, there would be other tools at the ECB's disposal. These include the "outright monetary transactions" program, which involves targeted bond purchases for a country in difficulty in exchange for a program of reforms.

The ECB faces a delicate balance between communicating its intentions and being able to adapt to evolving circumstances. As they prepare for the autumn, investors should be patient: Better to have a flexible central bank than one that commits to the wrong path and then has to make amends.

INTERNATIONAL



The Problem Isn't Just Who Trump Has Offended — It's Who He Hasn't

President Donald Trump's opening moves on the world stage have left behind a trail of offended U.S. allies. From Germany (handshake and mutual defense commitment snubs) to South Korea (missile

defense shakedown) to Australia (berating phone call), the president's diplomatic forays have at times felt like outtakes from *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. In Europe last week, he sought to undo some of the damage.

But what if the most dangerous part of Trump's foreign policy turns out to be the meetings where the leader across the table *isn't* offended?

While many of America's democratic friends are reeling, another group of U.S. partners is visibly delighted, a fact that was on display as Poland's

hard-right government based in supporters for Trump's speech. In a few short months, autocrats and elected illiberal hardliners, from Manila to Riyadh to Warsaw, are already leaping at the opportunity to pursue their most repressive, destabilizing actions — from dream projects to impulse buys

— without the pushback they might have expected from any previous U.S. president.

In fact, we may be seeing the first signs of a “Trump bump” under which, meeting by meeting, call by call, he is empowering dictators, hardliners, and demagogic opportunists, leaving behind a more repressive and less stable world. Leaders appear to be leaving conversations with Trump feeling greenlit to act aggressively against their own people or their neighbors.

As Trump returns from European meetings with the illiberal leaders of Poland, Russia, and other nations — and as his team trumpets initiatives on Syria, energy, and other issues, it is sobering to consider the rocky aftermath of the previous splashy international speech, which he gave in the Middle East.

Less than two months ago in Riyadh, Trump spoke and posed alongside Saudi Arabia's King Salman and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, their three faces aglow with optimism. Trump had “united the entire Muslim world,” a top White House official said. Unlike in Europe, where Trump faced pushback, his Saudi Arabian sojourn included warm meetings with his Saudi hosts and the rulers of the Bahrain, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and even Qatar, among other nations.

The “orb” photo was instantly iconic. But what happened next hasn't gotten enough scrutiny.

Just four days later in Bahrain, police arrested 286 protestors and killed five people staging a sit-in protest in the home village of the country's top dissident cleric. President Barack Obama had painstakingly sought to coax Bahrain's ruling Sunni minority to reconcile with the country's roiling Shiite communities before the host of the U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet descended into civil unrest or Iranian-backed insurgency. In Riyadh, Trump told Bahrain's king, “[T]here has been a little strain, but there won't be strain with this administration.” Message received.

In Egypt, within 96 hours of the orb photo, police had locked up a rival presidential candidate and blocked dozens of

websites, including Egypt's most prominent investigative journalism project. For six months, Sisi had held off on signing a draconian NGO law passed by Egypt's parliament targeting independent civil society. Human rights champions from Cairo to the U.S. Senate urged him not to sign. Eight days after meeting Trump, Sisi signed the bill into law. As Declan Walsh wrote in the *New York Times*, “Sisi has appeared emboldened by a burgeoning friendship with President Trump, who has hailed the Egyptian strongman as a ‘fantastic guy.’” Notably, Rex Tillerson, Trump's secretary of state, expressed disappointment. But the White House's silence spoke even louder. The enabler-in-chief had struck again.

Perhaps the most complex and potentially damaging aftermath of the orb moment has been the feud between America's Arab partners in the Persian Gulf. On June 5, four of the leaders who had taken the measure of Trump in Riyadh (from Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), emboldened by his uncritical embrace, launched an embargo against Qatar, which hosts U.S. Central Command. Many U.S. officials share some of the blockaders' frustrations with Qatar — along with a hope that several Gulf nations can meet a higher standard on combating terrorist financing and extremist ideology. But the feud is already distracting U.S. partners from the fight against the Islamic State in Syria and efforts to push back against Iran — Trump's top priorities — and creating a long-term risk to U.S. force posture as key U.S. military hosts blockade each another. The secretaries of state and defense have been calling for restraint and a speedy resolution. But not the enabler-in-chief. In a region of strongmen, where several days of painstaking Cabinet-level diplomacy is no match for 140 characters from the president on Twitter, Trump has repeatedly egged on the blockaders.

The trend isn't limited to the Middle East. In a leaked phone transcript, Trump reportedly told Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte — who has bragged about personally engaging in extrajudicial killings, among the thousands his forces have reportedly committed — “what

a great job you are doing,” and “we had a previous president who did not understand that.” Four weeks later — in the face of a growing terrorist threat, admittedly — Duterte declared sweeping martial law over several islands (and joked that his soldiers would enjoy impunity for rape).

The risks are real and pervasive. As Central and Eastern Europeans struggle, country by country, to preserve liberal values and beat back demagoguery and corruption, how many more Trump greenlights will leaders carry home with them? In Poland, protestors managed to stave off the far-right government's proposed restrictions on media coverage of Parliament last December.

Will Trump's blessing — and his own public trashing of America's media while on Polish soil — embolden the government to renew its assault on Poland's free press?

Will Trump's blessing — and his own public trashing of America's media while on Polish soil — embolden the government to renew its assault on Poland's free press?

Trump's travels are not all that raise concerns. Tillerson warned State Department staff to downplay U.S. values and skipped the release of the department's annual human rights report. Listening only to Trump, one might conclude that Cuba and Iran are the world's only human rights abusers. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad barely made the list for public censure until he dropped a weapon of mass destruction on his own people — again. Trump treats human rights as a cudgel to bash and burden adversaries rather than ideals to be upheld by all. And other countries listen closely. Sometimes foreign leaders hear more clearly than Americans do the true, bottom-line messages that the United States is sending.

In fairness, as candidate Trump often noted, today's Middle East — “a mess” — reflects his predecessors' failures to make good on their own ambitious agendas for rights, reform, or even diplomatic restraint. Leaders like Duterte, Salman, and Sisi proved willing to do what they felt their survival required and defy Obama, and President George W. Bush before

him, despite their public and private reproaches. The near-term costs of raising these difficult issues are real (as are the greater costs of abandoning values). The pursuit can be frustrating and too often inconsistent in practice. And the Obama administration is not immune from the same criticism for responding to repression with mixed messages.

These are early days, but it's already clear that Trump represents something altogether different. And without American leadership to exact even limited reputational or diplomatic costs, the story of the orb and its aftermath will become a regrettable pattern, as autocrats increasingly perceive a green light. That's bad news. While Trump may win plaudits from strongmen, the societies beneath them will not stay cryogenically frozen. Their repression will ensure brittle U.S. partners prone to crack into instability and less able to share burdens. And their populations will remember the U.S. president with whose blessing their leaders sought to crush them.

The truth is that the chance to repair frayed relationships with Middle Eastern partners does present opportunities for a new U.S. president. Each of these leaders faces real threats that merit U.S. support. But Trump seems determined to ask for almost nothing of value in return.

Most troubling of all is the prospect that Russian President Vladimir Putin left his meeting with Trump feeling as emboldened as the orb-mates seemingly did. Reports suggest that Trump and Putin agreed to disagree on whether Russia interfered in the 2016 election (hint: it did!), but there's little suggestion that Trump imposed any concrete costs whatsoever for past or future assaults on American democracy.

As a private citizen, Trump famously quipped, “When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.” As president, he seems to be extending the same impunity to autocrats and hardliners overseas.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Galston : What Does Trump Mean by ‘the West’?

William A. Galston

Parliament. He felt very much at home in Westminster, he began, because it is “one of democracy's shrines.” He added that “here the rights of free people and the processes of representation have been debated and refined.”

These opening remarks were more than routine diplomatic niceties. Democracy was the heart of the speech, one of the most notable Reagan ever gave. Despite the apparent strength of democracy's enemies, he insisted, “optimism is in

order,” because “regimes planted by bayonets do not take root.” A democratic revolution is gaining momentum, he observed presciently. But although “democracy is not a fragile flower . . . it needs cultivating.” The West

Thirty-five years ago, Ronald Reagan addressed the British

must act to assist the "campaign for democracy."

Reagan spelled out the elements of this campaign: to foster the "infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities, which allows a people to choose their own way." To those who objected to the promotion of democracy as "cultural imperialism," he had a forthright reply: It is "providing the means for genuine self-determination and protection for diversity." Indeed, "it would be cultural condescension, or worse, to say that any people prefer dictatorship to democracy."

Noting that Western European nations were already engaged in this endeavor, Reagan promised to mobilize U.S. leaders across party lines to join and strengthen it. "It is time we committed ourselves as a nation—in both the public and private sectors—to assisting democratic development," he declared, and he went on to spell out how he intended to do so. "Let us ask ourselves, 'What kind of people do we think we are?'" he concluded. "Let us answer, 'Free

people, worthy of freedom and determined not only to remain so but to help others gain their freedom as well.'"

Toward the beginning of his speech, Reagan observed that Poland was "at the center of European civilization" and was contributing to this civilization as he spoke by resisting oppression. Poland resisted to regain its national independence, but also "to secure the basic rights we often take for granted." The "struggle to be Poland" was inextricably tied to the struggle for democracy.

Thirty-five years later, the current U.S. president addressed a crowd in Warsaw. In his speech last week Donald Trump barely mentioned democracy. He spoke instead of the "will to defend our civilization." Although he did not offer an explicit definition of this civilization, the basic thrust of his understanding emerged. Our civilization rests on bonds of "history, culture, and memory." It puts "faith and family" at the center of our lives. It is best summarized in the words one million Poles chanted in response to Pope

John Paul II's Warsaw sermon in 1979: "We want God." This is the heart of the matter, said Mr. Trump: "The people of Poland, the people of America, and the people of Europe still cry out, 'We want God.'"

While this may well be true for the most devoutly Catholic nation in Europe, it would come as a surprise to most other Europeans. It is an inherently—perhaps intentionally—divisive interpretation of what we allegedly share as participants in Western civilization. Freedom of religion—the right of each to worship in his own way or not at all—would have been a more accurate way of putting it. It would also have been unifying. If this is what Mr. Trump meant, he should have said so. He is, after all, the president of a country dedicated like no other to the principle of religious liberty. But had he framed it that way, his audience might not have chanted his name. They certainly would not have done so if Mr. Trump had summoned the courage to say what many Poles and most Europeans know—that along with Hungary's Viktor Orban, the current Polish

government is Europe's leading threat to liberal democracy.

There is no evidence that Donald Trump cares much about democracy, one way or the other. He regularly praises autocrats as strong leaders and reserves most of his blame for democratic leaders whose policies he doesn't like. If he had been born in an autocracy, he would not have been a dissident.

If Ronald Reagan had been asked to define the phrase "America First," his initial reaction probably would have been: Those were the people too myopic to see why the United States should oppose fascism and Nazism. To judge from his Westminster address, his deeper answer would have been that America puts itself first when it is true to itself. And being true to itself means understanding that our constitutive principles apply beyond our borders. Indifference to democratic self-determination for other peoples is not putting America first; it is a betrayal of who we are.

Bloomberg

Sen : U.S. Is Still a Global Leader. Trump Can't Change That.

If you think of the U.S. as a global leader, these are troubling times. This past week's G-20 meeting showed how weak the U.S. has become. At a big international summit, the president seems uninterested and withdrawn.

But America is not now and has never been a homogeneous country with universal shared values. And while perhaps the shrinking part of America that Trump represents may seek to go its own way, the growing parts of America that represent the future are likely to redefine a 21st-century version of global leadership.

In the years following World War II, Europe's and Japan's economies were in ruins. Mostly unscathed by war and economically empowered by wartime production, the U.S. inherited its position as the world's dominant superpower. Industrial-era cities were at their high. Factories were booming. The parents of baby boomers were expanding into the suburbs, financed by government-backed mortgages and new highways. We had visions of man setting foot on the moon.

For parts of America, much has gone wrong since then. Europe and Japan rebuilt their economies, and the rise of China and other emerging markets led to competition for American manufacturing jobs. Outsourcing and productivity

improvements slowly hollowed out America's factories. Continued domestic migration south and west, along with lower fertility rates, put demographic strains on the Northeast and the Midwest. Highways may have been a boon for the American economy, but communities far from them slowly became economically irrelevant. In stagnant communities, strains from pension costs and aging infrastructure have led to a host of financial, social and political challenges. The shock of the 2008 financial crisis was a body blow from which many communities are still reeling. The election of Trump was a response to all of this.

Globalization and demography certainly created American losers -- to borrow Trump's terminology. But those forces also created winners, who represent America's future. The areas with growing populations have the best prospects.

States in the South and the West now account for the bulk of American population growth. Whereas postwar population growth was somewhat homogeneous -- white families settling into newly created suburbs -- today's population growth has a decidedly more diverse, global look. It's first- and second-generation Hispanic families settling all over the South and the West. Asian immigrants moving to the West Coast and large metro areas in the South. African-

Americans moving from struggling Midwestern cities like Chicago to more vibrant Southern ones like Atlanta. And continued white migration from the Northeast and the Midwest to the South and the West. As Adam Carstens of PQ Partners showed, roughly 80 percent of the U.S. population growth for ages 25 to 44 this decade is taking place in the South and the West, and the vast majority of that is non-white.

Ongoing trends in the global economy favors these parts of America as well. Think ahead 20 years to when millennials are running the world. Solar energy should represent a much larger share of global energy consumption, with oil far less important. This is great news for energy consumers like the Sun Belt, and bad news for hydrocarbon producers like Russia and the Middle East. The role of technology should continue to increase, with West Coast American companies like Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon better-positioned to capitalize on these trends than anyone else in the world. The development of autonomous vehicles could help unchoke traffic gridlock in sprawling car-dependent metro areas in the South and the West.

As the global economy continues to shift from manufacturing to services, U.S. media, content and culture have more and more influence

around the world. Whether it's the aforementioned technology companies, Hollywood, Disney, global brands like Nike and Starbucks, or athletes and musicians like LeBron James and Ariana Grande, here too America has unparalleled dominance. The U.S. continues to have the largest, deepest and most transparent capital markets in the world, with Wall Street banks in their best health in decades. As the emerging world like China becomes wealthier, it also seeks to become more educated. Here, too, America is poised to thrive. One of the noteworthy aspects as China is supposedly set to wrest the global leadership mantle from the U.S. is that those in China with the means to get out want to buy real estate in the U.S. and send their children to U.S. schools.

And then there is the matter of demography. Europe, Russia and Japan have shrinking populations. China's working-age population has already peaked, and is set to decline by 90 million by the year 2040. The only large and powerful nation in the 21st century that has a reasonable birthrate and is also an attractive destination for immigrants is the U.S.

Trump's America, with its backbone as factory towns in the Midwest, may be in decline. But America's future, one based on thriving, diverse Sun Belt metropolises like



Trump's Mideast Peace Plan is Crashing Against Political Reality

TEL AVIV, Israel — Jared Kushner's shuttle diplomacy to the Holy Land late last month may have caused more issues than it resolved. No sooner was the presidential envoy back in the air after meetings in Jerusalem and Ramallah than an anonymous report came out that President Donald Trump was considering walking away from the entire peace process gambit. No matter that the story, from the London-based Arabic daily Al-Hayat, was sketchily sourced to a "Palestinian official," nor that a senior administration official quickly denied it, calling it "nonsense." It spread like wildfire, picked up by other news outlets and propagated on social media; people seemingly wanted it to be true.

Trump will almost certainly not give up on his efforts to broker what he has termed the "ultimate deal" between the Israelis and Palestinians — an agreement that he thinks is "frankly, maybe not as difficult as people have thought over the years." In his short time in office, Trump has already hosted both sides' leaders at the White House, visited Israel and the Palestinian territories himself, and now sent his son-in-law to the region. Yet this most recent iteration of the U.S.-led peace process is already showing signs of strain.

The new U.S. administration approached the issue of Israeli-Palestinian peace, as it did most other issues, with a clear strategy: to do the opposite of its predecessor. It jettisoned Barack Obama's overemphasis on halting Israeli settlement expansion and has not committed to final status talks between the two parties, an effort primarily undertaken by Secretary of State John Kerry in 2013 and 2014. Indeed,

Trump did not even publicly utter the words "two-state solution" or "Palestinian state" on his recent trip.

Trump did not even publicly utter the words "two-state solution" or "Palestinian state" on his recent trip. The new president even managed to dilute Palestinian preconditions during the Obama era for entering such talks, namely an Israeli freeze to settlement construction and the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. There is a "new" paradigm (that's not so new) about a regional peace deal between Israel

and all its Arab neighbors. Yet it's still beholden to progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

What has remained constant is the old peace process idea of mutual "confidence-building measures," or, as the White House now likes to call them, steps that "reaffirm" the two sides' "commitment to peace."

But the effort could still run aground due to obstacles in both countries' domestic political environments. On Israel's part, the Trump administration has reportedly requested that Jerusalem take steps to improve Palestinian economic life in the West Bank. The first manifestation of this was a package passed by the Israeli cabinet on the eve of Trump's visit in May, which included improved access and movement for Palestinians to and from the West Bank, especially at the Allenby border crossing to Jordan; an expanded industrial zone; and retroactive legalization of thousands of existing Palestinian homes in the West Bank's "Area C," which totals about 60 percent of the entire territory. These steps were largely recycled plans long in the works inside the Israeli military. Yet Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon recently called them part of the "Trump framework," hinting at more economic steps to come.

The "Trump framework," however, threatened to be derailed the other week by Israeli bickering over the approved expansion of the Palestinian city of Qalqilya, which abuts the 1967 "Green Line" between the West Bank and Israel.

In truth, the Israeli cabinet had passed the plan last year as part of its "carrots and sticks" approach to combating Palestinian terrorism. "It wasn't a coincidence that we chose Qalqilya," Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman explained. "Qalqilya was one of the quietest cities in this whole last wave of terror [beginning in late 2015]" — and would therefore be rewarded.

The problems arose when settler leaders caught wind of the plan, viewing it as an under-the-table transfer of Area C territory to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as is his wont, balked in the face of right-wing pressure.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as is his wont, balked in the face of right-wing pressure. He at first denied knowledge or memory of the entire plan. Faced with recorded minutes of the cabinet meeting, he then allowed that it did take place — but that he would hold a new cabinet meeting to revisit the proposal. All of this for several thousand new homes in a Palestinian city encircled on its western edge by Israel's security barrier and already extremely densely populated.

For his part, Education Minister Naftali Bennett of the pro-settler Jewish Home party called the plan "threatening" and said he would work to block it. "The Palestinians have never-ending land in Areas A and B" of the West Bank under their control, he said — which is both false and beside the point. The boundaries were set two decades ago and 1 million Palestinian residents demand for housing outstrips affordable supply, leading to exorbitant prices in the major cities — a concept likely not alien to real estate veterans like Kushner and Jason Greenblatt, Trump's special representative for international negotiations.

"In everything, we lead, and we bring the government along with us," Bennett vowed, directly challenging both Netanyahu and Trump. The Qalqilya plan, and others like it, may ultimately pass; it will reportedly be up for discussion again in the coming weeks. But Bennett and the settlers will likely extract a major price from Netanyahu in the process.

For the Palestinians, Trump's request represents a more difficult hurdle to overcome. After effectively agreeing to return to talks without any of their preconditions met, they have now been asked to do something themselves: end incitement against Israel and stop the payment of stipends to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and the families of "martyrs." The request, on the face of it, isn't that unreasonable. As Trump put it in May after a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Bethlehem, "Peace can never take root in an environment where violence is tolerated, funded, and even rewarded."

But in both public statements and private conversations, Palestinian

officials are livid about the new request. They view the emphasis on these stipends as a sign that the United States has adopted Israel's talking points and as a ploy by Netanyahu to deflect attention by injecting new conditions onto the Palestinians. More to the point, Palestinians view prisoners and their fallen as national heroes and the stipends as a form of social aid. "One out of every three Palestinian males has spent time in Israeli prison. Is any rational human being going to claim that ... one-third of Palestinians are terrorists?" Abbas recently stated through a proxy at the Herzliya Conference, an annual policy gathering in Israel. "Payments to support families are a social responsibility to look after innocent people impacted by the incarceration or killing of loved ones as a result of the military occupation."

It's unclear if Kushner and Greenblatt were swayed by such arguments. Upon their landing in Israel, the American envoys paid a very public condolence visit to the family of a slain Israeli border policewoman, who was killed by Palestinian attackers. Abbas conspicuously failed to condemn the attack, and his Fatah party posthumously adopted one of the attackers as its own. Reports subsequently came out that Kushner's meeting with Abbas was "tense," a point the White House eventually denied.

Stopping these payments would be very difficult for Abbas — "political suicide," according to one Palestinian official. According to one poll from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 91 percent of Palestinians oppose such a measure (although a competing survey by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy indicates a bit more flexibility).

The PA did in fact cut off around 270 recipients in the Gaza Strip the other month. A move could be made to differentiate between payments to "heavy" security prisoners with blood on their hands, as Israel calls them, and the genuine political prisoners that Abbas spoke of. Cutting off families, including widows and orphans of slain Palestinians, would likely be another matter altogether.

The irony is that both prisoners and "martyr" families are paid out of the

same official coffers as the PA security forces that work — in tandem with Israeli forces — to stop such attacks. And just as Abbas's Fatah party and its local affiliates often laud terrorist acts, incitement by official PA media organs significantly decreased after the outbreak of violence in late 2015, according to a senior Israeli military officer responsible for the West Bank.

"Abbas is stronger than ever," the Israeli officer recently told Foreign Policy.

"Abbas is stronger than ever," the Israeli officer recently told Foreign Policy. "I don't see a 'twilight period' to his rule yet."

Unpopular and in the 12th year of what was supposed to be a four-

year presidential term, foreign observers often perceive the 82-year-old Abbas as weak. Yet since last fall, he has managed to completely kneecap a rival movement in his own party, re-emerge on the international stage, and contain a potentially tricky prisoner hunger strike led by a senior Fatah member. The security situation in the West Bank has stabilized due to continued coordination between the PA and Israel. And Abbas is now consolidating his rule in the West Bank by squeezing the Gaza Strip, which has been under Hamas control since 2007.

It is in this context that Trump is making demands of Abbas and why the cutting of the salary payments is viewed with such alarm in Ramallah.

It runs the risk of undermining the veteran Palestinian leader right in the midst of his push to consolidate power domestically. A Palestinian delegation is set to visit Washington again in the coming weeks to continue the discussion.

For Netanyahu, putting the issue of terrorist salary payments on the peace process agenda was a masterstroke — yet he is not completely free of worry either.

Like Abbas, the Israeli prime minister is also in consolidation mode, shoring up his right-wing base ahead of a looming decision by authorities regarding his corruption investigations. Tellingly, after the Qalqilya episode, Netanyahu warned his own political camp about the possible ramifications of

undermining the government. "I would like to remind [everyone] what happened the last time a right-wing government was shaken from the right," he said, a reference to his first term in office in the late 1990s when he was undone by right-wing anger at his peace overtures toward the Palestinians. The warning, in other words, could cut both ways.

Neither Netanyahu nor Abbas wants to incur the wrath of Donald Trump. They are playing the peace process game. The question is what happens when Trump's high-level deal-making crashes into the ground-level reality of Abbas's and Netanyahu's internal politics. "[F]orging peace will take time," the White House stated after Kushner returned from his trip. The leaders of Israel and Palestine likely hope so.

**The
Washington
Post**

UNE - Battle for Mosul: Iraqis celebrate victory over the Islamic State

By Louisa Loveluck

6-8 minutes

MOSUL, Iraq — As the sun sank over Iraq's northern city of Mosul on Tuesday, sounds of elation filled the air.

Families cheered and sang as they clutched their national flag, drivers blasted their horns, and, for a moment, it seemed that the city was united in victory against the Islamic State.

Across the country, the party had also started. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's declaration Monday that the battle was officially over after nine months sent revelers pouring into the streets of Baghdad. In the southern city of Basra, fireworks crackled late into the night.

The celebrations provide a much-needed respite for a nation that was already unraveling when the Islamic State arrived in Mosul three years ago. Defeat here is a heavy blow for the militants, robbing them of one of their most important strongholds and dashing their dream of a proto-state.

But viewed from the ground, Iraq's victory is a messy business.

How Iraqi forces defeated the Islamic State

No one knows how many people died during the fighting. Half the city's residents were displaced; its landmarks and most populous districts are shattered beyond recognition.

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : The Challenges After Mosul - The New York Times

Iraq's prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, and Iraqi security forces deserved to celebrate after re-

The eastern districts have sprung back to life. Fruit sellers line the roads, peddling melons and mulberries in the heat of the day. And shops run a roaring trade, packed at lunchtime and bustling with life as the sun sets.

But cross the Tigris River heading west, and the cityscape shatters into an ugly sea of broken buildings.

In the Old City, a final redoubt for Islamic State militants this week, it can be hard to tell where one structure ended and another began.

The only way through some alleyways is over collapsed homes. And as one clammers, one sees remnants of lives they once held. Baby clothes and a cheese grater were mixed into the rubble of one house. The stench of rotting flesh suggested the occupants were still there, too — buried, somewhere, deep under the rubble.

[Away from Iraq's front lines, the Islamic State is creeping back in]

Security remains a huge challenge in a city that had a population of more than 2.5 million before the war. The militants have already proved their ability to launch wildcat bombings in districts long retaken by the security forces. Residents are uneasy about the prospect of sleeper cells, sometimes fearing that a weak rule of law will allow extremist fighters to walk free for the cost of a bribe.

"Of course their men are here; everyone knows it," said Ahmed Wadallah, tending a Mosul

nut shop Tuesday. His family has installed security cameras at the door to record the movements of men they know to have joined the Islamic State.

On the eastern bank of the Tigris River, an old fairground is now a screening station to stop fighters from leaving among the civilians. Inside an old bumper-car rink, dozens of men sat in rows last week and waited for their judgment. Military intelligence officers in balaclavas sporadically moved among them to pull out an evacuee accused of working with the militants.

Some went quietly. Others wanted a fight.

"I swear I only prayed in their mosque. I have nothing to do with them," shouted one man, his back covered in what appeared to be fresh welts.

A thickset officer with his face covered waved to his colleagues to drag the man away.

"You were walking through the streets with your gun," he said. "We saw you."

The man hung his head, then began to cry.

establishing control over Mosul, which the Islamic State occupied for three years in its bloody quest for a

caliphate. The celebration should be brief. There is still plenty of urgent work to be done — by Iraqis, the

United States, regional neighbors and others — to stabilize Iraq and Syria while also working to counter ISIS' insidious ideology. And a new report about the high civilian casualty rate demands that President Trump and the Pentagon rethink how the war is being fought.

The focus among ISIS' foes has been killing the terrorists in Iraq and in Syria, where American-backed Syrian forces are closer to recapturing ISIS headquarters, in Raqqa. The longer-term challenge will be addressing the complex factors that have created conditions for the group to thrive, including destructive rivalries between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, corruption and the failure of governments to meet their citizens' economic and security needs.

In Mosul, there are pockets of resistance and residual threats from ISIS sleeper cells, suicide bombers and houses rigged with explosives. Any satisfaction over the military success must be tempered by the high death toll, with perhaps over

1,000 Iraqi soldiers and hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians killed in nine months of fighting. ISIS used civilians as human shields, while Iraqi and the American-led coalition forces could have done more to protect civilians, says a new report by Amnesty International.

Mosul residents have been left traumatized by the psychological, sexual and physical violence suffered during three years of ISIS control. The city has been devastated, including the iconic Al Nuri mosque and much of the rest of its religious and cultural heritage. At least \$1 billion is needed for reconstruction so that thousands of displaced Iraqis can return home. The coalition of nations that joined with America to fight ISIS has raised funds through the United Nations to rebuild Iraq and Syria; some are meeting in Washington this week to decide on future steps.

The obvious question is, what comes next? The Trump administration has so far failed to put forward a comprehensive

strategy to deal with postwar reconstruction in Mosul and other challenges. The White House is reportedly debating whether to get involved in Iraq's long-term recovery, the kind of overseas venture Mr. Trump disparaged during the election campaign. His proposal to greatly reduce the State Department aid budget would limit what America could do. Iraqis bear the primary responsibility for stabilizing their country, but they cannot do it without help.

One unanswered question is how to ensure that Iraq's Shiite-led government guarantees the Sunni minority security and brings Sunnis into the political process. Its failure to do so, dating back to 2003, when the Americans invaded and deposed Saddam Hussein, created the fertile ground in which ISIS flourished. Mr. Abadi has been more inclusive than his predecessor, but there is a long way to go. Serious efforts are also needed to curb corruption, which undermines public trust.

Tensions between Kurds and Iraqis in northern Iraq must be managed, as must Kurdish aspirations for independence in Iraqi Kurdistan. Preventing Iran from expanding its influence in Iraq and in Syria, where with Russia it is a major ally of the Assad regime, is also important. Left unaddressed, such situations will continue to roil Iraqi politics and lead to new conflicts that ISIS can exploit.

Another dilemma is what to do about the ISIS fighters who are even now melting back into local communities to regroup, not just in the Middle East but in far-flung parts of the globe. There must also be efforts at the local level to persuade young people not to join militant groups that manipulate Islam for violent purposes.

Iraq squandered one opportunity to remake itself into a stable and pluralistic country. With ISIS on the run, it should seize this second chance.



Bergen : Is the fall of Mosul the fall of ISIS?

