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FRANCE - EUROPE

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : Mr. Macron Starts Making Waves

Emmanuel Macron's entry to the French presidential stage was about as exciting and theatrical as electoral politics gets. Rising from relative obscurity, he seized the Élysée Palace and the National Assembly with huge majorities. He was the wunderkind, at 39 the youngest French head of state since Napoléon, promising radical economic change while restoring the presidency to a Jupiterian level, in his words, after the garish "bling bling" of Nicolas Sarkozy and the tawdry "normality" of François Hollande.

After so grand an entrance, and with so ambitious a program, there was bound to be pushback. And it has begun.

Surprisingly, for France, the first of what promises to be a tough series of domestic confrontations was with the military, which is traditionally quiet in public. Facing budget cuts equivalent to nearly \$1 billion, the top general of the French armed forces, Pierre de Villiers, used an unprintable epithet before a parliamentary committee and quit. Mr. Macron promptly struck back at a military garden party, telling the generals, "I am the boss."

The strife is likely to get worse as Mr. Macron works to cut more than five times that much from this year's overall budget, and more for 2018, to meet the European Union's deficit limit of 3 percent of gross domestic product. The French have long understood the need to trim their spending, but every cut is fiercely,

and often successfully, resisted. Town mayors are up in arms against cuts to local government budgets, university professors are furious about cuts to their funding, and an overhaul to pension and labor laws is certain to bring down the wrath of the unions.

The question is whether General de Villiers's defiant resignation is good or bad for Mr. Macron. On the negative side, the first public resistance to his program was from the military and against the first president never to have served in the army, and at a time when thousands of soldiers are deployed around the country against terrorist attacks. Critics inevitably assailed him for what another general termed "juvenile authoritarianism."

But the first skirmish also demonstrated a president prepared to stand his ground even against a bemedaled warrior. Lesser senior officials may not be as likely now to openly rebel. Mr. Macron's ratings and those of his prime minister, Édouard Philippe, have dipped a bit but remain high, and polls continue to show a public ready for change.

None of what Mr. Macron is doing should be a surprise; it was all there in his campaign, and the French voted overwhelmingly for him. He came to office keenly aware that unless reforms are started immediately, they will not happen. The power of Jupiterian symbols make for grand political theater, but the real action has only begun.

Bloomberg

Gobry : Macron Is Short-Changing France's Military

Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry

After just three months in office, President Emmanuel Macron has triggered the deepest crisis in relations between the government and the military since 1961, when several generals attempted a coup against Charles de Gaulle. General Pierre de Villiers, chief of the general staff since 2014, tendered his resignation Wednesday morning -- a first in modern French history -- after a short feud with the president over the defense budget. The dispute has exposed a lack of leadership and strategic thinking at the Elysee Palace.

Macron announced steep cuts -- 850 million euro (\$983 million) -- to the defense budget shortly after being elected. Yet he had campaigned on a promise to boost spending because France's military commitments -- fighting radical Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and the African Sahel -- are deeper than they've been at any point since the end of the Cold War.

This decision is indefensible. Of course, generals are never happy about defense cuts, but the unprecedented protest resignation suggests this time is different. Macron's government has embarked on a program of spending reductions that, as a Bloomberg View editorial pointed out, are unjustified economically and only aimed at meeting the European

Union's arbitrary 3 percent deficit target. What's more, unlike in the U.S. where the Pentagon suffers from chronic overfunding, the French military can legitimately claim it is underfunded. Since the end of the Cold War, French governments have consistently used the defense budget as a piggy bank to plug other holes such as ballooning social welfare expenditures.

Furthermore, the reality of modern warfare makes the need for fresh equipment -- the area where Macron's axe is due to fall -- particularly acute. To take one example, Opération Barkhane, France's anti-terrorism effort in the Sahel, calls for a force of 3,000 for operations in the world's biggest and most punishing desert, the size of India. This requires lots of helicopters and drones. At present, France relies on U.S. military logistical support due to a lack of transport planes. For a nation on the frontlines of the fight against radical Islamic terrorism, and whose defense doctrine calls for it to be able to project power globally, this is a joke, particularly given that Macron had portrayed himself as a war president.

Then there's the personal drama. The dispute began to flare into a crisis after de Villiers, in a closed-door meeting of the Defense Committee of the National Assembly, said of the president: "I

won't let him [expletive] me." The next day, speaking at a military ceremony, Macron gave his chief of general staff a tongue-lashing, without mentioning him. "I am your leader," Macron said. In a follow-up interview with the Journal du Dimanche, Macron threatened to oust de Villiers.

At first, it seemed as if the contretemps might be brought down to a simmer. Macron appeared to offer a compromise: keeping this year's cuts but announcing increases for next year.

It was not enough. De Villiers announced his resignation, sparking a political crisis. Few people believe the cuts are justified, and Macron seems to have made his first major misstep, needlessly inflaming the situation. The set-to has made him appear arrogant and out of touch, and he looks particularly hapless in an area where he had staked a lot of political capital, his role as commander in chief.

The armed forces have been quietly, and justifiably, seething for decades. But there is a deeper problem: the lack of strategic vision in the French executive and the resulting damage to civil-military relationships. Traditionally, the military is supposed to be the adviser to the chief executive, who sets the strategy. But since 2007, French presidents have lacked the expertise and interest to decide on a strategy for the military. Rather than advisers

to a strategist, military chiefs have been seen as technicians who solve problems. A defense budget should be a consequence of strategy; once a decision has been made on goals and how to accomplish them, the question of how much it's going to cost flows naturally. But if that work hasn't been done, the budget question becomes a zero-sum power struggle about nothing more than money.

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Macron, a military neophyte with tremendous political skills but few original ideas, does not have a strategy for the French military, seeing it instead as an item in the budget and a source of photo opportunities. Technology and globalization are changing the nature of war, and a far-sighted country with France's history and assets might leverage those trends to build a world-beating military that could tackle 21st century challenges by, for example, embracing automation and agile special forces working with intelligence and civil affairs units. But this requires a strategic vision about the long-term threats and opportunities. There is no such thing in the Élysée palace, nor has there been for many years.

White : The Martyrdom of Jacques Hamel

Christopher White

solidarity with their Catholic neighbors.

Dominique Lebrun, the archbishop of Rouen, France, was attending the Catholic Church's World Youth Day in Poland last July when the news came. One of his priests, 85-year-old Father Jacques Hamel, had been murdered by Islamic State-inspired terrorists while celebrating morning mass on July 26.

Archbishop Lebrun soon received an urgent request from François Hollande, then the French president. Fearful of civil unrest between the nation's Christians and Muslims, Mr. Hollande requested the archbishop speak with him before making any public statements. "What will you say?" the president asked the archbishop. "I am going to pray and ask God to help me love my enemies," he replied.

A few months later, Mr. Hollande admitted the prelate had stunned him: He actually seemed to believe what he was saying, and his tone of forgiveness and reconciliation was crucial after the attack. The following week Muslims throughout the country were encouraged by Islamic leaders to attend Mass as a show of

The killing moved millions of people, including Pope Francis. In September the pope described Hamel as a martyr. He urged Catholics to ask for the intercession of the late priest so that he "gives us the courage to say the truth: to kill in the name of God is satanic." The Vatican has fast-tracked Hamel's path to sainthood, and Francis has already declared him "blessed," the first step in the canonization process.

In an earlier era, France's leader would not have been so shocked by the archbishop's words of forgiveness. Once thought of as a Catholic country, France, like much of Europe, has abandoned any overt association with its Christian heritage over the past several decades. If Europe's political leaders were somehow able to reclaim the attitude of sacrifice and solidarity embodied by Archbishop Lebrun's statement, it could reshape the way their ailing continent deals with terrorism and the anti-immigrant, populist backlash it produces.

In the aftermath of World War II, when nations throughout Europe were on the verge of collapse, the project of European integration was born to ensure that the war's atrocities could never be repeated. There was a strong sense that those who had died in the war had sacrificed themselves so that others could live in freedom and prosperity. In the new European project, stronger countries would help weaker ones. They had a moral responsibility.

And while the European Union has at times been hostile to religious concerns, it nonetheless has been undergirded by the Catholic doctrine of solidarity. This principle demands shared responsibility and sacrifice in spiritual and physical matters, between nations and peoples, rich and poor. A core commitment to the belief in the dignity of all human beings means that the practice of solidarity isn't one of mere charity, but one of Christian duty.

Speaking to European heads of state this spring, Pope Francis argued that solidarity was the antidote to populism and extremism. "Politics needs this kind of leadership, which avoids appealing to emotions to gain consent," he

argued, adding that the European Union needs "a spirit of solidarity and subsidiarity."

Is it a coincidence that in an era of nationalist populism, the one country that offered a resounding rejection of such principles is the one where an elderly priest was brutally beheaded while offering his daily mass? Could it be that, in this secular European nation, Hamel's martyrdom triggered, unconsciously, an examination of conscience, stirring many French citizens to reconsider the type of future they want to build and the values they want to define them?

In his statement after Hamel's death, Archbishop Lebrun noted that the attack produced three victims: the priest and his two killers. Hamel's brutal end personified true sacrifice while his attackers' deaths perverted it. Perhaps the witness of this modern martyr will lead to an embrace of this traditional teaching of solidarity, and therein shore up the foundation of a country and a continent.

Mr. White is the director of Catholic Voices USA.

The New York Times

At a Family Workshop Near Paris, the 'Drowned Mona Lisa' Lives On

Elaine Sciolino

ARCUEIL, France — The most famous person to have died in the Seine River has no identity at all. She is "L'Inconnue de la Seine" — the Unknown Woman of the Seine.

Here is her story. In the late 19th century, the body of an unidentified young woman was fished out of the Seine in Paris. Because her body was free of wounds and blemishes, she was presumed to have committed suicide. The pathologist at the morgue that received her body was so mesmerized by her beauty that he called in a "mouleur" — a molder — to preserve her face in a plaster death mask.

In the decades that followed, the mask was mass-produced and sold as a decorative item for the walls of private homes and studios, first in Paris, then abroad. L'Inconnue became a muse for artists, poets and other writers, among them Pablo Picasso, Man Ray, Rainer Maria Rilke and Vladimir Nabokov. L'Inconnue hung in the studio of Albert Camus, who called her a "drowned Mona Lisa." She inspired some of the films of François Truffaut.

L'Inconnue is kept alive these days in an out-of-the-way, family-run workshop in the southern Paris suburb of Arcueil. Founded in 1871, the workshop, L'Atelier Lorenzi, creates handmade, perfectly molded plaster copies of figurines, busts, statues and masks the way it has for four generations. But it is best known for L'Inconnue.

In a box on the second floor of the atelier is its most precious possession: a 19th-century, chestnut-brown plaster mold of a death mask that is said to be that of L'Inconnue.

"You ask me if my great-grandfather made the mold himself, and I don't know," said Laurent Lorenzi Forestier, who runs the family business. "You ask me how the morgue organized the casting of the mold, and I don't know. What I do know is that we have a mold from that period in time."

L'Inconnue's face is serene. Her cheeks are round and full, her skin smooth, her eyelashes matted to give the impression that they are still wet. Her hair is parted in the middle and pulled back behind her neck. She is young, perhaps still a teenager. She is pleasant-looking, but not classically beautiful.

It is the mystery of her half-smile that haunts. Her lips lack definition, perhaps the result of her body's deterioration. She seems happy in death or maybe only asleep. And her eyes look as if they might open at any time.

Skeptics have claimed that the woman depicted in the mask could not have been a drowning victim, because her features are too perfect. Some scholars assert that it was common practice to resculpt death masks at the time.

L'Inconnue has been imagined in literature as a victim: an orphan who drowns herself in the Seine after an English aristocrat seduces and then abandons her. She also has been portrayed as a witch who destroys a young poet, and as a seductress who witnesses a robbery and murder in a clockmaker's shop. No documents survive in the Paris police archives. No trace of her body was found.

"Maybe the mold was taken before her facial muscles began to fall," said Juan José Garcia, a master mold maker here for 29 years. "Maybe. Maybe."

Copies of the mask hang in most of the rooms in the two-story wood-

beamed building, which was built as a relay postal station in the 19th century and is badly in need of roof repair. It overflows with other treasures: copies of ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman busts; medieval figurines; Renaissance nudes; antique polychrome Chinese horses.

A copy of Houdon's "Bust of Molière" is for sale, as are busts of Benjamin Franklin, Mozart, Napoleon, Henry IV, Julius Caesar and Dante. Boxes of assorted body parts line the wall of one storage room. In another, the casts are dried the old-fashioned way: with the heat of a potbellied, coal-fueled stove.

In recent years, the family has added to its repertoire and now makes the casts in silicone — much like silicone baking molds. Many of the works are now made in resin, which is more durable than plaster, especially in outdoor installations. The casts can be painted to resemble various materials, including gilded wood, bronze, terracotta, marble and stone.

Much of the shop's business comes from governmental and commercial commissions. When the four sculptures outside France's National Assembly began to crumble, the

Lorenzis were called in to replace them with copies in resin. They have made resin trees for Disneyland Paris and resin stonelike decorations for Versailles. Film studios, boutiques and fashion houses including Hermès and Dior have rented sculptures from them.

The company's best sellers are busts of Marianne, the symbol of the French republic, which sit in most local, regional and national governmental offices in France; and, of course, L'Inconnue (\$130 for her death mask in white plaster, \$175 with a shiny glaze).

In 2008, high rent forced the family to abandon its original shop on Rue Racine on the Left Bank near the Seine and consolidate its entire operation in the workshop in Arcueil.

The New York Times

As 'Brexit' Clock Ticks, U.K. Seems Adrift

Stephen Castle

LONDON — One was accused of trying to sabotage Britain's exit from the European Union and of treating colleagues like "pirates who have taken him prisoner." Two others were described as "dangerous and deranged." As for the man leading London's talks on "Brexit," he has been called "lazy as a toad" and "vain as Narcissus," and his colleagues "government morons."

Such descriptions of Britain's leaders are perhaps not all that surprising, given the country's often colorful political wars. Except they were issued not by opponents of the governing Conservative Party, whose lawmakers are negotiating the country's departure from the 28-nation bloc, but by people in or close to it.

As discussions got serious this week in Brussels — amid open feuding, cabinet splits and confusion over policy objectives back in London — Britain's handling of its most important negotiations since World War II was starting to look shambolic. Nearly four months after Prime Minister Theresa May invoked Article 50, starting the clock on a two-year window to negotiate Britain's departure, little or nothing of substance has been accomplished.

With the British currency languishing, the standard of living progressively squeezed and investors starting to take fright, there is markedly less bravado in London about a new age of opportunities for a "global Britain." Amid a growing sense of drift, gone is the talk of a "red, white and blue Brexit" — a reference to the colors of the national flag.

Then crises in the family made it more difficult to keep the business going.

"There seemed to be no solution except to close," Mr. Forestier said. "But it was my great-grandfather who opened the atelier when he moved to Paris, originally from a small town in Tuscany. We have more than a century of history. I couldn't let that happen."

So Mr. Forestier, a 65-year-old architect who retired from his job as an urban planner a year ago, took over the family business with his associate Quentin Thomas, who had worked as a molder at the atelier for over 20 years. There is now a Facebook page and an internet site.

But the works can be expensive — a mold can cost \$2,000 to make, a

cast upward of \$1,000. Mr. Forestier often is asked why he doesn't mass-produce the casts in China.

"Out of the question!" he said.

In the 1960s, L'Inconnue became famous in a different way — as a first aid mannequin to teach CPR. Peter Safar, an Austrian doctor, had recently developed the basics of CPR. He turned to Asmund Laerdal, a Norwegian toymaker, who coincidentally had rescued his young son from drowning, and they decided to create a life-size mannequin as a training tool.

Mr. Laerdal wanted a female doll, assuming that men would not want to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on a male dummy. He saw a death mask of L'Inconnue at a relative's home, was struck by her

beauty and decided to make her his model. She was called "Resusci Anne" ("CPR Annie" in the United States) and became a physical symbol of salvation. Since then, millions of people have learned CPR on her, making her the world's most beloved life-size doll.

As the company's website explained: "Inspired by the 'young woman of the Seine,' CPR Annie has become the symbol of life for millions of people around the world who have received training in modern techniques of resuscitation and for those whose lives have been saved from unnecessary death."

"I am not sure that anybody is in control at the moment," said Tim Bale, a professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London. "There are about as many views about the direction of Brexit as there are members of the cabinet."

The chaos is being met with consternation elsewhere in the European Union, where negotiators say they are beginning to wonder if the British will ever decide on a coherent strategy.

"You hear more and more voices saying, 'It is ridiculous what the Brits are doing,' " said Joachim Fritz-Vannahme, director of the Europe program at the Bertelsmann Foundation, a research institute based in Germany.

"Over the last 12 months, we have heard everything and the opposite: hard Brexit, soft Brexit, quick Brexit, long Brexit," he said. "When you follow what is coming out of Theresa May's cabinet, it is not clear what vision Britain is opting for."

To make matters worse, infighting over negotiating strategy and policies has become entangled with a leadership struggle: At least three senior cabinet members are thought to be jockeying to replace Mrs. May, whose position was severely — perhaps fatally — weakened when she lost a parliamentary majority in last month's election.

The prime minister is pleading for an end to the ferocious "backbiting and carping" in the Conservative Party, and she lectured her cabinet this week on the importance of keeping internal discussions confidential.

Her pleas came after reports that the chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, had said at a recent cabinet meeting that public sector workers — who are subject to

a cap on pay increases of 1 percent, when inflation is more than 2.5 percent — were overpaid compared with their counterparts in the private sector.

Mr. Hammond, who has led the "soft Brexit" faction that favors prioritizing the economy over considerations like immigration, then publicly blamed those seeking a quick, clean break from the European Union for the leaks.

Against this tumultuous backdrop, David Davis, the British secretary of state for exiting the European Union, was photographed with colleagues in Brussels on Monday sitting at the negotiating table without any documents or notes, while their European Union counterparts had sheaves of position papers before them.

Things went only marginally better on Thursday, when the European Union's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, emerged from a meeting in Brussels with Mr. Davis to lament that he still had no idea of Britain's positions on the most basic issues, like how much the country will owe the bloc in its so-called divorce bill.

Officially, Britain is still pursuing the vision of a clean break with the European Union that Mrs. May outlined in January, one that prioritizes immigration and the supremacy of British courts — even over the interests of the economy.

Unfortunately for Mrs. May, voters hinted last month that they did not support that approach. With a shortage of nurses and doctors in the National Health Service, among other labor shortfalls, there is a growing realization that Britain is dependent on foreign workers.

As a result, the prime minister's plan for the withdrawal may not have the

support of a majority of her cabinet, let alone of Parliament — a challenge she must contend with while fighting to keep her job and as potential successors circle.

Logic suggests that, given the divisive nature of the withdrawal from the European Union and the Conservatives' recent electoral showing, the party should shift to a softer approach in negotiations, perhaps enlisting the support of lawmakers from the opposition Labour Party. But the leadership struggle is taking precedence.

"The national interest and parliamentary arithmetic would dictate some kind of grand coalition on Brexit," Mr. Bale said. "But the logic of the internal politics of the Conservative Party points the prime minister, and aspirant leaders, away from the obvious solution."

The contenders to succeed Mrs. May — Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, as well as Mr. Hammond and Mr. Davis — will ultimately be chosen by members of the Conservative Party, who tend to be emphatically supportive of leaving the bloc, and who will not tolerate backsliding into a diluted withdrawal.

So, as Mr. Hammond leads the push for a softer, less economically risky strategy, supporters of a harder exit are pushing back.

Britain is a big and diverse country that imports many goods from the Continent, which means there are incentives on both sides to strike a deal — and Mr. Fritz-Vannahme and others say they believe a sensible outcome can be brokered.

As the clock ticks, though, British businesses are growing nervous. So far this year, investment in the auto sector has been about \$840 million, according to the Society of Motor

Manufacturers and Traders, an industry group. If that trend continues, the annual total will be well below the \$3.2 billion invested in 2015, the last full year before the vote on European Union membership. Carmakers worry that leaving the European customs union would mean the imposition of tariffs and the disruption of complex international supply chains, both of which would raise their production costs.

At the same time, many banks are planning to relocate members of staff, in the expectation that firms based in London will lose the right to offer services across the European Union once Britain leaves the single market. And airlines will be affected unless a deal is reached to protect their right to fly to and from continental Europe. The budget airline easyJet has already announced plans to set up a new carrier, with headquarters in Austria, to allow it to continue operating flights across the bloc after Britain's withdrawal.

Trying to steady the ship, Justice Secretary David Lidington dismissed

reports of political infighting as little more than the product of summer garden parties: "too much sun, and too much warm prosecco."

Few are buying that, however, and many analysts say they expect the feuding to continue until Mrs. May is pushed aside and a successor is named. But solving the leadership crisis may take time, which Britain can ill afford as far as the withdrawal process is concerned. And as Mrs. May herself has signaled, forcing her out could lead to a new general election that could be won by Labour and its leader, Jeremy Corbyn. So the jockeying, backbiting and carping might continue for some time.

Either way, the feuding reflects more than internecine battles among the Conservative grandees. It also reflects a growing, if belated, realization that there are few good options for Britain.

A so-called cliff-edge withdrawal that cuts many ties with the European Union without establishing new trade arrangements could lead to a sharp recession and an unpopular

jolt to voters who had been promised a sunny future in a prosperous trading nation.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is what is being called the Norway option, in which Britain would leave the European Union but try to remain a part of its economic structures. That would put the country in a worse position than it is in today, forcing it to pay money to the bloc and to accept European rules without having a say in making them.

Mr. Hammond is trying to thread the needle, softening the possible economic hit a little by allowing for businesses to have a transition period to adapt to new rules.

A looming question is whether Britain should seek to replicate elements of its membership of the European Union's customs union, which eliminates tariffs on industrial goods. That could reassure big industries like the auto and pharmaceuticals sectors, and it might ease the border problem in Northern Ireland, which would have a frontier with the European Union

because the Republic of Ireland, its neighbor, is a member of the bloc.

But it would most likely prevent Britain from striking trade deals with non-European nations, as supporters of leaving the union had promised.

As the negotiations progress, and the trade-offs and costs of leaving the European Union become clearer, the choices are likely to become even harder.

"Britons are not very honest with themselves," Mr. Fritz-Vannahme said. "The harder, sharper the Brexit, the harder the economic situation will be."

Perhaps it was in recognition of such troubles that Mr. Hammond offered a recent toast.

"In victory, you deserve Champagne," he told a gathering at the French Embassy in London, in a slight variation on the words of Winston Churchill. "In defeat, you need it."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.S. Government-Bond Prices Strengthen on Draghi Comments

Min Zeng

The U.S. government-bond market got a boost Thursday as comments from European Central Bank President Mario Draghi deflated some anxiety over a shift toward less monetary stimulus.

The ECB held its interest-rate policy and bond-buying program steady Thursday. During a press conference, Mr. Draghi gave a nod to the eurozone's economic recovery, but signaled that inflation isn't showing convincing signs of picking up. The ECB chief added that policy makers haven't set a precise date on when to discuss policy changes.

Bond investors took the remark as less hawkish than the one Mr. Draghi made last month that kick-started the recent selloff of government bonds in the developed world. Mr. Draghi on June 27 signaled that the central bank might start winding down its monetary stimulus as the eurozone economy picks up speed.

"The hawkish Draghi view has turned into cautious ECB thesis," said Victor Xing, founder and investment analyst at Keksellas Inc.

The buying sent the yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note to as low as 2.239% during early Thursday morning, the lowest level since June 28. Yields fall as bond prices rise.

The yield pared its decline in the afternoon session because of a bout of profit-taking. It settled at 2.266%, compared with 2.268% Wednesday.

Bond yields have fallen after a recent rise. The 10-year yield nearly topped 2.4% on July 7 before turning lower. The shift bolsters some money managers' belief that without signs of accelerated inflation, it would be difficult for a rise in yields to have staying power.

Major central banks are still struggling to push up inflation to their desired target, making it difficult for policy makers to dial back monetary stimulus even as the global economy has been showing broad improvement, said analysts.

Demand for Thursday's 10-year Treasury inflation-protected securities sank, a sign of reduced need to hedge the risk of higher inflation with U.S. data showing softening consumer prices during the past few months.

The "unsightly auction is pulling yields" in both Treasuries and TIPS higher during the afternoon session, said Jim Vogel, an interest-rate strategist at FTN Financial.

The selling was heavier in TIPS, which pushed down the yield premium on the 10-year Treasury note relative to the 10-year TIPS by 0.04 percentage point to 1.74 percentage point. A shrinking premium signals reduced inflation expectations.

The bond market shows "sharp skepticism in the ability of central banks to generate inflation," said Tony Crescenzi, portfolio manager and market strategist at Pacific Investment Management Co.

The Bank of Japan on Thursday kept its bond-buying program steady. One notable change is that

the BoJ pushed back the date when it expects 2% inflation—the sixth time it has been postponed under Governor Haruhiko Kuroda.

The central bank now sees the target being reached by March 2020, five years after Mr. Kuroda's initial timing.

Large bond buying from both the ECB and the BOJ has played a big role in driving down government-bond yields in the developed world to historically very low levels. Analysts have warned that the value of government bonds would fall when these central banks reduce purchases.

Some money managers said the central bank policy outlook is the main risk for bond investors and that the uncertainty is likely to generate price swings in the months ahead.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Euro Jumps to Two-Year High After ECB Meeting

Christopher Whittall

LONDON—The euro jumped against the dollar to its highest level in nearly two years on Thursday after European Central Bank

President Mario Draghi said the ECB will discuss when to trim its massive bond purchases in the fall.

But bond markets remained broadly calm, as Mr. Draghi's tentative language failed to spark the kind of

volatility that followed his comments last month in which he hinted at winding down its massive stimulus program.

The euro traded at \$1.1638 late in the European afternoon Thursday,

up 1.1% on the day against the dollar and its highest intraday trading level since August 2015.

Late in New York trading, the euro was up 1% on the day at \$1.1632,

the highest late New York rate since Jan. 15, 2015.

Meanwhile, 10-year German bond yields were little changed at around 0.54% and riskier eurozone debt rallied, as financial markets showed signs of mixed reactions to the ECB's messaging.

That contrasts to the concurrent rises in bond yields and the euro that followed Mr. Draghi's comments in late June on the improving outlook in the euro area that investors took as the first clues the ECB is moving closer to ending its easy-money policies. Yields rise as prices fall.

The ECB's policies of ultralow interest rates and mass asset purchases have helped pin down the euro and bond yields in recent

years.

But with a strengthening local economy, many investors are asking whether the time is nearing when that stimulus will start to be withdrawn. That could mark an important turning point for markets given the Federal Reserve is already tightening its own monetary policy and making plans to reduce the size of its balance sheet.

Mr. Draghi described the eurozone economy as "robust" on Thursday, but also highlighted the lack of inflation in the region, suggesting there are still reasons to keep stimulus in place. And while he said the central bank would discuss the issue of scaling back its bond-buying program in the fall, he refused to set a date. The bank's Governing Council left monetary policy unchanged on Thursday.

The ECB is likely eager to avoid the sharp rise in bond yields that followed the Federal Reserve raising the prospect of trimming its bond purchases in 2013, often referred to as the taper tantrum.

Mr. Draghi has "delivered a balanced and nuanced approach to the thorny issue of tapering," said Arnab Das, head of EMEA and emerging-market macro research at Invesco Fixed Income. "They are keeping their options open, but they are putting tapering on the table to try to avoid another mini tantrum."

Both bond yields and the euro have moved sharply since Mr. Draghi first hinted at tapering in June. The euro has gained around 4.5% against the dollar over the past month, while the 10-year German bond yield has more than doubled.

Still, there are signs that investors aren't overly worried about the impact of the withdrawal of stimulus on riskier assets. On Thursday, Italian and Spanish bond prices rose — markets that have benefited from the ECB's bond-buying.

"The European story is good right now with growth, and political risk has receded. It's a positive backdrop for both the euro and risk assets right now," said Ryan Myerberg, a senior portfolio manager at Janus Henderson Investors, who said the euro could break through \$1.17 over the summer.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ECB's Inaction Echoes Global Caution Over Weak Inflation

Tom Fairless

FRANKFURT—

The European Central Bank delayed discussion over whether to wind down its giant bond-buying program, underlining a recent tone of caution from global policy makers as they fight weak inflation.

ECB President Mario Draghi on Thursday welcomed a "robust" economic recovery in the 19-nation eurozone, but warned that stronger growth wasn't yet translating into higher consumer prices.

"We need to be persistent and patient because we aren't there yet," Mr. Draghi said after the bank left its monetary policy mix unchanged on Thursday. The bank will discuss the future of bond purchases, known as quantitative easing, in the fall, he said. "Basically inflation is not where we want it to be and where it should be."

The ECB mirrored a message of caution emanating from other major central banks, which are struggling to understand why prices aren't picking up more rapidly despite robust economic growth.

The Bank of Japan earlier Thursday pushed back by a year the date when it expects to hit its 2% inflation target, the sixth time it has been postponed under Governor Haruhiko Kuroda. Federal Reserve Chairwoman Janet Yellen said in testimony last week that the U.S. central bank was looking "very carefully" at recent weak inflation data.

Still, Mr. Draghi's comments drove the euro to its highest level against the dollar in nearly two years. His bullish description of the eurozone economy appeared to bolster the

narrative of an end to the ECB's support of bonds, a shift which would enhance the euro's appeal.

Bond markets, on the other hand, were stable. Mr. Draghi highlighted low eurozone inflation and said the bank would act cautiously, suggesting that stimulus could remain in place through 2018 and possibly beyond.

After years of easy-money policies, central banks in the U.K., Canada and the eurozone have all recently signaled they are preparing to follow the Fed by nudging interest rates higher. Some investors believed the ECB could move soon after Mr. Draghi recently hinted that the days of easy money might be numbered. The ECB's decision to stand pat surprised them.

"Contrary to what we too had expected, the ECB has not taken any step towards normalizing its monetary policy at today's meeting," said Ralph Solveen, an economist with Commerzbank in Frankfurt.

Privately, though, ECB officials have long indicated that the bank might signal the future of the program at a policy meeting on Sept. 7. Mr. Draghi is due to speak at the Fed's economic conference in Jackson Hole in late August, which could give the ECB chief an opportunity to signal a policy shift.

The ECB's €60 billion (\$69 billion)-a-month bond-buying program has helped drive down market interest rates as the eurozone recovers from a yearslong economic crisis. Its future is one of the biggest questions hanging over financial markets. Asset prices, borrowing costs and the value of the euro currency will all be impacted by its withdrawal.

But ECB officials face a dilemma: While the eurozone economy is accelerating, inflation, at 1.3% last month, remains some way below their near-2% target.

Mr. Draghi rocked financial markets last month in Sintra, Portugal, by suggesting that the ECB might soon wind down its bond-buying program as the region's economy accelerates.

Top ECB officials have since called for caution, wary of triggering a sharp rise in borrowing costs that could upset the region's economic recovery.

Mr. Draghi didn't backtrack from his comments, which triggered a sharp jump in Eurozone bond yields and helped push the euro to its highest level against the dollar in more than a year.

Indeed, the ECB chief suggested that officials are comfortable with recent market movements. "Long term yields have risen but are still low by historic standards and...bank rates continue to be at very supportive levels," he said.

Only the recent strength of the euro was something that "received attention" from ECB officials, Mr. Draghi said. A stronger euro hurts the region's large exporters and could put downward pressure on growth and inflation.

"Draghi's overarching message was similar to his Sintra speech," said Peter Schaffrik, an economist with Royal Bank of Canada in London. "The euro area was finally experiencing a strong recovery and the Governing Council needed to be patient."

The ECB chief offered little in the way of new information to investors,

except to say that officials had agreed to take up the discussion on the bond-buying program "in the fall." That could include the ECB's next policy meeting on Sept. 7, he suggested, when the ECB will have fresh economic forecasts for the euro area.

"The ECB is not ready to commit to any timescale on tapering, or on its announcement," said Greg Fuzesi, an analyst with JPMorgan in London. "Clearly, the ECB needs more time to discuss the outlook."

Michael Steen, a spokesman for Mr. Draghi, reinforced the possibility of a September policy move by tweeting a link to a definition of "meteorological autumn," which begins on Sept. 1. The astronomical season begins only on Sept. 22.

The ECB's decision Thursday is likely to aggravate officials in Germany, Europe's largest economy, who are growing restless at the flow of easy money from Frankfurt. They worry that years of ultralow interest rates have subsidized southern European governments and hurt German savers and pensioners.

Clemens Fuest, president of German economic institute Ifo, urged the ECB to set out a plan for halting bond buying in January. "Without a clearly communicated program for phasing out expansionary monetary policy, pressure on the ECB to keep up the flood of liquidity will only grow," Mr. Fuest said.

Europe's Most Fragile Bonds Power Through ECB Taper Talk

Mike Bird

Even as Europe prepares to tighten the monetary taps, investors appear unfazed about the prospects for its most fragile economies.

The bonds of the weakest economies have risen in value relative to ultrasafe Germany, despite expectations that the European Central Bank will reduce its stimulus—which has benefited these economies the most.

That speaks to the cautious path the ECB is treading in communicating the end of monetary policy that has shaped markets, and the more positive outlook for the region's economy and politics, investors say.

On Thursday, the ECB left its stimulus measures unchanged but signaled it would discuss how to proceed with interest rates and bond buying—part of its bid to stimulate the regional economy—in the fall.

Bond yields in nations including Spain, Portugal and Italy have dropped dramatically since the summer of 2014, when ECB President Mario Draghi first hinted that the bank would kick off a quantitative-easing program. As the eurozone's economy strengthened, investors began eyeing an end to the unprecedented stimulus.

At the start of 2017, less than a fifth of investors surveyed by Citi Research believed that peripheral European spreads would end the year lower. Yields move in the opposite direction to process prices. Nearly half believed they would end the year sharply or moderately

higher.

But since December, when the ECB said it would reduce bond purchases by €20 billion (\$23 billion) a month, Spanish, Portuguese, Irish and Greek bond yields have declined in comparison with German yields.

The spread between German yields and those on other bonds is commonly used as a measure of the risk that investors attach to holding other debt.

"We don't think we're going to see a car crash, a European government bond market tantrum," said Andrea Iannelli, fixed-income investment director at Fidelity International.

The sharpest fall in yields this year has been in Greece, where the spread against German bunds has dropped from more than 6 percentage points to around 4.5. The country, which once seemed on the verge of leaving the eurozone, received its latest bailout tranche from international creditors earlier this month, and is even considering returning to private markets by issuing its first bond in three years.

Investors have also returned to Irish and Spanish bonds, two countries where economic growth has outperformed and budget deficits have fallen sharply.

One reason for the lack of widening in spreads is the careful messaging of the ECB, said Gilles Pradere, a senior bond fund manager at RAM Active Investments.

"It's still a very dovish message that they're sending overall," said Mr.

Pradere. "They talk about patience, that they're not done yet."

On Thursday, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Greek bonds continued to rally, in a sign that investors are becoming increasingly relaxed about holding the debt of these countries, which they once sold heavily.

Mr. Pradere said the ECB doesn't want to repeat the mistake he believes the U.S. Federal Reserve made in 2013. That May, the Fed's announcement that it would begin reducing bond-buying sparked the so-called taper tantrum, when U.S. 10-year Treasury yields rose from 2% to 3% by early September.

Many analysts now expect the ECB to announce in September a reduction in the bond-buying program for a fixed period—for example, cutting monthly purchases to €40 billion for a particular number of months. The Fed trimmed its buying by a set amount every month until it was no longer accumulating bonds.

Investors' concerns over the periphery have been soothed by stronger growth in the eurozone, which has recently outstripped the U.S.

"The economy is definitely in a better place than it was last year—that helps sentiment and risk appetite," said Mr. Iannelli at Fidelity International.

Worries about regional political risk that capped investors' enthusiasm for Europe through much of this year have also waned. The anti-euro political candidates that had ridden high in French and Dutch opinion

polls failed to win their elections, while support for Germany's antiestablishment party have fallen.

Some analysts and investors still believe that debt markets in Europe's periphery are most exposed to tapering.

"We remain firmly biased toward peripheral spreads widening going forward," said Rabobank strategists in a recent research note. The Dutch bank said that as investors begin to price in tapering, financing costs will rise for these countries, which will feed into concern over their ability to eventually pay back debts.

Analysts say that Italian debt is most at risk from tapering. The country's government debt is equivalent to around 133% of gross domestic product, compared with 97% in France and 68% in Germany. The spread on Italy's 10-year bond is the only one among peripheral markets to not fall against Germany, though nor have they risen notably. The spread has been effectively unchanged compared with eight months ago.

Political risk in Italy hasn't faded. The country will go to the polls early next year, with the anti-euro populist 5 Star Movement regularly leading in national surveys.

"The Italian risks are just coming later, they've not been resolved," said Richard Barwell, senior economist at BNP Paribas.

Strong Euro Can't Wait as Mario Draghi Plays for Time

Richard Barley

Gradually does it. The European Central Bank is playing for time on extreme monetary policy. But markets now a decision on winding down its bond-purchase program can't be put off forever.

The main message from ECB President Mario Draghi Thursday was that nothing had been decided about the pace or duration of purchases, currently running at €60 billion a month until the end of 2017. He did say that discussions on the topic would take place in the fall—but also that policy makers had been unanimous in not setting a precise date for when to talk about potential changes. And he

underlined that the ECB has been able to find flexibility within the program when needed. That is aimed at watering down the idea that constraints on bond supply mean the program's withdrawal is inevitable.

The ECB would clearly like to avoid an over-reaction by financial markets—Mr. Draghi said an unwarranted tightening of conditions "was the last thing we may want."

But investors are currently hypersensitive to even slight changes in tone. Bund yields and the euro initially fell when the ECB's policy statement showed it retaining the option to do more asset purchases if needed—a potentially dovish signal. But they then rose

again as Mr. Draghi in his press conference was upbeat on growth, and didn't sound too worried about the rise in yields and the euro that has occurred in the past few weeks. Markets took that as a green light: In the end, the euro rose decisively above \$1.16, reaching its highest since January 2015.

It isn't clear, however, that the ECB's decision will be any easier in the fall than it might be now. While the growth picture in the eurozone is strong, Mr. Draghi was forced to acknowledge that inflation "is not where we want it to be." The latest reading showed headline inflation at 1.3% in June, and little sign of upward pressure on underlying measures. But Mr. Draghi reiterated that there was confidence that the

economic expansion would lift inflation toward the ECB's aim of "below, but close to" 2%.

The ECB's ambiguity about its intentions have helped keep market pressures contained in the short-term. While the euro and bond yields have moved, there's been little in the way of repercussions into other asset classes. If this is a taper tantrum, it's on a small scale so far.

The focus will now move swiftly to Mr. Draghi's appearance at the Federal Reserve's Jackson Hole conference at the end of August, where his speech will be scrutinized for any hints on how the ECB will execute its exit plans. Mark your diaries now.

For Right-Wing Italian Youth, a Mission to Disrupt Migration

Jason Horowitz

MILAN — As dawn broke over a quiet suburb, Lorenzo Fiato lugged a silver suitcase packed with windbreakers and anti-seasickness gum out of the bedroom he had decorated with stickers (“Enough Immigration”) and shelves filled with medieval knight toy soldiers.

At the front door, Mr. Fiato, 23, hugged his mother goodbye and set out to catch a flight to Sicily, where he planned to embark on the last leg of what has become Europe’s alt-right odyssey.

It began in May, when Mr. Fiato, a leader of the Italian branch of a European right-wing movement that calls itself identitarian, joined his allies in using an inflatable raft to momentarily delay a ship carrying Doctors Without Borders personnel that was chartered to rescue migrants at sea. The tactic appalled human rights organizations, which argued that the activists, mostly in their 20s, threatened the lives of desperate migrants making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea.

But it also attracted publicity, new members and, identitarians say, at least \$100,000 in private donations. That money went to Defend Europe, a project that included as its centerpiece the chartering of a 130-foot ship previously used off the Horn of Africa.

Mr. Fiato and his allies around Europe suspect aid ships of colluding with human traffickers and believe migration amounts to a Muslim invasion. They wanted to disrupt and monitor the operations of rescue vessels and make sure they did not cross into Libyan waters, cooperate with human traffickers or bring more migrants to Europe’s shores.

“I certainly wish them the best,” said Richard B. Spencer, a white nationalist in the United States who is a leader of the so-called alt-right, a far-right movement. “This sounds like a wonderful mission.”

Except that, as of now, Mr. Fiato’s ship still has not come in.

On Thursday morning, the boat was stuck in Egypt, where he said inspectors seemed to be looking for “any misplaced hair” to hold up its arrival. In Italy, members of Parliament have excoriated the mission, and others have wondered if the band of activists might not come under attack by armed smugglers. A Spanish aid group has accused them of being pirates.

“It’s a bad climate,” Mr. Fiato said with a sigh over a beer on Wednesday night in Milan.

A tense atmosphere hangs over much of Italy these days.

While Europe and its leaders are confounded by the waves of migrants in the warm southern months, no country is as exposed as Italy, with its southern islands, miles of coastline and proximity to the smuggling hub of Libya.

Migration has set off political upheaval across the continent, but it has especially dominated Italy’s attention. It has left the government scrambling for solutions, from furnishing Libya with patrol boats, to floating the possibilities of closing Italian ports to ships that do not fly Italian flags, to granting travel visas to migrants so they can go north.

As Italian politicians have physically scuffled over whether to extend citizenship to the children of immigrants born in Italy, the left-leaning government, keenly aware that the issue is fueling the conservative opposition, has grown exasperated by the reluctance across Europe to open up borders and ports and share the burden of a mass migration.

Much of the focus has recently fallen on the ships run by nongovernmental organizations, or N.G.O.s, which according to Italy’s interior minister, Marco Minniti, operate 34 percent of rescue missions in a sea where about 2,000 refugees have drowned this year.

More than 93,000 migrants, the majority sub-Saharan Africans, have been rescued and taken to Italian ports so far this year. There is a concern the arrivals could top 200,000 by year’s end.

Right-wing groups have particularly latched onto an Italian prosecutor in Sicily who, without providing any evidence, began investigating potential collusion between aid groups and human traffickers. This month, human rights groups lashed out after an aid group leaked a draft of a government proposal that would bar N.G.O. ships from entering Libyan territorial waters for rescues, and slow them down by banning them from transferring refugees to bigger vessels.

Mr. Fiato, like some of Italy’s leading right-wing politicians, argues that the aid ships become a magnet for more immigration, and that they end up benefiting smugglers and mobsters who exploit reception centers, all the while costing more lives by drawing more migrants into the water. The

United Nations immigration agency called this argument baseless.

In Milan on Wednesday, Mr. Fiato seemed eager to get out to sea. He sat in shorts and a blue shirt at Bar Magenta with his grade school friend and fellow identitarian Lara Montaperto. One of the city’s oldest bars and an institution, it has become a favorite place for Mr. Fiato’s group to plot how to preserve Europe’s identity.

At an outside table, surrounded by fashionable Milanese coming for their aperitifs and migrant workers selling cigarettes and roses, the two spoke against multiculturalism and forced integration as threats to traditional European cultures.

Ms. Montaperto, who recently started an identitarian women’s chapter (“We’re not home making tortellini”), argued that Europe’s overly welcoming posture resulted from excessive guilt over transgressions during colonialism and World War II. She said she was not alone in thinking there was a horrible paradox in Europe creating refugee centers, which she called “not totally different from concentration camps.”

They considered the alt-right a separate American phenomenon and a “big minestrone” in which a lot of different right-wing flavors were tossed in. But Mr. Fiato admired how a person highly familiar with the movement, Stephen K. Bannon, had become President Trump’s chief strategist.

In 2012, around the time Mr. Bannon took control of a favorite alt-right news outlet, Breitbart News, a friend alerted Mr. Fiato to a YouTube video called “Declaration of War” promoted by Generation Identity, a France-based right-wing group. Then 18, he had no strong political opinions, but the film’s themes struck a chord with his deep interest in European history and the “great mystery” about the “origins of European man.”