(CNN)The tidal wave of tens of thousands of "foreign fighters" that once flocked from around the Muslim world and beyond to ISIS' black banners has slowed to a trickle. Estimates cited by The Washington Post suggest that the flow of foreign recruits to ISIS had dropped from a high of 2,000 a month to 50 a month by last fall.

Few foreign militants want to join the losing team.

On Monday, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the defeat of ISIS in Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq and the place where three years ago the terror group first announced its self-styled caliphate.

The loss of its Iraqi capital as well of much of its territory in Iraq and Syria dramatically undercuts ISIS' claim that it is the caliphate because the caliphate has historically been both a substantial geographic entity such, as the Ottoman Empire, as well as a theological construct.

While the victory over ISIS at Mosul is certainly to be celebrated and its fighters are now more concerned about simple survival than plotting

attacks in the West, it's worth recalling that ISIS continues to hold the Iraqi towns of Tal Afar (population 100,000) and Hawija (population 115,000) and its de facto Syrian capital, Raqqa (population around 200,000).

The campaign to liberate Raqqa is now underway, but given the fact that it took around eight months to expel ISIS from Mosul we should expect a long battle for Raqqa.

Also, the one thing that really brought together the fractious sects and ethnic groups of Iraq --- the Kurds, the Shia and most of the Sunnis -- was their shared hatred of ISIS. With ISIS sharply declining in power, the tensions that have long existed in Iraq between these various groups will likely reassert themselves.

Which brings us to the bigger picture: ISIS was never the root problem in Iraq -- even though it certainly created great misery among those it lorded over -- but rather the group was the symptom of deeper problems that exist in the Middle East that are unlikely to disappear anytime soon.

ISIS, after all, is a branch of al Qaeda in Iraq, which was founded more than a decade ago. After suffering a near total defeat by US forces in Iraq between 2007 and 2010, al Qaeda regrouped in neighboring Syria as that country descended into a civil war beginning in 2011.

Al Qaeda in Iraq subsequently rebranded itself as ISIS.

ISIS emerged in Syria because it was seen as one of the few Sunni groups truly capable of standing up to the brutal Shia Alawite regime of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad.

Similarly, ISIS did well in Iraq when it swept across the country in 2014, in part, because many Iraqi Sunnis were fed up with the deeply sectarian Shia government of then-Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

The deep divisions between many Sunnis and Shia in both Iraq and Syria and also in countries such as Yemen, where Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran are fighting a proxy war, are likely to continue for many years. These are the conditions that will surely set the stage for the emergence of a son of ISIS (and even a grandson of ISIS).

At the same time, the collapse of governance in Arab countries such as Libya, Yemen and Syria has provided the breeding ground for groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda that thrive in countries where there is a leadership vacuum.

This is also compounded by the post-Arab Spring collapse of many Middle Eastern economies.

In turn, these factors have produced a massive and unprecedented wave of Muslim immigration into Europe. This influx has caused great political turbulence in Europe, enabling the rise of ultranationalist parties from France to Poland.

All of these factors have interacted to produce Sunni jihadists in the Middle East and to create fertile soil in Europe for the ideology of jihadism to take root among alienated, young Muslim men such as the ISIS recruits who carried out the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels and Manchester, England, over the past two years.

That takes us to the unhappy conclusion that the war against the terrorists is far from over.



Bershidsky : Islamic State Remains Dangerous in Defeat

With Mosul recaptured from Islamic State and Raqqa, part of its old town already in the hands of U.S.-backed groups, probably weeks from being taken, the Islamic State is likely

soon to be wiped off war zone maps. Like Lord Voldemort in the early Harry Potter books, it won't have a physical presence -- but it will live on in other forms: the minds of the foreign fighters returning to

their homelands, the online presence it has built and the souls of the disaffected Sunni populations in the areas that the terrorist group has held for years.

It's important to assess all three dangers and start dealing with them even before the looming military defeat of IS.

The foreign fighters, reportedly, have been abandoning the failed

caliphate in droves -- the ones, that is, who haven't been killed, a number that's hard to estimate. But thousands of them are still in Syria and Iraq, and many will try to go home.

In 2013, Thomas Hegghammer, an authority on foreign fighters at the University of Oslo, calculated that of 401 terrorists who took part in attacks in the West between 1990 and 2010, 107 had traveled to foreign countries to fight for Islamist causes. Hegghammer has estimated that at most, one in nine foreign fighters return to strike in the West, but, in a 2016 paper, Daniel Byman of Georgetown University argued that one in 20 would be more accurate. That could still mean a lot of attacks considering how big a magnet for foreigners Islamic State has been.

According to Byman, the returnee threat is overrated, though. The former foreign fighters take a number of "off-ramps" on the road to terror, even if they outlive the conflicts in which they went to fight. Some go off to other Middle Eastern wars, and IS fighters now have the opportunity to move to Afghanistan and other places where the organization has active cells. Others are intercepted by the intelligence services and put under such intensive surveillance that they can't be effective as terrorists. Yet others find it hard, and perhaps demeaning, to apply the skills they gained fighting in a civil war to the clandestine planning to attacks on

civilians.

But, in the case of IS returnees, the reasons why most won't continue their jihad will be psychological. Byman wrote:

At the start, simply defending the Syrian people against the regime's brutality was the primary motivation of many foreign fighters, not defending them against a Western or other "foreign" enemy. Most joined the fight to gain bragging rights among their friends or to seek "excitement and adventure." In their eyes, Syria seemed an admirable and an honorable way for them to do so.

Taking the fight to one's peaceful neighbors is far more iffy in terms of bragging rights.

Besides, many will come back disappointed. Islamic State propaganda promoted the caliphate's territory as a jihadist paradise, based on Muslim camaraderie and noble goals. But in reality, many of the foreigners couldn't blend in with the locals, were given menial tasks, and were appalled by the brutality of the Middle Eastern civil conflict. Especially after a military defeat, they won't come back as poster boys for the cause. It's up to Western societies to make contact with them and seek their help in countering further terrorist propaganda. Denmark's experience in foreign fighter rehabilitation could come in handy.

The Islamic State's propaganda network will still be in place after its military defeat, though the group's dwindling financial resources have already hit its media operations hard. Ultimately, running recruitment campaigns on the social networks is cheap, and taking down the terrorists' propaganda product is nothing but a game of whack-a-mole. But the propagandists will have trouble with the message.

The dream of an actual state was an effective propaganda tool for a while, and so was the buzz of early victories. That's all in the past now, and propaganda channels have to push the tired idea of vengeance. It doesn't measure up to the enormity of a looming apocalyptic battle against crusaders near the Syrian town of Dabiq, a mainstay of Islamic State propaganda in previous years -- until the town was captured from IS by the Syrian rebels last October, without much fanfare.

Soon, Islamic State will be just another terrorist group competing for the angry attention of potential recruits. Defeat is hard to sell, as al-Qaeda has found out in the long years while its leaders were killed off and its bases destroyed one by one. The rise of IS would have been impossible without the erosion of that major terrorist "brand."

The plight of the Sunni Arabs in the areas of Iraq and Syria that are being liberated today is more difficult to cope with than the returnees or the remaining IS propaganda operation. IS couldn't have held on

to these lands for as long as it did without local support.

But Mosul was ruined by the time it was liberated, and Raqqa will follow in its path. Rebuilding either -- and other areas formerly held by IS -- seems like a longshot given the resources of the Iraqi government and Syrian rebels. Reaching a political settlement is more realistic, but will also take time. The areas IS occupied are likely to be worse off once the terror group is gone.

A 2013 Rand Corporation report that attempted to summarize the modern experience of dealing with insurgencies has found that only one strategy (out of the 24 Rand singled out) was a glaring failure: "Crush them," or "escalating repression and collective punishment." It's still a likely scenario at this point, and locals fear it from the Shiite-led government of Iraq. What works is confident policing coupled with a rebuilding effort -- a difficult combination to get right.

A June report from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point shows that IS remains active in the liberated cities, conducting terror attacks and maintaining a clandestine presence. There must be a better alternative for the locals than a new insurgency, and that's the biggest challenge in Mosul and, soon, in Raqqa.



Ignatius : America can succeed militarily in the Mideast. ISIS's defeat in Mosul tells us how.

5-7 minutes

What lessons can we take from the Islamic State's defeat in Mosul and its coming eviction from Raqqa? The collapse of the caliphate tells us that the United States can succeed militarily in the Middle East if -- and probably only if -- it works with local forces who are prepared to do the fighting and dying.

Where the massive U.S. ground campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past decade and a half became expensive exercises in frustration, the war against the Islamic State has been far less costly in money and American lives -- and also more successful. Amazingly, over the past three years, just five Americans have been killed in action in Syria and Iraq, according to the U.S. military.

The overall human toll has been horrific, even if Americans haven't been paying the price. A triumphal

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi proclaimed victory in Mosul on Monday, but pictures of the city showed a devastated wasteland of pulverized buildings. We may never know how many thousands of civilians lie under the rubble.

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Because the U.S. footprint and casualty levels have been so modest, to Americans this war has mostly been out of sight, out of mind. But it's worth examining how the strategy has worked militarily -- and to recognize the lack of any corresponding political strategy, which may well cause problems down the road.

The American campaign has been built around Special Operations forces. The SOF slogan has been that the battle must be waged "by,

with and through" local partners. That has meant training, equipping and advising Iraqi and Syrian soldiers -- then providing them with air support that has relentlessly pounded the enemy.

The most brutally efficient part of the campaign has been the secret "capture or kill" strikes by the United States and some of its partners. In simple terms, when the United States has had actionable intelligence about a terrorist operative, it has tried to take that person off the battlefield.

The marriage of local ground forces with U.S. drones, warplanes and intelligence has been potent. Linda Robinson, a Rand Corp. analyst who spent weeks observing the fight this spring in Iraq and Syria, wrote in a recent blog post that the United States has found a "new way of warfighting."

Credit for this innovative campaign goes to the U.S. military, which became increasingly confident after

a slow start; to President Barack Obama, who sent thousands of U.S. troops to Iraq and Syria despite public wariness; and to President Trump, who delegated decisions to the military in ways that accelerated the campaign.

The surprise has been how motivated and disciplined the Iraqi and Syrian forces have been. They've fought bravely, taking significant casualties. And for the most part, they have cooperated across sectarian lines.

In Iraq, the United States has relied on two battle-hardened forces: the Iraqi army's Counter Terrorism Service and the Kurdish peshmerga. The two cooperate on the battlefield (even as their political leaders continue to bicker). Meanwhile, Iraq's Shiite militias, which analysts feared would undermine the fight against the Sunni extremists, haven't played that spoiler role.

In Syria, America's decisive ally has been the Kurdish militia known as

the YPG. This partnership began almost by accident back in 2014, when the marauding Islamic State was on the verge of capturing Kobani in northern Syria. Iraqi Kurds from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan militia touted the Syrian YPG to their American advisers, and an improvised system of spotting, targeting and air assault evolved. The Americans were astonished by the determination of the Kurds, and a warriors' kinship developed.

The Syrian Kurds were an awkward ally politically, because Turkey regards them (probably rightly) as an offshoot of the terrorist PKK. But as U.S. Central Command commander Gen. Joseph Votel told me at a training base inside Syria a year ago, "We have to go with what we've got" in Syria, which meant the Kurdish-led force.

This sort of improvised approach has characterized the U.S. effort

since 2014. Rather than build the ideal force on a U.S. model, commanders adapted. Political problems — bitter Turkish opposition, Iraqi Kurdish ambitions for independence, incoherent political strategy for Syria — were put on the shelf for later. The military strategy has been built on political quicksand, but it's still standing.

In 2012, the CIA conducted a study that argued that American support

for such local forces had rarely worked. But sources say that agency analysts had an important caveat: In the U.S. interventions that were successful, the United States had operated closely with its partners on the battlefield. This finding seems to have been reinforced in Syria and Iraq.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Iraq Faces Tough Task of Rebuilding Mosul After ISIS Defeat

Karen Leigh and Asa Fitch

ERBIL, Iraq—The day after announcing Islamic State's defeat in Mosul, Iraqis turned to the enormous challenges of rebuilding and resettling the country's second-largest city.

The municipal government worked Tuesday to repair and open roads in the western side of the city, where the terror group made its last stand in Mosul. Swaths of that half of the city were largely flattened in months of fighting, with streets impassable and basic services nonexistent.

"Our priority now is getting people home," said Abdulsattar Alhabbu, head of the Mosul municipality. "Our focus is on west Mosul, where most of the damage from the fight happened. Our priority is bringing back the water supply. There is no life without water."

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi proclaimed victory over Islamic State in Mosul on Monday. The government declared a holiday on Tuesday and a week of official celebrations. But even amid the festive atmosphere, Mr. Abadi referenced the tremendous economic and security challenges ahead. An Iraqi counterterrorism forces commander said the fight to clean up the last remaining pockets of Islamic State resistance in Mosul was continuing on Tuesday.

Nearly nine months of fighting to drive the extremist group from the city displaced more than 800,000 residents, according to the International Organization for Migration. Many say they won't

return home until water and other basic services are restored—a task that will take at least six weeks, according to Hussameldin al-Abbar, an official of Nineveh province, where Mosul is located.

"Nearly every building on the western side of Mosul was completely destroyed. With this level of devastation, it's very unlikely that the hundreds of thousands of displaced families will be going home anytime soon," said Arnaud Quemin, interim Iraq country director for aid group Mercy Corps. "This is a critical moment for Mosul."

That lack of basic services is keeping thousands of residents like Ahmed Suleiman Abdullah staying put in desert camps for displaced people near Mosul, even as scorching summer temperatures soar above 110 degrees. Mr. Abdullah fled in March with his two wives and nine children after his house in western Mosul was partly destroyed by fighting.

"One of the major problems is there is no water supply to the area and no electricity," he said recently. "How do you survive with kids with no water?"

Part of his house could be repaired quickly if he had money to do it, Mr. Abdullah said.

"We had no jobs for three years under Daesh," he said, using an Arabic acronym for Islamic State. "We spent all our savings, and now there is no work and we have nothing."

Khalid Muhammed, 32, a stationery and cosmetics shop owner in western Mosul, said last week that he reopened last month as people

started to return. But a lack of city-supplied water was limiting customers.

"We are getting water tankers from NGOs, but we need the state-supplied water to be back so all the people will come back to their homes," he said, referring to aid organizations.

Though government officials recently put forth a \$100 billion, 10-year plan for reconstructing the country, they are short on funds. The International Monetary Fund in 2016 provided more than \$5 billion in emergency loans to shore up Iraq's economy and to rebuild key cities destroyed by fighting. But it wasn't enough.

The government will need hundreds of millions of dollars to rebuild and compensate residents who lost their homes, businesses and factories in Mosul. But Iraq's economy has been badly battered in three years of war against Islamic State and the government has only a fraction of what it needs to repair the city.

"What we have now is nothing. We need an emergency budget for rebuilding Mosul, and international aid," said Mr. Abbar, the provincial official. "For 2017, Nineveh province's budget was \$40 million. By my estimation what we need only for the restoration of infrastructure and basic services is more than \$500 million."

A committee of local and federal government officials is organizing the massive task of cataloging and verifying damage to homes and businesses, but it is a preliminary step. A 2009 federal law promises Iraqis compensation for damage cities such as Mosul to helping the Iraqi government better address political grievances. Failure risks sowing the seeds of ISIS's resurgence.

ISIS started strong in 2014, taking advantage of Sunni grievances

caused by terror attacks or military operations.

While life in Mosul's eastern half largely returned to normal after it was retaken by Iraqi forces in January, months of fierce fighting continued to dislodge entrenched militants from densely populated western neighborhoods, including stiff resistance this week during its last stand in the historic Old City.

Islamic State took control of Mosul in the summer of 2014, seizing about one-third of Iraq. The northern city, once home to some two million people, became its stronghold in Iraq. Even after its defeat in Mosul, the group still controls a few towns in Iraq, a stretch of the border with Syria and much of the oil-rich eastern Syrian province of Deir Ezzour.

Some Mosul residents had already begun returning to help in the cleanup and to begin to rebuild even before Mosul's full recapture this week.

In the Jadida neighborhood of western Mosul, Hassan Falah, 20, stacked broken blocks of concrete last week at his family's house, whose roof and third story were blown off. He and his extended family are hoping for government aid for rebuilding, but they aren't waiting for it to come. They built the multifamily structure themselves decades ago, and they can build it again, he said.

"After what we saw under Daesh, we never hoped to survive," he said, recounting how his family and neighbors hid out in the basement as the battle raged above them. "We were given a new life after liberation."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Jones : Iraq Declares Victory in Mosul, but the War Is Far From Over

Seth G. Jones

5-7 minutes

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi arrived in Mosul on Sunday, dressed in a black military uniform, and

against the Iraqi government. At its peak, according to a Rand Corp. analysis, ISIS controlled nearly 58,000 square kilometers of territory in Iraq, home to more than six million people. But beginning in 2016 the group lost significant territory in cities like Sinjar, Fallujah, Ramadi and now most of Mosul to a combination of U.S. and allied strikes, ground assaults by the Iraqi security forces, and Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish militia advances.

Despite these successes, there are troubling signs in Iraq, particularly within the Sunni Arab community. Take the western city of Fallujah. A year after Iraqi forces liberated the city, residents are disenchanted because of the slow pace of rebuilding, the absence of government services and skyrocketing unemployment. "This area was liberated in June, and it still looks the same now," Hussein Ahmed, a Fallujah resident, told a visiting journalist earlier this year. "I speak for thousands of people when I say the government has forgotten us."

Many Sunnis also look warily at growing Iranian influence. Tehran is

committed to increasing its influence in Iraq through such organizations as the Popular Mobilization Units, militias that include as many as 150,000 Shiite fighters. To the consternation of many Sunnis, Iraq's parliament passed a law in December 2016 formally integrating the Popular Mobilization Units into Iraq's security forces. Today, such Shiite forces are nearly as large as the entire Iraqi army.

ISIS fighters are attempting to leverage these grievances in several ways. Its operatives have recruited new members who are unhappy about the pace of reconstruction in Sunni towns and cities, angry about friends or family members who have been abused by pro-government militias, and nervous about Iran's growing influence in the country. Iraq's security services have noted with alarm that ISIS cells are re-establishing intelligence networks in Ramadi and Fallujah. Even after last week's defeat in Mosul, ISIS still holds nearly 10,000 square kilometers of territory in Iraq with a total population of one million, including the western city of al Qa'im. It also boasts over 15,000 fighters across the Iraq-Syria

battlefield and more than \$500 million in annual revenue through the end of 2016, though ISIS's monthly revenues have declined in 2017.

ISIS is also shifting from conventional to guerrilla operations, including ambushes, raids, suicide attacks, car bombs and assassinations. The group is relocating its personnel and battlefield supplies to mountains, caves and desert areas around the Iraqi city of Haditha, Lake Tharthar, and the Iraq-Syria border region. ISIS has also used multi-rotor and fixed wing drones for surveillance and, occasionally, strike missions. In addition, the group is restructuring its wilayahs, or provinces, and decentralizing its organizational structure in Syria and Iraq to conduct more effective guerrilla operations.

In light of these developments, the U.S. should establish a more aggressive political strategy to prevent Islamic State's revitalization. U.S. diplomats and military leaders need to encourage Iraqi leaders to better address Sunni grievances. One step would be to cut in half the

number of Shiite forces under the Popular Mobilization Units and transition militia fighters to civilian employment. U.S. officials might also press Baghdad to withdraw Shiite militias from the Iraq-Syria border, including in Nineveh, where they facilitate a regional pipeline of Shiite fighters from Iran all the way to Lebanon.

In addition, the U.S. should help coordinate international assistance coming into Iraq, with an emphasis on rapid repair of damaged infrastructure in urban centers like Mosul, Ramadi, Fallujah and Beiji. Reconstruction assistance should be openly associated with efforts to move the Iraqi government and Sunni Arabs closer together.

Islamic State's predecessor, al Qaeda in Iraq, began to reconstitute itself in 2011 in part because of Baghdad's failure to address Sunni grievances and Washington's decision to withdraw U.S. forces and inability to influence Iraqi politics. It would be doubly tragic to make the same mistake again today.



Editorial : After Victory in Mosul - WSJ

The Editorial Board

4-5 minutes

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory Monday over Islamic State in Mosul, and Americans can also take pride at the end of a bloody three-year campaign that would not have happened without U.S. leadership and arms. The triumph will be short-lived, however, if the Baghdad government and U.S. repeat the mistakes they made after the successful "surge" of 2007-2008.

The victory removes ISIS from the capital of the self-styled caliphate that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared after routing the Iraqi army in Mosul in June 2014. It provides relief to tens of thousands of Iraqis living in fear of torture or death for even minor offenses against Shariah law, or for being a non-Muslim.

It is also a morale boost to the Iraqi military and Mr. Abadi, who has proven to be a major improvement over predecessor Nouri al-Maliki. Particular credit goes to the Kurdish *peshmerga* who were the main resistance to Islamic State in 2014 and prevented a larger rout.

The biggest problem with the Mosul campaign is that it took so long. Barack Obama never wanted to admit that his 2011 withdrawal of all U.S. forces was a blunder that required a U.S. military return to Iraq. He thus deployed a light footprint limited mainly to special forces and air power. New Defense Secretary Jim Mattis accelerated the pace of battle after January. But the ability of ISIS to survive in Mosul for so long gave it an elan in the Islamic world that helped recruit young radicals and spread its brand around the world.

Defeat in Mosul diminishes that appeal, a decline that will continue as the U.S. coalition closes in on Islamic State's Syrian stronghold in

Raqqa. But the threat won't vanish, as the jihadists disperse into smaller cells in towns and cities across the Sunni heartland. The jihadists will return to their post-Saddam insurgent tactics and wait to exploit bad governance or more sectarian conflict.

"We have another mission ahead of us, to create stability, to build and clear Daesh [ISIS] cells, and that requires an intelligence and security effort, and the unity which enabled us to fight Daesh," Mr. Abadi said Monday, and we hope he means it.

He could start by declaring his support for local Sunni government and preventing Iran-backed Shiite militias from treating Sunnis like members of Islamic State as they go door to door in Mosul. He needs to rebuild Mosul rapidly and more effectively than his government has Fallujah and other former ISIS-run cities. (See Seth Jones nearby.)

The Trump Administration can help by negotiating a modest U.S.

military presence that will remain in Iraq for the long run. Mr. Mattis told the Senate in June that such a force could serve "in a training role and mentoring role in Iraq if we work that out with the government." A U.S. presence will serve as a moderating voice among the Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish factions. And it may give Mr. Abadi more courage to resist becoming a de facto subsidiary of Iran and its Hezbollah-like militias in Iraq.

This will be crucial as September's Kurdish independence referendum approaches, which may threaten the Abadi government. Iran would love a fractured and diminished Baghdad to replace Mr. Abadi with an ally like Mr. Maliki. A politically stable and independent Iraq, by contrast, would improve the chances of stabilizing Syria after ISIS is swept from Raqqa. There are no permanent victories in the Middle East, but the liberation of Mosul is an important milestone in the war against radical Islam.



Secret Details of Trump-Putin Syria Cease-fire Focus on Iranian Proxies

A confidential U.S.-Russian cease-fire agreement for southwestern Syria that went into effect Sunday calls for barring

Iranian-backed foreign fighters from a strategic stretch of Syrian territory near the borders of Israel and Jordan, according to three diplomatic sources.

President Donald Trump hailed it as an important agreement that would serve to save lives. But few details of the accord have been made public.

U.S. Defense Department officials — who would have responsibility for monitoring the agreement — appeared to be in the dark about the pact's fine print.

The pact is aimed at addressing demands by Israel and Jordan — the latter is a party to the agreement — that Iranian forces and their proxies, including Hezbollah, not be permitted near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, which separates Syria from Israel, or along the Jordanian border.

But former U.S. diplomats and observers question whether the agreement is truly enforceable, expressing doubts that Russia could act as a reliable guarantor for a cease-fire involving the Syrian regime, Iran, and its proxies.

“The question is, ‘Who is going to enforce that?’ Is Russia going to take on the responsibility for telling Iran what to do?” said Gerald Feierstein, a veteran U.S. diplomat who retired last year, noting that a peace deal without Iranian buy-in is untenable. “Iranians are much closer to Assad’s position on the way forward in Syria than the Russians are.”

And they have far more leverage. “It’s the Iranians and their proxies who are doing a bulk of the fighting inside Syria,” he told Foreign Policy.

With Iran in the driver’s seat, seasoned U.S. diplomats expressed doubts that the Kremlin could deliver on its promises. “The key to the survival of the Assad regime is Iran, not Russia,” said Fred Hof, a former State Department special advisor for transition in Syria. “Are the Russians trying to rush this [agreement] through without a firm understanding with the regime and without clear understanding of what the ‘or else’ is?”

Since May, the Russians have failed to persuade Iranian-backed militia groups or the Syrian regime to respect a “deconfliction zone” that American commanders had declared near a U.S. outpost in southeastern Syria. Although U.S. officers informed their Russian counterparts about the zone around Tanf, Iranian-backed militias and Syrian fighter jets ignored the warning and moved toward U.S. special operations forces and their Syrian Kurdish and Arab allies. As a result, U.S. aircraft shot down a Syrian fighter jet and an Iranian-made drone and struck Iranian-backed militias in the area.

Given the track record so far, “Why should we believe that it will be different under this cease-fire?” one congressional staffer asked.

An Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Bahram Qasemi, reacted coolly to the pact, saying it contained some “ambiguities” and that “no agreement would be successful without taking the realities on the ground into account.”

“Iran is seeking Syria’s sovereignty and security so a cease-fire cannot be limited to a certain location,” Qasemi was quoted saying by Tasnim News Agency.

Not everyone was so pessimistic. Andrew Tabler, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said southwestern Syria’s relative calm — and Washington’s continued influence among U.S.-trained opposition factions fighting President Bashar al-Assad — make it a natural proving ground for U.S. and Russian cooperation.

If successful, such cooperation could be employed in other parts of the country. “I think it’s worth a try,” Tabler said. “If we’re going to test something, this is a good place to test it.”

The pact — detailed in a Memorandum of Principle for De-escalation in Southern Syria — established a cease-fire between Syrian government forces and armed opposition groups that came into force on Sunday. It calls for transforming southern Syria below Quneitra and Suwayda into an exclusion zone for fighters of “non-Syrian origin,” including Iranian troops, their proxies, and fighters linked to al Qaeda and the Islamic State, which have a limited presence in the area.

“This could be designed mainly to reassure the Israelis that these elements would not be operating in proximity to the Golan Heights,” said Hof, who is now at the Atlantic Council.

The accord calls for maintaining existing governance and security arrangements in opposition-held areas in southwestern Syria, a provision aimed at dissuading Syrian government forces from retaking territory in the area. But some observers said the arrangement could also help turn a de facto partition of southern Syria into a permanent one. “This entrenches Syria’s partition further,” one diplomatic observer said.

The accord also calls for the unimpeded access for humanitarian aid workers and for the creation of conditions for the return of refugees from southwestern Syria. Jordan has received more than 650,000 registered Syrian refugees since the conflict began more than six years ago.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced Monday the establishment of a monitoring center in Jordan, but State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert declined to confirm any specifics. “Mr. Lavrov likes to talk a lot,” she said.

A State Department official told FP that the United States and Russia are still trying to work out the details of the pact, “including how to monitor the cease-fire, the rules that would govern the southwest de-escalation area, and the presence of monitors.”

“We are looking at various options for the monitoring arrangement in which information can be exchanged and violations resolved,” the official said.

When asked if she was optimistic about the cease-fire holding, Nauert demurred. “Perhaps optimism is too strong a word. But I think it is promising, in a certain sense, we have been able to get the cease-fire underway,” she said.

The White House did not respond to queries about the cease-fire deal.

The agreement — finalized following Trump’s recent meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin — calls for more coordination among the former Cold War superpowers in the fight against terrorists in Syria. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested that the pact may serve as a model for further cooperation in northern Syria and provides the “first indication of the U.S. and Russia being able to work together in Syria.”

It also marked a recognition by Moscow that a separate effort to negotiate a cease-fire in Astana, Kazakhstan, with Iran and Turkey was foundering. On May 4, the three powers signed an agreement to establish four so-called “de-escalation zones” throughout Syria. But they have been unable to agree on whose forces would monitor those cease-fires.

“Not necessarily a brilliant deal for the Russians,” one diplomatic source said. “I suspect that after the humiliating failure of Astana, Putin needed a ‘success’ to announce and divert attention from Astana failure.”

The cease-fire would be overseen by officials from the United States, Russia, and Jordan at a monitoring cell in Amman, Jordan. Israel is not a formal party to the pact but has been actively involved behind the scenes in the discussions leading up to the agreement.

Hof said the provision for a joint monitoring center resembles a plan put forward by former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to coordinate efforts to confront extremists in northwestern Syria. “[U.S. Central Command] was very, very, very skeptical about that when it was first proposed,” Hof said. “They feared being hoodwinked by the Russians into some kind of attack on an urban area that would produce massive civilian casualties.”

In fact, it appears that the military was not consulted this time around. On Monday, BuzzFeed News reported that top Pentagon officials were not involved in the planning or briefed on their role in the arrangement.

A military officer confirmed to FP that the Pentagon and Centcom have very little information about the proposed cease-fire and said, “We’re getting to that level of understanding this week.”

American aircraft rarely operate in southwestern Syria, but “we’ll certainly respect the cease-fire,” the officer said, adding that the U.S. military hasn’t decided if it would fly combat air patrols to enforce any agreement.