He soon started reading right-wing philosophers like Dominique Venner, Guillaume Faye and Gianfranco Miglio.

“We want to change something,” said Ms. Montaperto, who regretted missing the coming mission because of a long-planned trip to practice her Russian in Moscow. (“Lara’s crazy for Putin,” said Mr. Fiato, who recently gave her a gift of the works of Aleksandr Dugin, the ultranationalist Russian traditionalist and anti-liberal writer who is sometimes called Putin’s Rasputin.)

That opportunity to do something finally came, Mr. Fiato said, in May. Modeling themselves after Greenpeace, which works to impede whaling boats, he and a small crew rented a rubber raft with a 40-horsepower engine and a banner reading “No Way.”

For about three hours he said he waited, “cold, depressed and feeling like I was going to vomit,” until the aid ship set out to sea. Mr. Fiato and his friends sprang to action and momentarily blocked it.

“It was like David versus Goliath,” he said triumphantly.

Critics of the identitarians across Italy’s political spectrum have questioned the competence of the right-wing movement beyond its ability to briefly bother an aid ship or publish sleek YouTube videos of nonwhite people looting and laying waste to cities. (Mr. Fiato, for example, missed his flight on Thursday. “I’ll be in Sicily tomorrow,” he insisted Thursday evening.)

Human rights groups and some Italian officials have questioned the morality, and legality, of their tactics. So has Ms. Montaperto’s father, a retired Italian Navy official, who has argued with her about the group’s potentially breaking maritime law.

The identitarians bristle at critics who say they are endangering the lives of desperate migrants by slowing rescue ships.

“There are life vests so we can help,” said Mr. Fiato, noting that maritime law required them to help those in need.

“We are not murderers,” Ms. Montaperto said.

What they are, for sure, is the immigration story of the moment. As Mr. Fiato waits for the ship to arrive in Catania from Egypt, he said he had to deal with a horde of journalists, some of whom had arrived in Sicily before he even boarded a flight. Every day, he said, his phone rings with reporters — from the major American networks, Vice News, the BBC and Vanity Fair — many asking to accompany them out to sea.

“I can’t take it anymore,” he said.

Ms. Montaperto understood her friend’s frustration but offered him a comforting thought.

“We’ve found the media to be useful,” she said. “It gives us visibility.”

van der Staaij : In the Netherlands, the Doctor Will Kill You Now

Kees van der Staaij

In 2002 the Netherlands became the first country to legalize euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide for those suffering deadly diseases or in the last stages of life. Not long after the legislation was enacted, eligibility was expanded to include those experiencing psychological suffering or dementia. Today pressure is mounting for the Dutch government to legalize a "euthanasia pill" for those who are not ill, but simply consider their lives to be "full."

Proponents of assisted suicide continue to claim that safeguards already built into Dutch law are sufficient to reduce the risk of abuse. They point out that medical professionals are required to assess whether a person's suffering is indeed unbearable and hopeless.

These safeguards do exist. In practice, however, they are hard to enforce. A poignant illustration was recently aired on Dutch television. An older woman stricken with semantic dementia had lost her ability to use words to convey meaning. "Upsy-daisy, let's go," she said. Both her

husband and her physician at the end-of-life clinic interpreted her words to mean, "I want to die." A review committee judged her euthanasia was in accordance both with the law and her earlier written instructions, an outcome very few would have imagined possible as recently as 10 years ago.

Such episodes have many Dutch people worried about the erosion of protections for the socially vulnerable and medically fragile. A broad and heated public debate recently flared about whether doctors may administer fatal drugs to those with severe dementia based on a previously signed "advance directive." In several controversial cases, assisted suicide was not directly discussed with patients who were incapable of reaffirming earlier written death wishes. In one case, a doctor slipped a dementia patient a sleeping pill in some apple sauce so that he could be easily taken home and given a deadly injection.

Hundreds of Dutch physicians signed a declaration outlining their moral objection to these increasingly common practices. Nonetheless, the Dutch government stands by its claim that the law permits doctors to

end such patients' lives. Meanwhile, the Dutch Right to Die Society, a national euthanasia lobby, keeps pressing to take further steps, arguing that individuals should have the option to "step out of life."

But is this argument really convincing? Those seeking death because their lives are "full" are often haunted by loneliness and despair. Some elderly people fear bothering their children with their social and medical needs. They don't want to be perceived as burdensome.

Legalizing the euthanasia pill could put even more pressure on the vulnerable, disabled and elderly. More than 60% of geriatric-care specialists already say they have felt pressure from patients' family members to euthanize elderly relatives. Will the day come when society considers it entirely normal—even "natural"—for people who grow old or become sick simply to pop the pill and disappear? If so, those who desire to continue living in spite of society's expectations will have some serious explaining to do.

All of this clearly shows the slippery slope of the euthanasia path. Contrary to the emphatic advice of a

special advisory committee chaired by a prominent member of a liberal-democratic party, the outgoing Dutch government wishes to expand and extend the euthanasia law to those who consider their lives to be full. The pressing question is where the slope ends and the abyss begins. Will those with intellectual disabilities or physical defects also be "empowered" to step out of life? Will those battling thoughts of suicide be encouraged to opt for a "dignified death" in place of excellent psychiatric care?

The government's most fundamental task is to protect its citizens. The Dutch government, to its credit, often speaks out when fundamental human rights are under threat around the world. Now that the fundamental right to life is under threat in the Netherlands, it's time for others to speak out about the Dutch culture of euthanasia.

Mr. van der Staaij is a member of the Dutch Parliament.

EU Weighs Taking Action Against Poland

Emre Peker

BRUSSELS—The European Union is threatening to deploy its most severe punishment on a member state for the first time, highlighting what it sees as Poland's grave departure from the bloc's core tenets.

With Polish President Andrzej Duda poised to sign legislation into law that expands government control on the judiciary, Brussels may ask EU governments to formally warn Poland to reverse course, under provisions of Article 7 of the 2009 Lisbon Treaty that aim to protect the rule of law and other democratic values. If Warsaw persists, EU governments could even impose sanctions on Poland up to suspending its voting rights.

"It should come as no surprise to anyone that given the latest developments, we are coming very close to triggering Article 7," said Frans Timmermans, first vice

president of the European Commission, the EU's executive arm.

The provision for such action first entered EU treaties as the bloc considered expanding eastward after the Soviet Union's collapse, with an eye to safeguarding its democratic principles. It was meant to fill a gap that results from the wide scope Brussels allows national governments over designing their democratic order.

If the commission triggers Article 7, EU governments would have to muster the necessary four-fifths majority of states and the European Parliament's consent to warn Warsaw. Sanctions would be harder to introduce, requiring unanimity among the 27 members other than Poland. That is likely impossible given Hungary's support for Warsaw and its disagreement with Brussels over what a European democracy should look like.

In a sign of the challenges to taking drastic action against a member of the bloc, the European Parliament last year rejected a push to impose Article 7 measures against Hungary. Budapest has largely evaded the EU's wrath, with Prime Minister Viktor Orban consolidating his power on an anti-EU platform despite losing some infringement procedures for breaking the bloc's laws.

Poland's bills propelled the commission to start a dialogue with Warsaw in January 2016 to prevent a breach of EU rules and treaties. Failing to make headway, EU officials issued two recommendations in July and December of last year, advising Poland on how to align its changes with the bloc's criteria.

Warsaw dismissed the EU's overtures as political interference.

"These laws considerably increase the systemic threat in Poland to the

rule of law," Mr. Timmermans said Wednesday. "They would abolish any remaining judiciary independence and put the judiciary under full political control of the government."

The EU's executive body will adopt a third set of recommendations for Poland next week, he said. He added that the commission could also launch procedures that may result in legal enforcement and fines.

"The European Union is not just about money and procedures. It is first and foremost about values and high standards," European Council President Donald Tusk said Thursday. A former Polish prime minister, Mr. Tusk urged Warsaw to engage in a dialogue with Brussels, saying its new law on the judiciary "transport us, in the political sense, in time and in space: backwards and eastwards."

Poland Moves to Replace Supreme Court, Despite Protests

Drew Hinshaw

WARSAW—Poland's lower chamber of parliament approved a bill that would allow the government

to replace every judge on the Supreme Court, a move opposition politicians and European Union leaders warned undermines

democracy in the once-communist nation.

The bill, which allows the government to retire all 83 judges on

the country's highest courts within the next two weeks, passed Thursday only eight days after it was first introduced. By nightfall tens of thousands people gathered to

protest in the country's biggest cities.

Under the proposed law, only judges granted exemptions by President Andrzej Duda would stay on. The justice minister would then appoint acting judges whom he would be able to fire at any moment. That would give the ruling Law and Justice party the leeway to take control of the judiciary, which it says is stocked with former communists who don't represent the will of voters.

Poland's Senate, where Law and Justice holds an absolute majority, was expected to ratify the bill by Friday. Mr. Duda would then need to sign it to turn it into a law that would take immediate effect.

EU leaders have called the bill an alarming step backward for Poland's postcommunist democracy and a breach of EU legal standards, but have been powerless to intervene. That inability shows the bloc's waning sway over its members in what was once Europe's Soviet Bloc.

Poland, the largest of those countries, was once held up as a model reformer, exemplifying the benefits of adhering to the EU's liberal democratic vision for Europe. EU officials considered the fast-growing country a model for what countries like Turkey and Bosnia could gain by joining.

Now Poland is becoming instead an example of how little authority the EU can exercise even over its members. For months, Warsaw has repeatedly shunned proposals to speak on the issue of judicial independence with the European Commission, the EU's executive arm. In May, several governments pushed Poland to engage with the commission, to no avail. Last week, Polish foreign and interior ministers again shrugged off another EU request for more dialogue.

Next week, the EU will adopt a set of recommendations for Poland—the third such initiative—and debate potential disciplinary measures. Eventually, the EU could move to revoke Poland's voting rights in the bloc, which would be a considerable and unprecedented rebuke of a member state.

"Sooner or later you will have to take the necessary steps to enforce the rules," said Frans Timmermans, first vice president of the commission.

But actually punishing Poland for its Supreme Court law would be extremely difficult for the EU. In most cases, that would require unanimity from its members—including some, such as Hungary, that are also at odds with the EU over what a European democracy should look like.

"I think it's very difficult to enter into these guys' minds," said Marcin Matczak, a law professor at the public University of Warsaw, speaking of the Law and Justice party's leadership.

For Poland, the bill underlines the conservative, nationalist government's broad power to remake the largest EU country formerly in the Soviet Union's orbit.

Though the courts have been the central battlefield in that effort, the government has also increased its influence over media, passing a law last year that gives it the right to name the heads of the public TV and radio stations.

The ruling party and its state-media allies say their opponents are traitors and its leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, has accused the opposition of conspiring to kill his identical twin brother, who died in a 2010 plane crash in Russia. "You murdered him, you scumbags," he said to the opposition during the parliament ary debate on the new law.

Poland is in a "political crisis," said President Donald Tusk of the EU's European Council, a former Polish prime minister and leading figure for the opposition—which along with Russia's government says the plane crash was an accident.

"The situation, including at international level, is really serious," he said Thursday.

Poland's Supreme Court is nearly the only domestic check on Law and Justice's rule. The court holds the power to invalidate or validate election results. It can also block political parties from receiving state funding and functions as an appeals court for businesses and individuals who feel they aren't being treated fairly by the government's tax services, regulators or law enforcement.

Until now, high-court judges have generally been appointed and managed through a process that gives fellow judges considerable sway.

The ruling party says the judges have been unaccountable and slow to render judgments.

"We are fighting pathologies in the judiciary," Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski told reporters Wednesday. "People even call parliament to complain to us that their cases are pending for years."

Top business leaders have expressed unease over the law, saying they fear investors could be exposed to government interference in arbitration. One of the country's main investor lobbies, the Polish Business Roundtable, has asked Mr. Duda to veto the law.

Mr. Duda has said he would sign the bill as long as an amendment is passed to raise the number of votes needed for legislators to choose the committee members tasked with vetting future judges. The Senate is expected to do so.

Two years ago, Law and Justice won an absolute majority in the country's parliament, the first time any party had done so since the fall of communism. At the time, the party's euroskeptic views and populist style led some politicians and analysts to expect it would be isolated in Europe and unpopular at home.

But the party has faced only minimal resistance. Two weeks ago, it hosted U.S. President Donald Trump, who greeted thousands of supporters bused in from across the country. In opinion polls, Law and Justice continues to lead, and the opposition remains fractured.

A tribunal tasked with examining whether new laws are permissible under the constitution is now led by justices appointed by the ruling party. The U.S. State Department has repeatedly condemned Poland's moves against the judiciary, but that criticism has been overshadowed by the praise Mr. Trump expressed for Poland's leadership during his visit.

As the law passed, only a few hundred protesters gathered outside parliament. They stamped their feet on police barricades and chanted "shame!"

Later, protests against the new law grew to more than 10,000 people in Warsaw, many holding candles. Several thousand more gathered in Krakow and elsewhere.

"We are frustrated and upset: It's actually the end of democracy in Poland," said Karolina Kostowska, a graphic designer in Warsaw. "And there's nothing we can do. We're completely speechless."

—Emre Peker and Laurence Norman in Brussels contributed to this article.

INTERNATIONAL

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

Beyond Syria and Iraq, Faraway ISIS 'Provinces' Fight On

Yaroslav Trofimov

DUBAI—In the three years since it proclaimed a world-wide caliphate, Islamic State has become a global franchise—which means that the loss of its core in Syria and Iraq won't pacify the far-flung conflict zones where the group's affiliates operate.

Regional "provinces" of Islamic State have sprung up from West Africa to the Philippines after the group's self-appointed "caliph," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, seized the Iraqi city of Mosul in 2014 and demanded allegiance from Muslims world-wide.

Most of these "provinces" grew out of existing insurgent organizations, such as Nigeria's Boko Haram or Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Egypt's

Sinai Peninsula. These groups simply reflagged with Islamic State's new brand—then seen as uniquely appealing to recruits and donors because of Islamic State's seeming invincibility.

Other "provinces" were breakaways from relatively more moderate groups, such as Islamic State Khorasan, which absorbed the most violent elements of the Taliban in

Afghanistan and Pakistan. Some groups, like Boko Haram, controlled huge territory. Other Islamic State "provinces," such as the one in Russia's North Caucasus, consisted of scattered militants on the run.

In any case, the conflicts in which all these "provinces" thrived preceded Islamic State's 2014 proclamation. And even after the recent liberation of Mosul and the impending collapse

of Islamic State's second-largest stronghold of Raqqa, in Syria, these distant conflicts will persist, following their own individual dynamics.

"Operationally, the fall of Mosul changes nothing because every one of these groups is autonomous from Islamic State central," said Mathieu Guidere, a terrorism expert at the University of Toulouse. "The only impact is psychological—these groups will fear that something like what happened to Mosul will happen to them, and will draw their lessons."

In fact, just as Iraqi troops were mopping up the last pockets of resistance in Mosul, Islamic State's Asian affiliate halfway around the world attempted a dramatic takeover of Marawi, one of the largest Muslim cities on the southern Philippines island of Mindanao. The battle there still goes on.

"Islamic State is a very resilient organization, it's not one single group but a movement now," said Rohan Gunaratna, head of the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. "And because the world

has no real strategy to contain, isolate and eliminate Islamic State beyond Iraq and Syria, we will see a significant global expansion of this group."

Asia, home to many more Muslims than the Middle East, is a particular concern. "We should prepare for a Daesh pivot to Asia. Opportunities are limitless here because it is a very deep market," said Richard Javad Heydarian, a security analyst in the Philippines, using an Arabic acronym for Islamic State. "Places like Mindanao are a perfect haven: borders are extremely porous and it's easy to travel from Malaysia and Indonesia, while the depth of grievances of the Muslim minority in the southern region of the Philippines provides an ecosystem for extremism."

While Islamic State—routed from much of its territory in Syria and Iraq—no longer has the winning momentum that once made it so attractive to potential jihadists, the organization has left a permanent mark on the motley assortment of militant groups that joined its caliphate project.

"Daesh has already done its damage, transforming the local groups ideologically and operationally," said Muhammad Amir Rana, head of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, a think tank focused on counterterrorism and security. "They have become ideologically more radical and have turned to more brutal attacks."

One consequence of Islamic State's losses in the Middle East may be a rekindled debate within the organization's affiliates about just how indiscriminately brutal they should be. That issue has already split Boko Haram, currently known as Islamic State West Africa Province, with one faction treating anyone not actively aiding the group as apostates deserving death and another preaching more targeted violence against Christians and government officials.

In Pakistan, a recently formed group made up of disaffected Islamic State fighters, Ansar ul-Sharia Pakistan, has similarly rejected mass attacks targeting ordinary Muslims, focusing on assassinating police officers instead.

In trying to assess Islamic State's global future after Mosul, terrorism experts and counterterrorism officials look for clues in what happened to al Qaeda after the loss of its Afghan base in 2001 and the killing of Osama bin Laden 10 years later. While these events significantly weakened al Qaeda's core and reduced its ability to target the West, the group's regional affiliates have flourished nevertheless—and marched on to victories in places such as northern Mali, Somalia and Yemen.

Niger parliament member Lamido Moumouni Harouna, who represents a region on the border with Nigeria that is frequently attacked by Boko Haram, said that he doesn't expect his constituents to benefit from Islamic State's demise in Mosul and Raqqa. "The conflict here is a local conflict," he said. "And the way it will develop will depend on how the local environment develops."



Iraqi Forces Carry Out Revenge Killings Against ISIS Suspects

Jesse Chase-Lubitz

An execution site has been discovered in the Iraqi city of Mosul, Human Rights Watch says, citing it as the latest evidence of retribution carried out by government forces after the defeat of Islamic State extremists.

International observers found the execution site in western Mosul on Wednesday, Human Rights Watch reported. When international observers, trusted by Human Rights Watch, visited the site, which consists of an empty building taken by Iraqi forces in April, they found 17 male corpses in pools of blood. A senior

government official told the international observers that "he was comfortable with the execution of suspected ISIS-affiliates as long as there was no torture."

ISIS has killed thousands of people while fighting between Islamic State forces and Iraqi soldiers has demolished large parts of the city, in which almost a million people once lived. Yet as Iraqi forces celebrate their victory over the terrorist group, there are increasing reports of war crimes.

A video of Iraqi troops throwing an unarmed fighter from a high ledge was also released. These crimes are not solely against ISIS fighters however, and some accounts

include attacks against their families as well.

Human Rights Watch has found and documented at least 1,200 men and boys detained, and sometimes tortured and executed, under inhuman conditions by Iraqi forces. No Iraqi forces, some of whom are publicizing the murder and torture of suspected ISIS soldiers, have been charged.

ISIS hasn't even been defeated in full yet, but as Iraqi forces begin to take the upper hand, Sunni Muslims are now the target of the country's anger. Attacks against Sunni Muslims who once lived in ISIS-controlled areas have been underway since January, with

families reportedly being targeted in densely populated areas.

"If we're to keep...ISIS 2.0 from emerging, the Iraqi government is going to have to do something pretty significantly different," said U.S. Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of U.S.-led coalition fighting ISIS, according to the BBC. "They're going to have to reach out and reconcile with the Sunni population, and make them feel like their government in Baghdad represents them."



Ignatius : What the demise of the CIA's anti-Assad program means

What did the CIA's covert assistance program for Syrian rebels accomplish? Bizarrely, the biggest consequence may be that it helped trigger the Russian military intervention in 2015 that rescued President Bashar al-Assad — achieving the opposite of what the program intended.

Syria adds another chapter to the star-crossed history of CIA paramilitary action. These efforts begin with the worthy objective of giving presidents policy options short of all-out war. But they often end with an untidy mess, in which rebels feel they have been "seduced

and abandoned" by the promise of U.S. support that disappears when the political winds change.

One Syrian opposition leader highlighted for me the danger for his rebel comrades now: "The groups that decided to work with the U.S. already have a target on their back from the extremists, but now will not be able to defend themselves."

The best conversations on The Washington Post

The demise of the Syria program was disclosed by The Post this week, but it's been unraveling since President Trump took office. Trump

wanted to work more closely with Russia to stabilize Syria, and a program that targeted Russia's allies didn't fit. The White House's own Syria policy remains a hodgepodge of half-baked assumptions and conflicting goals, but that's a subject for another day.

The rise and fall of the Syria covert action program conveys some useful lessons about this most delicate weapon in the United States' arsenal. To summarize, the program was too late, too limited and too dependent on dubious partners, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. It was potent enough to threaten Assad and draw Russian

intervention, but not strong enough to prevail. Perhaps worst, the CIA-backed fighters were so divided politically, and so interwoven with extremist opposition groups, that the rebels could never offer a viable political future.

That's not to say that the CIA effort was bootless. Run from secret operations centers in Turkey and Jordan, the program pumped many hundreds of millions of dollars to many dozens of militia groups. One knowledgeable official estimates that the CIA-backed fighters may have killed or wounded 100,000 Syrian soldiers and their allies over the past four years. By the summer

of 2015, the rebels were at the gates of Latakia on the northern coast, threatening Assad's ancestral homeland and Russian bases there. Rebel fighters were also pushing toward Damascus.

CIA analysts began to speak that summer about a "catastrophic success" — in which the rebels would topple Assad without creating a strong, moderate government. In a June 2015 column, I quoted a U.S. intelligence official saying, "Based on current trend lines, it is time to start thinking about a post-Assad Syria." Russian President Vladimir Putin was warily observing the same trend, especially after an urgent visit to Moscow in July that year by Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Quds Force and Assad's regional patron.

Putin got the message: He intervened militarily in September 2015, decisively changing the balance of the Syrian war. What Trump did in ending the CIA program was arguably just recognizing that ground truth.

What could the United States have done to provide a different outcome? Here are some thoughts gathered from U.S. and Syrian officials who have followed the CIA program closely.

- CIA support could have started earlier, in 2012, when extremists weren't so powerful and there was still hope of building a moderate force. By 2013, when the program got rolling, the military opposition was dominated by jihadists and warlords.

- The United States could have given the rebels antiaircraft weapons, allowing them to protect rebel-held areas from Assad's brutal bombing. The rebels trained with such weapons but could never use them on the battlefield.