The more likely situation would see a “remote” monitoring agreement, where U.S. military personnel would sit together with Russian officers at the proposed facility in Amman, the officer said, though “we have to figure out exactly what it means, and we have to figure out what the terms of reference are between the Russians and us and if the Syrians are even a party to it.”

U.S. troops won’t be working directly with Iranians or Syrians, however. “Our operating assumption is if the Iranians and Syrians will want to be informed, the Russians are going to be the intermediary on all things,” the officer said.

“The United States remains committed to defeating ISIS, helping to end the conflict in Syria, reducing suffering, and enabling people to return to their homes,” Trump’s national security advisor, H.R. McMaster, said last Friday, referring to the Islamic State. “This agreement is an important step toward these common goals.”

But questions lingered about its workability.

The region is occupied by several armed opposition groups backed by the United States, Turkey, Jordan, and Persian Gulf states and also includes small pockets of forces loyal to al Qaeda and the Islamic State. The United States exercises little influence over such extremist groups, making them potential spoilers.

On July 9, Trump tweeted that the Syrian cease-fire seems to be holding. For Moscow, the pact placed Putin in the role of peacemaker, even as Russia continued to provide air support for Syrian offensive operations.

“This is a sop for Russia,” said Joshua Landis, a Syria scholar at the University of Oklahoma. “The Americans can’t police this situation.”

Tillerson Calls Qatar's Position in Dispute With Arab States 'Very Reasonable'

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met Tuesday with Qatari officials as he continued his tour of the region in an attempt to help defuse the monthlong rift between Qatar and its Arab neighbors.

"I think Qatar has been quite clear in its positions, and I think those have been very reasonable," Tillerson said Tuesday.

On Monday, Tillerson and Mark Sedwill, the British national-security adviser, met with officials in Kuwait, which is mediating the crisis among its fellow members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Tillerson travels next to Saudi Arabia, which is leading the blockade of Qatar.

In June, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain severed ties with Qatar, accusing it of, among other things, supporting terrorist groups. They expelled Qatari citizens who lived in their countries and ordered their citizens in Qatar to return—in many cases separating families. They also cut all transportation ties with Qatar, which relies on supplies trucked in through its land border with Saudi Arabia.

Qatar, which denies the charges against it, turned to Iran and Turkey for support. The U.S. finds itself caught in the middle. Qatar is home to the largest U.S. military base in the region, and it's from where the U.S. military strikes ISIS. The U.S. also has close ties to Saudi Arabia and other other countries involved in the blockade. Tillerson, who as CEO of Exxon developed close relations with Qatar's emir, has called for the blockade to be lifted.

Saudi Arabia and the others sent Qatar a list of 13 demands, including the closure of Al-Jazeera, the Qatari-owned Arabic language broadcaster; the severing of links with Iran, which Saudi Arabia views as its main regional rival; the closure of a Turkish military base in Qatar; and the severing of links with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar has rejected the demands. The U.S. says some of the demands could be met. Saudi Arabia and the others say the offer no longer stands.

In Washington, Ali Bin Samikh Al-Marri, chairman of the the country's independent National Human Rights

Committee, said the blockade's humanitarian costs were mounting, and urged the Trump administration to put the "human-rights issue at the top of the agenda." He was in the U.S. capital to meet with State Department officials on the human-rights aspect of the dispute.

Al-Marri called the Saudi-led action "reckless and unprofessional," and a "human-rights violation against the people." He said 11,300 individuals from the countries that imposed the blockade live in Qatar while 19,000 Qataris live in the four countries. Many, he said, had longstanding family, business, educational, and professional ties.

"We're facing a new Berlin Wall" separating families, al-Marri said, adding his organization had received 2,900 complaints about the blockade in the last month alone; the number for all of 2016 was 2,300.

Indeed, humanitarian groups have criticized the blockade. Amnesty International said the restrictions were "toying with the lives of thousands of Gulf residents" while Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights, said the Arab-led measures "have the potential to seriously disrupt the lives of thousands of women, children and men."

"They would like to use civilians ... to make pressure on ... Qatar," al-Marri said in Washington. "They've put families at the heart of the crisis."

In Doha Tuesday, Tillerson and Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, his Qatari counterpart, signed an agreement on ways to combat the financing of terrorism. Tillerson said the deal "represents weeks of intensive discussions between experts and reinvigorates the spirit of the Riyadh summit," a reference to President Trump's meeting with Arab leaders in the Saudi capital in May. Trump has appeared to support Saudi Arabia's version of events in the dispute.

Sheikh Mohammed said Tuesday's agreement had been in the works for months, adding it was not connected to the dispute with Saudi Arabia and the others.

Tillerson Tries Shuttle Diplomacy in Qatar Dispute

Gardiner Harris
6-7 minutes

Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson arrived in Doha, Qatar, on Tuesday. Qatar News Agency, via Associated Press

KUWAIT CITY — Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson signed a memorandum of understanding Tuesday with Qatar's foreign minister, outlining ways the tiny gas-rich state could fortify its fight against terrorism and address terrorism funding issues.

On Wednesday, Mr. Tillerson, in his first effort at shuttle diplomacy, will take the memorandum to leaders in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to see if it will be enough to end a standoff that has led four Arab nations to blockade Qatar for more than a month. But as temperatures here hovered around 120 degrees, the chances that anything might cool down appeared dim.

The dispute began a month ago when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain announced an embargo against Qatar to punish it for what the four

nations called its support for terrorism. The four have since created a list of demands for Qatar to meet before the embargo will be lifted, including shutting down the news network Al Jazeera and abandoning ties with Islamist organizations, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood.

The State Department has openly questioned whether the Saudi-led group's real intent is to settle old scores with Qatar, and on Tuesday Mr. Tillerson made clear that on the issue of terrorism financing, Qatar had now leapfrogged its rivals. At a news conference, Qatar's foreign minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, challenged other countries in the region to sign a similar agreement with Mr. Tillerson.

"I applaud the leadership of his highness, the emir of Qatar, for being the first to respond to President Trump's challenge at the Riyadh summit to stop the funding of terrorism," Mr. Tillerson at the news conference, adding, "Qatar, I think, has taken the initiative to move out on things that had been discussed but had not been brought to a conclusion, and to put in place a very, very strong agreement."

Few in the region believe Qatar's government will accede to most of the demands. So far, one result of the embargo, which has squeezed the Qatari economy and put at risk a host of American priorities in the region, has been to push Qatar closer to Iran, which has stepped in with plane-loads of fresh vegetables and other support.

Before beginning this week's effort, Mr. Tillerson stopped by the World Petroleum Congress in Istanbul on Sunday to accept a lifetime achievement award for his 41-year tenure at Exxon Mobil. He retired as chief executive at the company to take the job as the nation's top diplomat.

"I miss all of you," he told the gathered oil executives. "I miss you as colleagues, I miss you as partners, I miss you as competitors."

He may have also missed the way his trips here often concluded. For oilmen, the Middle East is a land of fortune and opportunity, and Mr. Tillerson struck some of the most important and lucrative deals of his career here. For secretaries of state, however, it is a place of frustration and failure, where tribal, religious and political differences have stymied some of the most persistent

and patient diplomatic campaigns in American history.

Mr. Tillerson hoped to avoid this trip. During the first days of the crisis, he spent hours on the phone urging the two sides to compromise. In his first major public address about the dispute, he cited humanitarian reasons for the four countries to ease their embargo of Qatar unconditionally. Barely an hour later, President Trump undercut those efforts by explicitly siding with the quartet and accusing Qatar of being a "funder of terrorism at a very high level."

With Mr. Trump squarely on their side, Saudi Arabia and its allies have done little to resolve the dispute.

But many crucial American policy priorities depend on Arab unity, including the defeat of the Islamic State and the rebuilding of devastated portions of Iraq and Syria. Qatar is home to the largest United States military base in the Middle East, while Bahrain hosts the Fifth Fleet, American installations caught in opposite sides of the dispute.

Last week, after the State Department warned that the dispute could drag on for months and

possibly intensify, Mr. Tillerson announced that he would travel to the region for talks.

"The purpose of the trip is to explore the art of the possible of where a resolution can be found," said R. C. Hammond, a spokesman for Mr. Tillerson.

But with failure all too likely, Mr. Hammond said that Mr. Tillerson

was maintaining his distance and not trying to act as a mediator.

"No, a mediator says this is what the final resolution is going to be, we'll decide it for you, that's a mediation," Mr. Hammond said, and then added: "The emir of Kuwait is leading these efforts. Our job is to make sure everybody continues to talk to each other."

Mr. Tillerson has largely sided with Qatar since the beginning.

Saudi Arabia's claim that Qatar has an unusually bad record of funding terrorism has been met with skepticism among American diplomats, since the Saudis have long been the principal financier of mosques around the world that teach a stark form of Islam associated with extremism.

The memorandum signed Tuesday with Qatar might make Saudi Arabia's claims that the dispute is all about terrorism funding more difficult. "It's a two-way street," Mr. Hammond said. "There are no clean hands here."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Fahim

7-8 minutes

Qatar agrees to combat terrorism financing under deal with U.S.

By Carol Morello and Kareem

that have imposed a trade and diplomatic embargo on it, led by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and, beyond the gulf, Egypt.

The dispute is at an impasse after the four countries made 13 demands that Qatar rejected as an attack on its sovereignty. They include Qatar's stopping its alleged financing of terrorist groups and closing the Qatar-based news network Al Jazeera, which reports critically on the region's governments.

Tillerson has said some of the demands are worth discussing, but some appear to be peripheral to any concerns about terrorism. And on Tuesday, after meeting with Kuwaiti officials, Tillerson told reporters he found Qatar's positions to be "reasonable."

Tillerson portrayed the agreement between Qatar and the United States as distinct from the Qatar crisis. But he flies to the Saudi city of Jiddah on Wednesday for talks Thursday with foreign ministers of the four countries leading the boycott against Qatar, and seemed to be messaging them that the diplomatic squabble is a distraction from forming a unified front to combat terrorism.

The Trump administration worries that the embargo against a country where the United States has a large air base could affect counterterrorism operations and push Qatar further into the arms of Iran. Tehran has allowed Qatar to use its air and sea lanes after the

gulf states suspended all flights to and from Doha and severed diplomatic ties.

The dispute, however, appears to be intensifying. This week, on the eve of Tillerson's arrival in the region, documents were leaked purporting to show secret agreements that Qatar had signed several years ago consenting to not support the Muslim Brotherhood or other groups opposed to its Persian Gulf neighbors.

The Saudi-led bloc made little effort to hide its role in leaking the documents, which were first reported by CNN. In a joint statement carried by the Saudi press agency, the Arab states said that the agreements "confirm beyond any doubt Qatar's failure to meet its commitments."

During the current crisis, the gulf states have linked Qatar to a host of opposition and militant groups in the region. In a statement on the leaks, Qatar said that its opponents had undertaken "a campaign of duplicity and subterfuge rather than pursue their complaints through established GCC mechanisms," referring to the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council.

Other leaks during the crisis, from a group apparently sympathetic to Qatar, have sought to embarrass Doha's adversaries, in particular the UAE. The group has widely shared with journalists apparently hacked emails from the account of Yousef al-Otaiba, the UAE's ambassador to the United States.

The emails have highlighted the UAE's determination over years to rally Washington thinkers and policymakers to the country's side on the issues at the center of its dispute with Qatar. In a 2014 email to David Rothkopf, then-editor of Foreign Policy, Otaiba wrote that the Middle East was "in a cold war."

"Qatar, turkey, hamas, and muslim brotherhood on one team. UAE, saudi, egypt, jordan, and israel on the other team. We see ourselves as the moderate, secular faction while qatar champions the extremist/radical political islamist team," Otaiba wrote. "I think there is a notion that talking to them will make them more moderate," he added. "Needless to say, we don't believe that works."

A spokesman for Otaiba said the ambassador "will not comment on information/emails that may have been stolen from the Ambassador's account and will not assist in authenticating any of the information," adding that "patently false and selective information has been distributed by parties clearly adverse to the Ambassador."

Tillerson is unlikely to find the going any easier on Thursday. Last Friday, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said Qatar should be kicked out of the multinational coalition, calling it "unacceptable for the coalition to have among its members states that support terrorism or advocate for it in their media."

KUWAIT CITY — In a not very subtle display of why the United States wants the Persian Gulf countries to quit feuding and concentrate on what's important, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Tuesday signed an agreement to work with Qatar to curtail terrorism financing.

But the memo of understanding signed in Doha, the Qatari capital, quickly became a cudgel for Qatar to use on neighbors who have severed ties and imposed a trade embargo on the country, accusing it of helping support terrorism. In a statement, the Qatari government spokesman crowed that Qatar was the first gulf country to sign such an agreement and suggested that it be a model for its neighbors to follow instead of pointing fingers of Qatar.

The agreement Tillerson signed, weeks in the making, calls for the United States and Qatar to share information to track down sources of funding for terrorism for years to come.

"The United States has one goal — to drive terrorism off the face of the earth," Tillerson said in a news conference in Doha.

Tillerson is in the middle of four days of hopping around the Persian Gulf to try to get negotiations going between Qatar and the countries

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Felicia Schwartz

6-7 minutes

Rex Tillerson, Mediating Gulf Dispute, Signs Antiterrorism Pact With Qatar

he shuttles around the Persian Gulf to resolve a weekslong conflict between four Arab states and Qatar.

Under the agreement, the two countries will step up efforts to track down terrorist funding sources and will do more to collaborate and share information.

Speaking to reporters after meetings with senior Qatari officials, Mr. Tillerson said the agreement lays

out steps both sides will take in coming months and years to "interrupt and disable terror financing flows and intensify counterterrorism activities globally."

Both Mr. Tillerson and his Qatari counterpart said Tuesday the accord isn't directly related to the feud with Qatar on one side and Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt on the other.

"The United States has one goal, drive terrorism off the face of the earth," Mr. Tillerson said. "The agreement in which we both have signed on behalf of our governments represents weeks of intensive discussions between experts and reinvigorates the spirit of the Riyadh summit," he said in reference to meetings in May in Riyadh among the leaders of the U.S. and Arab countries.

Updated July 11, 2017 4:50 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The U.S. and Qatar signed an agreement in Doha Tuesday to crack down on terrorist financing, part of efforts by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson as

He added: "Together the United States and Qatar will do more to track down funding sources, will do more to collaborate and share information and will do more to keep the region and our homeland safe."

Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, who spoke to reporters alongside Mr. Tillerson, said, "The blockading countries have accused Qatar of financing terrorism, now the state of Qatar is the first country to sign this memorandum of understanding with the United States. We invite the other blockading countries to join."

The four countries cut diplomatic ties and imposed a travel ban on June 5 in response to allegations that Qatar funds terrorist groups. U.S. officials have said they fear the conflict could drag on for months.

Qatar denies the allegations and has accused the bloc of Arab nations of waging a smear campaign. The four Arab countries rejected Qatar's response to a list of demands to try to resolve the crisis, including curbing diplomatic ties with Iran, severing links with the Muslim Brotherhood and closing the Al Jazeera television network.

Mr. Tillerson will meet with officials from the four-nation bloc Wednesday in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Trump administration officials want to bring an end to the conflict as well as combat the flow of funds to terrorist groups. Mr. Tillerson said some of the work on the agreement signed Tuesday began a year ago, and that experts have held discussions on the document for weeks.

"I applaud the leadership of his Highness the Emir of Qatar [Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani] for being the first to respond to President Trump's challenge at the Riyadh summit to stop the funding of terrorism," Mr. Tillerson said Tuesday.

Earlier, Mr. Tillerson called Qatar's position in the feud with the four Arab nations "very reasonable."

Later Tuesday, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt said in a statement that the agreement reached between Washington and Doha "is not enough," and said they would "closely monitor the seriousness of Qatar in combating all forms of funding, supporting and fostering of

terrorism," according to Emirati state news agency WAM. The four nations also said sanctions on Qatar would remain in place until Doha abides by their list of 13 demands.

At the start of the conflict in June, President Donald Trump sided with Saudi Arabia and the other countries, criticizing Qatar's alleged support to terrorist groups and taking credit for the decision to crack down on Doha as evidence of the success of his visit to Riyadh in May. Mr. Tillerson, on the other hand, has been sympathetic to Qatar throughout and has urged calm and moderation.

Before Mr. Tillerson arrived in Kuwait on Monday, a senior adviser traveling with him told reporters that the list of 13 demands put forward to Qatar by the four Arab countries aren't viable as a package.

Mr. Tillerson is using Kuwait as a base to travel around the Persian Gulf region throughout the week.

"They are not worth revisiting as a package but individually there are things in there that could work," R.C. Hammond, the adviser, told reporters in Istanbul.

Mr. Hammond said both sides will need to make concessions to bring

about an end to the conflict, as all nations in the region could do more to combat terror financing.

"This is a two-way street," he said Monday.

Qatar and its neighbors in 2013 and 2014 agreed on a number of actions that would result in Doha ending its support for political groups active in those countries and in Yemen. Details of that agreement, which were disclosed for the first time earlier this week, show that Qatar has until now failed to comply with these demands, the four Arab countries said Monday.

In a joint statement, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Bahrain and Egypt said the documents "confirm beyond any doubt Qatar's failure to meet its commitments and its full violations of its pledges."

In response, Qatar said the publication of the documents was an attempt to undermine Mr. Tillerson's efforts to resolve the crisis. Doha also repeated earlier accusations that the quartet is seeking to destabilize Qatar's government and sovereignty.

POLITICO Russian diplomacy about to get tougher edge in Washington

Noted hardliner Anatoly Antonov is taking over from Sergey Kislyak, who used a softer touch as the Russian ambassador.

A new — and likely more aggressive — chapter in Russian diplomacy is about to begin in Washington with the departure of Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak, whose soft-power approach to D.C. will be taken over by noted hardliner Anatoly Antonov.

The switch in what has become one of Washington's most scrutinized jobs comes as the controversy over President Donald Trump and his allies' ties to Moscow intensifies, especially with the revelation that Donald Trump Jr. met with a Kremlin-linked lawyer at the height of the campaign after being told she could provide damaging information on Hillary Clinton as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

The scandal has at times centered on secret meetings with Kislyak — a long-time and well-respected diplomat who held the top post in Washington for nine years before his 2016 meetings with Trump officials made him a politically radioactive figure.

The 62-year-old Antonov is also a longtime diplomat, but he recently completed a nearly six-year stint as

a deputy in Russia's far more hardline defense ministry.

Antonov's arrival is expected to be a noted shift in Washington's diplomatic community, where Kislyak was known as an affable fixture on the embassy party circuit, and an experienced political figure with routine official access to U.S. government circles.

"It's the continuation of a trend we're seeing throughout Europe, where Moscow is putting in hardline, almost Soviet-style diplomats," said Heather Conley, who runs the Europe and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

After navigating some of the most tense U.S.-Russia relations in recent memory, including Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, Kislyak was rumored to take a post at the United Nations following his near decade of service in Washington. But as the Trump-Russia scandal flared, he was instead recalled to Moscow, though the Kremlin has not said what factored into that decision.

Where Kislyak dealt in soft power — known for lavish parties, calls for better relations between the U.S. and Russia, and a genial if unyielding demeanor — Antonov's

reputation as a hardline Kremlin acolyte precedes him.

As a defense official, Antonov was a key strategist in Moscow's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, and he received a medal from Putin awarded to officials who participated in the Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula. That participation also made him a target of European Union sanctions in 2015, though he was never singled out by U.S. economic penalties.

"He was a very outspoken defender of the whole thing, very nasty in his attacks," said former U.S. ambassador Alexander Vershbow. "You can expect to hear him talking a lot about NATO encirclement of Russia...he not only says that stuff but he believes it."

Vershbow, who worked with Antonov on negotiations over ballistic missile cooperation, also said that he is a "much more aggressive public persona" than Kislyak.

He said Antonov's dedication to Kremlin talking points could be maddening at times. "He wouldn't let scientific fact get in the way of propaganda," Vershbow said.

In a March 2015, interview with the Russian network RT, Antonov blamed the U.S. for the then-

deteriorating relationship between Washington and Moscow. "They have to change their behavior," he said of the U.S. "It is not we who started the confrontation between NATO and the Russian Federation."

A defiant Antonov also told RT that his addition to the EU sanctions list was "very strange and funny and... very stupid."

Antonov comes to Washington as tensions between the U.S. and Russia reach a fever pitch, in an environment that could be uniquely suited to his aggressive approach. His penchant for taking the hard line is a yet-untested strategy with the Trump administration, which has given clear, early indications that it wants to work more cooperatively with the Kremlin.

Though his reputation precedes him, Antonov is also respected for his skills as a diplomat. And if the Trump administration needs a softer touch, he's capable of using it.

"I don't see him as an obstructionist. I don't think he's coming here with that kind of mission," said Matthew Rojansky, a Russia expert who is the director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute. "If he needs to play that role, he will. ... He is very smart, and I think very capable of conducting and managing a productive relationship."

Antonov may find few open doors on Capitol Hill, where suspicion of Russia is at a post-Cold War high. But the political uproar over Trump's Russia ties weren't enough to keep his predecessor Kislyak from joining Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in the Oval Office in May.

Kislyak, whose farewell dinner was to be hosted by the U.S.-Russia Business Council on Tuesday evening, has fast become one of the most controversial figures in Washington. As investigators probe

whether anyone in the Trump camp colluded with the Russian government in swaying the election, Kislyak has emerged as a near-constant presence. His meetings and phone calls with Trump officials, including former national security adviser Michael Flynn and top Trump adviser Jared Kushner, are being heavily scrutinized.

The attention led to speculation that Kislyak was not just a diplomat, but instead was a super-spy, rumors that remain wholly unproven and,

according to multiple U.S. officials, unlikely.

Antonov does not appear to have that reputation among diplomatic circles — yet.

"I'm not aware of any particular [nefarious] reputation," one U.S. official said of him.

Antonov's Washington to-do list is no small feat. The U.S. and Russia are crossing each other in several high-pressure theaters — Syria, Eastern Europe and Iran, to start.

There is continued tension over Russia's aggressive cyber-strategy, and the ever-lingering questions surrounding its alleged efforts to manipulate the 2016 presidential election.

The State Department did not respond to a request for comment asking why Antonov avoided U.S. scrutiny for his role in the invasion of Ukraine. The Russian embassy did not respond to questions on Antonov's exact start date.

**NATIONAL
REVIEW
ONLINE**

Donald Trump's Russia Foreign Policy: Tougher than Obama's

7-9 minutes

Lech Walesa, interpreted that as an abandonment.

Trump and Andrzej Duda, the president of Poland, also discussed American natural-gas shipments to Poland, the first of which arrived only last month. Trump is pushing American and Polish companies to sign a long-term liquefied natural gas (LNG) deal, though he won't have to push very hard.

This is part of Trump's strategy to achieve "energy dominance," as he put it last week. "We will export American energy all around the world," Trump said. Rick Perry, the U.S. secretary of energy, explained that the plan seeks to counter Russian influence. The goal is to provide vulnerable European nations with an "alternative to Russia" so they can no longer be "held hostage." Trump echoed these comments in Poland.

This initial memorandum of understanding with Poland is only the plan's first step. More is planned. As *Investors Business Daily* notes:

Poland has just built a massive Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) terminal on the Baltic as an entry point for gas from the U.S. and other energy suppliers. What's more, that terminal is big enough, according to estimates, to replace as much as 80% of Russia's gas supplies to Poland. All of the Baltic nations — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — are likewise building LNG facilities. Croatia plans to open its own LNG terminal in 2019.

Already, Trump has offered to export American coal to Ukraine, which Russia has long bullied with actual or threatened cuts in natural-gas exports. The other nations at the recent Three Seas Initiative attended by Trump (Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria) would like U.S. energy too.

There is perhaps nothing the Russians fear more than American

oil and gas production. It has the potential to supplant Russian gas exports, which are crucial to Russia's coffers as well as its strategic ambitions. The absence of a strong "oil weapon" functioning as both carrot and stick would substantially reduce Russia's ability to meddle in European affairs. Trump's initiative, therefore, is poised to protect Europe and weaken Russia.

This is part of why Walter Russell Mead suggested in February that "Trump isn't sounding like a Russian mole." If Trump were under Putin's influence, he would surely be doing everything he could to limit American natural-gas production, reject proposed pipelines, curtail fracking, and impose harsh emissions reduction targets. But Trump has done the opposite. He has withdrawn from the Paris agreement, approved the Keystone pipeline and set about repealing roadblocks to fracking on federal lands. In June, for instance, the Bureau of Land Management announced it would auction off 195,732 acres of federal land in Nevada for fossil-fuel development.

Flooding the market, American fossil fuels are not only reducing Russian market share, but also bringing down the global prices of oil and gas, creating a new normal that spells trouble for the oil-dependant Russian economy. In other words, by promoting American energy development, Trump is putting the screws to Russia.

In fact, Trump is placing pressure on Russia all across the world. In Syria, where the Obama administration ceded a great deal of ground to the Russians, Trump has escalated, upsetting the Russians. Though the two nations have signed a partial ceasefire covering southwest Syria, many fear that Trump has been too strident in combatting Russian efforts to dominate Syria. The Trump administration has also taken on Iranian-backed rebels in Syria and decisively sided with the Sunni

Arab states over Iran, a Russian ally.

Furthermore, Trump has modestly increased military spending and successfully pressured our NATO allies into increasing their military spending as well. NATO's "enhanced Forward Presence" program has sent more troops to the Baltic states, where the alliance has also held extensive war games. Finally, Trump has just appointed Kurt Volker, former ambassador to NATO, as special envoy for Ukraine. On Russia, Volker is as tough as it gets. All together, these measures constitute a serious effort to pressure — not appease — an aggressive Russia.

Of course, none of this means that Putin did not interfere in the election. It certainly doesn't help anyone escape accusations of collusion. However, as Damir Marusic writes, "At a minimum, it means that Putin's interference doesn't appear to have given him a docile American President."

On Friday, Rex Tillerson acknowledged that Trump and Putin seem to have good "chemistry." This, I predict, will prove temporary. While Trump may try to leverage this personal relationship into Russian strategic compromises — he would not be the first or second president to try — American and Russian interests are simply not aligned. As Trump continues to favor oil and gas extraction, a central plank of his "America First" strategy, and continues to stand with our Middle Eastern and Eastern European allies, Putin will discover that a Republican president was not in the Russian interest after all.

Then the smiles will disappear.

Anyone who knows anything about President Trump knows that there's something up with him and Russia. Yesterday, Donald Trump Jr. basically admitted to at least attempted collusion. And there is the long list of often embarrassingly positive statements Trump Sr. has made about the Russian president. Frank Bruni compiled them in a recent column for the *New York Times*. Yet there is something missing from Bruni's article, and often, from the larger narrative about the Trump campaign's alleged collusion with the Russians: a single mention of policy.

That omission is telling. Trump's comments might be suggestive, and his campaign team may well have sought and even used anti-Clinton information from Russian sources, but his policies have thus far been revealing—and not of any particular softness on Russia. Just the opposite: Where Obama was weak, the Trump administration has pursued a tough-on-Russia foreign policy.

Take Trump's recent trip to Poland, a nation that has on occasion seen Russian troops and never wants to see them again. Look past the noise surrounding Trump's excellent speech. Instead, focus on the air-defense memorandum signed on Thursday. "The U.S. government has agreed to sell Poland Patriot missiles in the most modern configuration," Poland's defense minister Antoni Macierewicz announced. This provides a real measure of Trump's support for Poland, which is understandably nervous about the Russian Iskander missile system to be deployed in Kaliningrad.

This move also contrasts sharply with the Obama administration's decision in 2009 to scrap missile-defense plans for Poland and the Czech Republic. Many Poles, including the heroic former president



How to Reason With a Nuclear Rogue

A country bent on threatening the United States with annihilation develops nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them from Asia to the U.S. homeland, putting America and its allies, including Japan and South Korea, at grave risk. It is clear that only grave consequences will come from ignoring this danger any longer, but taking military action in the vain attempt to eliminate the program threatens to provoke unspeakable destruction.

No, this is not an assessment of North Korea in 2017, but of China in 1964, the year China first tested a nuclear weapon. Then, it was called Red China, and was widely considered part of a communist wave bent on global domination. You think North Korean leader Kim Jong Un says crazy things? Chairman Mao Zedong famously declared, "I'm not afraid of nuclear war. There are 2.7 billion people in the world; it doesn't matter if some are killed. China has a population of 600 million; even if half of them are killed, there are still 300 million people left."

Then, as now, voices called for strength and resolve and pushed for military action to surgically remove the nuclear capability our enemy had developed. Failure to act, it was argued, would create a near-certain risk of nuclear destruction. At a minimum, the United States would be under constant threat of nuclear blackmail, undermining the security of our allies in East Asia so greatly that they themselves would surely have to go nuclear.

Of course, deterrence did work, the countries avoided war, and America and its allies learned to manage a complex deterrent relationship with China, to our mutual advantage. No one believes we will become strong trading partners with North Korea, but many of the ideas put forward in 1964 are similar to the ones heard today, and need to be taken with a grain of salt. Then, as now, few experts had been to the country in question or met with its leaders, and little was known about what it really wanted and how it would act over the long-term.

I have written before about the terrible problem President Donald Trump and the United States inherited on North Korea. It is worse than the terrible problem President Barack Obama inherited from President George W. Bush, which was worse than the one Bush inherited from President Bill Clinton. There are no easy solutions to North

Korea's nuclear and missile programs, and anyone who tells you differently is selling something.