- While negotiating the nuclear deal with Iran, the United States didn't want to kill Iranians in Syria. And once Putin intervened, the United States avoided Russians. Those limits were prudent, but they neutered the U.S.-backed military operations.

- The United States didn't have a political strategy to match the CIA's covert campaign. "There was no 'there' there, in terms of a clearly articulated national security objective and an accompanying

strategy," said Fred Hof, a former State Department official who has followed the Syria story closely. The American effort unintentionally "created massive divisions and rivalries instead of being used as a tool to unite disparate factions," another former official said.

Contrast the sad demise of the CIA's anti-Assad program in western Syria with the rampaging campaign against the Islamic State in the east. What's the difference? In the east, motivated, well-organized Syrian fighters are backed by U.S. warriors on the ground and planes in the sky. In this game, halfway is not the place to be.

**The
Washington
Post**

Syrian rebels feel betrayed by U.S. decision to end CIA support: 'It will weaken America's influence.'

ISTANBUL — Syrian rebel commanders said Thursday that they were disappointed in the Trump administration's decision to end a covert CIA weapons and training program for opposition fighters, an initiative that began under President Barack Obama but fizzled out amid battlefield losses and concerns about extremism within rebel ranks.

"We definitely feel betrayed," said Gen. Tlass al-Salameh of Osoud al-Sharqiya, a group affiliated with the Free Syrian Army. Salameh and his deputies say that they have received CIA support to rout the Islamic State from areas of eastern Syria but that they have also fought battles against pro-government forces.

"It feels like we are being abandoned at a very difficult moment," Salameh said. "It feels like they only wanted to help when we were fighting [the Islamic State]. Now that we are also fighting the regime, the Americans want to withdraw."

Salameh and others, reached by phone Thursday, said they had only read about the

decision, which was first reported by The Washington Post, in reports translated by local news media. The commanders were unclear how the policy to end the program would be implemented or whether their fighters would be affected.

Others pointed to President Trump's warming relations with Russia, a staunch backer of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Both the U.S. and Russian governments have said the priority is to fight the Islamic State.

"The picture is not clear for us yet, but I think it is a very bad move," Col. Ahmed al-Hammadi, a Free Syrian Army commander in the Damascus countryside, said of the decision.

"It will give a boost to the Assad regime and strengthen the Iranians," he said, referring to Iran's substantial support for Assad. "And it will weaken America's influence in Syria and the region."

[Trump ends covert CIA program to arm anti-Assad rebels in Syria]

But it also put an official end to what analysts say had become an

ineffective and largely defunct program, blunted by Russia's military intervention to prop up the Syrian regime in 2015, which dealt a devastating blow to the rebels.

"The weapons and resources the CIA provided were very little when compared with what Russia and Iran have sent to the regime," Salameh said.

"It made a difference, but not a massive one," he said of the CIA support. "It's not like the U.S. is sending us planes or ground troops."

The Obama policy was, in fact, designed to provoke a battlefield stalemate — which the administration hoped would lead to a negotiated end to the conflict. It began in 2013, with training and weapons for rebels vetted for extremist ties.

This included groups such as northern Syria's Division 13 and the Yarmouk Army in the south, and they put Assad on the back foot.

But then Russia intervened with warplanes and battleships, and with

the United States focused on the Islamic State, the rebels have struggled ever since.

"The program played an important role in organizing and supporting the rebels," said Lt. Col. Ahmed al-Saud, who commands the Division 13 rebel group in Idlib province.

He said that "this won't affect our fight against the regime, the Islamic State or Nusra," which is the former name of Syria's al-Qaeda affiliate. But he also expressed disbelief that the United States would end its support.

"I don't think this is going to happen," he said. "America is a superpower. It won't just retreat like that."

Habib reported from Stockholm. Zakaria Zakaria in Istanbul contributed to this report.

**The
New York
Times**

Israeli Aid Gives an Unexpected 'Glimmer of Hope' for Syrians (UNE)

Isabel Kershner
GOLAN HEIGHTS — Quietly, over the last year, hundreds of sick Syrian children and their chaperones have been whisked across enemy lines at dawn for treatment at clinics in Israel, slipping back home after dark.

Truckloads of supplies have passed into Syrian villages through a gate in the sturdy security fence that Israel has constructed since Syria erupted

into civil war, including stacks of flour, generators, half a million liters of fuel, construction materials, tons of shoes, baby formula, antibiotics and even a few vehicles and mules.

This week, the Israeli military revealed the scope of the humanitarian aid project, which it calls Operation Good Neighbor and which began in June 2016 along the Israeli-Syrian boundary on the Golan Heights.

The aid project depends on an extraordinary level of cooperation between old foes on both sides of the decades-old armistice lines separating the Syrians and Israelis. Military officials say they coordinate directly with Syrian doctors and village leaders to gauge needs.

The humanitarian effort is likely to burnish the reputation of the Israeli military, which is usually viewed as an occupying force and formidable war machine. It also yields

immediate security benefits by giving Syrian border villages — dominated by rebel forces fighting the government of President Bashar al-Assad — an interest in keeping out more radical anti-Israeli militias, and represents what officials say is a longer-term investment in stabilizing the area.

"The aid creates a positive awareness of Israel on the Syrian side," said Col. Barak Hiram, the commanding officer of Israel's 474

Golan Brigade, adding that it could lay the "first seeds" of some form of future agreement.

Most of the supplies are donated by Israeli and foreign nongovernmental organizations, while the Israeli government has footed the bill for medical treatment. According to the Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees, a New York-based network of organizations involved in the aid effort, Israel has also become an efficient, if unlikely, staging area for Syrian aid groups operating abroad that, facilitated by the Israeli military, are now shipping goods into Syria through Israeli ports.

The extent of the project became known days after the United States and Russia announced a cease-fire agreement for southern Syria, territory that includes the areas covered by Operation Good Neighbor, and after President Trump's cancellation of the clandestine and failing American program to provide arms and supplies to Syrian rebel groups.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking to Israeli reporters during a trip to Europe this week, said he was utterly opposed to the cease-fire deal because of concerns that it would allow Shiite militias backed by Israel's archenemy, Iran, to dig in close to its borders.

"Netanyahu is upset because the Jordanians were told that the Shiite militias would be kept 40 kilometers from their border," said Ehud Yaari, an Israeli analyst and fellow of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Israel did not get the same promise. We were left out."

But discussions about the cease-fire are continuing, Mr. Yaari said, and the Israeli

protests seemed aimed at trying to shape the outcome.

Israel says it maintains a policy of nonintervention in Syria's civil war, which began in 2011. But it has frequently bombed convoys and stores of weapons destined for Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Lebanese militia fighting in Syria on behalf of Mr. Assad. On other occasions, it has retaliated against Syrian government positions for the spillover of errant fire into the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

According to Israeli military officials, extremist groups associated with the Islamic State control about 20 percent of the territory along the Syrian side of the Golan boundary, concentrated in the south. A mélange of other Sunni rebel groups, including affiliates of Al Qaeda, control an additional 65 percent, while the Syrian Army, Shiite allies and Druze loyalists control about 15 percent in the north.

Israeli analysts say it can be assumed that cash, ammunition and intelligence assets also pass through the fence on the Golan Heights, the strategic plateau that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 war. A recent Wall Street Journal article quoted local Syrian rebels saying that they regularly received cash for salaries and weapons as part of the Israeli effort to push hostile forces from the border villages. Israel has not explicitly denied the report, and the military would not comment.

But Israeli military officials insist that Operation Good Neighbor deals purely with humanitarian aid and that they would not jeopardize the emerging climate of cooperation or

taint it by mixing in weapons transfers and intelligence gathering.

Since Israel and Syria are technically in a state of war and have no diplomatic relations, Israel has not taken in masses of Syrian refugees as other countries have done. Even a government proposal to bring in 100 orphaned Syrian children was dropped.

Still, many Israelis have expressed distress over standing by as the humanitarian disaster has unfolded in Syria, which is what motivated the military to undertake the operation, officials said.

Syrians wounded in the fighting first arrived at the Israeli border fence early in 2013, desperate for help.

"We faced a dilemma," said Dr. Noam Fink, the chief medical officer of the Israeli military's northern command. "The decision was made by our commanders and our government to allow them to enter the country and to give them full medical treatment."

Since then, with medical facilities in war-ravaged towns and villages barely functioning, Israel has treated about 4,000 war-wounded or sick Syrians.

Israel says it is now getting aid to an area inhabited by about 200,000 Syrians, including around 400 displaced families living in tent encampments along the international boundary, and is helping equip new clinics in the area.

"So far the strategy is working," said Amos Harel, the military affairs analyst for the newspaper Haaretz, noting the relative quiet along the Israeli-Syrian cease-fire line. "It is an

intelligent policy. It is not only altruistic."

Georgette Bennett, who founded the Multifaith Alliance in 2013, said her network had the ability to reach deeper on the Syrian side, covering an area of 1.5 million Syrians. The cooperation between Israelis and Syrians is "a great glimmer of hope coming out of this tragedy," said Ms. Bennett, a Hungarian-born former refugee and the daughter of Holocaust survivors.

The alliance's director of humanitarian relief and regional relations, Shadi Martini, is a Syrian who said he managed a hospital in Aleppo, a city that has been an epicenter of the war, before fleeing the country in 2012. When he first heard about the Israelis' aid, he said: "It was a very big shock to me. Syrians were brought up to fear Israelis as the devil who wants to kill us and take our land."

Speaking by telephone from Michigan, where he now lives, Mr. Martini said he had since visited Israel five times to push for, and coordinate, the effort with the Israeli military. "It has struck a chord with a lot of Syrians," he said. "This is supposed to be our enemy."

While some Syrians still have reservations about receiving aid from Israel, he added: "It is not the monster they told us it was. People have started looking at it differently."

Correction: July 20, 2017

An earlier version of this article mischaracterized Georgette Bennett, who founded the Multifaith Alliance. She is the daughter of Holocaust survivors, not a Holocaust survivor herself.

**The
New York
Times**

When Syria Came to Fresno: Refugees Test Limits of Outstretched Hand

Miriam Jordan

FRESNO, Calif. — The police responded to a call about a loud party on East San Ramon Avenue, but it wasn't just any party: A sheep was reportedly being slaughtered in a backyard.

"Muslim refugees were unaware that slaughtering sheep is not allowed in the city," the police wrote afterward in their report, which also stated that those involved "were advised to clean up the blood and mess" and warned that in the future "they could be cited."

The animal, actually a goat, was killed by a Syrian refugee who later skinned, roasted and shared it with his Syrian neighbors in the

apartment complex where they all live.

Refugees are typically placed in towns and cities such as Buffalo, N.Y.; Boise, Idaho; and Fayetteville, Ark., where resettlement agencies ease their transition to life in a new country. But they are free to move about the country like anybody else, and they sometimes land in places like Fresno that are not exactly prepared for their arrival.

Since late 2016, more than 200 Syrian refugees originally settled elsewhere in the United States have made a fresh start in Fresno, the largest city in California's agricultural belt. They have been drawn there mainly by cheap housing.

But behind the low rent is a city struggling with high poverty and unemployment, making it more difficult for the refugees to secure jobs. And Fresno has no federally funded agency to help them find work, learn basics like bus routes and understand United States culture and rules, like with the practice of animal slaughter.

Syrian children turned up unexpectedly at Ahwahnee Middle School, needing vaccinations, trauma counseling, English-language instruction and academic support as a result of interrupted schooling. "It was a shock at first," said Jose Guzman, the principal. "We never had to teach students who speak Arabic."

He hired an Arabic-speaking teaching assistant, while some of his staff communicated with students with the aid of Google Translate.

Without notice, there also was no time to build political and community support for the new arrivals. So while they elicited gestures of kindness from some, they aroused suspicion from others. Some mosques, churches and a synagogue came to the refugees' aid. A local car broker donated a 1999 Toyota Avalon to one of the Syrians, Abdulrazzaq Alghraibi, a father of four who now works on the de-winging line at a poultry plant.

But Muslim refugees represent a polarizing issue. Although all refugees undergo extensive

screening before being approved for resettlement, some Fresnoans have echoed President Trump's concerns that the vetting isn't good enough.

Among them is Trevor Carey, a conservative talk-show host on PowerTalk 96.7 FM.

"In my years in the valley, I've met some great Syrian people," he said on the air during a segment about Muslim refugees. "Come on, our safety is at stake here. This area they are coming from is embedded with ISIS."

That sentiment was shared by Michael Martin, a 28-year-old who works in air-conditioning maintenance. He praised Fresno's diversity, citing its Armenian and Hmong communities. As for the Syrians, "I think it's a little bit scary because of what is going on" in their home country, he said over lunch at the Chicken Pie Shop, a popular local diner.

His father, Joe, was not against their presence. "Anything is fine as long as they act like us," he said.

There is a tradition of refugees continuing to migrate once they reach the United States. In the 1990s, about a dozen evangelical Christian families from the former Soviet Union who originally settled in Oregon and Washington followed a leader to Delta Junction, Alaska, and established a community there.

Many Hmong, an ethnic group from Laos that helped the United States during the Vietnam War, left their first American homes and converged on the Twin Cities, in Minnesota, where leaders like Leng "Vang" Wong, a former interpreter for the C.I.A., had settled.

At the moment, no refugees can enter the United States for four months unless they already have a close relative here, according to a Supreme Court order that allowed part of Mr. Trump's travel ban to proceed. But in the past two years, more than 20,000 Syrians have been admitted after fleeing civil war and the Islamic State's ruthless grip

on parts of the country.

As the Syrian flow intensified, Turlock, a town about 80 miles north of Fresno that has been receiving Christian minorities from Iraq and Iran for more than a decade, was identified as a site with "decent housing, jobs and a welcoming mayor," said Karen Ferguson, executive director of the International Rescue Committee of Northern California.

About 250 Syrians, overwhelmingly Muslim, were sent there. But the agency could not immediately house all of them, stranding some families in hotels for several weeks or longer.

Last fall, a few members of Fresno's 15,000-strong Muslim community — Pakistanis, Yemenis, Iranians and Palestinians, among others — offered to help. Soon, they were welcoming four Syrian families to apartments that they had found for them.

Word traveled fast to Turlock and elsewhere that rent in Fresno was a relative bargain — about \$450 a month for a two-bedroom unit in some places — and that there were people ready to supply furniture, food, clothing and more.

"Helping one or two families, that's easy," said Reza Nekumanesh, director of the Islamic Cultural Center of Fresno. "But soon, one family after another was arriving — from San Diego, out of state."

"They didn't realize rent is low here for a reason," he said.

Abdullah Zakaria, who ran cafes in Syria, fled to Jordan with his family in 2013 after a bomb struck his house in Homs and burned his eldest child, Tasneem, now 7, whose back still bears scars. They could not find work in Turlock, so they moved to Fresno. Mr. Zakaria and his wife, Aida, are trying to start a business selling kibbeh, shawarmas and sfih as to Fresno State University students and others.

"Fresno is bigger city," Mr. Zakaria said. "I want to open restaurant."

In a blue-collar neighborhood once dubbed "Sin City," more than a dozen Syrian families with up to nine members apiece are crammed into two-bedroom units in two apartment blocks on East San Ramon Avenue, where the goat roast occurred in February.

Some have found jobs, including at a carwash and a poultry plant. Nasser Alobeid, who worked as a security guard in Syria, is still jobless, and he and his wife, Neveen Al Assad, get by with a \$1,100 monthly welfare check, food stamps and help from the local community.

"Nasser doesn't speak English," Ms. Al Assad, a mother of five, said in broken English while Syrian children poured into a concrete courtyard to play.

Having left a resettlement agency's fold, the refugees no longer had access to interpreters, employment training and English classes. Many couldn't afford the security deposit to rent an apartment.

Help came from across the religious spectrum. The Islamic Cultural Center began paying deposits and utility bills. Wesley United Methodist Church distributed vouchers for its thrift store. Jim Call, a member of the Mormon community, collected donations to buy dining sets and TVs. Congregants from Temple Beth Israel also stepped up.

Fresno's new Syrians also are relying on people like Nabih Dagher, whose Dunia International Market sells halal meat, pita bread and other Middle Eastern staples. On a recent afternoon, Mr. Dagher flipped through a notebook in which each page was filled with the name of a Syrian family and the sum owed him from each visit, \$56.50 to \$449.64.

"I give each family \$20, \$50 groceries free," said Mr. Dagher, a Syrian Christian who has been in the United States for 15 years. "After that, I said you have to pay."

In March, the Fresno Board of Supervisors approved a \$375,000 grant over four and a half years to Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries, or FIRM, a local nonprofit. The money is paying for four part-time Arabic speakers but doesn't cover the full cost of serving the newcomers, whose needs are "insane," said Zachary Darrah, FIRM's executive director.

Mr. Darrah, a Baptist pastor, has also made it his mission to sell Fresno to the Syrians. Last month he led a service in an upscale retirement community, where he noted that the Syrians arriving in Fresno are "moderate or secular Muslims."

"Everyone is our neighbor, even Muslims," he told the worshippers. "Our God said it doesn't matter."

Some nodded; others shook their heads. "As a Christian, I believe in what the Lord says" about welcoming strangers, said one worshiper, Doris Rahm. But she added, "I have concerns if they are not vetted properly."

At another gathering, Mr. Darrah said, "A guy told me he had a great idea, find some land far from Fresno and send the Syrians there because they're a danger to the community." Mr. Darrah said he then told the man that Fresno during World War II had an internment camp for Japanese-Americans, a blemish on its past.

But there have been no reports of anti-Muslim violence or vandalism. And Syrians keep arriving. Among them is Anas Hammad, a baker and father of two, who was originally settled in Michigan.

Mr. Alghraibi, the new owner of the old Toyota, has invited friends living in Tennessee who had been his neighbors in a refugee camp in Turkey.

"I've gotten calls from Indiana, Florida, Texas," said Mr. Darrah. "We can't stop families from coming here."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Germany to Take New Steps Over Turkey Arrest

Andrea Thomas

BERLIN—Germany said it would take new steps in response to Ankara's crackdown on human-rights activists, escalating a travel alert and reconsidering an investment program, as a feud that has tested relations between the traditional allies deepened.

Germany and Turkey have been at odds over a litany of issues, with

tensions mounting further after the arrest this month of a German activist in Turkey under controversial terror laws that give authorities wide leeway. Berlin says the accusations against him are unfounded.

Government officials were meeting Thursday to discuss possible actions. In addition to the escalated alert, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said the country must reassess a key program guaranteeing companies'

investments in Turkey and questioned plans to expand the decades-old customs union between the European Union and Turkey.

"We have to come to a realignment of our Turkey policy," Mr. Gabriel said. "We can't go on as before. We must be clearer than before so that those in charge in Ankara understand such a policy is not without consequences."

Germany is Turkey's leading trade partner and largest export market for Turkish products. There are more than 6,000 German companies active in almost every sector in Turkey and about 100,000 Turkish-German businesses operating in Turkey, according to Turkish government statistics. Germany exported €21.9 billion (\$25.2 billion) in goods to Turkey last year, and imports from Turkey reached €15.4 billion, according to German government statistics.

German companies expressed concern about the plans. Germany's DIHK chambers of commerce said it expects trade between the countries to decline by 10%.

"Investment will also continue to suffer from this," Germany's BGA export group said in a statement. "This is actually an escalation we couldn't have imagined and which is bitter for all involved."

Germans are one of the largest segments in Turkey's tourism industry, with approximately 5.5 million visitors coming to Turkey each year.

A spokesman for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan characterized the remarks as aimed at voters ahead of Germany's September general election. "Unfortunately, this has become fashionable in Germany," Ibrahim Kalin said.

Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that a serious

crisis of confidence is brewing with Germany, despite close and friendly ties between the nations.

The ministry said Germany has a double standard, repeating Turkey's long held grievance that Germany allegedly gives supporters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and supporters of U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Mr. Erdogan has accused of masterminding a botched coup against his rule last summer, a haven, despite Turkey's requests to extradite or arrest them. Both the U.S. and Turkey have designated the PKK as a terrorist group.

"While German authorities are preventing our ministers and lawmakers from meeting with our citizens in Germany, they expect German lawmakers close to the [PKK] terror organization can visit our sovereign military bases whenever they want to as their right," the statement said.

**The
New York
Times**

Turkey's Arrest of German Activist Heightens Nations' Tensions

Melissa Eddy

BERLIN — Germany told its citizens on Thursday to exercise caution when traveling to Turkey and warned that it might cut off export insurance guarantees and other forms of economic cooperation, the latest step in the deterioration of relations between the two powers.

In a blunt suggestion that Germany would use its economic might to avoid being bullied, its foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, cut short a vacation to denounce the arrests in Turkey of several human rights activists, including a German citizen, Peter Steudtner. "We are reorienting our policy toward Turkey," Mr. Gabriel told reporters.

Turkey's foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, called Mr. Gabriel's remarks "threats and blackmail" that were not "worthy of a serious country." He accused Germany of harboring terrorists by "providing shelter" to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., and to the followers of the cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Turkey has accused of plotting a failed coup attempt last July.

The harsh exchange was the latest step in the worsening of relations between two countries with deep economic and demographic ties. Even before the coup attempt in Turkey last year, the authoritarian tendencies of its president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had begun to disturb many German officials.

Last year, Mr. Erdogan unsuccessfully sought the prosecution of a German comedian who had lampooned him. And this

year, he accused Germany of "Nazi practices" after it blocked Mr. Erdogan's allies from campaigning among Turkish voters living in Germany to support a referendum to vastly expand the president's powers. (The referendum was narrowly approved in April.)

German officials have sought to maintain a calm, patient tone, even while expressing concerns over Mr. Erdogan's steady expansion of his powers and his firing of tens of thousands of people regarded as political opponents. Since the coup attempt, several hundred Turkish diplomats, soldiers and others have applied for political asylum in Germany.

Last month, Germany said it would withdraw its forces from a military base in southern Turkey after Mr. Erdogan's government refused to guarantee visits to forces there by German lawmakers, which lawmakers are required to do under the German Constitution.

The tensions came to a new head this week after the Turkish authorities decided to hold Mr. Steudtner under arrest. He was detained on July 5 with five others, including Amnesty International's Turkey director, in a raid on a hotel where they were attending a digital security workshop. The Turkish authorities have accused them of having links to terrorist groups.