Nine months ago, I also helped write the transition memo to Trump (sorry, no link to this one) and his incoming national security team, which made these terrible choices clear. The incoming team understood that Kim Jong Un's programs were progressing despite the United States doing every responsible thing it could to impede their advance. The incoming team also knew that we had more ways to put pressure on China. Those steps, now under consideration, might yet bring North Korea back to the negotiating table.

This is where the problem goes from occupational hazard of being president to self-inflicted wound. Well aware of North Korea's program and trajectory, Trump tweeted in January that a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile "won't happen." He staked the credibility of his office and country on this claim and was wrong, severely straining our believability not only in Asia, but globally. Obama received a lot of criticism for his Syrian "red line." Despite the removal of many tons of chemical weapons from Syria, the consequences of Obama's actions, or lack of them, in Syria are part of his legacy. When a president makes declaratory statements, he is spending America's hard-won reputation. While Trump took widely supported action in response to a chemical weapons attack by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, other bluffs have been called with no response. None of these bluffs have been more visible and ill-advised than the one called by North Korea on July 4, when the country tested a missile with intercontinental range. But North Korea is not the only country watching and learning.

Kim has decided that his survival depends on possessing long-range missiles that can target the United States. While the United States has taken steps that have slowed this program down and made it more expensive and less reliable, nothing can prevent North Korea from further developing its missile and nuclear programs unless the North wants to stop. While military strikes could slow the program down, such strikes would certainly unleash a second Korean War, devastating a country we are legally bound to protect and defend.

China has been perpetually unwilling, without facing restrictions on its access to the U.S. banking system, to put enough pressure on North Korea to force it to confront a

real choice on its nuclear and missile efforts. Recent steps by the Trump administration to ratchet up the pressure on China are welcome, but too late to head off the ICBM Kim sought for so long. It remains to be seen, even if faced with a more stark choice between business with the United States or North Korea, how far China would go in risking the collapse of the North Korean state on its border. The most pressing problem is not how to stop the program, but how to deal with its existence.

Having analyzed North Korea's program for close to 30 years, I am now unclear on what America's current policy toward North Korea is. The confused response to date by the Trump team is clear cause for concern among our allies in the region. And if someone who has worked on Korean policy for decades is unsure what we are doing, how can we expect North Korea to accurately understand what we are up to, where our priorities lie, and what our endgame is?

Now that Trump's bluff has been called, what credibility do deterrent statements to North Korea or reassurance statements to our allies have? Trump may well feel he has to respond forcefully to compensate for his gaffe, but even if he ignores it entirely, our friends and enemies won't. The job of deterrence and reassurance is a lot harder today under Trump than it was just a few days ago.

As with China 50 years ago, the situation leaves only one real option: deterrence. North Korea is not a suicidal state. Far from it. Their pursuit of nuclear weapons and missiles appears driven, as far as we can divine, from a desire to preserve the regime. What remains unclear is how North Korea will behave now that it has demonstrated an ability to hit U.S. territory. The answer may be: It will behave similarly to how it has behaved for decades, in light of its ability to deter a U.S. conventional attack by holding Japan and South Korea hostage. The North has avoided steps that risk full-scale war, but is eager to undermine the U.S.-South Korean alliance, and damage the leadership in South Korea, including through blatant acts of aggression. But the American security community has been focused for so long on negotiating an end to North Korea's program that we have not done the hard work of figuring out how to successfully manage the much more complex deterrent relationship now emerging.

This situation satisfies no one. It admits that we cannot prevent North Korea from having nuclear capabilities, at least for now. But it does not mean, as others might suggest, that the goal of denuclearizing North Korea is dead. That must remain the goal of the United States and its partners, but we must accept that it will take time to realize, and in the meantime, there are real dangers that must be prevented from unfolding.

First, we must decide what we want to deter North Korea from doing with its newly acquired capabilities. My personal list starts with making clear that North Korea can never use nuclear weapons or missiles, and that it should not conduct any live fire tests with nuclear weapons. With the North having acquired the ability to hit the United States, allies in the region will be concerned about what is known in deterrence speak as "decoupling." Now that North Korea can hit American territory, leaders in Japan and South Korea will understandably worry whether the United States will trade Seattle to protect Seoul, or risk Los Angeles for Tokyo. Paris and Berlin had the same worry during the cold war, and we eased it only through great effort and investment. Making clear, declaratory statements that America is prepared and willing to back up its allies, and repeating them with conviction, is critical to any successful deterrent and reassurance strategy. Sadly, this is not Trump's forte. He and his cabinet need to get better at it, and soon.

In addition, U.S. policy should be to consider any attempt by North Korea to sell nuclear weapons or nuclear weapon-usable materials (enriched uranium or plutonium) an act of aggression against the United States that would require a direct response. Similarly, we must determine what we will do if and when North Korea seeks to export its ever-increasing ballistic missile technology, and where we should draw limits on what we will and will not be prepared to accept. North Korea cannot be allowed to become an Amazon.com for any would-be nuclear state.

Lastly, we must make clear that North Korea's nuclear capabilities are not a license to take military action or conduct cyber operations against the United States or its allies. We should and must continue to confront North Korean actions that threaten us or undermine the security of our allies and the stability of the region. These may not require massive military responses, but nuclear weapons for North Korea

cannot be tantamount to a get-out-of-jail-free card. Just as with China and the Soviet Union, we must confront the North at the sub-strategic level while working to manage the risk of escalation. I remain skeptical that this will require the United States to redeploy nuclear weapons to South Korea, but it will demand greater investments in other capabilities.

At the same time, we have to accept that the game has changed. The dangers of a military conflict between the United States and

North Korea have global implications. This means the United States and North Korea must begin immediate talks to avoid such conflicts, and to communicate directly to North Korea's leaders exactly what actions would require a direct U.S. military response. We have had to do this as other states gained nuclear capabilities, because failure to do so left too much to chance. This is no concession, but self-preservation.

This list is not exhaustive, but the president, his cabinet and advisors,

and our leaders in Congress need to begin the long-overdue conversation about what North Korean actions we seek to prevent. Unlike Trump's tweets, our conclusions need to be specific and we need to back them up, lest confidence in U.S. commitments — to deter our enemies and protect our allies — gets even weaker.

The good news (Korea watchers could all use some) is that U.S. leaders and security officials have dealt with this challenge before. When the Soviet Union crossed the

nuclear threshold in 1949, some thought war was inevitable. When China did the same in 1964, similar fatalism was common. The process of nonproliferation has never been a certain one, and now that efforts by four successive U.S. presidents have failed to prevent North Korea from directly threatening the United States, we need to begin seeking to understand the country we are dealing with and to ensure that it understands us.



US missile defense test successful as North Korea tensions rise

The Christian Science Monitor

3-4 minutes

July 11, 2017 Washington—The United States said on Tuesday it shot down a simulated, incoming intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) similar to the ones being developed by countries like North Korea, in a new test of the nation's defenses.

Planned months ago, the US missile defense test over the Pacific Ocean has gained significance after North Korea's July 4 launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile heightened concerns about the threat from Pyongyang.

The test was the first-ever of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system against an incoming IRBM, which experts say is a faster and more difficult target to hit than shorter-range missiles.

The US Missile Defense Agency said the IRBM was designed to behave similarly to the kinds of missiles that could threaten the US.

"The successful demonstration of THAAD against an IRBM-range missile threat bolsters the country's defensive capability against developing missile threats in North Korea and other countries," the Missile Defense Agency said in a statement.

The US has deployed THAAD to Guam and South Korea to help guard against threats from North Korea. A ground-based missile defense system, THAAD is designed to shoot down short-, medium-, and intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

In the latest test, a THAAD in Kodiak, Alaska, intercepted a ballistic missile target that was air-launched from a C-17 aircraft flying north of Hawaii, the Missile Defense Agency said in a statement.

This success leaves THAAD with a 100 percent track record for all 14 intercept attempts since flight testing began just over a decade ago.

Lockheed Martin Corp, the prime contractor for the THAAD system, said it could intercept incoming missiles both inside and outside the Earth's atmosphere.

The US deployed THAAD to South Korea this year to guard against North Korea's shorter-range missiles. That has drawn fierce criticism from China, which says the system's powerful radar can probe deep into its territory.

Earlier this month Moscow and Beijing, in a joint statement, called on Washington to immediately halt deployment of THAAD in South Korea.

The statement said Washington was using North Korea as a pretext to expand its military infrastructure in Asia and risked upsetting the strategic balance of power in the region.

THAAD's success rate in testing is far higher than the one for America's Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system, which is designed to shoot down an ICBM headed for the US mainland.

That GMD system has only a 55 percent success rate over the life of the program. But advocates say the technology has improved dramatically in recent years.

The GMD system successfully shot down an incoming, simulated North Korean ICBM in a test in May.

That led the Pentagon to upgrade its assessment of US ability to defend against a small number of ICBMs, according to an internal memo seen by Reuters.

The Missile Defense Agency told Congress in June that it planned to deliver 52 more THAAD interceptors to US Army between October 2017 and September 2018, bringing total deliveries to 210 since May 2011.



North Korea's Missile Can Take Off But Might Not Survive Re-Entry, Seoul Says

Alastair Gale

5-6 minutes

North Korea's recent long-range missile test didn't show Pyongyang is able to arm the device with a warhead that can survive the intense heat and vibration of re-entering the atmosphere, South Korea's intelligence agency said.

The assessment, given to South Korean lawmakers on Tuesday, contradicts an assertion by North Korea and suggests the isolated state may still have a significant technical hurdle to overcome in its quest for a missile that can threaten major U.S. cities.

Governments and private sector analysts are still analyzing data from

the July 4 test launch of a missile North Korea called the Hwasong-14. Most agree the flight path indicates the missile would be able to reach Alaska and possibly further in a conflict.

More specific details are largely dependent on images released by North Korea and guesswork. The tip of the missile, where the warhead, or re-entry vehicle, would be located, has drawn attention from experts because it appears to consist of a simple hollow fairing.

The fairing looks too small to fit the re-entry vehicle that North Korea has shown on other missiles, John Schilling, an aerospace engineer, wrote in an analysis of the Hwasong-14 published Monday on the North Korea-focused website 38North.

Yi Wan-young, a South Korean lawmaker who attended a briefing by the National Intelligence Service, said in televised comments that the spy agency assessed that North Korea hasn't developed re-entry technology for the Hwasong-14.

The agency reached the assessment because it wasn't able to confirm a successful re-entry of the missile, and because North Korea doesn't have testing facilities for re-entry vehicles, Mr. Yi said.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service declined to comment

Developing a ballistic missile that can carry a nuclear weapon in a warhead at its tip and successfully detonating the device at a predetermined target is one of the biggest challenges in missile science. When it re-enters the

Earth's atmosphere on its descent, the warhead is exposed to temperatures of thousands of degrees and extreme vibration.

Following the Hwasong-14 launch, North Korea said through its state media that the test verified all the technical features of the missile "including the heat-resisting features and structural safety of the warhead tip of (the) ICBM made of (a) newly developed domestic carbon compound material."

South Korean authorities tend to be more skeptical of North Korea's weapons progress than their U.S. counterparts. American officials have stated that the latest North Korean missile appeared to have intercontinental range but haven't commented publicly on whether it has a viable warhead.

Mr. Schilling, the analyst, said the missile will likely need a year or two of testing before it can reliably deliver a nuclear warhead to targets along the U.S. west coast.

The new capabilities displayed in last week's test brought new urgency to Washington's efforts to halt North Korea's weapons programs.

Separately on Tuesday, China pushed back on attempts by

Washington and others to pressure Beijing to do more to rein in Pyongyang. Without naming specific governments, Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang accused others of exacerbating tensions on the Korean Peninsula and then wrongly trying to make the problem China's to resolve.

"Recently, certain people, talking about the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue, have been exaggerating and

giving prominence to the so-called 'China responsibility theory,'" Mr. Geng said in a daily media briefing in Beijing. He said the attempt to shift responsibility was being done either out of a lack of knowledge or for "ulterior motives."

All the governments need to accept responsibility and work in concert to resolve the situation, he said. "Burning your bridges behind you is not OK. Backstabbing is even less

so. If the Chinese side is trying to put out the fire and others are adding fuel to it," he said, "then how can the Chinese side's efforts reach their intended results?"

"The 'China responsibility theory' on the peninsula nuclear issue can stop," Mr. Geng said.

**The
New York
Times**

UNE - North Koreans in Russia Work 'Basically in the Situation of Slaves'

Andrew Higgins

11-14 minutes

The new ferry boat between North Korea and Russia, arriving in Vladivostok last month. The ferry service comes as local businesses have started to use North Korean workers for low-cost labor. James Hill for The New York Times

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia — Across Western Europe and the United States, immigrants from poorer countries, whether plumbers from Poland or farmhands from Mexico, have become a lightning rod for economic anxieties over cheap labor.

The Russian city of Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean, however, has eagerly embraced a new icon of border-crushing globalization: the North Korean painter.

Unlike migrant workers in much of the West, destitute decorators from North Korea are so welcome that they have helped make Russia at least the equal of China — Pyongyang's main backer — as the world's biggest user of labor from the impoverished yet nuclear-armed country.

"They are fast, cheap and very reliable, much better than Russian workers," Yulia Kravchenko, a 32-year-old Vladivostok homemaker, said of the painters. "They do nothing but work from morning until late at night."

The work habits that delight Vladivostok homeowners are also generating sorely needed cash for the world's most isolated regime, a hereditary dictatorship in Pyongyang closing in on a nuclear weapon capable of hitting the United States. Just last week, the North reached a milestone by testing its first intercontinental ballistic missile.

Squeezed by international sanctions and unable to produce many goods that anyone outside North Korea wants to buy — other than missile

parts, textiles, coal and mushrooms — the government has sent tens of thousands of its impoverished citizens to cities and towns across the former Soviet Union to earn money for the state.

Human rights groups say this state-controlled traffic amounts to a slave trade, but so desperate are conditions in North Korea that laborers often pay bribes to get sent to Russia.

North Korean laborers helped build a new soccer stadium in St. Petersburg to be used in next year's World Cup, a project on which at least one of them died. They are working on a luxury apartment complex in central Moscow, where two North Koreans were found dead last month in a squalid hostel near the construction site. They also cut down trees in remote logging encampments in the Russian Far East that resemble Stalin-era prison camps.

But they have left their biggest and most visible mark in Vladivostok, providing labor to home repair companies that boast to customers how North Koreans are cheaper, more disciplined and more sober than native Russians.

A restaurant called Pyongyang in Vladivostok. James Hill for The New York Times

"Surprisingly, these people are hard-working and orderly. They will not take long rests from work, go on frequent cigarette breaks or shirk their duties," promised the website of a Vladivostok company.

The home repair industry stands at the more benign end of North Korea's labor export program. Painters and plasterers are not generally subjected to the brutal mistreatment endured by North Koreans working in Russian logging camps or on construction sites.

Though rigidly controlled by minders from the Workers' Party of Korea, the ruling party in Pyongyang, they

do not, on the whole, live in what the State Department in its recently released annual report on human trafficking called "credible reports of slave-like conditions of North Koreans working in Russia."

All the same, they still suffer from what human rights groups say is a particularly egregious feature of Pyongyang's labor export program: Most of their earnings are confiscated by the state.

A lengthy report on North Korean workers in Russia issued last year by the Data Base Center for North Korean Human Rights, a group in Seoul, said the Workers' Party of Korea seizes 80 percent of the wages earned by forestry workers and at least 30 percent of the salaries paid to laborers working in construction. Further money is taken to cover living expenses, mandatory contributions to a so-called loyalty fund and other "donations."

This "exploitative structure," the report said, constitutes "one of the fundamental causes of the North Korean workers' inhumanly hard labor in Russia."

The human rights group estimated that the North Korean authorities earn at least \$120 million a year from laborers sent to Russia, a vital source of income for a family dynasty founded, with Moscow's backing, by Kim Il-sung in 1948 and now headed by his 33-year-old grandson, Kim Jong-un. It put the number of North Koreans working in Russia at nearly 50,000, though other studies say the number is 30,000 to 40,000, which is still more than in China or the Middle East, the other principal destinations.

The Russian boss of a Vladivostok decorating company that employs scores of North Koreans said the amount of money seized from salaries had increased substantially over the past decade, rising to a current monthly rate of 50,000 rubles, or \$841, from 17,000 rubles a month in 2006.

He said his highest-paid workers now lose half or more of their monthly salary through confiscation, while the leader of each construction squad of around 20 to 30 laborers takes an additional cut of about 20 percent in return for finding painting jobs for his men.

The Russian asked that he not be identified because he feared that Workers' Party supervisors would punish his laborers or prevent them from working with him.

The increased rate of confiscation followed a sharp fall in the value of the ruble against the dollar, a troubling development for a regime that wants dollars, not rubles.

But the jacking up of the amount of rubles seized more than compensated for the ruble's fall, reflecting Pyongyang's desperate hunt for more cash since Kim Jong-un took power in December 2011 and ramped up North Korea's missile and nuclear programs.

International sanctions and a Chinese ban on imports of North Korean coal in February after a series of missile tests have steadily squeezed Pyongyang's other sources of foreign revenue. That has left the export of labor, along with a string of state-run restaurants and other small businesses in Vladivostok and elsewhere, as one of the regime's shrinking list of ways to generate hard currency.

To prevent them from seeking refuge in South Korea, North Korean laborers are forced to live together in cramped dormitories scattered around the outskirts of Vladivostok and prohibited from contacting Russians and other foreigners outside work.

The boom in North Korean labor exports to Russia coincides with an expansion of other links between the two countries, including a recent surge in Russian coal exports and the start in May of a new ferry service twice a week between Vladivostok and Rason, a special

economic zone on the east coast of North Korea.

In April last year, just months after North Korea announced that it had tested a “miniaturized hydrogen bomb,” Russian and North Korean officials gathered south of Vladivostok to celebrate the reopening of Kim Il-sung House, a wooden building dedicated to the memory of the dictator. It had been rebuilt, at Russia’s expense, after a fire.

The links with Russia are still far less extensive than those North Korea has with China, its principal foreign backer, and do not appear to violate sanctions imposed — with the Russian government’s support — by the United Nations. But they have nonetheless raised eyebrows in the United States and Japan, which want to tighten the economic and diplomatic vise on Pyongyang.

Russian coal exports to North Korea more than tripled to \$28.4 million in the first quarter of this year from \$7.5 million in the same period in 2014, indicating that Moscow would most likely object to any efforts by Washington to widen United Nations economic sanctions.

Why North Korea would sharply increase coal imports is a mystery, as it has plenty of coal. A bigger mystery is the business rationale behind the new ferry service to North Korea, started last month by a private Russian company, InvestStroyTrest, at a time when few Russians want to travel to North Korea and even fewer North Koreans, aside from laborers, visit Russia.

When the ferry, the Mangyongbong, docked in Vladivostok last week from North Korea it had just six paying passengers. It has berths for 193.

A North Korean worker who goes by the name Dima while in Russia, taking a short break from working on a house on the outskirts of Vladivostok last month. James Hill for The New York Times

Mikhail Khmel, the deputy director general of InvestStroyTrest, said that “all the noise around North Korea that makes people afraid” was to blame for the slow business.

North Koreans, he added, “are not angels” but don’t deserve all the pressure put on them by the United States. “America is very far away,

but we live next door,” he said. “We want to deal with them normally.”

The ferry service only expands existing transport links between North Korea and Vladivostok, the only foreign destination other than Beijing and the northern Chinese city of Shenyang for Pyongyang’s national airline, Air Koryo.

Each Friday, skinny North Korean laborers in ragged clothes, watched over by supervisors in suits with Kim Il-sung badges, gather at Vladivostok airport with piles of luggage before a weekly flight to and from Pyongyang.

While presenting a miserable tableau of deprivation at the airport, North Koreans who have worked as laborers in Russia often are eager to come back. Indeed, the Russian decorating company boss said, they often pay bribes to officials from the Workers’ Party to gain an assignment to work abroad.

One of these is a 52-year-old painter now on his second five-year assignment to Russia. Speaking broken Russian as he painted Ms. Kravchenko’s bedroom wall, he said that he liked the work and the opportunity to earn foreign money

for himself and his country. While in Russia, he goes by the name Dima, short for Dimitri.

He said his Russia work permit expires next year and he will have to go home. “I hope I can come back,” he said.

The Russian boss said North Koreans work “crazily long hours” without complaint and call him at 6 a.m., even on weekends, if he has not yet shown up to tell them what to paint or plaster. “They don’t take holidays. They eat, work and sleep and nothing else. And they don’t sleep much,” he said. “They are basically in the situation of slaves.”

All the same, he added, North Koreans still want to work in Russia, where, despite the hardships and confiscation of a big chunk of their wages, they can live better and freer than they do at home.

“It is not slave labor but hard labor. And it is much better here than in North Korea,” Georgy Toloraya, a former Russian diplomat in Pyongyang, said.

ETATS-UNIS



UNE- A revelation unlike any other in the Russia investigation

9-12 minutes

on past events

July 11 at 5:36 PM

There have been other moments in the lengthy investigation of Russian government interference in the 2016 presidential election that have registered on the legal and political Richter scales, but none with the power and explosiveness of the email chain involving Donald Trump Jr. that became public Tuesday.

The emails between President Trump’s oldest son and an intermediary for the Russians provide the clearest indication to date that Trump campaign officials and family members were at least prepared to do business with a foreign adversary in the mutual goal of taking down Hillary Clinton.

No one should presume to draw definitive conclusions from the contents of the emails as to possible jeopardy for Trump Jr.; where the overall investigation, which includes various threads, is

heading; or most specifically how it will end. That remains the purview of special counsel Robert S. Mueller III and investigators for the House and Senate intelligence committees. But in terms of public disclosures, what came out Tuesday was as stunning as anything to date, described by people closely watching on the outside as both breathtaking and surreal.

For those who had grown tired of the Russia issue or who believed it was losing potency or who thought the biggest surprises were in the past, Tuesday’s revelations provided dramatic proof that the investigation is alive with no end in sight. And at a minimum, the information in the emails demolishes the president’s claim, made as recently as last week, that “nobody really knows” whether the Russians meddled in the U.S. election and, if they did, whether they did so with the intent of helping him and hurting Clinton.

Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-Va.), vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, told reporters on Capitol

Hill that the contents of the emails showed clearly the Russians’ desire to interfere in the election with the intent of hampering Clinton and that, crucially, officials in the Trump operation “were aware of that.” He declined to speculate about how high up the chain of command that awareness might go.

The emails read like something out of a cheap spy thriller — or perhaps even a falsified document designed to lure and entrap a willing but unsuspecting victim. They also happen to lay out information that is transparently damaging and that undermines those who have dismissed suggestions of possible collusion or cooperation between Trump associates and the Russians as fanciful or deliberately misleading.

The language in the messages to Donald Trump Jr. is conspiratorial and explicit. The president’s son was offered “official documents” that would “incriminate Hillary” and that would be “very useful to your father.” Trump Jr. was also informed in the emails that the information

being offered was “part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump.”

Rather than setting off alarms within the Trump operation, the emails were gratefully received. “I love it,” Trump Jr. responded at one point. He agreed to set up a meeting to hear the information and said he would bring along Paul Manafort, at the time the Trump campaign’s chairman, and Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and now a senior White House adviser with an expansive portfolio and great power. That meeting took place on June 9, 2016.

Trump’s son said Tuesday that he was releasing the emails in the interest of transparency, but that decision came after the New York Times informed him that its reporters had the contents and were preparing to publish. Day by day, thanks to the Times’ reporting, Trump Jr. has been dissembling about how and why a meeting with a Russian lawyer came about.

When reporters from the Times first approached him about the meeting,

he said it was primarily about adoption, then later he conceded that he had been told that the purpose was to present damaging information about Clinton. Now it turns out there was an explicit connection to the Russian government. His rapidly changing explanations left White House chief of staff Reince Priebus hung out to dry with his comment Sunday that the meeting was about adoption.

Trump Jr. has been defiant in defense. He said that nothing untoward came from the meeting, that the Russian lawyer offered nothing credible about Clinton and that the discussion moved on to the Magnitsky Act, passed in 2012 to sanction Russian human rights abusers, which in turn prompted the Russians to shut down American adoptions of Russian children. He also tweeted that he was hardly the first campaign operative to be open to damaging information about an opponent.

Still, much isn't known about what happened subsequently, if anything. Given that the meeting took place in June 2016, at the front end of the general-election campaign, is it credible that this was the last communication between the

Russians and people in the orbit of the Trump campaign?

Was this a single entreaty that led to nothing and was shut off, or is there something more that could come out in the future? Two things are known. More than a month later, WikiLeaks dropped a batch of emails hacked from the Democratic National Committee, and days after that, then-candidate Trump called on the Russians to hack into Clinton's private emails and release them to the public.

The president, whose patience for the Russia investigation expired long ago and who now must recognize that it will stay with him and his administration for the foreseeable future, offered only the briefest of comments in reaction to the news. He called his son "a high-quality person" and said he applauded him for transparency. No one else was holding back as the revelations lit up Twitter and stoked endless rounds of discussion, analysis and speculation on cable television.

Among those trying to look the other way at this awkward moment was Vice President Pence. Marc Lotter, the vice president's press secretary, said in a statement that Pence

remains focused on the president's agenda, adding, "He is not focused on stories about the campaign, particularly stories about the time before he joined the ticket." Pence was not brought on as Trump's running mate until a month after the meeting in question.

It is by now a cliché to note that the Russia investigation not only hangs over the Trump presidency and his White House but that it also runs smack against efforts by Republicans to move ahead on their and the president's agenda. For Republicans, it is the most troubling of revelations at the worst of moments, as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) attempts to pass a health-care bill and as other legislation remains clogged in the pipeline.

Republicans can only wait as they watch the Russian front with trepidation. They hope that the eventual conclusion of the investigations will be exculpatory at best and murky at worst: a finding of clear Russian interference with motivation to help the president, but no definite connections among the various dots that hint at — but have not yet proved — collusion.

After what landed with such force Tuesday, however, they know there could be more damaging revelations to come. They are caught in a limbo. Whatever private fears they have, they are still attempting to remain publicly loyal to a president whose loyalty in return can never be taken for granted. Yet they know that their own political futures could hinge on what happens in the Russia investigation in the coming months.

Mueller's investigation appears to be wide-ranging, from possible abuse of power by the president in his attempts to limit the probe, to questions about cooperation or collusion between Trump associates and the Russians, to financial dealings by officials that have raised questions in the past. No one knows what else, if anything, he and his team are digging into. But the emails that were released Tuesday make for a provocative addition to that already heavy load, one that will keep the White House and its allies on edge for some time to come.

**The
Washington
Post**

UNE - Donald Trump Jr. was told campaign meeting would be with 'Russian government attorney,' according to emails

11-14 minutes

support for Mr. Trump" and would be "highly useful for your father."

The younger Trump appeared to relish the opportunity. "If it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer," he wrote back.

Trump Jr. posted the exchange on Twitter, saying he was revealing the correspondence "in order to be totally transparent," although the New York Times reported that the disclosure came after the newspaper informed him that it had reviewed the emails and intended to publish their content.

During an interview that aired Tuesday night on Fox News Channel's "Hannity" show, Trump Jr. said that the meeting came when "things are going a million miles per hour" in the campaign and that nothing concrete resulted.

"In retrospect I probably would have done things a little differently," Trump Jr. said, adding: "For me, this was opposition research. They had something, you know, maybe concrete evidence to all the stories I'd been hearing about, probably underreported for years, not just during the campaign, so I think I wanted to hear it out."

Trump Jr. said there was no more to the meeting than a "wasted" 20 minutes.

"There isn't anything else," he said, promising his team had scoured his emails and no other similar documents will emerge.

But rather than stemming the scrutiny, Trump Jr.'s disclosures Tuesday seemed to complicate matters further for the White House and undercut past efforts by the president to rebut allegations that his campaign colluded with the Kremlin.

The email exchange showed clearly that Trump Jr. — a key figure in his father's campaign — had reason to understand that he was accepting the meeting as a way to channel to his father's campaign information directly from the government of a nation hostile to the United States.

The revelation, coming amid investigations by Congress and a special counsel, sparked immediate calls by Democrats for the meeting participants to testify under oath and raised questions about legal jeopardy that Trump Jr. and other associates could face.

The revelation also could heighten pressure on Republicans, many of

whom on Tuesday either dismissed the significance of the Trump Jr. email exchange or declined to comment.

"Anytime you're in a campaign and you get an offer from a foreign government to help your campaign, the answer is 'no,'" said Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (S.C.), one of the few GOP lawmakers to offer criticism, adding that Trump Jr. "definitely" must testify as part of investigations of Russia's election meddling.

The White House on Tuesday offered a brief defense of Trump Jr., with deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders reading a statement from the president in which he said his son "is a high-quality person and I applaud his transparency."

Sanders referred most questions to lawyers for Trump and his son but relayed that the president is frustrated that Russia "continues to be an issue" and declined to answer a question about whether the president is now aware of Russia's efforts to help his campaign.

U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that Russian President Vladimir Putin directed a campaign to assist Trump, including the

For months, President Trump and his aides have forcefully rejected any suggestion that they sought or received help from Russia to win last year's election.

But the release Tuesday of a 2016 email exchange in which the president's eldest son welcomed the assistance of a "Russian government attorney" offered the clearest contradiction of the White House's denials — marking an escalation in the controversy that has engulfed the Trump presidency.

The email exchange was aimed at setting up a June 2016 meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and a Kremlin-connected lawyer who was said to have damaging information about Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. The meeting at Trump Tower was also attended by Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, and then-campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

During the email exchange, Trump Jr. was told by an intermediary that the "high level" information he would be offered about Clinton was "part of Russia and its government's

release of hacked emails stolen from Democratic officials.

Natalia Veselnitskaya, the Russian lawyer who took part in the meeting, denied in an interview Tuesday that she had represented the Russian government, suggesting that she sought the meeting on an entirely different subject: Russian adoptions.

"I did not have an assignment from the Kremlin, there were no orders from the government," Veselnitskaya said, adding that "someone in America really wants to overthrow their president."

The meeting occurred at a critical time for the Trump campaign. The New York businessman was securing the Republican nomination but was widely considered a long shot to defeat the more organized and politically experienced Clinton.

The email came from Rob Goldstone, a music publicist who represented Emin Agalarov, whose father, Aras Agalarov, is a major real estate developer close to Putin.

"Emin just called and asked me to contact you with something very interesting," Goldstone wrote to Trump Jr. "The Crown prosecutor of Russia met with his father Aras this morning and in their meeting offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father."

It is not clear who Goldstone was referring to in his mention of the "Crown prosecutor." There is no such position in the Russian government.

"This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government support for Mr. Trump — helped along by Aras and Emin," Goldstone wrote.

Goldstone offered to send the information directly to the elder Trump but said

that because it was "ultra sensitive," he wanted to contact Trump Jr. first.

Trump Jr. appears to have forwarded the exchange to Kushner and Manafort. And he wrote that he had invited the two fellow campaign advisers to the meeting. "It will likely be Paul Manafort (campaign boss) my brother in law and me," Trump Jr. wrote. A person close to Manafort who was not authorized to speak publicly said Manafort did not read the entire chain.

A spokesman for the president's lawyer has said that Trump was not aware of the meeting and did not attend. On Fox News, Trump Jr. said he did not tell his father about the meeting, saying, "There was nothing to tell."

Goldstone did not respond Tuesday to requests for comment on the email exchange. He confirmed that he has hired an attorney, Bob Gage, to handle Russia-related inquiries.

Scott Balber, a New York lawyer retained by Emin and Aras Agalarov, denied that Goldstone's emails accurately outlined the origins of the meeting. He said that Emin Agalarov is an acquaintance of Veselnitskaya and that she asked him if he could secure a meeting for her with Trump officials. Balber said Aras Agalarov never met with a Russian prosecutor and did not have access to information about Clinton.

"It is certainly not the case that either [Emin or Aras] was in possession of any information that was relevant to the campaign or was using Natalia as some kind of conduit to the campaign. That's fantasy land," he said. "It is not the case that we had any understanding that the purpose of the meeting was anything related to Hillary Clinton or to the election."

Balber said his understanding was that the meeting was meant to be a conversation about the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 law that punishes certain Russian human rights

abusers by allowing the United States to seize their assets and keep them from entering the country. Putin retaliated by barring American families from adopting Russian children.

In his statement Tuesday, Trump Jr. said he "wanted to just have a phone call but when that didn't work out, they said the woman would be in New York and asked if I would meet."

"I decided to take the meeting. The woman, as she has said publicly, was not a government official," he said.

Although Trump Jr. said the meeting took place before intense scrutiny on the Russia issue, in fact his father's warm comments toward Putin had started a year earlier and had grabbed significant attention among his opponents and foreign policy experts.

Five days after the June meeting in Trump Tower with the Russian lawyer, The Washington Post reported that hackers thought to be associated with the Russians had penetrated the computer systems of the Democratic National Committee and stolen internal records a few months earlier.

The next day, the first DNC documents were released publicly by Guccifer 2.0, an online persona the U.S. government has concluded was Russian-controlled.

WikiLeaks dumped a much larger cache of internal DNC emails on July 22, as the Democratic National Convention opened, causing internal party dissension that led the party chairman to resign.

Trump's reaction was to ask Russia at a public news conference if it could locate the 30,000 emails Clinton had deleted and not turned over the State Department from her time as secretary of state, deeming them purely personal.

In a July interview on CNN — the month after the meeting with Veselnitskaya — Trump Jr.

dismissed as "disgusting" and "phony" a suggestion that the Russians were attempting to aid his father's campaign.

He told the New York Times in March that although he was sure he had held meetings with Russians, there were "certainly none" in which he "was representing the campaign in any way, shape or form."

Such comments were part of a pattern from Trump's team, which has repeatedly denied coordination with Russia but then has been forced to acknowledge undisclosed contacts with Russians.

During a January appearance on CBS's "Face the Nation," Vice President Pence was asked if "any adviser or anybody in the Trump campaign [had] any contact with the Russians who were trying to meddle in the election?"

"Of course not," he replied. In a statement Tuesday, Pence's spokesman said the Trump Jr. meeting had occurred before Pence joined the campaign.

In recent days, Trump Jr.'s explanation for what transpired has evolved.

On Saturday, when the meeting was first reported by the Times, he said that it was about the adoption program that the Kremlin had cut off in retaliation for the Magnitsky Act.

But in a statement Sunday, Trump Jr. said an acquaintance asked him to meet with someone who "might have information helpful to the campaign." Trump Jr. said that the meeting was set up by an acquaintance and that he was not told the name of the person he was meeting.

"It quickly became clear that she had no meaningful information," Trump Jr. said in his Sunday statement. "She then changed subjects and began discussing the adoption of Russian children."

**The
New York
Times**

Matt Apuzzo

16-20 minutes

Donald Trump Jr. received an email on June 3, 2016, promising dirt on Hillary Clinton. The information was described as being part of Russia's support for his father's presidential bid. His reply? "I love it."

The June 3, 2016, email sent to Donald Trump Jr. could hardly have

UNE - Russian Dirt on Clinton? 'I Love It,' Donald Trump Jr. Said

Jo Becker, Adam Goldman and

been more explicit: One of his father's former Russian business partners had been contacted by a senior Russian government official and was offering to provide the Trump campaign with dirt on Hillary Clinton.

The documents "would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father," read the email, written by a trusted intermediary, who added, "This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part

of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

If the future president's eldest son was surprised or disturbed by the provenance of the promised material — or the notion that it was part of a continuing effort by the Russian government to aid his father's campaign — he gave no indication.

He replied within minutes: "If it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer."

Four days later, after a flurry of emails, the intermediary wrote back, proposing a meeting in New York on Thursday with a "Russian government attorney."

Donald Trump Jr. agreed, adding that he would most likely bring along "Paul Manafort (campaign boss)" and "my brother-in-law," Jared Kushner, now one of the president's closest White House advisers.

On June 9, the Russian lawyer was sitting in the younger Mr. Trump's

office on the 25th floor of Trump Tower, just one level below the office of the future president.

Over the past several days, The New York Times has disclosed the existence of the meeting, whom it involved and what it was about. The story has unfolded as The Times has been able to confirm details of the meetings.

But the email exchanges, which were reviewed by The Times, offer a detailed unspooling of how the meeting with the Kremlin-connected Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, came about — and just how eager Donald Trump Jr. was to accept what he was explicitly told was the Russian government's help.

The Justice Department and the House and Senate Intelligence Committees are examining whether any of President Trump's associates colluded with the Russian government to disrupt last year's election. American intelligence agencies have determined that the Russian government tried to sway the election in favor of Mr. Trump.

The precise nature of the promised damaging information about Mrs. Clinton is unclear, and there is no evidence to suggest that it was related to Russian-government computer hacking that led to the release of thousands of Democratic National Committee emails. But in recent days, accounts by some of the central organizers of the meeting, including Donald Trump Jr., have evolved or have been contradicted by the written email records.

Trump Team Has Frequently Claimed 'No Contact' With Russia

Trump advisers have often insisted that the campaign had no contact with various Russian insiders — claims which were later proven false.

After being told that The Times was about to publish the content of the emails, instead of responding to a request for comment, Donald Trump Jr. posted images of them on Tuesday on Twitter.

"To everyone, in order to be totally transparent, I am releasing the entire email chain of my emails" about the June 9 meeting, he wrote. "I first wanted to just have a phone call but when that didn't work out, they said the woman would be in New York and asked if I would meet."

He added that nothing came of it. But in an interview on Tuesday with Fox News's Sean Hannity, he said that "in retrospect, I probably would have done things a little differently."

President Trump wrote on Twitter early Wednesday: "My son Donald did a good job last night. He was open, transparent and innocent. This is the greatest Witch Hunt in political history. Sad!"

At a White House briefing on Tuesday, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the deputy press secretary, referred questions about the meeting to Donald Trump Jr.'s counsel, but read a statement from the president in which he called his son "a high-quality person."

The back story to the June 9 meeting involves an eclectic cast of characters the Trump family knew from its business dealings in Moscow.

The initial email outreach came from Rob Goldstone, a British-born former tabloid reporter and entertainment publicist who first met the future president when the Trump Organization was trying to do business in Russia.

In the June 3 email, Mr. Goldstone told Donald Trump Jr. that he was writing on behalf of a mutual friend, one of Russia's biggest pop music stars, Emin Agalarov. Emin, who professionally uses his first name only, is the son of Aras Agalarov, a real estate tycoon sometimes called the "Donald Trump of Russia."

The elder Mr. Agalarov boasts close ties to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia: His company has won several large state building contracts, and Mr. Putin awarded him the Order of Honor of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Agalarov joined with the elder Mr. Trump to bring the Miss Universe contest to Moscow in 2013, and the Trump and Agalarov families grew relatively close.

Rob Goldstone's Facebook page shows he checked in to Trump Tower on June 9, 2016, "preparing for meeting."

When Emin released a music video with a theme borrowed from the television show "The Apprentice," Mr. Trump, then the show's star, made a cameo appearance, delivering his trademark line: "You're fired!" The elder Mr. Agalarov had also partnered with the Trumps to build a Trump hotel in Moscow, but the deal never came to fruition.

"Emin just called and asked me to contact you with something very interesting," Mr. Goldstone wrote in the email. "The Crown prosecutor of Russia met with his father Aras this morning and in their meeting offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and

information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father."

He added, "What do you think is the best way to handle this information and would you be able to speak to Emin about it directly?"

There is no such title as crown prosecutor in Russia — the Crown Prosecution Service is a British term — but the equivalent in Russia is the prosecutor general of Russia.

That office is held by Yury Yakovlevich Chaika, a Putin appointee who is known to be close to Ms. Veselnitskaya.

Arranging a Meeting

After sending back his reply of "I love it especially later in the summer" — when voters' attention would be heightened by the approaching election — Donald Trump Jr. arranged to speak with Emin, sending along his private cellphone number on June 6.

"Ok he's on stage in Moscow but should be off within 20 Minutes so I'm sure can call," Mr. Goldstone wrote at 3:43 p.m.

Within the hour, Donald Trump Jr. had responded: "Rob thanks for the help. D."

The next day, Mr. Goldstone followed up: "Don Hope all is well Emin asked that I schedule a meeting with you and The Russian government attorney who is flying over from Moscow for this Thursday. I believe you are aware of this meeting — and so wondered if 3pm or later on Thursday works for you?"

Mr. Goldstone's emails contradict statements he made in his interview with The Times on Monday, when he said that he did not know whether the elder Mr. Agalarov had any role in arranging the meeting, and that he had no knowledge of any official Russian government role in the offer to provide the Trump campaign with dirt on Mrs. Clinton. Instead, he said that Ms. Veselnitskaya had contacted Emin directly, and that Emin had asked him to reach out to the Trumps as a favor to her.

"I actually asked him at one point how he knew her, and he said, 'I can't remember but, you know, I know thousands of people,'" he said in the interview.

Subsequent efforts to reach Mr. Goldstone, who acknowledged in the interview that he had spoken with someone at the Trump Organization over the weekend in anticipation of news media attention, have been unsuccessful.

Mr. Goldstone, in a June 7 follow-up email, wrote, "I will send the names of the two people meeting with you for security when I have them later today."

By that time, as the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Mr. Trump was already under the protection of the Secret Service and access to Trump Tower in New York was strictly controlled. Ms. Veselnitskaya told The Times that the person who accompanied her was an interpreter whom she declined to name.

After being informed that the Russian lawyer could not make the 3 p.m. time that had been proposed, and agreeing to move it by an hour, Donald Trump Jr. forwarded the entire email chain to Mr. Kushner's company work email, and to Mr. Manafort at his Trump campaign email.

"Meeting got moved to 4 tomorrow at my offices," he wrote on June 8. "Best, Don."

Mr. Kushner recently disclosed the fact of the meeting, though not the content, in a revised form on which all those seeking top secret security clearances are required to list contacts with foreign government officials and their representatives. The Times reported in April that he had failed to list his foreign contacts, including with several Russians; his lawyer has called those omissions an error.

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Mr. Manafort also disclosed that a meeting had occurred, and that Donald Trump Jr. had organized it, in response to one of the Russia-related congressional investigations.

Representatives for both men did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Ms. Veselnitskaya arrived the next day and was ushered into Donald Trump Jr.'s office for a meeting with what amounted to the Trump campaign's brain trust.

Besides having politically connected clients, one of whom was under investigation by federal prosecutors at the time of the meeting, Ms. Veselnitskaya is well known for her lobbying efforts against the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 law that punishes designated Russian human rights abusers by allowing the United States to seize their assets and keep them from entering the country. The law so angered Mr. Putin that he retaliated by barring

American families from adopting Russian children. Her activities and associations have brought her to the attention of the F.B.I., according to a former senior law enforcement official.

When first contacted by The Times on Saturday, Donald Trump Jr. portrayed the meeting this way: "It was a short introductory meeting. I asked Jared and Paul to stop by. We primarily discussed a program about the adoption of Russian children that was active and popular with American families years ago and was since ended by the Russian government, but it was not a campaign issue at the time and there was no follow-up."

Responding to Queries

The next day, after The Times informed him that it was preparing an article that would say that the meeting also involved a discussion about potentially compromising material on Mrs. Clinton, he issued another statement: "I was asked to have a meeting by an acquaintance I knew from the 2013 Miss Universe pageant with an individual who I

was told might have information helpful to the campaign. I was not told her name prior to the meeting. I asked Jared and Paul to attend, but told them nothing of the substance."

He continued: "After pleasantries were exchanged, the woman stated that she had information that individuals connected to Russia were funding the Democratic National Committee and supporting Ms. Clinton. Her statements were vague, ambiguous and made no sense. No details or supporting information was provided or even offered. It quickly became clear that she had no meaningful information. She then changed subjects and began discussing the adoption of Russian children and mentioned the Magnitsky Act. It became clear to me that this was the true agenda all along and that the claims of potentially helpful information were a pretext for the meeting."

Mr. Goldstone recalled the meeting in much the same way.

Ms. Veselnitskaya offered "just a vague, generic statement about the campaign's funding and how

people, including Russian people, living all over the world donate when they shouldn't donate" before turning to her anti-Magnitsky Act arguments, he said. "It was the most inane nonsense I've ever heard."

Ms. Veselnitskaya, for her part, said in an statement to The Times sent this past weekend that "nothing at all about the presidential campaign" had been discussed at the Trump Tower meeting, adding that she had "never acted on behalf of the Russian government" and that she had "never discussed any of these matters with any representative of the Russian government." She has not responded to requests for comment since.

A spokesman for Mr. Putin said on Monday that he did not know Ms. Veselnitskaya and that he had no knowledge of the June 2016 meeting.

Back in Washington, both the White House and a spokesman for President Trump's lawyer have taken pains to distance the president from the meeting, saying

that he did he not attend it and that he learned about it only recently, a point Donald Trump Jr. reiterated Tuesday in his interview on Fox News. He also said he would testify under oath in any of the investigations into possible collusion between Russia and his father's campaign.

Mr. Agalarov did not respond to a request for comment.

Emin, the pop star at the center of it all, will not comment on the matter, either, Mr. Goldstone, his publicist, said on Monday. "Emin said to me that I could tell journalists that, you know, he has decided to go with just a straight no comment," Mr. Goldstone said. "His reasoning for that is simply that he believes that by him commenting in any way from Russia, it once again will open this debate of Trump, Trump, Russia. Now here's another person from Russia. Now he's another person from Russia. So he wants to just not comment on the story. That's his reasoning. It's — the story will play out however it plays out."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

UNE- Email to Trump Jr. Says Clinton Info Was Part of Moscow's Trump Support

Paul Sonne and Rebecca Ballhaus

10-12 minutes

WASHINGTON—The president's eldest son and senior campaign aides attended a meeting last year to discuss allegedly incriminating information about Hillary Clinton they were told was being offered by the Russian government in support of Donald Trump's candidacy, according to emails Donald Trump Jr. released Tuesday.

The release of the emails, following days of news reports about the June 2016 meeting, offers evidence that senior officials in the Trump camp entertained offers of Russia's help in last year's election. That appears to contradict longtime statements by members of the campaign that they were unaware of a Russian effort to support Mr. Trump last year.

During the campaign and since his election victory, Mr. Trump repeatedly praised President Vladimir Putin and cast doubt on the U.S. intelligence community's conclusion that Russia sought to interfere in the election. Last week, he said in Warsaw: "Nobody knows for sure."

The meeting last June was also attended by Jared Kushner, Mr. Trump's son-in-law, who was a senior campaign aide at the time

and is now a top White House official, and Paul Manafort, then the campaign chairman.

The email release is likely to pull the younger Mr. Trump, who had a significant role in the campaign but never joined the Trump administration, further into the center of the matter being investigated by special counsel Robert Mueller. President Trump has said little about the episode, aside from a tweet late Tuesday in which he called his son a "great person who loves our country." But he has been closely following the reports, aides said, and in private, the president has been consulting with his eldest son and giving him advice, a person familiar with the matter said.

In a statement read to reporters by a White House spokeswoman on Tuesday, President Trump said: "My son is a high quality person and I applaud his transparency."

After reading the statement, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House principal deputy press secretary, said: "beyond that I'm going to have to refer everything on this matter" to Donald Trump Jr.'s attorney.

Richard Painter, White House ethics attorney in the George W. Bush administration, said it is illegal for a political campaign to accept "foreign contributions of money or services,"

which he said would include the information apparently described in Mr. Trump's email exchange. The younger Mr. Trump has said information about Mrs. Clinton was offered but that it was of little value.

Still, Mr. Painter said the extent to which the Trump campaign entangled itself in Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential campaign wasn't clear from the correspondence. The Russian government has denied trying to influence the campaign, and the president and his operatives have long said there was no collusion, with Mr. Trump also contradicting the intelligence community by saying other countries besides Russia could have interfered with the election.

"It's one more shoe to drop," Mr. Painter said. "They said there's no collusion and now we see clearly that Donald Trump Jr. wanted to collude."

In an email to the younger Mr. Trump dated June 3, 2016, a British publicist said that a top Russian prosecutor had "offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father."

The publicist said the prosecutor had communicated this offer to Azerbaijani-Russian billionaire Aras

Agalarov, who along with his son, pop star Emin Agalarov, organized the 2013 Miss Universe pageant in Moscow with the president and developed a relationship with the Trump family.

"This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump—helped along by Aras and Emin," the publicist, Rob Goldstone, who was working for the Agalarovs, wrote in the email to the younger Mr. Trump. "What do you think is the best way to handle this information and would you be able to speak to Emin about it directly?"

Donald Trump Jr. responded by offering to speak to Emin Agalarov about the matter. "[I]f it's what you say I love it," the younger Mr. Trump wrote, appearing to suggest the information would be good to release "later in the summer."

The correspondence appears to show the younger Mr. Trump forwarded the chain and meeting plans to Messrs. Kushner and Manafort. Over the weekend, the younger Mr. Trump said he told the two aides "nothing of the substance" of the meeting before it occurred.

In a statement Tuesday, the younger Mr. Trump said he believed the Agalarovs had political opposition research about Mrs. Clinton and wanted him to meet

with a Russian lawyer in New York about the matter.

In an interview Tuesday night on Fox News, the younger Mr. Trump said it was common for people to act on an interesting email. "I didn't know if there was any credibility, I didn't know if there was anything behind it, I can't vouch for the information," he said. "Someone sends me an email—I can't help what someone sends me. You know, I read it, I responded accordingly."

Donald Trump Jr. said he didn't tell his father about the meeting because it was "such a nothing." He said he probably had met with other Russians but not in the context of a "formalized meeting." He was also asked if anyone else came to him offering information about Mrs. Clinton that he remembered, and he said, "No."

The younger Mr. Trump hired a private attorney Monday and said he would work with congressional investigators who have sought his testimony since he said he arranged the meeting with top campaign aides and the Russian lawyer. On Tuesday, Sen. John Cornyn (R., Texas), a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee that is investigating Russian activity, called for the younger Mr. Trump to testify before the committee.

The New York Times

All along, the truth was right there in the emails — Donald Trump Jr.'s emails, that is, which he released publicly on Twitter Tuesday morning after learning that The New York Times was about to publish their contents.

In language so blunt and obvious it would make a Hollywood screenwriter blush, the emails confirm what the president, his son and others have denied repeatedly for more than a year: that top members of the Trump campaign met with representatives of the Russian government in the expectation of help in damaging Hillary Clinton and getting Donald Trump elected.

On June 3, 2016, the younger Mr. Trump received an email from Rob Goldstone, a former British tabloid reporter and music publicist, telling him that a Russian government lawyer had "offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father."

The top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Adam Schiff of California, told reporters Tuesday that there was "a very demonstrable pattern of obfuscation and dissembling" about the Trump family's dealings with the Russians. Mr. Schiff said the House committee, which is conducting its own probe, would like to call everyone involved in the meeting to testify in the near future.

Mr. Schiff said the activity described in the emails could constitute criminal violations under certain circumstances, but beyond that, he said that collusion with a foreign power contravened Americans' basic civic responsibilities.

"It is absolutely not only a breach of norms, but a breach of civic responsibility to the country. If you get approached by a foreign government offering to interfere in a presidential election, you go to the FBI. You report it. That's what a decent citizen would do," said Mr. Schiff.

A special counsel appointed by the Justice Department earlier this year, former FBI Director Robert Mueller, also is investigating whether Trump campaign aides colluded with Moscow.

The president's son said in a statement Tuesday that the Russian lawyer he met, Natalia

Veselnitskaya, wasn't working for the Russian government, and Ms. Veselnitskaya herself has denied ties to the Kremlin. Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for Mr. Putin, said Monday the Kremlin doesn't know Ms. Veselnitskaya and "cannot keep track of every Russian lawyer and their meetings within the country or abroad."

But Ms. Veselnitskaya and the Agalarov family have extensive ties to Russian officials. She counts among her clients state-owned companies and relatives of top government officials. Her husband previously served as deputy transportation minister of the Moscow region. In one of the emails released by Donald Trump Jr. on Tuesday, Mr. Goldstone, the publicist, described the lawyer as a "Russian government attorney flying over from Moscow."

Ms. Veselnitskaya said in an NBC interview broadcast on Tuesday before the younger Mr. Trump released the emails that she didn't take the meeting with the intent of supplying "damaging" information on Mrs. Clinton.

"I never had any damaging or sensitive information about Hillary Clinton. It was never my intention to have that," she said.

Ms. Veselnitskaya has been involved in a broad Russian

campaign to discredit the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 U.S. law that punishes Russian officials accused of human-rights violations. Moscow banned Americans from adopting Russian children in response to the U.S. law's passage.

In a July 24, 2016, interview with CNN, the younger Mr. Trump said the charge that Russia had mounted a campaign to help his father was "so phony."

Mark Corallo, a spokesman for Marc Kasowitz, the president's private attorney, said Tuesday: "The president was not aware of and did not attend the meeting."

On the same day Donald Trump Jr. confirmed the meeting with Mr. Goldstone—two days before the meeting took place—the elder Mr. Trump at a rally promised to give a "major speech" days later that would address "all of the things that have taken place with the Clintons."

"I think you're going to find it informative and very, very interesting," Mr. Trump said to a round of applause.

Mr. Trump ultimately focused that speech on terror threats in the wake of the Orlando nightclub shooting that happened that weekend.

Editorial : Donald Trump Jr. Makes the Russian Connection

Mr. Goldstone went on, "This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

At this point, any halfway competent and ethical campaign would have contacted the F.B.I. That's what the Gore campaign did in 2000 when it mysteriously received confidential debate materials belonging to the Bush campaign.

In President Trump's world, ethics is for suckers. His son wrote back to Mr. Goldstone, "If it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer" — when he probably assumed it would do the most damage.

On June 9, the younger Mr. Trump met at Trump Tower with the Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, who has connections to the Kremlin. Also attending were members of the Trump inner circle — Paul Manafort, the campaign chairman, and Jared Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law and now a senior White House adviser. (Mr. Kushner initially failed to mention this meeting, and several others with Russian officials, on his security clearance application.)

What happened at the meeting? Nothing, according to Donald Trump Jr., who said it had occurred "before the current Russian fever was in vogue." Less than two months later, CNN asked him about allegations that Russia was trying to help his father's campaign. "It's disgusting, it's so phony," Mr. Trump said then. "I can't think of bigger lies."

He might try thinking a little harder, especially about his multiple conflicting accounts of what transpired with Ms. Veselnitskaya. On Sunday, for example, he said that he had told Mr. Manafort and Mr. Kushner "nothing of the substance" of the meeting in advance. But the subject line of the exchange with Mr. Goldstone, which Mr. Trump forwarded to both men, read, "Russia — Clinton — private and confidential."

Donald Trump Jr. appears to be in real legal jeopardy. Federal campaign finance law prohibits political campaigns from soliciting any "thing of value" from foreign nationals. By that standard, Mr. Trump's acceptance of the offer to see Ms. Veselnitskaya certainly looks bad. Any charges along these lines could be filed by Robert Mueller III, the special counsel

overseeing the Russia investigation, or by the Justice Department under the direction of Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who took over all Russia-related matters after Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself in March.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress are maintaining their head-between-the-knees position as the Trump plane spirals downward. Senator Orrin Hatch said attention to the emails was "overblown" and called Donald Trump Jr. a "very nice young man."

Vice President Mike Pence tried to vault himself as far as possible from the mess. He was "not aware of the meeting," his press secretary said, and is "not focused" on "stories about the time before he joined the ticket."

And what of the president? Mr. Goldstone ended his email to the younger Mr. Trump by saying, "I can also send this info to your father" through his personal assistant. Donald Trump Jr. has flatly denied that his father had any knowledge of the meeting, but that's hard to believe given who was in attendance, and impossible to

accept given how untruthful the younger Mr. Trump has been.

On Tuesday, President Trump was uncharacteristically subdued on social media. He offered only a

bloodless note of support for Donald Jr. in a statement released by his press office: "My son is a high-quality person and I applaud his transparency." But transparency is

one of the many things, along with credibility, that this administration lacks. So when Donald Trump Jr. claims that he's released the "full

email chain," the question has to be, what else are you hiding?

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

Editorial : Keystone Kops Collusion - WSJ

The Editorial Board

4-5 minutes

President Trump's critics claim to have uncovered proof, finally, of 2016 collusion between the campaign and the Kremlin. Another reading of the meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and a well-connected Russian lawyer is, well, political farce.

In June 2016, Mr. Trump Jr. arranged an appointment in Trump Tower with the lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya. He said in a statement that he hoped to acquire opposition research about Hillary Clinton, and he even pulled in Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner and then campaign manager Paul Manafort. By Mr. Trump Jr.'s account, Ms. Veselnitskaya relayed nothing to compromise Mrs. Clinton and then lobbied him about the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 U.S. law that sanctions Russian human-rights abusers.

According to the emails that Mr. Trump Jr. released Tuesday, Mr.

Trump Jr. agreed to meet with Ms. Veselnitskaya after he was approached by Rob Goldstone, a publicist who offered to pass along "some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father." He wrote that this information "is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

The appropriate response from a political competent would have been to alert the FBI if a cut-out promised material supplied by a foreign government. Mr. Trump Jr. instead replied that "if it's what you say I love it."

Then again, the Trumps knew Mr. Goldstone through the Russian pop star Emin, aka Emin Agalarov, whose father partnered with Donald Trump Sr. in bringing the Miss Universe beauty pageant to Moscow in 2013. Mr. Trump Sr. appeared in a music video with Emin the same year. Mr. Goldstone said that "Emin just called and asked me to contact you with something very interesting"—info his father got from the "Crown

prosecutor of Russia." Russia's "Crown prosecutor" doesn't exist.

Mr. Trump Jr. responded that "perhaps I just speak to Emin first." Mr. Goldstone brokered the call, reporting that "Ok he's on stage in Moscow but should be off within 20 Minutes so I am sure can call." Subsequent messages show Emin asked Mr. Trump Jr. to meet with Ms. Veselnitskaya, who was well-known as an anti-Magnitsky operative at the time. Mr. Goldstone publicly checked into Trump Tower on Facebook during the meeting, which isn't how a KGB man would normally conceal the handoff of state secrets.

In the daisy chain from Russian oligarch to singer to PR go-between to lawyer to Trump scion, which is more plausible? That Don Jr. was canny enough to coordinate a global plot to rig the election but not canny enough to notice that this plot was detailed in his personal emails? Or that some Russians took advantage of a political naif named Trump in an unsuccessful bid to undermine the Magnitsky law they hated?

**The
Washington
Post**

Editorial : The Russia meddling story is no longer just smoke. It's fire.

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

5-6 minutes

THERE CAN now be no doubt: The Russia meddling story is not just smoke but fire. Donald Trump Jr.'s interactions with Russians during last year's presidential campaign were abnormal and alarming. An incriminating email chain has made it impossible for the administration to deploy its always flimsy argument of last resort — that the whole story is just "fake news."