"The case of Peter Steudtner shows that German citizens are no longer safe from arbitrary arrests," Mr. Gabriel said. German authorities said nine other German citizens,

Mr. Gabriel called on Turkey to enter what he called a "real dialogue" on the basis of European values.

"We continue to be interested in good relations with Turkey that are built on trust," he said. "We want Turkey to become a part of the West or remain part of it where it already is. But it takes two to tango."

Berlin and Ankara have traditionally close ties because Germany is home to the largest Turkish diaspora in the world and both countries are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

But Berlin has limited room to maneuver. Germany relies on a pact with Turkey that has drastically reduced the inflows of migrants from the Middle East since the summer of 2015, which caused a political crisis for the chancellor because Turkey is the main transit route to Europe.

Turkish police on July 5 arrested 10 Amnesty International activists, including German citizen Peter

including two journalists, Deniz Yucel and Mesale Tolu, were being held by Turkey.

Mr. Gabriel said the Germans had been accused without evidence. He cited their detentions as "examples of the absurd accusations of terror propaganda that obviously are only meant to serve to silence every critical voice in Turkey."

In a strongly worded statement that nonetheless fell short of an outright travel warning, the German Foreign Ministry urged Germans traveling to Turkey to exercise caution and register with the German Embassy in Ankara, or one of Germany's consulates in Turkey, "even for short trips."

The German government will consider "further measures" in the coming weeks, after discussing the future of financial aid for Ankara with its European Union partners, in the context of the long-stalled talks about Turkey's potentially joining the bloc, Mr. Gabriel said.

In Turkey, ministers lashed back, with Mr. Cavusoglu accusing Germany of maintaining an "unacceptable, one-sided attitude."

Hours after Mr. Gabriel made his statement, prosecutors in the western city of Celle said they had arrested a Turkish man on suspicion of belonging to a terrorist organization and working as a regional leader for the P.K.K. in Europe.

Roughly four million Germans vacationed on Turkish beaches last year, an important source of income

Steutdner, who had gathered in Turkey for what the organization called a routine workshop. Six of the activists have been jailed pending trial on charges of aiding a terror group.

A German official on Wednesday said Ankara had provided Germany with a list of prominent German companies it says support terrorism, including car maker Daimler AG and pharmaceutical company BASF SE.

A spokesman for BASF declined to comment. Daimler spokeswoman Ute Wüest von Vellberg said the company hadn't seen the list and declined to comment further.

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek rejected the claim. "Press reports that Turkey is investigating Daimler AG and BASF SE are completely false," he said on his official twitter account. "We welcome German investors."

for the country. Additionally, an estimated three million people living in Germany either hold Turkish citizenship or are descendants of Turkish migrants, many of whom were invited to work in factories in West Germany after World War II.

On Wednesday, the German weekly newspaper Die Zeit reported that Turkish authorities had handed Berlin a list of 68 German companies they accused of having links to Mr. Gulen, who lives in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania. The list included the chemicals giant BASF. Turkey has denied the report.

Mr. Gabriel said he could not advise firms to invest in a country where "even completely innocent companies are judged as being close to terrorists." He added: "I can't see how we as the German government can continue to guarantee corporate investments in Turkey if there is the threat of arbitrary expropriation for political reasons."

Germany was Turkey's top export destination in 2016, having bought \$14 billion worth of Turkish goods, according to the International Monetary Fund. It was also the second-biggest source of imports to Turkey, at \$21.5 billion, behind China, which exported \$25.4 billion worth of goods to Turkey.

Michael Werz, a specialist on Turkey and trans-Atlantic relations at the Center for American Progress, a Washington policy research firm, said he feared that relations had "reached a point of no return."

He said the travel warnings by Mr. Gabriel — who is generally viewed as favoring a softer stance toward

Turkey — could “hurt the battered tourism section even more.”



Rep. Zeldin: Iran deal is historically bad

Under this “deal,” up to \$150 billion in sanctions relief, as well as our leverage, was negotiated away without addressing Iran’s non-nuclear bad activities: overthrowing foreign governments, sponsoring terrorism, developing intercontinental ballistic missiles, unjustly imprisoning Americans, blowing up mock U.S. warships, pledging to wipe Israel (“the little Satan”) off the map, and chanting Death to America (“the great Satan”) on national holidays, just to name a few.

As far as Iran’s nuclear activities go, the Iranians can’t help themselves but to cheat.

Even if they don’t cheat, on top of the billions of dollars in sanctions relief that can be at least partially used for Iran’s dangerous, threatening activities, it has a blueprint for how to obtain a nuclear weapon in just over a decade. It’s the best of both worlds, and Iran is the clear all-around winner.

As far as compliance, the United States agreed not to have any American weapons inspector participate in any inspections; the Iranians have said before, during and after this agreement was entered into that no one will inspect their military sites; and the secret side deals between the IAEA and Iran outlining the verification regime

are still a mystery to the United States and have not been read by our nation’s leadership, which included former secretary of State John Kerry.

The alternative was a better deal or no deal at all. A better deal is no myth and was absolutely achievable without question. No deal was a better option than what we agreed to.

Iranian leadership was desperate for this deal to prop up the current regime, which is the wrong regime. But for some very odd reason, the United States continued to negotiate from weaker and weaker positions.

With too much at stake, this historically bad deal should not have been entered into in the first place and not be allowed to continue as is.

Rep. Lee Zeldin, R-N.Y., serves on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.



ISIS’ Core Helps Fund Militants in Philippines, Report Says

Jon Emont and Felipe Villamor

JAKARTA, Indonesia — The central command of the Islamic State in Syria has funneled tens of thousands of dollars to militants in the Philippines over the last year, most likely aiding their spectacular seizure of the southern Philippine city of Marawi, a report released Friday said.

The report from the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, a research institute based in Jakarta, describes how Mahmud Ahmad, a high-level Islamic State figure from Malaysia, who is based near Marawi, worked through the group’s chain of command to Syria to get money and international recruits to help local militants seize territory in the Philippines for the caliphate.

The report provides insight into a question that has bewildered policy makers since militants affiliated with the Islamic State swept into Marawi two months ago: How were they able to seize an important city in the southern Philippines, and what if any role did the Islamic State’s central command play in the seizure?

The city has remained largely under the control of the militants for nearly two months despite a government military campaign to retake it with ground forces and aerial bombardments.

Underscoring the severity of the situation, President Rodrigo Duterte said that of the estimated 600 militants in Marawi, about 220 are still believed to be fighting, a sharply higher estimate than the military’s

recent assertions that only around 60 were left there.

Mr. Duterte gave the figure this week in urging the Philippine Congress to extend martial law through the end of the year, and he noted that the insurgents were still in control of central Marawi and that their leadership remained intact.

After the militants seized Marawi in late May, they raised the Islamic State flag and declared the establishment of a new province of the organization, also known as ISIS or ISIL. Some senior politicians in the Philippines have dismissed the Maute Group, the major Islamist militant group behind the seizure of Marawi, as “ISIS wannabes,” characterizing it as a drug mafia with little in common with the ideologically driven Islamic State fighters.

But the institute’s report suggests that Islamic State commanders in Syria took the Maute Group’s strategic ambitions seriously.

The Islamic State’s ability to financially support its Philippine offshoots appears limited mainly to periodic Western Union transfers of tens of thousands of dollars, the report found, suggesting that direct support from Syria was a relatively minor factor in the Maute Group’s ability to seize Marawi.

The report argues that local recruiting and fund-raising among pious Muslims who resented the Philippines’ central government have probably played a more significant role in the insurgents’ successes.

The institute’s research is based on field visits this year to Mindanao, the island where Marawi sits, interviews with people close to Indonesian militants in the Philippines, and militants’ messages obtained from Telegram, the highly encrypted messaging service used by the Islamic State. Last week the Indonesian government announced it would ban some features of Telegram, because of how useful the app has been for terrorists.

Intercepted chats show that the Islamic State has a sophisticated command structure in Southeast Asia, allowing for complex coordination among its supporters across the region.

In one instance from last year, two Indonesian militants were connected via a Malaysian contact to another militant based in Thailand who helped them support a prison break in that country. The goal was to free a group of Uighurs, members of a Muslim ethnic group from western China, who had been detained there.

Though the prison break was initially successful, the Uighurs were eventually recaptured by the Thai police. Still, the report notes, “The story illustrates how well-connected the ISIS network has become, with an Indonesian connecting as easily with contacts in Turkey, the Philippines and Thailand as with his own friends in prison.”

International coordination of Islamic State leaders with Southeast Asian militants may amplify the terrorism threat to neighboring Indonesia, the report said.

The last 18 months have produced a steady trickle of low-casualty Islamic State-inspired terrorist attacks in Indonesia, but until now the actions have tended to be poorly planned and executed. For example, two Indonesian suicide bombers struck in the Kampung Melayu neighborhood in East Jakarta in May, but only three victims were killed.

A major concern for the Indonesian government is that some of the 20-odd Indonesian fighters who have joined up with Islamic State groups in Mindanao will acquire the equipment and expertise to commit serious terrorist attacks at home.

The report calls for Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines to improve their security services’ coordination and intelligence sharing, so that the names of key suspects are passed along.

Still, the first step is ousting the Islamic State from Marawi.

When Marawi was seized in late May, Mr. Duterte pledged that the militants would be defeated quickly. But on Thursday he said that during recent operations to clear the city, the military recovered 75 million pesos, or \$15 million, from one of the militants’ homes, a clear indication that they stocked up arms and money for the fight.

At least four villages, which make up the city’s commercial district and are home to roughly 800 structures, are in rebel hands, he added.

He also said the militants’ leadership “largely remains intact,” contrary to earlier military reports. Clashes

continued into Friday as the military struggled to make advances.

The self-styled leader of Islamic State in the Philippines, Isnilon Hapilon, who leads the Abu Sayyaf

insurgent group, is still at large, as are the brothers who lead the Maute group.

The New York Times Gerson : Trump's breathtaking surrender to Russia

In the normal course of events, the revelation of attempted collusion with Russia to determine the outcome of a presidential election might cause an administration to overcorrect in the other direction. A president might find ways to confront the range of Russian aggression, including cyber-aggression, if only to avoid the impression of being bought and sold by a strategic rival.

But once again, President Trump — after extended personal contact with Vladimir Putin and the complete surrender to Russian interests in Syria — acts precisely as though he has been bought and sold by a strategic rival. The ignoble cutoff of aid to American proxies means that “Putin won in Syria,” as an administration official was quoted by The Post. Concessions without reciprocation, made against the better judgment of foreign policy advisers, smack more of payoff than outreach. If this is what Trump's version of “winning” looks like, what might further victory entail? The re-creation of the Warsaw Pact? The reversion of Alaska to Russian control?

There is nothing normal about an American president's subservience to Russia's interests and worldview. It is not the result of some bold, secret, Nixonian foreign policy stratagem — the most laughable possible explanation. Does it come from Trump's bad case of authoritarianism envy? A fundamental sympathy with

European right-wing, anti-democratic populism? An exposure to pressure from his checkered financial history? There are no benign explanations, and the worst ones seem the most plausible.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

There is no way to venture where this approach ends up, except that it involves greater Russian influence and intimidation in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East (where Iran, the Syrian regime and Hezbollah are winners as well). But we can already count some of the costs.

Trump is alienating Republicans from their own heroic foreign policy tradition. The conduct of the Cold War was steadied and steered by Ronald Reagan, who engaged with Soviet leaders but was an enemy of communism and a foe of Soviet aggression. In fact, he successfully engaged Soviet leaders because he was an enemy of communism and a foe of Soviet aggression. There is no single or simple explanation for the end of the Cold War, but Republicans have generally held that the United States' strategic determination played a central role.

President Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 7 had an undisclosed meeting that followed a first conversation during the Group of 20 summit in Hamburg.

President Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 7 had an undisclosed meeting that followed a first conversation during the G-20 summit in Hamburg. (Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

Now Trump pursues a policy of preemptive concession with a Russia that is literally on the march in places such as Georgia and the Ukraine. Trump is the Henry Wallace of the populist right (which more than occasionally finds common cause with the populist left). “We should recognize,” Wallace argued following World War II, “that we have no more business in the political affairs of Eastern Europe than Russia has in the political affairs of Latin America, Western Europe and the United States.” The difference now is that Russia has made the political affairs of the United States very much its business. With almost no serious American response. Russian interference in America's self-defining civic ritual has been almost costless.

And this points to the main cost of Trump's Russophilia. It is effective permission for a broad, unconventional Russian offensive, designed to undo the “color revolutions” and restore lost glory at the expense of neighbors and American interests. Russia has employed a sophisticated mix of conventional operations and cyber-operations to annex territory and

destabilize governments. It has systematically encouraged far-right, nationalist leaders and supported pro-Russian, anti-democratic parties across Europe. It is trying to delegitimize democratic processes on the theory that turbulence in the West is good for a rising East. This is a strategy that allows Russia to punch above its strategic weight, especially since Trump has chosen to abdicate the United States' natural role in opposition.

How deep is this transformation of America's global self-conception? I suspect (and social science seems to indicate) that most foreign policy views of the public are shallowly held and that leaders play a disproportionate role in legitimizing or delegitimizing opinions on things such as trade, foreign aid and Russia. So 49 percent of Republicans now identify Russia as an ally or friend, taking their political signal from the head of their party. But this cognitive conformity would probably work in the other direction with a more traditional Republican leader.

The problem is the damage to U.S. interests done in the meantime. It now seems that the Russians — by meddling in a presidential election and by playing down such aggression — have achieved an intelligence coup beyond the dreams of the Soviet era. The result is an America strategically and morally disarmed.

The Washington Post McDonough : Obama stood up to Russian interference. Now Trump must follow through.

By Denis McDonough

Denis McDonough was White House chief of staff from 2013 to 2017.

I have watched with concern the tone, substance and trajectory of the national debate about Russian efforts to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. I write today to set the record straight about the events of last fall and, more important, to ensure that we as a nation do not lose sight of what happened — and what we must do to preserve our democracy.

On Oct. 7, as part of a painstaking intelligence, homeland security and diplomatic effort to safeguard the integrity of our election infrastructure

and the sanctity of each American's vote, the homeland security secretary and director of national intelligence released an unprecedented joint statement about an unprecedented development. In that statement, these two senior officials stated unequivocally that the Russian government, had directed the theft of emails from U.S. “persons and institutions. . . . These thefts and disclosures are intended to interfere with the U.S. election process. . . . [and] only Russia's senior-most officials could have authorized these activities.”

The events that led to that public statement began last summer, as national security professionals in the government grew increasingly

concerned about Russian intentions to interfere in our election. President Barack Obama directed his staff to brief appropriate members of Congress, prepare possible responses, assess the vulnerabilities of the electoral infrastructure, and help state and local election authorities secure their networks.

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Congressional briefings began in early August and finished once Congress returned to Washington

after the summer recess. At that point, the president invited the majority and minority leaders of the House and Senate to the White House, ostensibly to discuss the budget and his trip to Asia. The real purpose of this meeting was to discuss the alarming news about Russian ambitions to interfere with the election and ask the four leaders to draft a statement of concern. This joint, bipartisan statement was thought by the White House to be particularly important since state and local authorities had been reluctant to accept the assistance being offered by the Department of Homeland Security, and we believed a bipartisan statement would help persuade them to put aside their concerns and work with the federal

government to protect our election infrastructure.

This bipartisan outreach was harder and more time-consuming than it needed to be, but it was ultimately successful, with a statement released by the four congressional leaders on Sept. 29. By Election Day, 33 states and 36 counties and cities had used Homeland Security tools to scan or strengthen their systems.

During this period we took extraordinary steps to avoid letting our legitimate concern about Russian interference be characterized as partisan. For instance, I asked two Democrats to withhold a public statement on the matter mainly to avoid politicizing the issue, and they initially honored that request. We did this not just

because it was the right thing to do in the heat of a campaign, but also because we were extremely concerned that the perception of partisan motives would undermine Americans' confidence in the vote and make state authorities more reluctant to cooperate.

While these efforts were underway, we were simultaneously conducting urgent diplomatic efforts to make sure that the Russians understood that we knew what they were up to, that it would not be allowed to succeed and that it needed to stop. On Sept. 5, Obama delivered this message to President Vladimir Putin with stark clarity about the consequences if the Russians continued their efforts. Later that month, a similarly unambiguous message was passed through Russia's embassy. We believe that

these direct warnings in fact caused the Russians to dial back their efforts to interfere.

Because we assumed that Russia might have ambitions to interfere in elections in other democracies, as it appears to have tried to do in France, we set out to capture and make public as much as possible the evidence of what Russia had done. That public description of Russian actions also served to ensure that Russia paid a price — as did the individual and economic penalties we applied to Russian actors in December. We viewed the Russian efforts as a serious national security threat unrelated to the outcome of this particular election, and we firmly believed that Russia should be punished irrespective of who won.

That is why it remains important that the new administration follows through on the steps we took to make clear that the United States is united in our opposition to Russian interference and will not tolerate such activities in the future.

Findings since that Oct. 7 statement prove that the intelligence community was dead right: Russia poses a threat to our democracy. Yet the past several months have also seen too much denial, finger-pointing and partisan posturing on this issue. Instead, we must build on the experience of past year, find a bipartisan path to complete a comprehensive review of what happened — and ensure that renewed efforts by Russia will not succeed.



Axelrod: Trump's Putin meeting should set off alarm bells

David Axelrod is a CNN commentator and host of the podcast "The Axe Files," now a regularly featured show on CNN. He was senior adviser to President Barack Obama and chief strategist for the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns. The opinions expressed in this commentary are his.

(CNN)President Barack Obama was running behind.

In Moscow for bilateral talks with Russian President Dimitri Medvedev in the summer of 2009, Obama took a meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, widely understood to be the power behind the throne. Now, the meeting with Putin was going well beyond the allotted hour, and the President was late for an appointment with former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

As a senior adviser, I was asked to sit in with Gorbachev until Obama arrived. During our 45 minutes of conversation, the aging Soviet leader, still spry at 78, mused about his meetings with President Ronald Reagan that led to historic breakthroughs in US-Soviet relations.

"He would sometimes go off on tangents and (Secretary of State)

George Schultz, who was sitting next to him, would gently place his hand on Reagan's. And Reagan would just stop," Gorbachev told me.

I thought of this story when we learned that President Donald Trump had had an unreported conversation with Putin at the recent G20 meeting in Hamburg -- with no aides present and only Putin's translator as a party to the chat.

Even if the darkening cloud of Russia's incursion on the 2016 election were not hanging over Trump, such a scenario would have set off alarm bells.

The specter of an inexperienced president, engaged alone in a lengthy, private exchange with the cunning and seasoned leader of an adversarial nation defies every rule of diplomacy and good sense. Such scenarios play to the advantage of the other side -- leaving ours prone to manipulation.

And it is highly unusual for a president to have such a conversation without, at a minimum, his own translator to avoid any misinterpretation on either side.

While sidebars between leaders at global conferences are not unusual, such lengthy conversations, where more than pleasantries are being

exchanged, rarely occur without an aide, a note taker or witness to record what was said.

And yet the only other participant in Trump's discussion with Putin was the translator who works for the Russians. (Trump's translator did not speak Russian. He spoke Japanese, since Trump had initially been seated next to Japanese President Shinzo Abe.)

It also must have struck a chilling note for other G20 leaders to see the American President engrossed in a lengthy, private conversation with a Russian strongman whose seizure of territory from Ukraine and election subterfuge throughout Europe has unsettled the continent.

No diplomat I spoke with could do anything but scratch their heads over this strange departure from protocol.

The timing of this news comes amid other developments that are heightening suspicions about Trump's relationship with the Russians. First, there are the revelations about a June 2016 meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and the campaign's high command and Russians who were promising dirt on Hillary Clinton. Then, there's the Washington Post report that the

administration has decided to end support for anti-Assad rebels in Syria, a decision that was long sought by Putin, who counts the Syrian dictator as a client of Russia.

Yet even without the growing questions about potential Trump campaign collusion with the Russians and other issues, the President's decision to engage Putin would be disturbing.

For time immemorial, presidents and their teams have carefully plotted and orchestrated such encounters to ensure that both sides understood their meeting.

Reagan had Schultz at his side. Trump apparently believed he needed no such counsel or company.

The most charitable explanation for this break in protocol would be the combination of hubris and naïveté in a President who prides himself on the "art of the deal."

Another possibility, darker and far more disturbing, is that America's interests were mortgaged in a stealthy political deal cut some time ago.



Exxon Mobil Fined for Violating Sanctions on Russia

Alan Rappoport

WASHINGTON — The Treasury Department on Thursday fined Exxon Mobil \$2 million for violating sanctions that the United States imposed on Russia in 2014 while Rex W. Tillerson, now the secretary of state, was the oil company's chief executive.

The penalty was relatively small for the Treasury and a blip on Exxon's mammoth balance sheet, but it came as controversy over Russia policy has engulfed Washington. The Trump administration is facing questions about Russia's intervention in the 2016 election, and Congress has considered stiffening sanctions out of concern

that President Trump will try to ease those already in place.

The move also underscores concerns over Mr. Tillerson's deep business connections in Russia.

"Exxon Mobil demonstrated reckless disregard for U.S. sanctions requirements," the Treasury said in a report announcing the penalty.

"Exxon Mobil caused significant harm to the Ukraine-related sanctions program."

Hal Eren, a former official in Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, said the fine showed that the department's staff members would not be cowed.

"It gives the message that they're going to do what they have to even though Rex Tillerson is secretary of state," he said. "Perhaps it was a bit of assertion of independence by the staff of O.F.A.C."

Exxon violated sanctions imposed after Russia's armed actions against Ukraine when presidents of the company's American subsidiaries did business with individuals whose assets were blocked, according to the foreign assets control unit. The violations involved the signing of legal documents related to oil and gas projects in Russia with Igor Sechin, the head of Rosneft, the Russian state oil company, and another person.

Mr. Tillerson had personal business dealings with Mr. Sechin. In 2013, Mr. Tillerson was awarded the Russian government's Order of Friendship after he signed deals with Rosneft that opened the Kara Sea in the Arctic to oil drilling.