Not only Mr. Trump but also presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner and then-campaign chairman Paul J. Manafort are involved. Following a string of misleading and false statements, Americans must also wonder: Were other Trump associates involved? Did other meetings take place? Was President Trump aware of them? What more did the Trump camp

know about Kremlin support for the Trump campaign?

And then there is this recurring question: How long can the rest of the Republican Party prioritize partisanship and agenda over decency and patriotism?

The emails were released by the younger Mr. Trump after he learned that the New York Times was about to publish them. They show that in June 2016 a publicist who had been involved with Donald Trump's 2013 Miss Universe pageant in Moscow offered the president's son "official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary [Clinton]." This "very high level and sensitive information" would be from "the Crown prosecutor of Russia," an apparent reference to Russia's prosecutor general. It would be passed on as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

Donald Trump Jr.'s reply was damning: "If it's what you say I love it." In subsequent emails, it was explicit that he would meet with a

"Russian government attorney" in order to get the information.

The younger Mr. Trump and his apologists claim that he responded as would any campaign operative seeking dirt on an opponent. No. A ny ethical operative confronted by a foreign power's attempt to meddle in this way in U.S. elections would refer the matter promptly to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Instead, Mr. Trump was enthused, drawing Mr. Manafort and Mr. Kushner into a meeting with someone he believed to be a Russian government attorney. Even if the Trump camp got no dirt on Ms. Clinton out of that meeting, the Russians could have used the email chain and subsequent meeting as leverage over Mr. Trump and Mr. Kushner, who is now a top White House adviser. Mr. Trump's enthusiasm may also have communicated to the Kremlin that the Trump camp would welcome Kremlin election meddling. The Russians went on to run an anti-Clinton hacking campaign.

The problem is that President Trump has too often made the implausible plausible by undermining his own credibility on Russia. He's stocked his cabinet with Russia hawks but dallied with characters like the legendary Beltway bandit Mr. Manafort or the conspiratorialist Roger Stone. His Syrian bombing and energy policy are tough on Russia, but Mr. Trump thinks that if he says Russia interfered in 2016 he will play into the Democratic narrative that his victory is illegitimate.

Thus in retrospect the John Podesta and Democratic National Committee hacks—still so far the tangible extent of Russian meddling—did less damage to U.S. democracy than it has done to the Trump Presidency. The person who should be maddest about the Russian hacks is Mr. Trump.

What now? The president's sole comment on the matter, relayed Tuesday by principal deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, is that "my son is a high-quality person and I applaud his transparency." On Monday, Ms. Sanders herself said that "the only thing I see inappropriate about the meeting was the people that leaked the information about the meeting after it was voluntarily disclosed." That's the only inappropriate thing? A responsible president should have something to say about the gross inappropriateness of this meeting and, speaking of transparency, about how and when he learned of it.

Senators questioning Christopher A. Wray, the president's nominee to lead the FBI, in a Wednesday hearing must demand that he detail any conversation he had with Trump administration officials and commit to cooperating fully with special counsel Robert S. Mueller III in his investigation of the Trump-Russia connections. Lawmakers must pass a tough sanctions bill holding Russia accountable for its election meddling.

And Republican leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (Ky.) and House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (Wis.), must

finally decide: Is this really okay? Are they really prepared to debase themselves in defense of a president whose closest advisers

may have welcomed underhanded interference in America's election from a hostile foreign power?



Editorial : Donald Trump Jr. chose Russia & victory over patriotism

Americans have seen through the smoke surrounding Russian interference in the 2016 election and there is fire, leaping flames that President Trump and his minions can no longer extinguish with their denials.

In June, 2016, President Trump's eldest son received an email from a business associate saying that a top Russian government official was offering dirt to "incriminate" Hillary Clinton as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

Donald Trump Jr. sounded giddy upon learning that a hostile foreign power wanted to interfere in the U.S. presidential election. "If it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer," he emailed in reply. Trump Jr. agreed to a meeting at New York's Trump Tower on June 9 with someone described as a "Russian government attorney." The meeting also included then campaign chairman Paul Manafort and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner, now a senior White House adviser.

Did Donald Trump Jr. commit a crime by planning to meet with a "Russian government attorney" for the purpose of obtaining dirt on his father's opponent? Federal law prohibits soliciting or accepting a campaign contribution or any "other

thing of value" from a foreign national. Dirt on Clinton was certainly a thing of value to Republicans. Whether the campaign crossed a legal line we'll leave for special counsel Robert Mueller and the courts to sort out.

But this much is evident: The Trump campaign, at the highest levels, was willing to let a hostile foreign power interfere in a U.S. election to help Trump win. That is a exactly the betrayal of American independence the Founders feared.

And while we've now seen, in Donald Trump Jr.'s own words, how far the campaign was willing to go to win, it's tough to take his word or that of the lawyer, who denies working for the Russian government, about what transpired. For starters, Trump Jr.'s stories shifted over the weekend. When *The New York Times* broke the story Saturday, Trump Jr. said the meeting with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya was about a Russian adoption program, popular with Americans, that was shut down by the Russian government. By Sunday, when other sources said the meeting involved the promise of derogatory information on Clinton, Trump Jr. suddenly acknowledged that the lawyer had indeed offered such information but said it turned out to be "vague, ambiguous and made no sense."

No matter what happened there is no getting away from the fact that the younger Trump, Kushner and Manafort met with someone they thought was a Russian emissary on the promise of foreign help in the election. That their effort allegedly failed is no excuse for having launched it in the first place. And the Trump administration's reckless disregard for the truth gives ample reason to doubt their account.

What should the younger Trump have done upon receiving the Russian offer? The same thing former Democratic congressman Thomas Downey did when he was working with Al Gore's 2000 presidential campaign and received a package containing a videotape of George W. Bush's debate practice sessions and other confidential material. He turned all of it over to the FBI.

The Trump White House likes to shield itself from charges of wrongdoing with a veneer of bumbling incompetence.

Now, it expects the world to believe that the president's son, the man he put in charge of his business empire, and son-in-law Jared Kushner, one of his closest advisers and the man he put in charge of Middle East peace, knew since June 2016 of a secret Russian campaign to sway the election, met with a Russian lawyer and never bothered to mention it to the

president. They stayed quiet even as two congressional committees and a special counsel investigated whether the campaign colluded with the Russians. And even as President Trump repeatedly wrote off Russian interference as "fake news" and a Democratic Party myth to explain its election loss.

That is too preposterous even for this White House.

Now we know part of the sad truth. The chain of emails Trump Jr. revealed Tuesday provides evidence that the Russian government wanted to sway the election to Trump and that some in Trump's inner circle were willing to accept that help. We do not yet know what the president knew about their efforts and whether the Trump campaign effort to collude with America's enemies continued during the remainder of the campaign.

We do, however, have a perfectly clear picture of Trump family priorities: Winning — at business and politics — beats patriotism every time.



Editorial : If it wasn't clear already, Trump Jr.'s email release proves Russia investigation is no 'witch hunt'

The Times
Editorial Board
4-5 minutes

The Times Editorial Board

Donald Trump Jr. on Tuesday released a chain of emails that established beyond any doubt that he was eager to receive derogatory information about Hillary Clinton from agents of the Russian government.

The emails also further undercut the notion — endlessly propagated by Donald Trump Sr. — that investigations into Russian meddling into last year's election are a "witch hunt."

The emails begin on June 3 with a message from Rob Goldstone, a music promoter with business

dealings in Russia, who tells the younger Trump that a Russian official was willing to provide the Trump campaign with "official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father." The offer, Goldstone said, was "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

Trump Jr.'s response: "If it's what you say, I love it."

Goldstone later proposed a meeting with a "Russian government attorney" soon to be flying to the U.S. Trump Jr. summoned Paul Manafort, then the chairman of the campaign, and his brother-in-law Jared Kushner, to the meeting with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya; he later complained

that "she had no information to provide" and wanted instead to talk about adoption policy and the Magnitsky Act, a U.S. law imposing sanctions on Russian human-rights violators. (Veselnitskaya has denied that she offered to share damaging information about Clinton and said she never worked for the Russian government.)

Notwithstanding his shopper's remorse, Trump Jr. was clearly willing to accept what he calls "Political Opposition Research" from Russia. That admission makes a mockery of his claim in July of last year — several weeks after his meeting with the Russian lawyer — that Democratic accusations that Russia was helping the Trump campaign were "disgusting" and "phony."

Unsavoury as it is, the behavior of Donald Trump Jr. may not have violated the law and it doesn't establish that the Trump campaign was complicit in other Russian activities connected to the 2016 campaign, notably the hacking of Democratic email accounts and the relaying of their contents to WikiLeaks. But after this revelation, no one can pretend that the various investigations into possible contacts between Russia and the Trump campaign are frivolous or politically motivated.

That includes President Trump, who should take a belated vow of silence on this subject and let the investigations take their course.

Donald Trump Jr's Meeting with Russian Lawyer -- Email Revelations

5-6 minutes

It's been a journalistic season of hype, innuendo, and sometimes flat-out error on the Russia story, but the *New York Times* finally hit paydirt in the last several days.

Over the weekend, the *Times* revealed that Donald Trump Jr., then-campaign manager Paul Manafort, and Jared Kushner met with a Kremlin-connected lawyer at Trump Tower in Manhattan on June 9, 2016, two weeks after Trump Sr. had effectively clinched the Republican nomination for president. Trump Jr. responded to say that the meeting was to discuss adoption (the Kremlin, characteristically, prohibited Americans from adopting Russian children in response to the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 sanctions law targeting Russian human-rights abusers). In fact, as the *Times* reported on Monday, Trump Jr. took the meeting hoping to obtain compromising information about the Clinton campaign, as promised by an intermediary in a lengthy e-mail exchange.

On Tuesday, to preempt another *Times* scoop, Trump Jr. released the correspondence himself. In an e-mail dated June 3, 2016, Rob Goldstone, a former tabloid reporter

and Trump-family friend, suggested that a high-level Russian prosecutor and Russian real-estate magnate Aras Agalarov — with whom Donald Trump Sr. became acquainted in 2013, when the pair collaborated on the Miss Universe pageant in Moscow — had “offered to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father.” According to Goldstone, the offer was “part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump.” Donald Trump Jr. responded: “If it’s what you say[,] I love it.” According to the e-mails, Trump Jr. perhaps spoke on the phone with Agalarov’s son, Emin (a Russian pop star), and then the campaign higher-ups met at Trump Tower with Natalia Veselnitskaya, identified by Goldstone in the exchange as “a Russian government attorney.” (Veselnitskaya, who is Kremlin-connected, has campaigned in Europe and the United States against sanctions; she disputes the well-documented account of whistleblower Sergei Magnitsky’s brutal death at the hands of Russian officials.) The whole correspondence appears to have been forwarded to Manafort and Kushner prior to the meeting.

No campaign professional would have accepted such a dodgy meeting the way Trump Jr. did, and no person with a strong sense of propriety — Russia is a hostile power run by a deeply corrupt regime — would have wanted to.

That said, the meeting doesn’t prove that the Trump campaign colluded with Russia, let alone “treason.” In the best-case scenario, Trump Jr. took the meeting to accommodate a friend of the family (and Kushner and Manafort showed up to accommodate the son of the candidate); Goldstone’s suggestion that he had compromising information about the Clintons was only a pretense to get Velnitskaya through the door; everyone was as bored during the meeting as Velnitskaya has said (in a *Today* interview, she said Kushner left early and Manafort looked at his phone the entire time); and nothing else came of it.

In general, it’s hard to see why the Kremlin would have wanted to jeopardize a sensitive intelligence operation by attempting to coordinate with a poorly organized presidential campaign.

The worst case, on the other hand, is that the Trump Jr. meeting is only the beginning of damaging revelations about some sort of relationship between a Russian

government determined to try to tip the scales in an American presidential election and the Trump campaign.

It would be easier to credit the Trump team’s denials if they didn’t so routinely mislead. Put aside Trump Jr.’s self-servingly incomplete account of the meeting with the Russian lawyer; he has said in the past that he never at any point met with Russian nationals, that he never discussed policy matters with Russian citizens, and that he never met with any Russians as a representative of the campaign. All of those statements have proven false. Paul Manafort’s record of truth-telling is no better, and Jared Kushner — the only person in the meeting with a White House job — initially failed to disclose the meeting during his security-clearance application process.

If the Trump team affirmatively wanted to stoke suspicions of the worst, it wouldn’t be acting any differently. One meeting doesn’t prove collusion, but it does demonstrate the seriousness of this matter and the public interest in getting to the bottom of it — now more than ever.

Donald Trump Jr. E-mails: Proof Trump Campaign Attempted Collusion with Russia

7-9 minutes

Just hours ago, Donald Trump Jr. released one of the more astounding e-mail chains of the entire Russia controversy. The end result is that Americans may now be introduced to the term “attempted collusion.” Or, perhaps more accurately (based on present information), “failed collusion.”

In other words, there now exists evidence that senior members of the Trump campaign *tried* unsuccessfully to facilitate Russian government efforts to defeat Hillary Clinton.

First, some background. On July 8, the *New York Times* reported that Donald Trump Jr., Paul Manafort, and Jared Kushner had a previously undisclosed meeting with a Russian lawyer with alleged “connections with the Kremlin.” In an initial response to the story, Trump Jr.

said the meeting was “primarily about an adoption program.”

By the next day, the story shifted. The *Times* reported new details suggesting Trump Jr. took the meeting after being promised “damaging information” about Hillary Clinton.

In his own statement, Trump Jr. confirmed that he had entered the meeting seeking opposition research and claimed that the conversation had only moved to the Magnitsky Act, a sanctions law that led Vladimir Putin to retaliate by blocking American adoptions of Russian children, after it “became clear” that the lawyer “had no meaningful information” on Clinton.

On July 10, the next shoe dropped. This time, the *Times* alleged Donald Jr. had received an e-mail beforehand making clear that the lawyer was acting as “part of a Russian government effort to aid his father’s candidacy.” The *Times* cited three anonymous sources who had

“knowledge of the email.” Needless to say, because of recent bitter experience, I was skeptical. More anonymous sources? Let’s wait and see.

Well, we didn’t have to wait long. This morning, in two tweets, Donald Jr. released the entire e-mail chain. I urge you to read it all. The first tweet contained his statement and the end of the chain. The second tweet contained the key first e-mail. Here’s that e-mail, in full:

Rob Goldstone is a former tabloid journalist and publicist who has business ties in Russia. He tells Donald Jr.:

The Crown prosecutor of Russia met with his father [Russian businessman] Aras [Agalarov] this morning and in their meeting offered to provide the Trump campaign with *official documents and information* that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father. This is obviously very high level and

sensitive information but is *part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump* – helped along by Aras and Emin. [Emphasis added.]

Donald Jr.’s response? “Seems we have some time and *if it’s what you say I love it* especially later in the summer” (emphasis added). Later in the chain, the Russian lawyer is described as a “Russian government attorney.”

In his latest statement, Trump Jr. claims that the lawyer wasn’t a government official, there was no opposition research, and the meeting was mainly about “adoption policy and the Magnitsky act.” The lawyer herself backs this claim, and denies that she has any connection with the Kremlin. Available evidence now indicates that the meeting turned out to be, to use a formal legal term, a “nothingburger” from which the participants quickly disengaged.

So, what are we left with? From the available evidence, it looks like Donald Jr., Paul Manafort, and Jared Kushner (the latter two were forwarded the e-mail chain and attended the meeting) attempted to cooperate in what they were told was an official Russian government effort to "support" Donald Trump. The meeting became meaningless to them only after it was clear that the Russian lawyer couldn't deliver the goods. In other words, this isn't the smoking gun that proves actual "collusion" with Russia, but rather evidence that Trump Jr., Manafort, and Kushner *tried* to collude with Russia.

Let's define our terms. The word "collusion" doesn't have precise legal meaning. It's largely a *political* term that refers to claims and allegations that the Trump team worked in some way with Russians as part of the alleged Russian effort to elect Trump. In other words, to claim that Trump officials colluded with Russians is not the same thing as claiming that they violated the law. As with many political operations, including dealings with

foreign governments, their actions can be unsavory without being illegal.

No American — Democrat or Republican — should defend the expressed intent of this meeting.

Indeed, that seems to be the case here. Yes, the left side of the Internet is lighting up with claims that receiving information is the same thing as receiving an unlawful foreign campaign contribution, but the argument (based on current facts) is frivolous. The law is designed to capture contributions of definable value, like money or other assets. What is the definable value of "information"? Defining speech as a reportable or even illegal "thing of value" would raise serious constitutional concerns.

But to say that it (so far) appears that Donald Jr. didn't break the law isn't to defend his actions. To repeat, it now looks as if the senior campaign team of a major-party presidential candidate *intended* to meet with an official representative

of a hostile foreign power to facilitate that foreign power's attempt to influence an American election. Russian collusion claims are no longer the exclusive province of tinfoil-hat conspiracy theorists. No American — Democrat or Republican — should defend the expressed intent of this meeting.

Going further, at long last we can now put to bed the notion that the Russia investigation is little more than frivolous partisan harassment, and it casts in an entirely different light the president's fury and frustration at its continued progress. As recently as last week, it appeared that the "collusion narrative" had lost steam, and that the so-called "Russia scandal" had morphed into an attack on Donald Trump's handling of the investigation, rather than the investigation itself. If you had told me last week that there existed an e-mail chain where a Trump contact *explicitly* tried to set up a meeting between a purported Russian official and the Trump senior team to facilitate official Russian efforts to beat Clinton, I'd have thought you'd

been spending too much time in the deranged corners of Twitter.

As of now, we should have zero confidence that we know all or even most material facts. We should have zero confidence that Trump's frustration is entirely due to his feeling like an innocent man caught in the crosshairs of crazed conspiracy theorists. It now appears that his son, son-in-law, and campaign chair met with a lawyer who they were *told* was part of an official Russian government effort to impact the presidential election. The Russian investigation isn't a witch hunt anymore, if it ever was. It's a national necessity.



Ghitis : Donald Trump Jr. astonishes America

Donald Trump Jr.'s decision to take a meeting with a Russian lawyer who had alleged ties to the Kremlin may be the most baffling move by a high-level political operative in recent memory. Second only to his apparent thinking that such a meeting would be a good decision.

The emails show -- and, by releasing them, Trump Jr. acknowledges -- that he agreed to meet someone he was told was a "Russia government attorney," and someone who was alleged to have "very high level and sensitive information" to incriminate Hillary Clinton.

In short, the emails suggest he was prepared to meet with a potential agent of a hostile foreign government. And because he was joined by key campaign players Jared Kushner and then-campaign manager Paul Manafort, we know this was no casual meeting.

Why would Trump Jr. make these communications public? It seems that he was trying to beat the New York Times to the punch line, releasing the emails in the name of transparency -- a decision his father later praised.

Regardless, the President's son has shown astonishingly poor judgment. The email chain only makes this whole incident look more troubling. Earlier, Trump Jr. explained that he had met with the Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya to discuss

adoptions. Then he claimed he didn't know who he was meeting, adding that she didn't offer dirt on Clinton -- as if that somehow made the meeting acceptable.

Whether or not this might amount to treason, as Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Virginia, suggested, or whether it represents collusion, coordination, obstruction or any violation of the law are not the main issues. Instead, what should trouble the American people most is whether this incident will lead investigators to evidence that Trump acquiesced to and accepted help from Russia, based on the Kremlin's interference in the heart of America's democracy, its presidential elections. And if there is something beyond that.

One of the most curious aspects of Trump's political campaign and his presidency has been his interest in reversing policy on Russia.

That became strikingly evident just one month after the meeting with Veselnitskaya, when Republican delegates met to draft the platform for the party's convention.

Republicans had, until then, held strong positions regarding Russia's intervention in Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea. It was Russia's 2014 invasion and seizure of the Crimean Peninsula, and Moscow's subsequent support for Ukrainian separatists fighting against the Ukrainian government,

that prompted the United States to impose sanctions.

The Republican platform committee proposed language on the subject that would have been uncontroversial before Trump's success. But then, the Washington Post reports, Manafort and Trump's delegates pushed back, orchestrating changes that deleted a call to provide arms to Ukraine to help it defend itself from Russian forces fighting on its territory. Other language, including increasing sanctions against Russia and noting that "the post-Cold War ideal of a 'Europe whole and free' is being severely tested by Russia's military aggression," disappeared, even though they represented the view of the Republican foreign policy establishment.

That was one year ago. Now Trump is President and, according to senior officials in the White House, he's looking for ways to ease sanctions.

So is this definitive proof that Trump is paying Vladimir Putin back for what US intelligence officials say was a concerted effort by the Kremlin to help Trump win the election? No, it isn't. But it is one more piece of the puzzle in the curious relationship between the two world leaders.

Relations with Russia are one area where Trump is pushing hard against both Republicans and

Democrats. Just consider the bill tightening sanctions approved last month by a nearly unanimous Senate vote -- 98 to 2. The White House is now pressuring the House to water it down significantly before it becomes law.

Trump's dealings with Russia are a never-ending stream of controversy. He met in the Oval Office with the Russian foreign minister and the ambassador to the United States, giving them highly classified information. As President, Trump has the authority to declassify any material he wishes to, but the move -- revealing information provided by an ally without the ally's permission -- was shocking. Critics called it "reckless" and "dangerous."

Trump has gone out on a thin limb, risking charges of obstruction of justice to protect Mike Flynn, who lost his White House job after lying about contacts with Russians. Half a dozen campaign aides failed to disclose contacts with Russia. And Attorney General Jeff Sessions initially denied, under oath, meeting with the Russians. He reversed course when journalists uncovered evidence of his meeting with the Russian ambassador and then claimed the two had not discussed the campaign.

Trump is eager to move forward on cooperation with Russia, as we saw after his meeting with Putin in Hamburg, but the cloud hanging

over his administration has so far prevented policy reversals. The fallout right now would be too great.

But if the investigations come to a close, Trump is likely to change policy.

We now know that Russia did work to help Trump get elected. US intelligence agencies have "high confidence" in that, and the emails suggest it. We can also see that Trump is, in fact, trying to recast US policy in some areas beneficial to

Putin. It happened during the Republican platform drafting, and it has continued during his presidency.

What we don't know, and the key to how this will unfold, is whether the

latter is a consequence of the former. But if Trump Jr. continues trying to defend himself so ineptly, we may soon get the answers from him.



O'Brien : Trump's Son Is Acting Just Like His Dad

Chris Stewart, a Republican congressman from Utah, told CNN today that Donald Trump Jr., deserves "credit" for releasing -- on Twitter, of course -- a fascinating batch of compromising emails about how he helped his father's campaign during last year's election.

That's one way to look at it.

Another way is that the president's eldest son just stepped in something stinky. And, given that he's a chip off the old block, he may not have the wit or the awareness to realize that he may have caused himself more problems than he's solved.

The younger Trump has been rattled by media scrutiny following days of reporting from the New York Times and others that he met with a Russian lawyer last June who claimed to have damaging information on Hillary Clinton.

Trump told the Times on Saturday that he had met with the lawyer to discuss a Russian adoption program. Trump was forced to acknowledge on Sunday, after the Times presented him with new information, that the meeting took place because he was promised dirt on Clinton, his father's opponent in the presidential race. On Monday evening, the Times reported that Trump was told via email that the Clinton information was "part of a Russian government effort to aid in his father's candidacy."

Trump seems to have grown weary of this barrage of coverage, which has tainted both his credibility and the Trump campaign's repeated denials that they knew anything about the Kremlin's efforts to help their man win the 2016 election. So Donald Jr. did what Donald Sr.

does: He took his case to Twitter.

In an extraordinary pair of tweets today, Donald Jr. told the world that "in order to be totally transparent" he had decided to release emails he shared with the friend and publicist who arranged the meeting, Rob Goldstone. (Goldstone, a bon vivant, can be seen dancing in a money-blowing machine in this video.)

Trump also noted in one tweet that the meeting occurred "before the Russian fever was in vogue" (an apparent reference to media coverage and a federal investigation that his father describes as a "witch hunt"). He and Goldstone both decided, Trump noted, that the information they received at the meeting -- and it's still not clear what that information was -- was "the most inane nonsense."

Still, Trump was excited about the meeting, according to his email. Goldstone said that they would be meeting with a "Russian government attorney" who had "documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia" -- all of which "is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

That made young Trump happy. "If it's what you say I love it," he responded. In fact, he loved it so much that he invited his brother-in-law, Jared Kushner, and his father's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, to the meeting, too.

Here's the Goldstone kicker, in an email he sent to Donald Jr.: "I can also send this info to your father via Rhona, but it is ultra sensitive so wanted to send to you first."

"Rhona" refers to Rhona Graff. She has been the elder Trump's aide-de-camp and gatekeeper at the Trump Organization for about 25

years. She screened calls, visitors and meetings and continued playing that role for awhile even after Trump moved into the White House.

So was President Donald Trump aware of the meeting his son arranged? The White House said yesterday that he wasn't, so perhaps not. But it's worth noting that the Trump children have never operated very freely within the family business or hierarchy. A former business partner of the Trumps, Jody Kriss, recently put it this way in an interview with me:

Donald was always in charge. Donald had to agree to every term of every deal and had to sign off on everything. Nothing happened unless he said it was okay to do it. Even if Donald Jr. shook your hand on a deal, he came back downstairs to renegotiate if his father told him to.

Let's be generous. Running for president is hard work, so maybe the father was too busy to supervise his son closely during the campaign. But Donald Jr.'s email release today has given the Justice Department new material to work with as it continues to investigate whether the Trump campaign colluded with the Kremlin to tip the 2016 election.

Donald Jr.'s email release also presents more direct problems for the president's son. His supporters, like CNN pundit Jeffrey Lord, have said that he was merely collecting opposition research, a normal part of any campaign. But if an American citizen cooperates with a foreign entity that's spending money to influence a U.S. election, it can be considered a crime. The emails that Donald Jr., released today made it plain that he believed that he might be getting Kremlin-sourced information about Clinton. Whether that opens the door for prosecution

will be for the Justice Department to decide.

"My son is a high-quality person and I applaud his transparency," President Trump said in a statement the White House released today. "Beyond that I'm going to have to refer everything beyond this matter to Don Jr.'s counsel and outside counsel."

Since Donald Jr. obviously has access to legal counsel, that raises another interesting question about his Twitter extravaganza: Did he seek the advice of his lawyers before posting his documents in response to yet another set of questions from the Times?

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I don't know, but I'd hazard a guess that he didn't. His father, always a solo pilot, has never been one to seek advice -- legal or otherwise -- prior to speaking up or taking actions he thinks are sound. His father has always been fond of media battles, even if engaging in them means brushing aside the careful consideration of business or legal tactics. Exhibit A for the latter has been the president's willingness to attack judges and federal investigators on Twitter, even if it raises the prospect of deepening his legal troubles.

So one explanation for Donald Jr.'s Twitter foray today is that his father trained him well. Maybe too well.



Bruni : Mini-Donald's Major Fail - The New York Times

Sometimes the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Sometimes the apple is also considerably dimmer than the tree. And sometimes the apple must be thrown under the bus so that the tree and a few of its most crucial limbs don't tumble to the forest

floor, where they'll be chopped up and used as firewood by Democrats.

Is that the fruity fate of Donald Trump Jr.?

On Tuesday morning, he released a chain of emails from June of last year that prove that he was eager to

get dirt on Hillary Clinton from a representative of Russia, that the information was indeed characterized as "part of Russia and its government's support" for his father's presidential bid and that he held a meeting in the hopes of learning more.

It was, for my money, the most jaw-dropping development yet in an already-surreal presidency, and making sense of it requires some conjecture.

But evaluating the damage doesn't. This erodes whatever credibility President Trump and those in his inner circle had left (which wasn't

much). Adamantly and incessantly, they have characterized questions about the Trump campaign's possible cooperation with Russia as ludicrous — a “witch hunt,” in their preferred parlance.

And yet here is a document showing that the notion of such a concerted effort was dangled before the eyes of Trump's eldest son, who responded with glee — “*I love it*,” he wrote — and hauled his brother-in-law, Jared Kushner, and Paul Manafort, who was then the campaign's chairman, into a meeting about it.

With the walls now closing in around Donald Jr., I wouldn't be surprised if he says that he didn't really believe the written claim that this was “very high level and sensitive information” from the Russian government itself.

But evaluate any and all spin from him through the lens of his evasions and empty grandstanding to date. When The New York Times first disclosed the meeting in an article on Saturday, he released a statement implying that the meeting's purpose was to discuss Russian adoptions.

A day later, he significantly changed his story, admitting in a new statement that he had been led to expect material “helpful to the campaign” and that he cut the meeting off when the Russian

lawyer who came to Trump Tower diverted the discussion toward adoptions. Read the statement: Bizarrely and hilariously, it's so focused on the lawyer's bait-and-switch and Donald Jr.'s disappointment that it boldly confirms how badly he'd craved dirt and how misleading his initial response to The Times was. Like I said: dim.

The emails released on Tuesday make clear how incomplete *both* of those versions were, and they appear to contradict his insistence in the second statement that Kushner and Manafort knew nothing about the meeting's intent.

The release of the emails, at least, is no head scratcher: Donald Jr. apparently believed that The Times was about to publish them anyway and figured that if he beat us to the punch, he'd make it look as if he had nothing to hide. He tweeted that he wanted “to be totally transparent.”

Right. “Transparent” has as much to do with his last four days as “modest” does with his father's entire 71 years.