Mr. Tillerson was the only American official to join Mr. Trump at a meeting with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia at the Group of 20

summit meeting in Germany this month.

Relations between the United States and Russia have been strained by the allegations of election meddling and by the subsequent inquiries into Mr. Trump's campaign. The president has signaled a continuing desire to improve relations, and he recently praised the brokering of a cease-fire in part of Syria as the fruit of his rapport with Mr. Putin.

American and European sanctions were imposed on Russia in March 2014 after Moscow annexed Crimea from Ukraine. Even as the crisis in Ukraine deepened, Exxon continued to press for deeper involvement in Russia's oil industry.

Mr. Tillerson expressed opposition to the sanctions, before they were tightened in late 2014. At Exxon's annual meeting in 2014, he said, "We do not support sanctions, generally, because we don't find them to be effective unless they are very well implemented comprehensively, and that's a very hard thing to do."

**THE WALL
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JOURNAL.**

Samuel Rubinfeld, Lynn Cook and Ian Talley

U.S. and Exxon Spar Over Russia Sanctions Violation (UNE)

WASHINGTON—The U.S. Treasury Department on Thursday imposed a \$2 million fine on Exxon Mobil Corp. for what it called a "reckless disregard" of U.S. sanctions on Russia while Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was the oil giant's chief executive, a finding the company immediately said it would challenge.

Exxon, under Mr. Tillerson, in early 2014 deepened the company's longstanding partnership with the Kremlin despite Washington levying sanctions against Russia for annexing Crimea and supporting pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine. In May of that year, the Treasury Department said the company signed eight documents relating to oil and gas projects in Russia that were also signed by Igor Sechin, chief executive of the state oil giant PAO Rosneft. The Treasury said Thursday those deals violated U.S. sanctions against Mr. Sechin, a former Russian intelligence officer and ally to President Vladimir Putin.

Mr. Tillerson, who had close business ties to Russia and received an "Order of Friendship" award from Moscow, left Exxon last year to become U.S. secretary of state.

The \$2 million fine, the Treasury said, was the maximum amount it could levy against the company.

A spokesman for Exxon called the fine "outrageous" and said it would fight the Treasury's findings, saying they are a 180-degree turn from previous guidance handed down by the Obama administration when the sanctions were enacted. The Treasury's sanctions unit started its probe of the alleged sanctions violation several years ago. Exxon said it was first notified in 2015 by the sanctions unit, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, that it had violated sanctions regarding its interactions with Mr. Sechin. In a filing in a Texas court Thursday, the company said it had challenged the notification about a month later.

Exxon doesn't have any direct deals with Mr. Sechin but does have business dealings with Rosneft, where Mr. Sechin signed company documents in his capacity as CEO, Exxon said. According to the company, under President Barack Obama, the White House and the Treasury in 2014 said U.S. companies were allowed to participate in business dealings with Mr. Sechin if they were professional, not personal.

On Thursday afternoon, the Irving, Texas, company filed a complaint in U.S. District Court in the Northern District of Texas, seeking to toss the fine. In a court filing, Exxon said the sanctions unit "seeks to retroactively enforce a new interpretation of an executive order that is inconsistent with the explicit and unambiguous guidance from the White House and

The State Department declined to comment on the penalty and referred questions to Exxon.

In a statement, Exxon called the penalty "fundamentally unfair." The company also filed a lawsuit against the Treasury challenging the fine.

The company said it had adhered to guidance from the White House and the Treasury, and that its representatives had done nothing wrong by signing documents related to active business with Rosneft, which was not blocked by sanctions. Mr. Sechin was acting in an official capacity, Exxon said, not a personal one.

In its suit, Exxon argues that the Treasury penalty is out of sync with the guidance that the department and the White House provided when the sanctions were announced. The company also notes that BP's American chief executive was allowed to participate in Rosneft board meetings with Mr. Sechin so long as the activity involved Rosneft business and not Mr. Sechin's personal business.

The Treasury issued before the relevant conduct and still publicly available today."

The Justice Department declined to comment about Exxon's legal challenge.

The U.S. Treasury said in an enforcement notice against Exxon that the company showed "reckless disregard for U.S. sanctions requirements" when failing to consider the warning signs associated with dealing in the blocked services of someone under U.S. sanctions. The Treasury unit said one of the "aggravating factors" it considered was that Exxon is a globally sophisticated company that routinely deals with sanctions compliance concerns.

"No materials issued by the White House or the Department of the Treasury asserted an exception or carve-out for the professional conduct of designated or blocked persons, nor did any materials suggest that U.S. persons could continue to conduct or engage in business with such individuals," the Thursday notice said.

When Mr. Tillerson took his position in President Donald Trump's cabinet this year, he promised to recuse himself from matters involving Exxon for one year. He has stood by the current sanctions regime. In Ukraine earlier this month, Mr. Tillerson said the U.S. sanctions on Russia—imposed along with sanctions from the European

A Treasury official said the penalty came after a multiyear investigation.

It was not the first time in recent months that Exxon has drawn attention for its handling of the Russia sanctions. In April, the company asked the Treasury for a waiver from sanctions against Russia so it could drill in the Black Sea in a venture with Rosneft, stirring speculation that Exxon hoped to influence the administration through its ties to Mr. Tillerson. That request was denied.

There were signs on Thursday that the penalty could energize the push in Congress for tougher sanctions against Russia.

"I am disappointed that an American company would so clearly act in divergence from U.S. national security interests," said Senator Ben Cardin, a Maryland Democrat. "Today's news only underscores the urgency for new sanctions on Russia that increase pressure on the country and tighten loopholes in existing sanctions."

Union—would remain "until Moscow reverses the actions that triggered these particular sanctions."

Mr. Tillerson, as Mr. Trump's top diplomat, has been leading administration efforts to improve relations with Russia.

"This is a big black eye for Tillerson," said Anders Aslund, a senior fellow and Russia expert at the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank and Russia critic.

Though the State Department referred most questions about this specific matter to Exxon, spokeswoman Heather Nauert said Thursday that Mr. Tillerson is committed to the objectives of the Ukraine-related sanctions. She said the State Department wasn't involved with the decision to fine Exxon. She said Mr. Tillerson is "living up to his ethical commitments," including his recusal from Exxon-related matters.

Rosneft spokesman Michael Leontiev said signing an agreement with Mr. Sechin not as an individual, but as a representative of Rosneft management, can't be the foundation for a sanctions violation. "I am sure that while Exxon was preparing the decision about documents signing it consulted with both OFAC and lawyers specialized on sanctions very carefully," he said.

The penalty comes as committees in the Senate and House of Representatives, as well as a

Justice Department special counsel, investigate what U.S. intelligence agencies say was a Kremlin-backed campaign to interfere in the presidential election, and whether there was any collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. Russia has denied meddling and Mr. Trump has denied any collusion.

"Exxon Mobil caused significant harm to the Ukraine-related sanctions program objectives by

engaging the services" of a sanctioned entity, the Treasury said.

Exxon applied to the Treasury Department for a partial waiver from Russia sanctions in 2015. The application was never acted upon at that time but was again circulating among government departments earlier this year. The Trump administration said in April that it wouldn't grant the waiver, two days after the application was reported by The Wall Street Journal.

Exxon and other big energy companies also recently joined Mr. Trump in voicing concerns about congressional efforts to toughen sanctions on Russia, arguing that it could shut down oil and gas projects around the world that involve Russian partners. Mr. Tillerson opposed ramped-up sanctions being considered in Congress, saying the White House needs flexibility on the matter.

Lobbyists for Exxon told lawmakers in recent weeks that several provisions in the sanctions legislation under consideration on Capitol Hill are worrisome, including measures to prohibit partnerships with Russian individuals.

—Felicia Schwartz contributed to this article.

**The
Washington
Post**

India's new president rose from poverty to high office

By Vidhi Doshi

NEW DELHI — A few weeks ago, relatively few people in India had heard of Ram Nath Kovind. But on Thursday the country's Parliament and state leaders selected the low-caste septuagenarian to be India's president, the constitutional head of state.

Born in a mud hut in an impoverished village, Kovind, who is from the Koli weaver caste, rose to become a Supreme Court lawyer and later a politician with the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

As president, his role is mostly ceremonial, but he does have certain powers — the right to issue presidential pardons to those facing the death sentence, for example.

His victory, by a two-thirds majority, was widely predicted after he was selected by the governing coalition led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP.

Analysts said that his selection was an effort on the part of the party to woo lower-caste voters.

Generations of oppression, coupled with limited economic opportunity, long kept senior political positions out of the reach of most low-caste

Dalits, once known as "untouchables." Kovind is the second Dalit president since India's independence; the first was Kocheril Raman Narayanan, who was president from 1997 to 2002.

Modi tweeted congratulations to Kovind on Thursday, as well as a photo of the two men together in their younger days.

In earlier tweets, the prime minister carefully avoided mention of Kovind's Dalit status, presenting him instead as a representative of people from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.

"I am sure Shri Ram Nath Kovind will make an exceptional President & continue to be a strong voice for the poor, downtrodden & marginalised," he wrote.

In recent months, BJP-led policies have antagonized low-caste leaders. Efforts to curb the sale of beef, by which many Dalit communities subsist, have led to public lynchings by self-styled cow protectors, who believe the animal is sacred in the Hindu religion.

[In rebuke to Modi government, India's high court suspends ban on trade of cattle for slaughter]

The nomination of high-caste Yogi Adityanath to the coveted position of

chief minister in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, was also seen as pandering to the party's high-caste voter base.

"The BJP has been at the wrong end of the political spectrum due to the rising number of atrocities committed against the Dalits during their regime," said Praveen Rai, political analyst at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies, based in New Delhi. "By selecting him on 'Dalit identity,' it hopes to [calm] the rising tempers of the community and win back their votes for the next general elections in 2019."

For weeks ahead of the presidential vote, Indian newspapers and magazines detailed Kovind's virtuous beginnings: that he would walk miles to the next village to attend high school, that he could recite sacred texts from memory as a 15-year old, that he once solemnly corrected a politician's Hindi mispronunciation at a swearing-in ceremony — a testament to his devotion to the Indian constitution.

The intersection of culture and politics.

The opposition candidate, Meira Kumar, also born a Dalit, was reportedly chosen to split the electoral college along gender lines,

a strategy that "failed miserably," Rai said.

Sonia Gandhi, head of the opposition Indian National Congress party, had presented the election as an ideological battle. "We cannot and must not let India be hostage to those who wish to impose upon it a narrow-minded, divisive and communal vision," she said, according to NDTV.

Over the years, Kovind has been close to the Hindu nationalist organization known as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the right-wing ideological parent of the BJP — supporting its causes but never actually participating in its daily meetings, according to India Today magazine. Though a BJP stalwart, his distance from the Sangh meant his nomination was palatable to secularists, analysts said.

Analysts say that Kovind has repeatedly shown deference and a willingness to be a yes-man, especially in his previous role as governor of Bihar, where he loyally backed state initiatives including a controversial liquor ban. A profile in India Today suggested that he will be an "unobtrusive" president, leaving the limelight for Modi.

**The
New York
Times**

India Picks Ram Nath Kovind, of Caste Once Called 'Untouchables,' as President

Nida Najjar

NEW DELHI — A Dalit was elected India's 14th president on Thursday, a rare achievement for a member of a community once known as "untouchables" and one of the most deprived groups in India.

Ram Nath Kovind, 71, an understated politician from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's governing Bharatiya Janata Party, was selected as his party's candidate for the largely ceremonial position in an effort to secure the Dalit vote in future elections. That is a critical

step in the expansion of the party, known as B.J.P., observers said.

"Mr. Modi is essentially a political animal, and he's conscious of the political impact of a potential move," said Ashok Malik, an analyst at the Observer Research Foundation. In choosing a presidential candidate, "he's also gone for somebody who could potentially help the B.J.P."

The Indian president is elected by members of Parliament and the state assemblies, so given the B.J.P.'s strength nationally and the support of several other parties, the outcome of the vote was never in

doubt. Mr. Kovind garnered more than 65 percent of the votes on the way to becoming India's second Dalit president.

In televised comments after his victory, he spoke of the country's villagers and its working class. "Today, I want to tell them that Ram Nath Kovind is going to the president's house as their representative," he said. "My election to the position of president is the symbol of the greatness of Indian democracy."

He was opposed for the office by Meira Kumar, a Dalit from the Indian

National Congress party who is a former speaker of Parliament's lower house.

"Dalit politics suddenly has come center stage with a bang," Neeraja Chowdhury, a political analyst, said. "Every leader is bending over backward to show 'I am a well-wisher.'"

Mr. Kovind was born Oct. 1, 1945, in a village in the Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh into a family of the Kori caste, known as underprivileged even among the Dalits. He has practiced as a lawyer in the Supreme Court and served as

a B.J.P. member of the upper house of Parliament from 1994 to 2006. Most recently, he was the governor of Bihar State.

Mr. Kovind's connections to Uttar Pradesh are also considered significant. India's most populous state, it will figure prominently in the 2019 general election, when Mr. Modi will make every effort to forge a broad coalition among India's Hindu majority. Despite being the governing party in Uttar Pradesh, the B.J.P. has not historically captured much of the Dalit vote, and recent flare-ups over issues affecting Dalits across the country could hurt the party politically.

**The
Washington
Post**

Opposition strike paralyzes parts of Venezuela as fears of violence mount

CARACAS, Venezuela — An anti-government strike paralyzed large sections of Venezuela on Thursday as the nation risked spiraling into a deeper crisis ahead of a vote that many fear could move the country further down the path of authoritarian rule.

President Nicolás Maduro played down the strike, and some areas in the capital and elsewhere appeared less affected. But in many districts, a significant number of businesses were shuttered and protesters blocked roads as the opposition sought to stage Venezuela's largest general strike since 2002.

In Caracas, the strike was most pronounced in the eastern neighborhoods, a middle- and upper-middle-class bastion.

In the neighborhood of Los Ruices, national guard forces fired tear gas at protesters near the headquarters of the pro-government TV station Venezolana de Televisión. Demonstrators hurled back canisters. Maduro accused the mayor of the area, Carlos Ocariz, of organizing "the attack" and ordered the capture of "terrorists" striking in the area.

Similar confrontations reportedly occurred in other parts of Caracas and in other cities.

Many Venezuelan streets were barricaded and deserted on July 20 for a strike called by opponents of President Nicolas Maduro to demand elections and the end of efforts to create a new congress. Many Venezuelan streets were barricaded and deserted on July 20 for a strike called by opponents of President Nicolas Maduro to demand elections. (Reuters)

(Reuters)

"We put up the barricade early, around 5 a.m. ... The objective is

Last year, a Dalit scholar committed suicide in Hyderabad after being suspended following altercations with a right-wing Hindu campus group. Dalits have also been attacked over suspicions of cow slaughter by mobs of Hindus, who regard cows as sacred. And there were repeated clashes in May in Uttar Pradesh between Dalits and members of a higher caste.

Under Mr. Modi, the party has nevertheless made some inroads in the Dalit vote, and it has won elections in Uttar Pradesh with large margins in recent years.

that no one goes to work, that people stay home for 24 hours," said Caracas resident Edmond Fakrhi, 55. "We want liberty. We want democracy. We want everyone to have access to food."

Alfredo Romero, co-director of Foro Penal, a human rights group that defends political prisoners, tweeted that at least 261 protesters were arrested as of 9:30 p.m. Thursday.

The attorney general's office confirmed two deaths in the unrest, a 24-year-old man in Los Teques, about 20 miles southwest of Caracas, and a 23-year-old man in Valencia, 81 miles west of Caracas. The deaths brought the number of fatalities in more than three months of street protests to 94.

[After protest vote, Maduro's foes warn of 'zero hour' for Venezuela's democracy]

The opposition effort unfolded as Maduro's unpopular socialist government faced escalating international pressure to back off the special election on July 30. The vote would elect a body to rewrite the 1999 constitution and further squelch the opposition-controlled National Assembly in a move widely viewed by critics as a power grab.

The Trump administration, pressed by prominent U.S. lawmakers, is weighing sanctions up to and including bans on Venezuela's all-important oil exports if the vote is not called off. In an official report, Luis Almagro, secretary general of the Organization of American States, said Wednesday that there are fears that the situation in Venezuela "will escalate into a bloodbath."

"The reluctance of the international community to act in defense of democracy has allowed the situation to deteriorate incrementally but consistently, to the point where

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, a journalist who has written a biography of Mr. Modi, said Mr. Kovind had been selected "purely because of his identity, not his accomplishments."

The presidency, while a position of high esteem, has little power. The president, among other duties, has the ability to call elections, break ties in Parliament and issue death-row pardons. The current president, Pranab Mukherjee, who will step down on Monday, occasionally used the platform to draw attention to the importance of tolerance, though he was largely a cautious figure.

today it has become a full-blown humanitarian and security crisis," Almagro later said at a U.S. Senate hearing. "Every step of the way it has been too little and too late."

Venezuelan security forces and protesters clashed in the town of Tachiras ahead of President Nicolás Maduro's July 30 vote for a new Constituent Assembly. Venezuelan security forces and protesters clash in the town of Tachiras ahead of President Nicolás Maduro's July 30 vote for a new Constituent Assembly. (Reuters)

(Reuters)

Pressure was building inside Venezuela, too. The last time the opposition called for a general strike was in October, but that effort did not elicit the widespread street closures seen Thursday. In 2002, a prolonged national strike failed to oust President Hugo Chávez, who died in 2013 and had anointed Maduro as his successor.

[Things are so bad in Venezuela that people are rationing toothpaste]

Unlike the wide popularity enjoyed by Chávez, support for Maduro is fast eroding amid food and medical shortages and runaway inflation. On Sunday, the opposition carried out an unofficial referendum in which more than 7 million voters rejected the government's bid to draw up a new constitution and demanded new national elections. This week, the opposition pledged to form a transitional government as part of its effort to force new elections.

Venezuela, meanwhile, suffered a diplomatic blow Thursday when a senior member of its United Nations delegation, Isaias Arturo Medina Mejías, abruptly resigned, citing "irreconcilable differences" with the Maduro government.

Mr. Kovind, as a B.J.P. member, is expected to work in step with the government. His selection is another step in the party's consolidation of power. When it was last in power, the party chose A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, a pick more appealing to the opposition because he was a Muslim and not a party insider. This time such an accommodation was unnecessary, analysts said.

"This is a milestone moment for Indian politics," Mr. Malik said.

On the streets of Caracas on Thursday, Alfredo, a 17-year-old who did not give his last name for fear of reprisals, put up a barricade with his friends, all around his age, at 6 a.m.

"We're tired," he said. "We have to take to the streets. And people should do it even if leaders don't do it. I'm here every day, and I'll be here today, all day."

Government officials, however, remained defiant and deemed the strike a failure. "The 700 most important businesses in the country are 100 percent working," Maduro said on national TV. "Today, work triumphed."

The president of the National Federation of Transportation Workers, though, called the strike "an absolute success."

"In Caracas, I'd say almost 90 percent of transportation isn't functioning, the terminals are paralyzed," said Erick Zuleta, the union leader. "Buses and cars owned by the government are working, but those affiliated to us aren't."

Freddy Guevara, vice-president of the opposition controlled National Assembly, said in a press conference that about 85 percent of those called on participated in Thursday's strike. He said it was planned to end at 6 a.m., but issued a call for a national march on Saturday.

"We want to congratulate the people for this historic day," Guevara said.

The precise course that the Trump administration will take on Venezuela remains unclear. On Monday, President Trump called Maduro a "bad leader" and threatened "strong and swift" sanctions if the July 30 vote is not called off. People familiar with the

discussions say administration hawks are at odds with officials at the State and Energy departments over just how broad those sanctions should be.

A more narrow approach could target U.S. assets of senior Venezuelan officials. A tougher one, being backed by some in the administration and influential Republicans, could hit Venezuela where it hurts — the oil industry.

A third of the country's 2.1 million barrels a day is exported to the

United States, mostly for refining at facilities in Texas and Louisiana. Oil sanctions could range from limiting the industry's access to U.S. financial markets to outright bans on imports and re-exports.

The Daily 202 newsletter

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

Yet Venezuela relies on its oil trade with the United States to finance food and medicine imports, meaning that sanctions are likely to further hit the long-suffering Venezuelan people and potentially fuel anti-American sentiment. They could also cause supply-chain problems in the United States, at least temporarily raising gas prices slightly.

But the resulting pressure on the Venezuelan government, some

argue, could be a powerful tool at a critical time.

"Trump always criticized [President Barack] Obama for threatening and not doing anything," said Francisco J. Monaldi, a fellow at the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. "Just two months ago, I would tell you it's not going to happen. But I'm hearing from the oil companies that they are all preparing for it."

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Editorial : Trump's Nafta Stakes

President Trump campaigned on tearing up Nafta, but maybe he's learning on the job. The White House this week rolled out its objectives for renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement that could allow him to claim victory without doing too much protectionist damage.

The President has blamed Nafta for U.S. manufacturers moving jobs to Mexico. In April Mr. Trump came close to terminating the deal before cooler heads in the Administration persuaded him that withdrawing would be a disaster for U.S. businesses, especially farmers.

Nafta has helped American businesses stay competitive and prevented a larger exodus of jobs overseas by integrating cross-border supply chains. Consider Cummins, which makes the engine for Chrysler's RAM truck outside Columbus, Ind. Cummins exports its engines to a Chrysler plant in Mexico, where the trucks are assembled and sent back to the states. Prior to Nafta, Mexico imposed tariffs as high as 20% on automotive imports as well as local content requirements of 80% that shut out U.S. suppliers like Cummins.

American inputs make up 40% of Mexican products exported to the U.S. Since 2007 U.S. exports of auto parts to

Mexico have more than doubled. Nafta has enabled U.S. auto makers to compete with the Japanese, and many cars assembled in Mexico with American parts are shipped to Asia and Europe. Another example of cross-border integration: Canadian manufacturers use U.S. scrap metal, coal and iron to produce steel slab and coil for American vehicles, airplanes and public works.

Some of Nafta's biggest winners are American farmers. Nafta cut Mexico's high agricultural tariffs—ranging from 15% on soybeans and processed vegetables to 215% on corn—to zero on most products. U.S. exports of feedstock to Mexico have soared. Soybean sales to Mexico have quintupled since Nafta was finalized in 1993. Farm and ranch exports to Mexico and Canada have more than quadrupled.

It's true that Canada's supply-managed dairy system remains walled off from competition, and pricing policies discriminate against such U.S. products as a milk-protein used to make cheese. Canada also maintains high tariffs on U.S. poultry, eggs and wine. Mr. Trump should seek to ease these trade barriers in return for giving up some U.S. farm subsidies.

A major focus of U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer's agenda will be e-commerce,

financial services, telecommunications and intellectual property. This recognizes that trade in services is growing fast and an area in which the U.S. has a significant comparative advantage. For instance, the Administration says it aims to "secure commitments not to impose customs duties on digital products" and to prevent restrictions on sending and storing data.

The Administration will also try to "strengthen the rules of origin," which require a certain share of products to be sourced in North America—e.g., 62.5% for autos—to qualify for preferential trade treatment. One risk of raising the thresholds is that manufacturers may decide it makes more sense to move abroad and pay an import tariff.

Canada and Mexico adopted many of the Administration's objectives in the stillborn Trans-Pacific Partnership, so the biggest sticking points will likely be trade remedies. Mr. Lighthizer has called for eliminating Nafta's "global safeguard exclusion" to allow the U.S. to take action if a surge of imports imperils its domestic industries. He also wants to let the U.S. "impose measures based on third country dumping." So the U.S. could, say, levy duties on Mexican products with Chinese steel, though such

actions would likely be challenged and invite retaliatory tariffs.

Nafta allows investors to arbitrate disputes with foreign governments. The Administration is targeting this system as some on the right claim that it undermines U.S. sovereignty. Unions also hate arbitration because it reduces the risk of investing in Canada and Mexico. But the system has protected American investors from arbitrary policies, and the U.S. government has never lost a case.

The White House wants to conclude negotiations by the end of this year, though they could drag on if it tries to back Canada and Mexico into protectionist corners. While the President may think he has the whip hand, the U.S. can't afford to jilt its neighbors. Mexico is currently renegotiating its 2000 trade accord with the European Union to boost its trade in services and agriculture. It is also seeking to reduce its dependence on U.S. agriculture. During 2017's first four months, Mexican imports of U.S. soybean meal fell 15%. Canada has just concluded a deal with Europe.

If Mr. Trump wants a political victory, he'll push to further open Mexican and Canadian markets rather than impose trade barriers that hurt American businesses and consumers.



Galeotti: Trump Was Right: NATO Is Obsolete

Mark Galeotti

The much-discussed requirement that NATO members spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense is a crude measure, often misunderstood or criticized. But there are clear benefits to such a benchmark. It focuses attention on the need for adequate military spending — especially important in democracies, where votes are typically to be found in tax cuts and social care, not tanks and soldiers' pensions. It is a tool

that builds unity, enhances NATO's capacity to act, including in humanitarian operations abroad, and is a deterrent, offering no encouragement to adventurism from Moscow or anywhere else.

But all tools can get rusty or outdated, and the existing 2 percent benchmark is a perfect example. Now that "war" is as much about hacking, subversion, espionage, and fake news as it is about tanks, the West needs a minimal baseline requirement for spending on "hybrid

defense": police services, counterintelligence services, and the like.

Much of this may sound as if it shouldn't be NATO's business; this is a military alliance, after all, and it should be no more responsible for parachuting forensic accountants in to check whether British banks are laundering dirty Russian cash than it should be hunting spies in the Balkans. But it should matter just as much to members of the alliance when their fellow members

underspend on hybrid defense measures as it does when they underspend on the military. Given that NATO now recognizes cyberattacks as possible grounds for invoking Article 5, the alliance's mutual defense clause, weak national cyberdefenses are a potential invitation to a wider conflict. More broadly, a failure to address nonkinetic defense undermines the solidarity and common confidence building at NATO's heart.

After all, NATO membership is a powerful but only partial guarantee. Take Montenegro for example (which spends about 1.3 percent of its GDP on defense). The latest country to join the NATO club, the tiny Balkan nation was welcomed under the alliance umbrella in early June, as part of an effort to push for further integration with the West and to secure greater NATO commitment to the Balkan region. Montenegro is now likely safe from overt Russian military action, but what about covert measures? Shortly after joining, the country came under serious cyberattack — likely as a consequence of its new membership. The attacks came a few months after 20 Montenegrins and Serbians were arrested and, along with two Russians, charged with planning a coup. Montenegro claimed Moscow was behind the operation, and Russia's ritual denials lacked conviction.

Had the coup succeeded, it would have left NATO's newest member in severe disarray, vulnerable to further political subversion. It would have been an ominous warning to the rest of the Balkans: Mess with Moscow, put your faith in the West, and who knows what kind of underhanded dangers you'll face. And had Montenegro successfully been destabilized, the chaos likely would have encouraged yet more aggressive Russian adventurism and not just in the Balkans.

With the West, and Europe especially, engaged — like it or not — in a political war, we ought to pay as much attention to ensuring common minimal standards of "hybrid defense" as we do to outright military spending. My own preliminary investigation — with an

assist from Jakub Maco, a research assistant at the Institute of International Relations Prague — indicates that spending on the sorts of things that constitute hybrid defense indeed varies widely across the alliance.

Spending on Police and Security Services as Percentage of GDP POLICE SECURITY 0.00.30.60.91.21.5 AVERAGE ALBANIA BELGIUM BULGARIA CROATIA CZECH REPUBLIC DENMARK ESTONIA FRANCE GERMANY GREECE HUNGARY ICELAND ITALY LATVIA LITHUANIA LUXEMBOURG NETHERLANDS NORWAY POLAND PORTUGAL ROMANIA SLOVAKIA SLOVENIA SPAIN TURKEY UNITED KINGDOM Percentage GDP

Graphic by C.K. Hickey. GDP figures are from Eurostat for 2016. Police figures are from Eurostat (2015) except for Albania, Spain and Turkey. Intelligence budget figures are from various sources, but comparable ones for Greece, Iceland, Italy and Luxembourg were not available. New member Montenegro was not included.

Policing, for example, contributes directly to "hybrid security." Not only is organized crime sometimes an instrument of Russian covert activity, but a sense of public insecurity can be mobilized by malign propaganda to generate social tensions and support divisive extremist political agendas.

A capable, well-trained, and resourced police force also provides the state with more scalable responses in times of crisis.

A capable, well-trained, and resourced police force also provides the state with more scalable

responses in times of crisis. Deploying soldiers against rioters, for example, is not just bad optics; it increases the risk of escalation. Yet the available data suggest that some countries take adequate funding for policing more seriously than others. While allowing for some discrepancies in the quality of this early and still partial information — police spending is often hard to compare across countries because of the variety of local and national forces — we still found significant variation. Police spending averages 0.93 percent of GDP, with ranges from Bulgaria's and Greece's 1.4 percent to the 0.5 percent of Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, and Spain.

Security and counterintelligence services are also a critical aspect of hybrid defense. They are necessary to help monitor and close down foreign espionage and subversion operations and the secret "black account" funding used to support destabilizing groups and activities. When comparing spending here, the quality of data is again worth noting: France's anomalously low security service figure and Romania's unexpectedly high one are likely artifacts of inconsistent definitions of what qualifies as a security agency. But it's possible to draw a broad conclusion — namely that such spending varies enormously across the continent. Counterintelligence and security spending among European countries averages 0.07 percent of GDP but (absent France and Romania) ranges from the United Kingdom's 0.15 percent down to Belgium's 0.01 percent. These disparities risk creating vulnerabilities for everyone. It is widely acknowledged, for example, that the Czech Republic (below

average on counterintelligence spending) is a hub for Russian intelligence operations across Central Europe and NATO, and the EU headquarters in Belgium (lower yet) is a playground for Moscow's spooks. One can certainly question the details here. This was a quick-and-dirty exploratory exercise, aimed less at providing answers than investigating whether there might be grounds for future, more serious analysis. But, nonetheless, it throws up interesting evidence of European priorities and concerns. Countries such as Bulgaria and Estonia, for example, which acknowledge a serious and sustained effort by Moscow to penetrate and subvert them, have above-average counterintelligence spending to match. However, others appear to be neglecting this element of their security, focusing perhaps too much on policing, the regular military, or neither.

Simply having a common benchmark for hybrid defense will inevitably improve the quality of the data. It will also force European countries to do something new to most of them: to consider the whole gamut of nonkinetic defensive measures available, from counterintelligence to media awareness, as part of a single, unified security concept.

So it is time to have this conversation. Nonkinetic security spending, just like defense budgets, buys protection on a variety of levels. It blocks malign foreign activities, provides wider ranges of capability and response, and acts as a deterrent. In an age of hybrid war, minimum common standards of hybrid defense are a must.

ETATS-UNIS

POLITICO Trump's war of attrition against Obamacare

Paul Demko

Obamacare may escape another GOP repeal effort, but surviving a hostile administration could be a much tougher challenge.

If a last-ditch repeal effort fails in Congress next week, all indications are the Trump administration will continue chipping away at the Affordable Care Act — if not torching it outright.

Story Continued Below

President Donald Trump, who regularly says that Obamacare is already dead, has already taken

steps to undermine the law even as the legislative battle over repeal drags on. His administration has slashed crucial advertising dollars, cut the enrollment window in half, and regularly pumps out anti-Obamacare videos and graphics — actions sure to reduce the number of people who sign up.

Trump has plenty of other options to roll back a program covering roughly 20 million Americans. Those includes ending enforcement of the mandate to carry insurance, imposing work restrictions and nominal premiums on low-income adults who qualify for Obamacare's

Medicaid expansion and letting states relax the law's robust coverage rules.

The man charged with oversight of many of these decisions, HHS Secretary Tom Price, noted in his confirmation hearing that Obamacare grants him broad authority leeway about how to enact it — powers that in his hands could be used to the scale back the law's reach.

"Fourteen hundred and forty-two times the ACA said 'the secretary shall' or 'the secretary may,'" Price noted in March.

One possible brake on the administration might be the pushback from some Republican governors and lawmakers who oppose letting insurance markets crumble on their watch — even as Trump insists voters will blame Democrats. After the Senate's repeal effort appeared to unravel earlier this week, Lamar Alexander, chairman of a key health care committee, announced plans to hold hearings on stabilizing Obamacare's shaky insurance marketplaces.

"The best next step is for both parties to come together and do

what we can all agree on: fix our unstable insurance markets," wrote 11 governors this week in a bipartisan letter led by John Kasich of Ohio and John Hickenlooper of Colorado.

However, there's no sign that most Republicans in Washington are ready to drop their longtime vow to dismantle Obamacare, even with a planned Senate vote on repeal next week likely to fail.

The most devastating thing the administration could do to Obamacare is pull insurance subsidies, worth about \$7 billion this year, that are paid to insurers to cover the out-of-pocket costs of low-income consumers. That could lead to an exodus of insurers from the Obamacare markets, send premiums soaring, and lead already wobbly markets in some states to collapse.

"We pay hundreds of millions of dollars a month in subsidy ... and when those payments stop, it stops immediately," Trump said in a meeting with Republican senators Wednesday. "It doesn't take two years, three years, one year — it stops immediately."

The Trump administration confirmed Wednesday it will make this month's subsidy payments. However, insurers fear the administration could nix the subsidy at any time.

The other immediate concern for insurers is whether the administration will continue enforcing the individual mandate penalty for Americans who do not purchase insurance. Many saw Trump's Day One executive order instructing agencies to weaken Obamacare as a green light for the IRS to stop enforcing the tax penalty for skipping coverage. So far, however, the mandate remains.

While the mandate has proven weaker than insurers had hoped to induce Americans — particularly the

young and healthy — to purchase coverage, the industry still sees it as a key tool for keeping down costs and stabilizing the markets. Many are boosting premiums higher than planned due to fears Trump will no longer enforce it.

Signals that the mandate will no longer be enforced are sure to worry insurance companies whose participation in Obamacare's marketplaces are key to making them function. Some major national and regional insurers have already said they will pull out of the marketplaces next year, with most citing uncertainty about the effort to roll back the law.

"If there are questions, if there are unknowns, [insurers] have to proceed conservatively," said Ceci Connolly, CEO of the Alliance of Community Health Plans. "If they price on wishful thinking, they will come up short next year."

Trump health officials have already shown a willingness to flex executive power to whack at the law.

Weeks after taking office, the Trump administration canceled \$5 million in HealthCare.gov advertising in the final days of the previous enrollment season — a particularly crucial time for attracting young and healthy customers. On Wednesday, Trump's HHS confirmed it will soon terminate two contracts for outreach programs designed to sign up people for insurance across the country.

"The contracts were never intended to be long-term," said Jane Norris, a spokeswoman for CMS, which oversees the law's implementation.

The administration could also pare back federal funding for enrollment outreach programs. The Obama administration awarded \$63 million in grants last September to help states bolster enrollment efforts, and another tranche of funding is

supposed to be released by this fall. However, the administration hasn't signaled whether it would continue this funding, and an appropriations bill advancing in the House would block dollars for the so-called navigator programs.

The next enrollment period starting Nov. 1 is looming. The Trump administration has already cut the sign-up period in half — to six weeks in the nearly 40 states using HealthCare.gov — worrying advocates that the shortened window will depress sign-up numbers.

In past enrollment seasons, the Obama administration rolled out a full-court marketing press, with top administration officials making media appearances to push enrollment. It's hard to imagine Price and other top HHS officials making a similar effort after his department has trumpeted Obamacare's struggles on a daily basis.

"They have to sign up millions of enrollees just to maintain the same amount of total enrollment," said Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation. "If there's minimal outreach ... there could be a big drop-off in enrollment."

While the previous administration also took an active role in boosting insurer participation in the marketplaces, the Trump administration has taken a hands-off approach. There are no signs that HHS is looking to persuade insurers to sell coverage in the 40 counties that potentially won't have any insurers selling Obamacare plans next year. Trump and administration officials often tout these "bare" counties as another sign of Obamacare's flaws.

"40 counties in 3 states are currently projected by @CMSgov to have zero insurers on

#Obamacare," Price tweeted on Thursday.

HHS could also give red states much wider latitude to limit who can sign up Medicaid. Arkansas, Arizona, Kentucky, Indiana, Maine and Wisconsin are among the states with Republican governors seeking federal permission to add work requirements or make able-bodied adult beneficiaries pay more for care. The Obama administration largely shunned similar requests because they would shrink enrollment.

At least one state is seeking the Trump administration's permission to significantly overhaul Obamacare's coverage rules in order to attract insurers back to its struggling marketplace. Iowa, which is at risk of having no insurer sell coverage statewide next year, wants to scrap Obamacare's subsidies helping customers pay for premiums and medical bills and replace them with a limited tax credit. That could make lower-income and sick enrollees pay a lot more for coverage.

Iowa also wants to implement a single, standardized health insurance option instead of allowing insurers to sell a range of health plans as they now do under Obamacare. Finally, the state would create a reinsurance program meant to backstop insurers with particularly expensive customers, an idea pursued by Alaska, Minnesota, New Hampshire and other states.

At least one insurer said it would re-enter Iowa's marketplace if the plan goes through. Though some Obamacare advocates have questioned whether Iowa can legally roll back Obamacare standards as the state has proposed, the Trump administration is expected to green-light the plan.

The New York Times Krugman : Health Care in a Time of Sabotage

Paul Krugman

Is Trumpcare finally dead? Even now, it's hard to be sure, especially given Republican moderates' long track record of caving in to extremists at crucial moments. But it does look as if the frontal assault on the Affordable Care Act has failed.

And let's be clear: The reason this assault failed wasn't that Donald Trump did a poor selling job, or that Mitch McConnell mishandled the legislative strategy. Obamacare survived because it has worked — because it brought about a dramatic reduction in the number of Americans without health insurance,

and voters didn't and don't want to lose those gains.

Unfortunately, some of those gains will probably be lost all the same: The number of uninsured Americans is likely to tick up over the next few years. So it's important to say clearly, in advance, why this is about to happen. It won't be because the Affordable Care Act is failing; it will be the result of Trump administration sabotage.

Some background here: Even the A.C.A.'s supporters have always acknowledged that it's a bit of a Rube Goldberg device. The simplest way to ensure that people

have access to essential health care is for the government to pay their bills directly, the way Medicare does for older Americans. But in 2010, when the A.C.A. was enacted, Medicare for all was politically out of reach.

What we got instead was a system with a number of moving parts. It's not as complex as all that — once you understand the basic concept of the "three-legged stool" of regulations, mandates and subsidies, you've got most of it. But it has more failure points than, say, Medicare or Social Security.

Notably, people aren't automatically signed up for coverage, so it matters a lot whether the officials running the system try to make it work, reaching out to potential beneficiaries to ensure that they know what's available, while reminding currently healthy Americans that they are still legally required to sign up for coverage.

You can see this dependence on good intentions by looking at how health reform has played out at the state level. States that embraced the law fully, like California and Kentucky, made great progress in reducing the number of the

uninsured; states that dragged their feet, like Tennessee, benefited far less. Or consider the problem of counties served by only one insurer; as a recent study noted, this problem is almost entirely limited to states with Republican governors.

But now the federal government itself is run by people who couldn't repeal Obamacare, but would clearly still like to see it fail — if only to justify the repeated, dishonest claims, especially by the tweeter in chief himself, that it was already failing. Or to put it a bit differently, when Trump threatens to “let Obamacare fail,” what he's really threatening is to make it fail.

On Wednesday The Times reported on three ways the Trump administration is, in effect, sabotaging the A.C.A. (my term, not

The Times's). First, the administration is weakening enforcement of the requirement that healthy people buy coverage. Second, it's letting states impose onerous rules like work requirements on people seeking Medicaid. Third, it has backed off on advertising and outreach designed to let people know about options for coverage.

Actually, it has done more than back off. As reported by The Daily Beast, the Department of Health and Human Services has diverted funds appropriated by law for “consumer information and outreach” and used them instead to finance a social media propaganda campaign against the law that H.H.S. is supposed to be administering — a move, by the way, of dubious legality. Meanwhile,

the department's website, which used to offer helpful links for people seeking insurance, now sends viewers to denunciations of the A.C.A.

And there may be worse to come: Insurance companies, which are required by law to limit out-of-pocket expenses of low-income customers, are already raising premiums sharply because they're worried about a possible cutoff of the crucial federal “cost-sharing reduction” subsidies that help them meet that requirement.

The truly amazing thing about these sabotage efforts is that they don't serve any obvious purpose. They won't save money — in fact, cutting off those subsidies, in particular, would probably end up costing taxpayers more money than

keeping them. They're unlikely to revive Trumpcare's political prospects.

So this isn't about policy, or even politics in the normal sense. It's basically about spite: Trump and his allies may have suffered a humiliating political defeat, but at least they can make millions of other people suffer.

Can anything be done to protect Americans from this temper tantrum? In some cases, I believe, state governments can insulate their citizens from malfeasance at H.H.S. But the most important thing, surely, is to place the blame where it belongs. No, Mr. Trump, Obamacare isn't failing; you are.

**The
Washington
Post**

Editorial : The GOP's repeal-and-replace plan should stay dead

REPUBLICAN SENATORS have been

huddling in hopes of reviving their Obamacare repeal-and-replace bill. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reminded them Thursday of why the bill should, on the contrary, stay dead.

Congress's scorekeepers found that the latest version of the Senate bill would result in 22 million more people without health coverage by 2026. That is true even after the CBO accounted for \$70 billion in new funds meant to stabilize health-insurance markets by driving down premiums and other costs.

A major driver of the projected coverage loss is a 26 percent cut to Medicaid, the state-federal program covering the poor and near-poor, by 2026. The shrinking of Medicaid

would continue, with bad consequences not spelled out, after 2026.

The best conversations on The Washington Post

Americans who would have gotten Medicaid coverage could try to obtain private health insurance, and they would get some federal help. But the Republican plan is so stingy, the individual insurance market would not provide reasonable options to low-income and older people. Premiums for most older people would rise. Premiums would also climb for anyone trying to buy comprehensive coverage meeting the current Obamacare standard. People would instead be pushed into coverage that picked up fewer medical costs. Though premiums for those plans would be lower for some people,

they would also come with far higher deductibles that would make insurance virtually unusable for many. The benchmark deductible would equal half the income of someone making \$26,500, as opposed to 3 percent under current law. Unsurprisingly, the CBO concluded that many low-income people would not bother to buy insurance.

The CBO concluded all of this without even considering one of the most destructive ideas that could find its way into any final legislation, an amendment pushed by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) . The proposal would allow healthy people to buy cheap plans that covered relatively little; less healthy people would be left buying expensive plans that covered what they needed but with premiums that would likely spin out of control. No senator should

support a bill containing the Cruz amendment without hearing from the CBO on its likely effects.

Republicans are considering yet another option: partially repealing Obamacare with no replacement. The CBO released an analysis of this idea on Wednesday, projecting that 32 million people would lose insurance by 2026 as the individual insurance market descended into chaos.

If the GOP-majority Congress passed any of these plans, the numbers would no longer be politically inconvenient figures on a page. They would be a painful reality that Republicans imposed on the country, all so they could keep an irresponsible campaign promise.

**The
New York
Times**

These Americans Hated the Health Law. Until the Idea of Repeal Sank In. (UNE)

Kate Zernike and Abby Goodnough

DOYLESTOWN, Pa. — Five years ago, the Affordable Care Act had yet to begin its expansion of health insurance to millions of Americans, but Jeff Brahin was already stewing about it.

“It's going to cost a fortune,” he said in an interview at the time.

This week, as Republican efforts to repeal the law known as Obamacare appeared all but dead, Mr. Brahin, a 58-year-old lawyer and self-described fiscal hawk, said his feelings had evolved.

“As much as I was against it,” he said, “at this point I'm against the repeal.”

“Now that you've insured an additional 20 million people, you can't just take the insurance away from these people,” he added. “It's just not the right thing to do.”

As Mr. Brahin goes, so goes the nation.

When President Trump was elected, his party's long-cherished goal of dismantling the Affordable Care Act seemed all but assured. But eight months later, Republicans seem to have done what the Democrats who passed the law never could: make it popular among a majority of Americans.