And flash back to July 24 of last summer, which was just a month and a half after the meeting with the Russian lawyer, and Donald Jr.'s response when the CNN anchor Jake Tapper asked him about the Clinton campaign's assertion that

Russians could be engaged in “a plot to help Donald Trump.”

“It just goes to show you their exact moral compass,” Donald Jr. said, in what will go down as one of the most priceless instances ever of the psychological phenomenon of projection.

He railed to Tapper about “lie after lie” from the Clinton camp, said they'd “do anything to win,” and — my favorite part — claimed that if a Republican were making the kinds of wild allegations of Russian meddling that they were, there'd be a call “to bring out the electric chair” for that person. The electric chair, no less!

Well, he's on the hot seat now, and the days — by which I mean 48 hours ago — when we were all worked up about Ivanka Trump's presumptuous place at the G-20 table suddenly seem quaint. That actually *is* a nothingburger in the context of this whopper.

Of course Papa pooh-pooed it, releasing a statement Tuesday afternoon that vouched, “My son is a high-quality person.” I can buy that Donald Jr. is too low-wattage a political operative to have understood that his Russia hugging was extraordinary and possibly treasonous, but not that he considered it virtuous.

I wonder whether Ivanka actually factors into this. Among the Trump

children, she always sopped up the most lavish praise from Dad and drew the most media fascination. She was cast as his secret weapon. Such a designation eluded Donald Jr. When he met with the Russian lawyer, was he clumsily trying to maneuver his way to greater utility, favor and relevance?

Instead, in the grand tradition of ne'er-do-well namesakes, he brought his sire grief.

There's no proof that Donald Trump Sr. knew of the meeting with the Russian lawyer, though there's this: In the week between its scheduling and its occurrence back in June 2016, he made public remarks in which he said he'd be delivering a special speech about Clinton's wrongdoing that was set — oh so interestingly, in retrospect — for a few days *after* the meeting. But that meeting, we're now told, was a bust, with no great trove of Clinton-wounding revelations, and the speech didn't happen as promised.

It will be interesting to watch the president's next moves. Enamored of loyalty and deaf to charges of nepotism and conflict of interest, he has kept his kids in a tight circle around him. But to survive, he may have to push this bad apple away.

POLITICO Trump Jr.'s love affair with Moscow

By Michael Crowley

7-9 minutes

It sounded like a scene from a Cold War spy movie: Donald Trump Jr. was in a helicopter flying low on the outskirts of Russia's capital city.

“Buzzing the treetops outside Moscow at 100 knots,” Trump Jr. tweeted, adding the aircraft was flying “below radar in closed airspace,” for reasons he did not explain.

It was June 2011, and the future president's son was on a business trip to Moscow, where Trump Jr. had recently become a regular—and admiring—visitor.

“I really prefer Moscow over all cities in the world,” he had told an audience a few years earlier.

The younger Trump, now the focus of charges of collusion with the Kremlin, was such a frequent presence in the city that he even had a favorite landmark: the colorful

onion-domed St. Basil's cathedral on Red Square.

“St. Basil's Cathedral Moscow to me one of the cooler structures I know,” Trump had tweeted during his June 2011 visit. “Have 2C this each time here.”

While President Donald Trump's handful of trips to Russia have been meticulously scrutinized, a review of his son's public statements spanning several years, as well as social media posts and interviews with Russia experts, shows that Donald Jr. spent far more time in the country than his father did, and developed personal ties there that continued beyond the November election.

That might help to explain why Trump Jr. was so receptive to an approach last summer by a Russian lawyer promising dirt on Hillary Clinton which, as an intermediary told him in an email, was part of a Kremlin effort to assist his father's campaign. “I love it,” Donald Jr. responded, agreeing to a meeting that may have put him in legal jeopardy.

The connection was made through Emin Agalarov, the pop-singer son of a Moscow real estate mogul who had hosted the November 2013 Miss Universe pageant, a franchise then owned by Donald Trump. Trump Jr. had attended the event and befriended Emin Agalarov there. Agalarov's agent, Rob Goldstein, connected Donald Jr. with the lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya.

California Rep. Adam Schiff, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, told reporters on Tuesday that the Russian approach to Trump Jr. was consistent with Kremlin tradecraft.

“They'll look for relationships,” Schiff said. “Who had [the Trump family] done business with? They go to the son who knows the son of the now-president,” he said, referring to Emin Agalarov and Donald Jr.

In a Tuesday night interview with Fox News host Sean Hannity, Trump Jr. dismissed his meeting with Veselnitskaya as “a nothing,” while allowing that “[i]n retrospect, I probably would have done things a little differently.”

He also would not say that the meeting was his only encounter with Russians during the campaign.

“I've probably met with other people from Russia,” he added, though “not in the context of actual, a formalized meeting or anything like that.”

Until this year, Trump Jr. had mostly positive associations with Russia, a country he had visited repeatedly dating to at least 2006. That was the year when Felix Sater, a Russian-born real estate developer and Trump business partner, took Trump Jr. and his sister Ivanka to meet potential business partners in Moscow. Trump Jr. would return frequently — at least six more times by fall 2008, he said at a September 2008 real estate conference, according to a trade media report from the event.

At the conference, he showed a deep familiarity with the Moscow real estate market and the Russian economy.

“We see a lot of money pouring in from Russia,” he said of Trump Organization properties. “There's indeed a lot of money coming for

new-builds and resale reflecting a trend in the Russian economy and, of course, the weak dollar versus the ruble."

It is unclear how regularly Donald Jr. returned to the country since then. But he chronicled his June 2011 visit to Moscow, beginning with a tweet that said, "Heading [to] the airport to go to Moscow for business. I really have to stop traveling so much!!!"

A crucial visit came in November 2013, when Trump Jr. traveled to Moscow for the Miss Universe pageant and met Emin Agalarov, whose father, Aras Agalarov, is a real estate and construction mogul allied with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Agalarovs had advanced talks with elder Trump for the licensing rights to a tower project in Moscow. Trump designated Donald Jr. to oversee the project, according to a Tuesday Yahoo! News report.



Swalwell : Trump Jr. Russia emails prove we need bipartisan commission to investigate

New evidence about the Trump campaign's contacts with Russian officials last year makes it absolutely crucial that we have an independent, bipartisan commission to protect our democracy.

There is no doubt that Donald Trump Jr., then-campaign chairman Paul Manafort and Jared Kushner, son-in-law and close adviser to the president, met in June 2016 with a Russian government emissary whom they believed would offer them damaging information about Hillary Clinton. And there's no doubt that Trump Jr. knew who would be at the meeting and why.

This is not "fake news," or "a hoax," or "a witch hunt," as President Trump has claimed of this investigation. His own son's emails prove this.

It's as clear as day that Russians sought to work with the Trump campaign to influence the outcome of our last election. What's not clear, sadly, is how our country moves forward to hold anyone who worked with Russia accountable and most importantly, to ensure this never happens again.

In the short term, Kushner's security clearance should be revoked. And Congress must not allow this administration to soften any sanctions against Russia.

But in the longer term, America deserves a full explanation that it

The project was halted after Trump declared his candidacy for president in 2015. But Trump Jr. remained in touch with Emin Agalarov, who told Forbes in March that he had he had exchanged messages with Trump Jr. as recently as January.

Trump Jr.'s June 2016 meeting with Veselnitskaya was not his only notable interaction with a figure with ties to Moscow during the presidential campaign.

Last May, he had shared a dinner table at a National Rifle Association dinner with Alexander Torshin, a former Russian legislator and central bank official, according to an account Torshin gave *Bloomberg* last year.

And three weeks before Election Day, Trump Jr. flew to Paris, where he attended a conference at the Ritz Carlton hotel on ending the Syrian civil war. The event was hosted by an obscure French think tank whose founders have worked closely with Russia's government,

can trust, and policy prescriptions that it can accept as being in our nation's best interests.

In recent months, I have walked a line between my roles as ranking member of the House Intelligence CIA Subcommittee - in which I'm integrally involved in the committee's investigation - and as co-author of H.R. 356, the Protecting Our Democracy Act, to create an independent commission, with experts named by both parties, to undertake a similar but not redundant investigation.

I have tried to respond accurately - as much as the classified nature of some information allows - to inquiries about the committee's investigation. At the same time, I've had private conversations with dozens of my Republican colleagues about supporting H.R. 356. For now, the bill has only two Republican co-sponsors: Walter Jones and Justin Amash.

But we no longer have the luxury of time, or of indulging those who would deny the danger facing us.

To my Republican colleagues who believe this investigation has become too partisan: Work with me now to make that stop. Help me take an investigation of this magnitude where it belongs: outside of Congress, and into the hands of independent experts in national security, foreign policy and election law.

which plays a major role in the Syrian conflict. The think tank later nominated Putin for the Nobel Prize, calling him a "peacemaker." The precise reasons for Trump Jr.'s trip to Paris remain unclear, and the Trump Organization has not responded to queries about whether he was paid for his appearance.

Some Russia experts say it would not be surprising if Kremlin officials had used a Trump family member as a means of trying to influence a potential U.S. president.

"In an environment where no one really trusts anyone else, there's a huge incentive to work with your family members since you know them better. Against that backdrop, it makes perfect sense that elements of the Russian national security and business establishment wanted to put as many lines in as possible to the Trump family, either for purely mercenary purposes or more nefarious reasons," said Andrew Weiss, a former Clinton White House official who handled

Russia issues now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

But there is evidence that Trump Jr. was not naive about the true nature of Russian society. Even as he touted the money the Trump Organization was making from wealthy Russians—"in terms of high-end product influx into the US, Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets," he said at the 2008 real estate conference — he also acknowledged the dark side of the country he had come to love.

"As much as we want to take our business over there, Russia is just a different world," he said — one where any investment was at risk "because it is a question of who knows who, whose brother is paying off who, etcetera."

"It really is a scary place," he added.

Let's put aside the criminal question as to whether the president or anyone on his team worked with Russia to execute this attack. That's for Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation to determine.

But whether there's a mountain of evidence for collusion or no evidence at all, can't we agree that Russia interfered in our election and plans to do it again? Even if we agree on this and only this, don't we have a responsibility to our constituents to secure the next election not only from an influence campaign but also - God forbid - the possibility of vote tally tampering?

I don't enjoy what this investigation has done to an already-hyper-partisan Congress. I've seen friendships and working relationships, my own and those of others, frayed and tested to the breaking point. I've seen bipartisan staff partnerships strained as dutiful public servants dig in to defend their bosses.

I get it. Sometimes this feels like a zero-sum game for both sides. Republicans believe that for Democrats, victory is nothing short of removing Donald Trump from the Oval Office; Democrats believe that Republicans are willing to defend him at all costs, regardless of the evidence, regardless of the cost to our nation.

But this can't be about one person or party. It has to be about the people at home who are counting on us to do what's right. For most

people I talk to, doing what's right means telling them who if anyone worked with Russia to compromise our election and then making sure our country never finds itself in this kind of situation again.

Make no mistake - it will happen again if we don't act. The cost of doing nothing is grave, and signals to would-be meddlers that it's open season on our elections. At our Intelligence Committee hearing, I asked former Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson if other nations or even cyber-criminals could pull off a similar attack. He minced no words: "Yes," he replied.

It's not too late to protect our democracy, and we need not look too far in the past for successful models. The 9/11 Commission was created a full year after we were attacked from the skies, and after close study of our vulnerabilities, it made good recommendations to keep us safer, many of which are now law. Our nation is better protected from terrorism because of it.

Let's come out of our corners while there's still time. Let's put aside our political differences and put country ahead of party. The integrity of our democratic elections is at stake, and we must rise united to protect it.

McManus : At long last, the smoking Russian gun

Doyle McManus
6-7 minutes

The unraveling mystery of whether Donald Trump's presidential campaign colluded with Russia just produced a smoking gun: those emails from Donald Trump Jr. welcoming an offer from Moscow to supply dirt on Hillary Clinton.

This wasn't a casual meeting between the candidate's impetuous son and some random peddler of political gossip. Trump Jr. was explicitly offered "sensitive information [as] part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump." He recruited two other top aides, campaign Chairman Paul Manafort and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, to come along. All three were busy men; their presence suggests they considered the meeting to be a matter of high importance.

So now we know that the Trump campaign, at its highest level, eagerly sought Russia's help.

There's still plenty we don't know, of course.

The president can't claim that the investigation is a witch hunt anymore.

We don't know whether that initial meeting in June 2016 led to other secret contacts. We don't know whether the Trump aides' willingness to hear an offer of

clandestine help led to genuine collaboration.

In other words, we have a smoking gun — but no bullet and no body.

(Clinton's defeat doesn't count as evidence. She lost that election a half-dozen ways; Russian hacking was the least of them.)

And we don't know the answer to the old Watergate question: What did the president know, and when did he know it?

But there's lots of circumstantial evidence to suggest that acts of collusion may have occurred. The Russians hacked Democratic emails and released them through WikiLeaks, according to U.S. intelligence. Candidate Trump approved the hacking publicly and urged the Russians to do more. A longtime Trump ally, Roger Stone, seemed to know in advance when the email releases were going to happen. And the releases were often cleverly timed — just before the Democratic National Convention, for example. "It's as if the Russians were being advised by somebody who knows how a presidential campaign works," a veteran Democratic strategist told me. "Someone like Paul Manafort."

Trump's defenders will labor to put a charitable construction on what the emails revealed. It was only one meeting, they'll say. If nothing resulted, it was unseemly and improper, but little more. Besides, Trump Jr. says the Russian lawyer

who attended the meeting didn't turn over any dirt. That means the meeting was an attempt at collusion that didn't pan out. It's also not clear that the lawyer was really acting on behalf of the Russian government. (But Trump Jr. *thought* she was, and the Kremlin often uses private citizens as cutouts, to preserve deniability.)

Finally, the candidate's son and son-in-law, political neophytes, may not have known that they were potentially violating a federal law against seeking campaign help from foreigners. (Manafort, a veteran of many campaigns, should have known.)

What none of those excuses undercut, however, is that Donald Trump Jr. set out to obtain "sensitive information" from someone he thought was working for the Russian government.

"If it's what you say," he wrote, "I love it especially later in the summer."

To a prosecutor, that's evidence of intent, one of the elements necessary to make a case for criminal conspiracy.

"Conspiracy is a broad crime," Jeffrey H. Smith, a former general counsel at the CIA, told me Tuesday. "There is no need that the crime actually occur, only that the individuals were intending to do it and took steps to carry it out. These emails come pretty close."

Last week, Trump Jr. hired a criminal lawyer. That seems wise.

Moreover, the emails explode, yet again, the president's long string of denials that anyone in his campaign was ever in contact with Russia.

For months, Trump has denounced allegations of collusion as "a made-up story" and dismissed the FBI investigation of his campaign as a "witch hunt" — even as his attorney general, his former national security advisor, his son-in-law and son have admitted to contacts with Russians that they once concealed.

Trump Jr. continued his family's practice of clumsy, quick-evaporating denials, first claiming that he met with the Russian lawyer to discuss adoption policy, then admitting that they discussed the campaign.

It's simply baffling why any of the president's luckless spokespersons, let alone any other self-respecting Republican, would continue to stake their honor on the Trump family's honesty.

"There is no evidence of collusion," Trump declared in May.

Now there is, at the very least, evidence of attempted collusion. The president can't claim that the investigation is a witch hunt anymore. He's in new, more dangerous territory. The Trumps' own clumsiness has made it ever more likely that if they did something wrong, special counsel Robert S. Mueller III will find it.



D'Antonio : The Russia poison that's paralyzing the Trump presidency

(CNN)Consider the Komodo dragon. A hairless creature with thin lips, beady eyes and the hint of a smirk on its face, it stalks animals many times its size. A dragon attack often ends with the prey dashing away with barely a scratch. The tiniest nip, however, is enough to deposit a few drops of dragon saliva and start an infection. After a slow death, the dragon feasts.

The example of the Komodo lizard suggests a compelling political metaphor for our time. The dragon is a calculating Vladimir Putin. The nip may well have been delivered more than a year ago by Natalia Veselnitskaya, a Russian lawyer with Kremlin connections. The victim is the Trump presidency, which is in the grips of a festering and potentially fatal scandal.

In the latest twist in the Trump/Putin crisis, The New York Times has

revealed that the President's son, Donald Jr., his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and his one-time campaign manager Paul Manafort met with Veselnitskaya in June 2016, after being told she had Russian government information that could be damaging to their opponent in the 2016 election.

And on Tuesday the younger Trump released, via Twitter, the chain of emails he apparently received prior to the encounter, in which an intermediary told him the Trump team would receive "documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia" and proffered "very high level and sensitive information" described as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump." To which Trump Jr., replied, "...if it's what you say I love it."

These revelations could point to the day and the location -- Trump Tower -- where Team Trump was poisoned by the Russian campaign to destabilize American politics and destroy Democrat Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

Putin bears a well-established animus toward Clinton and has been engaged in a longterm effort to restore Russia, with an economy one-tenth the size of America's, to superpower status.

Accomplished with computer hackers and a deluge of propaganda, Russia's meddling in the US election was cheap and effective and has burdened the Trump presidency with a scandal that has diminished the United States' standing in the world and made Team Trump appear at best inept and at worst corrupt.

Ineptitude would be the most innocent explanation for Donald

Trump Jr.'s decision to meet with Veselnitskaya on the recommendation of an acquaintance who represents a Russian pop star, whose own father co-sponsored Donald Trump's 2013 Miss Universe pageant in Moscow. (You can't make this stuff up.)

A seasoned political pro would have recognized the danger, but Trump Jr., who belongs to a clan that considers self-confidence to be the same as competence, not only welcomed Veselnitskaya but brought Kushner and Manafort into the meeting.

During and after the election campaign, President Trump and his aides have repeatedly denied working with Russia to win the presidency. Instead of thoroughly investigating the Russian cyberattack on behalf of the United States, they have feverishly denied any collusion, lambasted those who revealed hidden facts, and

reminded the world over and over that they won the election.

The President himself denied any wrongdoing, attacked the integrity of the journalists who reported on the burgeoning scandal, and attempted to quell the "pressure" by suddenly firing FBI Director James Comey.

With each turn in this crisis, Team Trump has stumbled and withered. Trump Jr. first claimed that he was led astray by "an acquaintance" who didn't even tell him the name of the Russian he would meet. He said nothing of hoping to gather some Russian dirt about Clinton, explaining instead that the discussion was about restoring a process that let couples in the United States adopt Russian orphans.

Less than a day later came a second statement that confirmed that Trump Jr. had been intrigued by a promise of Russian help in defeating Clinton, and that the encounter included discussion of American sanctions against Russian individuals and entities suspected of corruption and human rights abuses. The law enabling these sanctions, the Magnitsky Act,

is named for a Russian whistleblower who died in custody after he claimed Kremlin cronies had cheated the government.

The Veselnitskaya chapter in the Trump/Russia controversy could have been avoided completely if someone at Trump Tower, perhaps even Donald Trump Jr., had put her name into an internet search engine and glanced at the results that show her work against the Magnitsky Act sanctions -- her passion mirroring Putin's anger over the sanctions, which he has called "outrageous." Instead, men who were among Donald Trump's most trusted advisers, piled into a room hoping for the delivery of some juicy information.

To believe that Trump Jr. welcomed a mystery guest from a hostile nation to meet in a room not far from where the GOP candidate for President was at work, we would have to believe he is dangerously lacking in intelligence and common sense.

Considering Donald Jr.'s own claims to superior abilities, which he has made to me personally, I have

to think that he knew who was coming to see him, and his excitement at what she might reveal moved him to draw in Kushner and Manafort. According to the second statement issued by Trump Jr., "It quickly became clear that she had no meaningful information."

In another context, the Veselnitskaya episode would be relegated to the barrel of oddities where one would find Billy Carter and Roger Clinton. Instead, however, it appears to be a serious piece of evidence pointing to the kind of possible Russia/Trump collusion that has been consistently denied by the President, his aides, and his supporters.

It comes after national security adviser Michael Flynn was forced to quit after it was shown that he had failed to declare payments from Russian entities. And it follows Jared Kushner's backward-looking correction of an application for a security clearance, which had initially omitted his contacts with Russia. Add Attorney General Jeff Sessions' failure to disclose his meetings with Russians, and

President Trump yukking it up in the Oval Office with Russian officials whom he told about his decision to dismiss the "nut job" Comey, and the implications of the latest episode come into focus.

In nature, the Komodo dragon's bite spells the end for its prey because it causes an infection; injury is followed by raging illness and fever before its target succumbs. In the case of Russia and the Trump campaign and presidency, the danger posed by the dragon was ignored by a group that, like its candidate, was aggressive to the point of seeming, at times, unhinged.

Metaphorically, like the dragon's prey, they lacked the elements of a proper immune system defense -- humility, caution, and ethical limits -- required to preserve themselves. Nearly paralyzed, the administration now labors under a cloud of scandal that casts a shadow over the nation and the world, both of which have been deprived of proper leadership by the White House.

If the dragon prevails, June 9, 2016 may be identified as the day the fatal wound was inflicted.



Zelizer : Republicans can't give Trump team a pass on this one

(CNN)When Donald Trump Jr. tweeted out the email exchange that led to his meeting with a Russian lawyer about potentially damaging information on Hillary Clinton in the summer of 2016, you could hear the silence among fellow Republicans.

The latest revelations seem to be the most damaging yet, providing some damning evidence that high-level members of the Trump campaign were having conversations with Russians who they thought had clear connections to Russian government and were willing to engage with them in search of damaging information about Clinton.

"They wanted it so badly," Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, who met with Trump Jr. last year, said on NBC's "Today" show. The emails and the reports of the conversation leave many questions unanswered, questions investigators will no doubt examine in great detail. In the rapid-fire pace through which this scandal keeps unfolding, it is extremely important for every elected official to take a breath before reaching judgment and to make sure they have a full understanding of new information and the context in which it was produced.

But the biggest political question remains: How long will Republicans

stand by this president? With Republicans in control of Congress, this may be the most far-reaching issue in terms of how this scandal will unfold.

It keeps getting harder for Republicans to absorb this heat and fend off the controversy. With Donald Trump Jr. releasing the emails himself (apparently in advance of another New York Times story on them), the President can't call it "fake news."

Republicans have many reasons to stop defending the President. Trump and his administration have a credibility crisis that is unlike anything we have seen in recent decades. At this point, Republicans have sat on their hands as the President and members of his team have repeatedly hidden information, twisted and changed their positions (sometimes, in the course of one day), lied about basic facts and acted to impede investigation.

If the Trump team is really innocent of any wrongdoing, they certainly don't act this way. Their strongest and most consistent defense has been to keep blasting the alleged "fake news" industry, despite the fact that much of the false information comes right from them. Right now, a Republican would be almost foolhardy to publicly vouch for anything that the president says.

The Russia chaos has put a stranglehold on the Republican legislative agenda. This is the anti-New Deal, not because President Trump's legislative accomplishments are so conservative, but because they don't exist. The Republican dreams about what united government could bring back in January 2017 today seem comical.

The party is struggling to squeak out of Congress one single major bill, the effort to repeal and replace Obamacare, which at this point seems to be in total jeopardy. The President's antics and inability to stop this scandal have been extremely detrimental to Sen. Mitch McConnell, who has received no assistance, just obstacles, from the president of his own party. Many in the GOP had to spend time back in the district hearing from angry constituents over the Fourth of July recess, or literally trying to avoid the public celebrations that members of Congress usually treasure as a way to showcase themselves when back at home.

The Republican Party has prided itself as being the party that is tough on defense and firm with dangerous adversaries. It spent much of President Obama's term blasting the administration for being too open about dealing with adversaries such as Iran.

Yet the information revealed this week suggests that much of Trump's early embrace of Russia had little to do with détente or some grand diplomatic strategy, and was simply about the crass goal of winning a presidential election.

"I love it," Trump Jr. wrote about the prospect of getting Russian information on Hillary Clinton and he released the emails without expressing any shame.

The President's two-hour plus meeting with Putin at the G-20 Summit, regardless of anything said in the meeting, did exactly what the Russian leader has been hoping to achieve -- it elevated his country's standing despite the its aggression in the Ukraine and the intervention into elections here and around the world. For a party that prides itself on patriotism, as Republicans have for decades, it keeps getting harder to justify what certainly appears like a self-interested embrace of a dangerous and threatening regime.

Partisanship is an extraordinarily powerful force -- and President Trump's supporters love to point to his strong approval ratings with "the base" and with the Republican Party more broadly -- but it is not impenetrable.

Presidents can do things to make it almost impossible for fellow party members to stand by their side.

Republicans initially were very defensive about Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal, but ultimately approached him and asked him to resign. Information can become so damning that it becomes impossible for all of the GOP to stay on the same page.

Some Republicans who are looking at 2018 and 2020 must be thinking how high of a cost they are willing to bear to defend the President.

the Atlantic

The Everybody-Does-It Defense of Collusion

McKay Coppins
and Rosie Gray

6-8 minutes

As evidence continues to mount suggesting the Trump campaign worked with Russia to influence the 2016 election, the president's allies have shifted to a new defense. As former House Speaker Newt Gingrich put it: "You could argue it's dumb, but it's not illegal."

For months, the White House has fervently denied allegations of collusion, with President Trump routinely dismissing Russia stories in the press as "fake news," and calling himself the victim of an historically unprecedented "witch hunt." His Republican defenders have largely followed suit, rejecting the entire collusion narrative as a "hoax," or at least a partisan smear.

Now, however, many of Trump's high-profile supporters and surrogates are changing tack. A series of explosive *The New York Times* stories this week revealed that three campaign officials—Donald Trump Jr., Jared Kushner, and Paul Manafort—met with a Kremlin-connected lawyer in June of last year in hopes of discovering valuable dirt on Hillary Clinton. The drip-drip procession of *Times* stories prompted Donald Jr. on Tuesday to release his private emails, revealing that the man who set up the meeting explicitly said the Russian government was trying to aid Trump's candidacy.

These revelations—and the possibility that more is yet to come—have made it increasingly untenable for Trump's supporters to argue that there is nothing to the collusion story. And so, many have now begun to argue that even if there was collusion of the kind

Republicans recalling the most virtuous moments in their party's past must be thinking about how much damage they are willing to see inflicted on the party's brand name before saying, "enough." Those are the kinds of considerations that could put President Trump in the greatest peril.

It is possible to look into the eyes of congressional Republicans who are

suggested by the *Times*, it wouldn't be a crime—or even all that out of the ordinary. Some Trump loyalists are even making the case that it was smart and savvy for the campaign to pursue help from the Russians.

In an interview on Tuesday, Gingrich, who has become one of Trump's most vocal defenders, said that the entire story was an "absurdity."

"If somebody in the middle of the campaign walks in the door and says 'I have information that will harm your opponent,' virtually every campaign in the world will say show me, what do you have," he said.

Sam Nunberg, a former adviser who helped Trump launch his presidential bid, defended the campaign officials' meeting with a Kremlin-connected lawyer by positing a hypothetical. "What would have happened if ... somebody contacted Chelsea [Clinton] from Ireland, said they had dirt on Trump from a foreign investment or something? Would they not take that meeting?" Nunberg said. "I'm not saying it's a nice thing, but this is politics."

Nunberg even framed the campaign's apparent willingness to cooperate with Russia as proof of the hard-charging, no holds-barred style that made Trump victorious. "In general, one of the reasons Donald Trump was able to win was that he said, 'I'm going to do whatever it takes to win,' and he went in with that mentality."

Asked for comment on Monday night, after the *Times* story revealing the existence of the email was published, the Trump confidant and Newsmax CEO Chris Ruddy responded by sending a link to his column from earlier that day which called the recent revelations a

being interviewed about the recent news and see the anger, as well as frustration, they are feeling. There is probably a feeling sweeping through the party that it becomes harder day by day to keep saying there is clearly "nothing there" and that the country should move on, especially when the White House is doing very little to help with an agenda on Capitol Hill.

"nothingburger." Ruddy wrote, "There is nothing illegal or improper in a campaign talking to a foreign national about their election opponent. It might actually be wise if they feel the foreigner has information the public should know."

The Fox News host Todd Starnes tweeted to similar effect on Tuesday, saying "If digging up dirt on your political opponent is a crime, then what about Mrs. Bill Clinton?"

Any campaign, Gingrich argued, would have done the same.

"I have yet to see anything that comes anywhere close to being illegal," Gingrich said.

"You're dealing with businessmen who'd never been involved in politics before and didn't understand the delicate nuances of pleasing *The New York Times*," Gingrich said. When reminded that one of the meeting's attendees, Paul Manafort, had actually been involved in politics for decades, Gingrich said "It would be more fair to say to Manafort, 'Why didn't you warn Don Jr. that this was not clever?'"

Gingrich also called attention to the Obama administration's "actively, overtly trying to defeat Netanyahu in the Israeli election," a reference to the State Department's giving funds in 2013 to a nonprofit that later built campaign infrastructure used to campaign against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's re-election in 2015.

The Israel incident was also brought up by another source close to the White House, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"If you're asking how people that are close to the Trump White House are responding, they're laughing at it," the source said.

But when more Republicans will start to act on these feelings and fears remains unclear. Would they just look at a smoking gun and act as if nothing was there, or would some Republicans finally feel compelled to speak out against this administration? If that party loyalty starts to fall apart, that would be the game changer.

Campaigns, the source said, "will take any information from anybody." The source also brought up a January story in *Politico* that revealed Ukrainian officials' efforts to boost Hillary Clinton's campaign, arguing that it's no different from Trump insiders meeting with the Russian lawyer last summer. "Why is the media focused on one and not the other? Because the media is abusively biased."

An article in *Breitbart News*, the right-wing outlet whose former chairman is White House chief strategist Steve Bannon, pointed out that Trump Jr. had said he thought he would be receiving "political opposition research" and concludes that "the email does not refer to any cooperation, coordination or collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russian government."

The message being spread by Trump allies is also coming from White House officials. National security aide Sebastian Gorka argued on MSNBC Tuesday morning that taking such a meeting is "standard political practice," and said that the meeting had not been organized in good faith.

Asked if he'd been sent any talking points from the White House, Gingrich said, "If they have I didn't notice them" and "I don't remember seeing anything about it this morning."

Trump Jr. will have the opportunity make the case for himself in an appearance on Sean Hannity's Fox News show on Tuesday night, where he is unlikely to face tough questioning. Hannity has been supportive publicly, retweeting a Wikileaks tweet about the Chinese ambassador's requesting a meeting with Clinton campaign officials and accusing the media of "fake news" and "selective outrage."

The Washington Post

Parker : The future of the Trump presidency is in the hands of — wait, who is this guy?

That quaking beneath your feet is from shock waves in Washington where tipping

points are merging with other tipping points to create the Mother of All Tipping Points.

Not only did Donald Trump Jr. meet with a Russian attorney who, he was told, had damaging information

about Hillary Clinton, but also there are emails indicating that he knew in advance that the opposition

research was part of the Kremlin's effort to help Donald Trump become president.

If that's not collusion, it seems at least "collusioney," a newly minted term surely destined to erase all memory of Monday's exhaustively used "nothing-burger."

Smoking guns don't need to be nearly this hot to capture Washington's attention, but these latest revelations should be enough to make every American take a deep breath. Whether Trump Jr. is merely stupid is yet to be determined, but he wasn't alone in that meeting. Joining him were his brother-in-law, Jared Kushner, and Paul J. Manafort, then Trump Sr.'s campaign manager, who is known to have had business dealings in Russia for a number of years.

The New York Times broke the story over the weekend, reporting that three (unnamed) individuals had corroborated the existence of the damning emails, which clearly establish intent to "something." Tuesday afternoon, Trump Jr. released the email thread between him and *some guy* — named Rob Goldstone — a music publicist who knew some guy who knew Donald

Trump vis-a-vis the Trump-owned Miss Universe contest. Got that?

Goldstone arranged the meeting, which took place in Trump Tower in June 2016 — just before the Republican primary season had ended — to talk about dirt on the presumptive nominee's general-election opponent. After Goldstone said that the Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, had information that would incriminate Clinton, Trump Jr. replied that he'd "love it." Who wouldn't? You're the namesake son of the man on track to become the Republican nominee and possibly president — and Russia wants to help him win? Hell *da*!

The fact that the alleged opposition research was part of Russia's war on Clinton, as indicated in one of the emails, would have raised flags for most people — no, make that for all but these people. I'm confident that, if the nice Ace Hardware man who recently helped me select a mailbox were to receive such an email, he'd contact the FBI as soon as possible.

Which, obviously, is what Junior, Manafort and Kushner should have done.

Thus, we can presume that all three knew better than to attend such a meeting. After all, it could well have been a trap — and I'm not sure it wasn't. But to the inexperienced minds of Kushner and Trump Jr., the calculation may have been as simple (and feeble) as: Why not? Defeating Clinton was in the national interest, wasn't it? And the Trumps have (or had) no pique with Russia.

Trump Jr.'s claim that he didn't tell his father about the meeting rather strains credulity, don't you think? Ditto Veselnitskaya's claim that she has never worked for the Kremlin and has no idea what all the fuss is about. She was here to lobby against American legislation that her client finds objectionable.

In an exclusive interview Tuesday with NBC News, Veselnitskaya said she never had any "damaging or sensitive information about Hillary Clinton. It was never my intention to have that." Asked where Trump Jr. could have gotten that idea, she responded, "It is quite possible that maybe they were longing for such an information. They wanted it so badly that they could only hear the thought that they wanted."

So, apparently, the future of the Trump presidency is in the hands of Goldstone. He set up the meeting; he brought Trump Jr. into a damning email exchange; he promised dirt. Wait, who is this guy again?

Well, that's a very good question. He's an intermediary for Veselnitskaya, who either (a) works for the Kremlin and possibly even Vladimir Putin; or (b) is just a lawyer/lobbyist interested in U.S. policy. Wouldn't we like to know? Also possible is that President Trump knew all along about the meeting, which may be why he acts like a cocker spaniel at a Doberman rally whenever the name Putin comes up. What did Veselnitskaya really come to say? For whom?

More shock waves are doubtless coming. Meanwhile, we know for certain: When a Russian lawyer meets privately with the future president's son, his son-in-law and his campaign manager on a third-party promise of Clinton-disabling intel, it's hard to say the Trump campaign had nothing to do with Russia. For now: Collusioney.

**The
Washington
Post**

Milbank : This is no 'rookie mistake.' The Trump team shouldn't even be on the field.

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

6-7 minutes

"I love it."

That's how Donald Trump Jr. responded, we now know, to an email last year offering dirt on Hillary Clinton from the Russian government.

What I love is the defense of this attempt by senior Trump campaign officials to receive Russian help in the election. As my colleagues John Wagner and Rosalind Helderman report, presidential advisers are explaining away the meeting with the Russian lawyer as a "rookie mistake" by an "unsophisticated" campaign.

"Rookie mistake": the all-purpose defense of the Trump White House.

When President Trump failed to support NATO's collective-defense promise, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) called it "a rookie mistake." After revelations of Trump's meddling in the FBI's Russia probe, House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) explained that Trump is "new at this." The rookie-

error explanation has been employed to describe Trump's firing of FBI Director James B. Comey, his handling of health care and his legislative approach.

What you need to know about Donald Trump Jr.'s ties to Russia. What you need to know about Donald Trump Jr.'s ties to Russia. (Thomas Johnson/The Washington Post)

(Thomas Johnson/The Washington Post)

There have been enough rookie errors to send this whole team back to Double-A ball. The longer this goes on — we're now six months into Trump's term — the less it looks like growing pains than incompetence and mismanagement aggravated by nepotism and dishonesty.

Returning from three weeks abroad, I've been catching up on developments at home. These weeks, though highly abnormal by usual standards, were fairly typical of the Trump presidency. Mistakes and outrages are so common that we become numb to them. But stack three weeks of the embarrassments together and the cumulative effect makes it plain that

this is amateur hour for the greatest nation on Earth:

The president, representing the United States at the Group of 20 summit in Germany, tweets that "everyone" at the world conference is talking about why Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta wouldn't give DNC servers to law enforcement. Trump erroneously claims the CIA sought the server. Podesta, who had no authority over the DNC, urges "our whack job" president to "get a grip."

Trump gives a speech in Warsaw contradicting an earlier speech he gave in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. While in Poland, he publicly disparages U.S. intelligence agencies.

The president meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping and the White House press release identifies his country as "the Republic of China" — that is, China's foe Taiwan.

Trump meets with Vladimir Putin and tweets that he "discussed forming an impenetrable Cyber Security unit" with Putin. Twelve hours later, Trump tweets that such a "Cyber Security unit" can't happen.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson tells reporters that Trump discussed sanctions with Putin. Trump tweets

the next day: "Sanctions were not discussed." (The previous month, Tillerson called for the end to a blockade of Qatar; hours later, Trump touted the Qatar blockade.)

Trump's voter-fraud commission requests voter files and is roundly rejected by Democratic and Republican state officials alike; the Mississippi secretary of state, a Republican, tells the commission to "go jump in the Gulf of Mexico."

In spite of Trump's vow that a North Korean missile capable of reaching the United States "won't happen," North Korea tests an ICBM. Trump calls this "very, very bad behavior." After the missile test, Trump's U.N. ambassador, Nikki Haley, complains on Twitter on Independence Day: "Spending my 4th in meetings all day. #ThanksNorthKorea."

Trump gives a speech at the Kennedy Center, in July, vowing, "We're going to start saying 'Merry Christmas' again."

The president tweets that a cable-news host, Mika Brzezinski, was "bleeding badly from a face-lift" when he met her. Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Nebr.) responds: "Please just stop."

Trump follows this by tweeting a mock professional wrestling video of him pummeling "Fraud News CNN."

The Post's David Fahrenthold reports that fake Time magazine covers featuring Trump were on display in at least five of Trump's clubs.

The president, who had implied he had tapes of his talks with Comey, tweets that there are no such tapes. Lawmakers, calling the president's

word insufficient, threaten to subpoena the tapes.

Former CIA director David Petraeus, asked in a panel discussion whether Trump is fit to serve, replies: "It's immaterial."

Trump claims the Senate health-care bill "is working along very well." Republican leaders soon abandon plans to have a vote on the bill.

The White House issues a statement threatening to bomb the

Syrian regime. Both the intelligence community and the Pentagon appear to be caught off guard.

Eight months after the election, Trump tweets: "Hillary Clinton colluded with the Democratic Party in order to beat Crazy Bernie Sanders."

Now, after months of Trump denials of Russia contacts, comes proof of a Russia meeting with Donald Jr., Jared Kushner and then-campaign chairman Paul J. Manafort during

the campaign. Among Junior's conflicting explanations: It was okay because the Russian didn't produce good dirt on Clinton.

And these are just some of the misfires.

They aren't rookie mistakes. This is a team that never should have taken the field.



Bernstein : Where the Trump-Russia Scandal Is Headed

It's hard to believe after four days of increasingly dire revelations about the president's son, son-in-law, and former campaign manager, but true nonetheless: The basics of the Trump-Russia scandal have only changed mildly in the past year.

In 2016, Donald Trump publicly encouraged Russian interference while bestowing the U.S. adversary with far friendlier policy positions and rhetoric than that of his party. Today, a special counsel appointed after the president fired FBI Director James Comey is working to fill in details. So are the halting but real investigations in Congress, especially the one by the Senate Intelligence Committee. 1 The various investigations may have legal implications, but the big picture has been public for a long time.

There are three separate tracks to this scandal, and all potentially contribute to any possible premature ending of the Trump administration.

The first is the drip, drip, drip of reporting from newspapers and TV news organizations, combined with the president's actions and reactions. Sometimes critical events, such as the Comey firing, show up on this track.

The second track is probably more important since it's the one that is powered by institutions designed to check the power of the president. Its timeline may look very different than the media's telling of the scandal, though questions abound because of its secrecy: What is special counsel Bob Mueller's investigation finding that we don't yet have access to? As they comb through physical evidence and interview all the

players and the witnesses, what story are they putting together? Meanwhile, what are the various Trump figures doing? Are any clearly in legal jeopardy -- and if so any of them have information the prosecutors would love to see, and if so are they considering cutting a deal before it's too late? If that's the case, what if anything is the White House doing in response?

One thing is for sure: Reasonable expectations of where the investigations will lead are starting to get clearer. Here's a quick scorecard:

- It's no longer possible that answers to all of those questions could add up to the "nothingburger" so often referenced by president and his allies.
- It is still possible that the worst offenses among Trump and his associated amount to extremely poor judgement and massively unethical behavior.
- It's also possible that less is being covered up than it seems, and that the scandal amounts to a political embarrassment without legal implications.
- It's possible that crimes were committed but that the president, despite his claims of being his own campaign manager, was uninvolved.
- And it's possible that everything anyone has imagined (or feared) and more will turn out to be true -- and that plenty of

physical evidence exists to confirm it.

While no one knows if or when Mueller will decide to prosecute anyone, the evidence is only one factor into what Congress eventually decides to do.

What we already know about the Russia scandal -- along with the lawlessness of Trump's disregard for normal presidential ethics and conflicts-of-interest -- is more than enough to justify impeachment. But it's also far from where impeachment and conviction is widely accepted as the only appropriate way to remove a duly-elected president.

That leaves the third track, which is the overall health of Trump's presidency. The more power he loses overall, the more Congress will be willing to move against him. For Trump's influence, popularity matters -- or, more technically, what Richard Neustadt called "public prestige," which is roughly defined as what those in Washington believe their constituents think about the president. For members of Congress, this is fairly straightforward, although still subjective: The more popular they think he is back home, the more likely they'll give him the benefit of the doubt. Polling enters into it, but so do other measures of district sentiment. Remember, these are political professionals, and they are expert (and certainly think they are expert, which is what matters) at gauging the sense of their districts far more carefully than any poll can get at.

And the president's professional reputation matters. Are they afraid he'll find a way to make them suffer if they oppose him? Or do they think he's a paper tiger? If he promises them no further revelations are

forthcoming, will they trust him, or do they think he's a liar?

That's the context, by the way, into which any speculation about Trump firing Mueller or pardoning anyone must be placed. On the one hand, Trump might slow the investigations. But if he (further) damages his popularity and his reputation in doing so, it's not at all clear he'll end up with a win -- especially not if overwhelming pressure means the investigations continue, just as they did after Richard Nixon fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. 2

A daily round-up of superb political insights.

Jonathan Bernstein's Early Returns

What we can say now is that this is one of the three most damaging presidential scandals of the modern era. 3 Watergate ended with the resignation of the president in order to avoid certain impeachment and conviction, along with the imprisonment of many people, including high White House officials. Ronald Reagan survived Iran-Contra, but it was still a serious blow to his presidency. It cost Reagan about 15 points in the approval polls for over a year. His chief of staff resigned, and several high administration officials were charged with crimes, some of whom were convicted. It's impossible to guess right now how Trump-Russia ends up, but it's certainly not too early to put it into this general category of severe blows to a presidency.



What If It's All True About Trump?

David A. Graham

For months, rumors, innuendos, and allegations about collusion between the Trump campaign, the

Trump administration, and the Russian government swirled around Washington, sometimes in great

gushing floods, other times in lazy rivulets. Time and again, Donald Trump and his allies denied it. They

8-11 minutes

said there was no contact before the election. They said that any meetings that were held were routine, or that campaign officials might not have known they were meeting with Russian officials. They pinned any misbehavior on low-level staffers and failed disclosures on honest oversights.

The most far-fetched claim of all was that the Trump campaign could have colluded with the Russian government. Donald Trump's affection for Vladimir Putin could be explained away by his admiration for authoritarians, his ignorance of foreign affairs, and an opportunistic chance to hurt both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Apparent Russian hacking targeting John Podesta and the Democratic National Committee made sense given Putin's hatred of Clinton and desire to disrupt the American election. But the notion of actual attempts to work together seemed implausible to even many of Trump's harshest critics—a liberal fever dream at best, a return to McCarthyist red-baiting at worst.

Yet with Donald Trump Jr.'s release of self-incriminating emails on Tuesday, the nation learned that the wildest of fantasies was all too real: Granted the chance to take what he believed to be damaging information about Hillary Clinton from a Russian government official, provided because the Kremlin wished to aid his father, Trump Jr. eagerly seized the opportunity. "If it's what you say I love it," he wrote to an intermediary. Not only that, but he brought along his brother-in-law Jared Kushner and Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

The disclosure of the emails raises a host of questions: Did anyone tell Donald Trump, and if so, when? (The White House and Trump's attorneys both say he did not attend and was not aware.) Did lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya actually hand over any incriminating information at the June 9, 2016, meeting at Trump Tower? (Both she and Trump Jr. say she did not.) Why release documents that, according to some analysts, already implicate Trump Jr. in a federal crime? And why do it now?

That's a particularly vexing question because Trump and his aides have so staunchly rejected any suggestion of collusion with the Russians—setting aside President

Trump's refusal to accept the consensus that Russia was behind interference in the election.

On July 24, 2016, for example, Trump Jr. appeared on CNN's *State of the Union* and proclaimed the notion that Russia wanted to help his father "phony" and "disgusting":

This was some six weeks after Trump Jr. met with a "Russian government lawyer" who wanted to give him information because the Russian government wanted to help his father.

The following day, Trump himself weighed in on Twitter:

Two days later he granted an interview to a local CBS station in Miami, disclaiming any connection to Russia at all: "I have nothing to do with Russia, nothing to do, I never met Putin, I have nothing to do with Russia whatsoever."

Trump claims that he was unaware of the June 9 meeting at the time. (In a June 7 victory speech, it's worth noting, Trump promised revelations about crimes by Hillary Clinton in the near future, perhaps on June 13. No such speech ever materialized.)

Trump's *père* and fils were not alone. NBC News put together a sizzle reel of Trump officials—including Paul Manafort, who was present at the June 9 meeting—denying any sort of contact between the Russians and the campaign:

In October, when Clinton accused him, during the third and final presidential debate, of being a puppet of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump shot back, "No puppet. No puppet. You're the puppet."

After the election, suggestions of collusion became more prominent, and Trump's denials became even more absolute.

In February, *The Washington Post* revealed that Michael Flynn, then the national-security adviser, had lied to the public and to Vice President Mike Pence about conversations with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, claiming he did not discuss sanctions when he had. Flynn was forced to resign on February 13.

The following day, *The New York Times* reported, "Phone records and intercepted calls show that

members of Donald J. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and other Trump associates had repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officials in the year before the election." That story focused in particular on Manafort, who worked for and with various Kremlin-linked officials and businessmen before joining the Trump campaign. Two weeks later, Attorney General Jeff Sessions was forced to recuse himself from the Russia investigation after admitting he had not disclosed his own meetings with Kislyak to the Senate.

Throughout this, the White House insisted that there was nothing more than met the eye here. Flynn was fired for lying to the vice president—and not for having improper conversations with foreign officials, Press Secretary Sean Spicer said, praising Flynn's character and service. Manafort was just some guy who "played a very limited role for a very limited amount of time," Spicer said. Sessions said he had simply overlooked the meetings. When the president's son-in-law and senior adviser was revealed to have also left several key meetings off his application for security clearance, the White House said that was an honest mistake. When news broke that Kushner met with the chief of a Russian state bank, the White House chalked it up to ordinary diplomacy, though the bank insisted Kushner appeared as head of his family's business.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, the president was scrambling to put a lid on any investigation. If those steps looked questionable when they were reported before, they seem even more nefarious in light of Trump Jr.'s admission of attempting to collude. He called up the heads of intelligence agencies and asked them to publicly state that there was no evidence of collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign. They declined, but doing so would of course have left them twisting in the wind when Trump Jr.'s email emerged. (Trump has repeatedly shown little compunction about allowing his aides to make untrue statements, or to contradict them.) It's unclear what U.S. intelligence agencies knew about Trump Jr.'s meeting with Veselnitskaya at the time, or more recently. CNN's Evan Perez reported Tuesday that the FBI did not have the emails that Trump Jr. released.

Trump was also pressuring FBI Director James Comey to drop an investigation into Flynn, calling him a "good guy." Comey was so rattled by the request that he asked Sessions to never let him be in a room alone with Trump again. Trump then fired Comey, a decision that the administration publicly attributed to Comey's mishandling of the investigation into, ironically, Hillary Clinton's emails. Pence and White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders both said so. But then Trump told NBC News's Lester Holt that in fact he had decided to fire Comey over the Russia investigation.

Trump's abrupt dismissal of Comey—and a resulting skirmish in which Trump threatened to release tapes of his conversations with Comey, only to say later that no such tapes existed—eventually led to the May 17 appointment of Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is now investigating a range of issues, including, apparently, collusion with Russia and whether Trump obstructed justice.

That day, Trump issued an uncharacteristically short and detached statement. "As I have stated many times, a thorough investigation will confirm what we already know—there was no collusion between my campaign and any foreign entity," he said. "I look forward to this matter concluding quickly. In the meantime, I will never stop fighting for the people and the issues that matter most to the future of our country."

Perhaps the president should have checked in with his son, or his son-in-law, before speaking so bluntly. On Tuesday, he released a statement through Sanders, saying, "My son is a high-quality person, and I applaud his transparency." That's his only comment thus far, other than a statement that he was not aware of the meeting, an unusually staid response for the loquacious Trump.

If Trump really knew nothing about the June 9 meeting, one wonders what it was that he was so eager to suppress in his calls to the intel chiefs and his firing of James Comey. And as the collusion scenario that once seemed so implausible is verified by an email trail, which of the other allegations are true, too?



Grynbaum : How Trump Jr.'s 'Transparency' Erodes Trust With the Media

Michael M. Grynbaum

4-5 minutes

When Donald Trump Jr. abruptly posted a series of private emails on Tuesday — revealing that he had

agreed to a meeting last year to hear damaging information about Hillary Clinton proffered by an

intermediary for the Russian government — he offered his 1.1

million Twitter followers a pre-emptive explanation.

He posted the emails, Donald Trump Jr. wrote, "in order to be totally transparent," zeroing in on an idea that quickly gained traction among his family members and their supporters in the news media. Bill O'Reilly, the former Fox News anchor, called him "smart to release emails." President Trump, in his own statement, said he applauded his son's "transparency."

The word seemed intended to make the younger Mr. Trump appear more than willing to release private communications to clear up confusion.

The reality was more complicated.

About an hour before Donald Trump Jr.'s tweets, The New York Times informed his representatives that it had reviewed the emails and was planning to publish them on its website. The Times, which since Saturday had published several articles about the meeting last year, asked if the younger Mr. Trump wanted to comment for the article.

A representative for Donald Trump Jr. asked for time to respond. At 11 a.m., before the news organization had heard back, the younger Mr. Trump posted the emails himself.

The Times published its article minutes later, but Donald Trump Jr.'s move was cheered by some of the president's supporters. They called it a clever way to upend a narrative emerging in the news media that Donald Trump Jr. — whose public explanations of the meeting had evolved several times since The Times revealed it — had not been forthcoming.

Still, political veterans from both parties said that while the pre-emptive publication might register as a short-term win, it could have long-term implications for the Trumps' ability to shape coverage. Reporters seek comment ahead of an article's publication to ensure a piece is fair; if the subject leaks the story to a competitor — or, in this case, leaks the information himself — it can be tough to re-establish trust.

"You get one mulligan to do it this way, and he just took it," said Ari Fleischer, a press secretary to President George W. Bush.

Mr. Fleischer, now a Republican consultant and Fox News contributor, said the younger Mr. Trump's actions on Tuesday represented a short-term strategy for a story that shows few signs of abating.

"He will not get that consideration from the press corps again," Mr. Fleischer said. "The next time something comes up, reporters are going to jam him in, 10 seconds before they hit the 'send' button, because they won't trust him not to do the same thing again."

Mr. Fleischer said he had used that tactic once in his career, "and I regretted it."

He added, "It helped me today, and it really lost me tomorrow."

For his part, Donald Trump Jr. reposted supportive tweets from fans, including a woman identifying herself as Pam Besteder who imagined that the news media was

frustrated that its scoop had been stolen. Mike Cernovich, a prominent right-wing commentator, wrote on Twitter: "Don Jr will have a tough news cycle and then life will go on. More sound and fury signifying nothing."

The transparency argument carried over from Donald Trump Jr.'s Twitter feed into the White House, where the president's deputy press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, told reporters on Tuesday that the administration was willing "to be fully transparent and open and answer any questions through the correct process, whether that is through the special counsel or anything beyond that."

Peter Alexander, an NBC News correspondent, asked Ms. Sanders if President Trump was aware that his son had released the emails only after he was informed that The Times was on the verge of publishing them.

"I'm not sure, Peter," Ms. Sanders replied. "I'd have to check."



Lewis : The Swamp Looks Pretty Good Compared to Trumpistan

Live by flouting the conventions of politics, die by flouting the conventions of politics—or, maybe insiders are right about some things after all.

Modern democratic politics, with its emphasis on things like transparency and full participation, has spawned a cottage industry of ironic "think pieces" lamenting the fall of the "good ol' boy" network. Generally, these essays argue that smoke-filled backrooms where bosses and cronies would horse trade and get things done weren't so bad after all.

Recent revelations about Donald Trump, Jr., including Tuesday's stunning emails that he himself released, showing unequivocally that he was at the very least eager to collude with a person offering Russia-generated dirt on Hillary Clinton, make us yearn for the halcyon days of the swamp that his father was going to clean up.

Why? Because in life, you've got to take the good with the bad. And when you usher in a new era of

outsiders, you can expect things to change for better *and* worse.

Donald Trump won the presidency by flouting the conventions of politics. And it very well may be that his presidency will be brought down by...flouting the conventions of politics.

There's a reason why campaigns need seasoned disciplinarians who are part of the establishment to keep things in line. An improvisational candidacy, or presidency, leads to chaos—or worse.

Case in point: This meeting between Don Jr., and a Russian lawyer took place because of (a) a lack of values and character, and/or (b) ignorance of the law and ignorance of proper protocol. You can't fix the former, but you can mitigate mistakes by virtue of creating a proper campaign infrastructure.

Appearing on *CNN Tonight* Monday, presidential campaign veteran Kevin Madden hinted at this when he noted that every campaign he has worked on had a rigid vetting process and a chain of command.

"Therefore," Madden hypothesized, "a meeting like this could have been prevented."

It's important to note that Madden, formerly a senior aide to Mitt Romney, is the kind of person at whom the Trump team might scoff. He would be considered too tied to the old ways of doing things—an establishment insider who just doesn't get the way things are today. They might also view him as someone committed to playing by the Marquis of Queensbury rules, while they were busy playing by their own rules—by playing 8-dimensional chess.

Political professionals, assuming they are ethical and knowledgeable, know better than to attend a meeting such as this. When Al Gore's team received a copy of George W. Bush's briefing book, they knew enough to call the FBI.

One thing Trump's supporters loved about him was that he was an outsider who would shake things up. But unlike other outsiders, Trump never truly empowered a grey beard to instill order. His operation consisted of lots of political novices who were either not

ready for prime time—or second-tier operatives with delusions of grandeur who had previously not been deemed acceptable to the establishment.

This raises interesting questions. Does an outsider campaign that truly rejects consensus and premises about the political campaign/policy paradigm also inexorably reject consensus about the moral and ethical conclusions maintained by that group? Does a campaign that thrived by breaking the rules and protocols of campaigns sow the seeds of an administration that is destroying itself by breaking rules and protocols of governing? Does a team of iconoclastic and eccentric outsiders who aren't part of Washington groupthink inevitably make mistakes that no traditional political Sherpa or operative would? Even if you set aside picking fights with the media and "deep state," was this doomed from the beginning? Maybe they flew too close to the sun? Maybe the house always wins?



Robbins : Donald Trump Jr. was within his rights to meet with Russian lawyer

The saying in the Watergate days was that "it's not the crime but the cover-up." These days, you don't

need a crime or a cover-up to trigger outsized political outrage, just a heavy dose of bad optics.

The latest hyperventilating from the anti-Trump crowd is over a chain of emails from June 3-8, 2016

between Donald Trump Jr. and music producer Rob Goldstone. Goldstone was acting as an

intermediary to set up a meeting between Trump and Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya. According to Goldstone, the purpose of the meeting would be to pass along "very high level and sensitive information" that "would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia." Goldstone opined that this was "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

Goldstone said he was told "she has information about illegal campaign contributions to the D.N.C." It would also have been reasonable to have assumed that the promised information had to do with the shady 2013 "Uranium One" deal, in which a Russian company with close ties to the Kremlin was allowed to assume control of one-fifth of all uranium production in the United States, while at the same time millions of dollars were flowing from interested parties in Russia to the Clinton Foundation and to Bill Clinton personally. The idea that Veselnitskaya was peddling information from hacked DNC servers would not have been obvious, since that story came out later, on June 14 — and even then it was reported that the hackers stole opposition research on Donald Trump.

However, when the meeting happened on June 9, no anti-Hillary information was forthcoming. Veselnitskaya only wanted to discuss a sanctions law called the Magnitsky Act, and claims she "never had any damaging or sensitive information about Hillary Clinton." Goldstone, who apparently had been misled, called it "the most inane nonsense I've ever heard."

This story is hardly as inane as the collective furor that has been generated around the Russia issue writ large. Although four (or, according to the Clinton camp, 17) intelligence agencies concluded the Russian government attempted to influence the 2016 election, there is no evidence that any of these attempts succeeded. Donald Trump won fair and square, unless you want to assert that somehow Russia hacked Michigan's paper ballot system.

But those who are dead-set on invalidating the election results by other means still persisted. Lacking evidence of actual crimes, they have been forced to drum up narratives around more nebulous, subjective offenses like "obstruction," "misleading conduct," and of course "collusion," which this email chain supposedly points to. However, the case is pathetically weak. Veselnitskaya was not

connected to the Kremlin and Don Trump Jr. said she had no anti-Hillary material to offer. She comes off more as someone who wormed her way onto Trump Jr.'s schedule by dangling a vague promise of tantalizing information, then denied she ever promised anything.

The situation became even murkier when it was revealed that Veselnitskaya had hired an investigator from Fusion GPS, the Democratic opposition research firm that was behind the notorious Trump-Russia dossier, a collection of unsubstantiated and in some cases demonstrably false links between Donald Trump's campaign and Russia. Could the real purpose of the meeting have been simply to get direct contact between a Russian and a member of the Trump family on the record? Fusion GPS says that any claim that it "arranged or facilitated" the meeting is "false." Mark Corallo, a spokesman for President Trump's lawyer, has implied the whole thing was a setup.

Those who are desperately concerned about the influence of foreign entities on U.S. elections should focus their attentions on the firm evidence of actual collusion between the Clinton campaign and Ukraine, particularly targeting one-time Trump campaign manager

Paul Manafort. It is a solid case. As for Donald Trump Jr., he was perfectly in his rights to follow up a lead on possible damaging information regarding Hilary Clinton in the heat of a political campaign. What if it had been true? Any journalist in that position would invoke the public's right to know.