Support for the Affordable Care Act has risen since the election — in some polls, sharply — with more

people now viewing the law favorably than unfavorably. Voters have besieged their representatives with emotional telephone calls and rallies, urging them not to repeal, one big reason Republicans have had surprising trouble in fulfilling their promise despite controlling both Congress and the White House.

The change in public opinion may not denote newfound love of the Affordable Care Act so much as dread of what might replace it. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that both the House and Senate proposals to replace the law would result in over 20 million more uninsured Americans. The shift in mood also reflects a strong increase in support

for Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor that the law expanded to cover far more people, and which faces the deepest cuts in its 52-year history under the Republican plans.

Most profound, though, is this: After years of Tea Party demands for smaller government, Republicans are now pushing up against a growing consensus that the government should guarantee health insurance. A Pew survey in January found that 60 percent of Americans believe the federal government should be responsible for ensuring that all Americans have health coverage. That was up from 51 percent last year, and the highest in nearly a decade.

The belief held even among many Republicans: 52 percent of those making below \$30,000 a year said the federal government has a responsibility to ensure health coverage, a huge jump from 31 percent last year. And 34 percent of Republicans who make between \$30,000 and about \$75,000 endorsed that view, up from 14 percent last year.

"The idea that you shouldn't take coverage away really captured a large share of people who weren't even helped by this bill," said Robert Blendon, a health policy expert at Harvard who has closely followed public opinion of the Affordable Care Act.

In 2012, when The New York Times talked to Mr. Brahin and others here in Bucks County, Pa., a perennial swing district outside Philadelphia, their attitudes on the law tracked with national polls that showed most Americans viewed it unfavorably.

But now, too, sentiment here reflects the polls — and how they have shifted. Many people still have little understanding of how the law works. But Democrats and independents have rallied around it, and many of those who opposed it now accept the law, unwilling to see millions of Americans stripped of the coverage that it extended to them.

"I can't even remember why I opposed it," said Patrick Murphy, who owns Bagel Barrel, on a quaint and bustling street near Mr. Brahin's law office here in Doylestown.

He thought Democrats "jammed it down our throats," and like Mr. Brahin, he worried about the growing deficit. But, he said, he has provided insurance for his own dozen or so employees since 1993.

"Everybody needs some sort of health insurance," Mr. Murphy said. "They're trying to repeal Obamacare but they don't have anything in place."

Five years ago, people here could barely turn on their televisions without seeing negative ads warning that the

Affordable Care Act would lead to rationed care and bloated bureaucracy. The law's supporters, meanwhile, including the president whose name is attached to it, were not making much of a case.

To win support, Democrats were emphasizing that little would change for people who already had coverage; President Barack Obama famously promised that you could keep your plan and your doctor, even as a few million people's noncompliant plans that did not offer all the law's required benefits were canceled as the law was rolled out.

"The best way to get something passed was to argue it was small change," said Stanley Greenberg, a veteran Democratic pollster. "It was only when Republicans got control that people then on their own discovered that this is what the benefits are."

Jennifer Bell, sitting outside Mr. Murphy's bagel shop with a friend, was raised a Democrat and always supported the health care law. But it was only after she was injured in a serious car accident in 2013 that she thought to advocate for it. She used to get health insurance through her job as a teacher. Now disabled with extensive neurological damage, and working part-time in a record store, she qualifies for Medicaid, and without it, she said, could not afford her ongoing treatment.

"It's very, very scary to think about not having health insurance," she said.

"If the condition doesn't kill you, the stress of having it does, in this country," she added. "The fact that people do without health insurance is a sin, in my opinion."

Ms. Bell, 35, joined about 2,000 others for a women's march in Doylestown after the inauguration, and now makes calls to Representative Brian Fitzpatrick and Senator Patrick J. Toomey, both Republicans, urging them to protect the Affordable Care Act. She

is working to elect a Democrat challenging Mr. Fitzpatrick, who voted against the House bill to replace the law, saying he worried about people losing coverage.

More vigorous support among the law's natural constituents since Mr. Trump's election has helped lift public opinion. The Kaiser Family Foundation polls tracking monthly support for the law have shown the greatest gains among Democrats and independents, with an increase of 10 to 12 points among each group over the last year, while Republicans' opinion has remained as unfavorable as ever.

"When something is threatened to be taken away, people start to rally around it," said Liz Hamel, the director of public opinion and survey research for Kaiser, a nonpartisan group.

There has been an increase in the percentage of Republicans and Democrats saying that Medicaid is important for them and their families; between February and July the percentage of Republicans saying so had increased 10 points, to 53 percent.

The law still faces hurdles even beyond the debate in Congress. Five years ago, Cindy McMahon, who works at the store on the vegetable farm her family has owned for nearly a century, was not intending to buy health insurance, despite the law's requirement that people have it or pay a tax penalty. She remains uninsured (and the Trump administration has suggested it may not enforce the penalty).

"If I had to pay a penalty, it's still less than I have to pay for having health care all year," Ms. McMahon said. At 52, she has diabetes and says the strips to test her blood sugar are so expensive that sometimes she tests once a month rather than daily. She has not looked into whether she might qualify for the Medicaid expansion; she was not aware Pennsylvania had expanded the program.

Frank Newport, the editor in chief of Gallup, said that the area of biggest agreement in polls is that Americans want the law changed. In the most recent poll, 44 percent of Americans said Congress should keep the law but make "significant changes." That compares with 23 percent who want to keep it as it is, and 30 percent who support the Republicans' plan to repeal and replace it.

Mr. Greenberg said the growing belief that the government should make sure people have health coverage was less an outbreak of compassion than a matter of affordability. In focus groups he conducted, Trump voters said they wanted the president and Congress to lower their health insurance premiums; they did not want to lose the Affordable Care Act's protections against insurers charging more to people with pre-existing conditions, or denying coverage of basic health benefits.

Mark Goracy, an insurance consultant in Langhorne, near Doylestown, calls the coverage he and his wife get through the individual market "a joke." Their premium is \$1,415 a month, with combined deductibles of more than \$12,000.

Still, Mr. Goracy, 62, said he nonetheless wants the law's mandate blocking insurers from charging people more because of pre-existing conditions to survive.

While he once wished for "root-and-branch" repeal of the Affordable Care Act, he is not disappointed about the Republican failure to repeal it.

"Unlike when Democrats passed A.C.A. with not one Republican vote, what the Republicans need to do is get together with 20 or 25 Democrats and pass some kind of reform," he said. "That, to me, is how legislation is supposed to proceed."

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Goldberg : Health-Care Fight & Bipartisan Dishonesty -- Battle Between Liars

The story of health-care policy this week, this month, and for the last decade (at least) has been a tale of partisan folly. But fear not, this isn't another earnest pundit's lament for the vital center to emerge, phoenix-like, to form a governing coalition of moderates in both parties. That's not my bag.

After all, I have always argued that bipartisanship is overrated.

Bipartisan support often means unthinking support (as the Founders could have told you). Partisans may be annoying from time to time, but they also can be relied upon to point out the shortcomings of what the other side is doing. When partisan criticism is missing, it might be a sign that politicians in both parties are helping themselves, not the country. Or, it might mean they're pandering to the passions of the

public and press rather than doing the hard work of thinking things through.

So you'll get no warm and fuzzy pleading for moderates to scrub clean the word "compromise" so that it's no longer a dirty word in Washington. Others can make the case for that. And besides, that argument misses the essence of this spectacular failure. Honest

partisanship isn't the problem, bipartisan dishonesty is.

01:00

Paul Ryan: From Wisconsin to Capitol Hill

Both parties have become defined by their lies and their refusal to accept reality. It's a problem bigger than health care, but health care is probably the best illustration of it.

For seven years Republicans campaigned to repeal Obamacare. We now know that for many of those politicians, that pledge was a sales pitch that expired after the sale — i.e., the election — was final.

But before liberal readers pull a muscle nodding their heads: The Democrats aren't any better. Obamacare itself was lied into passage. "You can keep your plan!" "You can keep your doctor!" "Your premiums won't go up!" These were lies. If those promises were remotely true, Obamacare wouldn't be the mess it is.

But these aren't even the lies I have in mind.

The Republican "repeal and replace" bills debated for the last six months did not in fact repeal Obamacare. They kept most of its regulations intact — particularly the popular ones. The GOP did seek to repeal and reform the Medicaid expansion under Obamacare, but

that's not the same thing as repealing Obamacare.

Yet Republicans insisted it was a repeal because they wanted to claim that they fulfilled their repeal pledge. Actually fulfilling the substance of the pledge was a low-order priority. Heroically winning the talking point: This was their brass ring.

So, too, for the White House. Donald Trump just wanted a win. He has made it abundantly clear that he would sign anything the Republicans sent him — up to and possibly including the head of Alfredo Garcia if someone had written "Obamacare: Repealed" on the poor chap's forehead. Trump has shown zero preference for any specific policy or approach during these debates. He just wants the bragging rights.

And that is the one thing Democrats are most determined to deny him. The Democrats know that Obamacare has been an albatross

for their party. They often acknowledge, through gritted teeth, that the law needs a substantial overhaul.

This was all about bogus gasconade and rodomontade for Republicans and insecure rhetorical wagon-circling around Barack Obama's "legacy" for Democrats.

More important, they also know that the GOP wasn't pushing an actual repeal. But they couldn't tolerate for a moment the idea that the Republicans would get to claim it was repeal. So the one thing both sides could agree upon was that this was a zero-sum war over repealing Obamacare — when it wasn't.

This was all about bogus gasconade and rodomontade for Republicans and insecure rhetorical wagon-circling around Barack Obama's "legacy" for Democrats. If Trump and the GOP agreed to

abandon "repeal," as Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer wants, one can only wonder how much replacing of Obamacare Schumer would allow the GOP to get away with.

Likewise, if Democrats could somehow give Republicans the ability to say they repealed Obamacare, many Republican senators — and certainly Trump — would probably be happy to leave the bulk of it intact.

It is this fact that makes the polarized, tribal climate in Washington so frustrating. I like partisan fights when those fights are about something real. The Medicaid fight was at least about something real. But most of this nonsense is a battle of liars trying to protect past lies in the hope of being able to make new lies seem just plausible enough for the liars to keep repeating them.

Jonah Goldberg

the Atlantic Trump Trains His Sights on Mueller's Investigation

Matt Ford

President Trump is exploring steps to curtail Special Counsel Robert Mueller's criminal investigation into the president's campaign and business dealings, inching the country closer to uncharted constitutional waters.

The New York Times reported Thursday that Trump's private legal team is scouring the backgrounds of Mueller and his prosecutors for potential conflicts of interest and damaging information to be used against them. According to the Times, that research is part of a broader effort by Trump to curtail and discredit the former FBI director's probe into whether the Trump campaign colluded with the Russian government to influence the 2016 election.

The Times's account depicted a president who is increasingly angered by the sprawling Russia investigation that has become a central feature of his young presidency. Trump displayed flashes of that anger during a lengthy interview Wednesday with the Times, in which he flitted between channeling his ire towards Mueller, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, and Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe, as well as James Comey, the former director of the FBI ousted by Trump in May.

Trump's lawyers defended their investigations of Mueller's team as part of an effort to ensure he stays

within the lines prescribed to him by the Justice Department. "The fact is that the president is concerned about conflicts that exist within the special counsel's office and any changes in the scope of the investigation," Jay Sekulow, the second-in-command of Trump's private legal team, told the Washington Post. "The scope is going to have to stay within his mandate. If there's drifting, we're going to object."

The Post and Times reports drew a swift reaction from members of the legal community, especially among former Obama administration officials. "If Mueller is fired, will any high-level DOJ officials resign in protest?" asked Preet Bharara, the former Manhattan federal prosecutor who was ousted by Trump in March. "Trump cannot define or constrain Mueller investigation," Eric Holder, the former attorney general, wrote on Twitter. "If he tries to do so this creates issues of constitutional and criminal dimension."

Trump's aggressive efforts follow weeks of his allies taking aim at Mueller and his staff for perceived conflicts of interest. A recurring talking point is past political donations for Democratic office-holders by some members of the special counsel's team. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who initially supported Mueller's appointment, tweeted last month that Republicans "are delusional if they think the special counsel is going to be fair," citing FEC reports. (Trump and his family have also

donated to Democrats in past election cycles.)

The news also comes as the investigation inches closer to members of Trump's immediate family. Donald Trump Jr., the president's eldest son, is under scrutiny for a June 2016 meeting in which he welcomed an offer purportedly made on behalf of the Russian government to provide damaging information about Hillary Clinton. Also present at that meeting was Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, whose business dealings and communications with Russian officials have also reportedly drawn Mueller's attention. Both Kushner and Trump Jr. have denied any wrongdoing.

The Post also reported Trump has asked advisers about his ability to issue pardons and whether he could use it to shield "aides, family members, or even himself" from Mueller's inquiry. Such a move would almost certainly provoke a substantial political backlash. There is no precedent in American history for a president pardoning himself—the Constitution is silent on the matter, aside from noting pardons can't prevent impeachment. Any legal dispute about it would almost certainly be resolved by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Any direct efforts to undermine Mueller's inquiry could pose serious challenges for the American rule of law. In prior administrations, presidents have typically insulated themselves from the day-to-day

investigative work of the Justice Department to avoid perceptions of political interference. The relationship hasn't always been smooth: Bill Clinton and his White House frequently clashed with Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr during the Whitewater and Lewinsky investigations, although Clinton lacked the power to remove Starr from his post.

But the Trump administration is not a typical presidential administration. In contemporaneous memos, former FBI Director James Comey depicted a president who sought Comey's pledge of personal loyalty and asked him to drop an investigation into a close adviser. Trump has disputed Comey's accounts of those incidents, which would represent a serious breach of the post-Watergate firewall between the White House and the FBI. The traditional separation between the president and the bureau developed to avoid politicizing the FBI's immense powers.

In his Wednesday interview with the Times, Trump went even further and suggested that the nation's top law-enforcement agency answers to him personally, not to the Justice Department. "When Nixon came along [inaudible] was pretty brutal, and out of courtesy, the FBI started reporting to the Department of Justice," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office, according to the Times transcript. "But there was nothing official, there was nothing from Congress. There was nothing—anything. But the FBI person really reports directly to the president of

the United States, which is interesting.”

The New York Times (UNE) Trump Aides, Seeking Leverage, Investigate Mueller’s Investigators

Michael S. Schmidt, Maggie Haberman and Matt Apuzzo

WASHINGTON — President Trump’s lawyers and aides are scouring the professional and political backgrounds of investigators hired by the special counsel Robert S. Mueller III, looking for conflicts of interest they could use to discredit the investigation — or even build a case to fire Mr. Mueller or get some members of his team recused, according to three people with knowledge of the research effort.

The search for potential conflicts is wide-ranging. It includes scrutinizing donations to Democratic candidates, investigators’ past clients and Mr. Mueller’s relationship with James B. Comey, whose firing as F.B.I. director is part of the special counsel’s investigation.

The effort to investigate the investigators is another sign of a looming showdown between Mr. Trump and Mr. Mueller, who has assembled a team of high-powered prosecutors and agents to examine whether any of Mr. Trump’s advisers aided Russia’s campaign to disrupt last year’s presidential election.

Some of the investigators have vast experience prosecuting financial malfeasance, and the prospect that Mr. Mueller’s inquiry could evolve into an expansive examination of Mr. Trump’s financial history has stoked fears among the president’s aides. Both Mr. Trump and his aides have said publicly they are watching closely to ensure Mr. Mueller’s investigation remains narrowly focused on last year’s election.

During an interview with The New York Times on Wednesday, Mr. Trump said he was aware that members of Mr. Mueller’s team had potential conflicts of interest and would make the information available “at some point.”

Mr. Trump also said Mr. Mueller would be going outside his mandate if he begins investigating matters unrelated to Russia, like the president’s personal finances. Mr. Trump repeatedly declined to say what he might do if Mr. Mueller appeared to exceed that mandate. But his comments to The Times

represented a clear message to Mr. Mueller.

“The president’s making clear that the special counsel should not move outside the scope of the investigation,” Sarah Huckabee Sanders, a White House spokeswoman, said during a news briefing on Thursday.

Joshua Stueve, a spokesman for the special counsel, declined to comment.

For weeks, Republicans have publicly identified what they see as potential conflicts among Mr. Mueller’s team of more than a dozen investigators. In particular, they have cited thousands of dollars of political donations to Democrats, including former President Barack Obama, made by Andrew Weissmann, a former senior Justice Department official who has expertise in fraud and other financial crimes. News reports have revealed similar donations by other members of Mr. Mueller’s team, which Mr. Trump’s allies have cited as evidence of political bias. Another lawyer Mr. Mueller has hired, Jeannie Rhee, represented the Clinton Foundation.

To seek a recusal, Mr. Trump’s lawyers can argue their case to Mr. Mueller or his boss, Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein. The Justice Department has explicit rules about what constitutes a conflict of interest. Prosecutors may not participate in investigations if they have “a personal or political relationship” with the subject of the case. Making campaign donations is not included on the list of things that would create a “political relationship.”

The examination of Mr. Mueller’s investigators reflects deep concerns among the president’s aides that Mr. Mueller will mount a wide-ranging investigation in the mold of the inquiry conducted by the independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr during the 1990s. Mr. Starr’s investigation into President Bill Clinton began by reviewing an Arkansas land deal and concluded several years later with the president’s impeachment over a lie about a sexual affair.

By building files on Mr. Mueller’s team, the Trump administration is

following in the footsteps of the Clinton White House, which openly challenged Mr. Starr and criticized what Mr. Clinton’s aides saw as a political witch hunt.

Mr. Trump’s advisers are split on how far to go in challenging the independence of Mr. Mueller, a retired F.B.I. director and one of the most respected figures in law enforcement. Some advisers have warned that dismissing Mr. Mueller would create a legal and political mess.

Nevertheless, Mr. Trump has kept up the attacks on him. In his interview with The Times, which caught members of his legal team by surprise, he focused on the fact that Mr. Mueller had interviewed to replace Mr. Comey as the F.B.I. director just a day before Mr. Mueller was appointed special prosecutor, saying that the interview could create a conflict.

“He was sitting in that chair,” Mr. Trump said during the Oval Office interview. “He was up here, and he wanted the job.” Mr. Trump did not explain how the interview created a conflict of interest.

In addition to investigating possible collusion between Russia and Mr. Trump’s advisers, the special counsel is examining whether the president obstructed justice by firing Mr. Comey. Some of Mr. Trump’s supporters have portrayed Mr. Mueller and Mr. Comey as close friends. While they worked closely together in the Justice Department under President George W. Bush and are known to respect each other, associates of both men say the two are not particularly close.

Mr. Mueller’s team has begun examining financial records, and has requested documents from the Internal Revenue Service related to Mr. Trump’s former campaign chairman, Paul J. Manafort, according to a senior American official. The records are from a criminal tax investigation that had been opened long before Mr. Trump’s campaign began. Mr. Manafort was never charged in that case.

Federal investigators have also contacted Deutsche Bank about Mr. Trump’s accounts, and the bank is expecting to provide information to Mr. Mueller.

A lawyer for Mr. Trump, Jay Sekulow, declined to address the potential conflicts he and the other lawyers for Mr. Trump have uncovered about Mr. Mueller’s team. He said, however, that “any good lawyer would raise, at the appropriate time and in the appropriate venue, conflict-of-interest issues.”

Mr. Sekulow is one part of a legal team in the midst of being reorganized, according to three people with knowledge of the matter. The role of Marc E. Kasowitz, the president’s longtime New York lawyer, will be significantly reduced. Mr. Trump liked Mr. Kasowitz’s blunt, aggressive style, but he was not a natural fit in the delicate, politically charged criminal investigation. The veteran Washington defense lawyer John Dowd will take the lead in representing Mr. Trump for the Russia inquiry.

Mr. Sekulow, a firebrand lawyer with deep conservative credentials, will serve as Mr. Dowd’s deputy. Two people briefed on the new structure said it was created because the investigation is much more focused in Washington, where Mr. Dowd has a long history of dealing with the Justice Department.

Mark Corallo is no longer working as a spokesman for the legal team. A former Justice Department spokesman, Mr. Corallo was one of several people cautioning against publicly criticizing Mr. Mueller.

The shake-up comes weeks after Mr. Dowd and Mr. Kasowitz had a face-to-face meeting with Mr. Mueller. The lawyers said they hoped Mr. Mueller would conduct a thorough investigation but asked that he wrap it up in a timely manner because of the cloud it had cast over the presidency, according to a senior American official and two others briefed on details of the meeting. Mr. Dowd said Mr. Trump would fully cooperate with Mr. Mueller, one of the people said.

It is not unusual for lawyers to meet with prosecutors to establish a line of communication, or to encourage them to move quickly. Mr. Trump’s situation is unique, though, because of his team’s public threats that they could fire Mr. Mueller at any time.

Trump team seeks to control, block Mueller's Russia investigation (UNE)

Some of President Trump's lawyers are exploring ways to limit or undercut special counsel Robert S. Mueller III's Russia investigation, building a case against what they allege are his conflicts of interest and discussing the president's authority to grant pardons, according to people familiar with the effort.

Trump has asked his advisers about his power to pardon aides, family members and even himself in connection with the probe, according to one of those people. A second person said Trump's lawyers have been discussing the president's pardoning powers among themselves.

One adviser said the president has simply expressed a curiosity in understanding the reach of his pardoning authority, as well as the limits of Mueller's investigation.

"This is not in the context of, 'I can't wait to pardon myself,'" a close adviser said.

President Trump suggested the special prosecutor's team might not be fair, impartial investigators because of previous political contributions, legal clients and personal friends. President Trump suggested the special prosecutor's team might not be fair, impartial investigators. (Meg Kelly/The Washington Post)

(Meg Kelly/The Washington Post)

With the Russia investigation continuing to widen, Trump's lawyers are working to corral the probe and question the propriety of the special counsel's work. They are actively compiling a list of Mueller's alleged potential conflicts of interest, which they say could serve as a way to stymie his work, according to several of Trump's legal advisers.

A conflict of interest is one of the possible grounds that can be cited by an attorney general to remove a special counsel from office under Justice Department regulations that set rules for the job.

Responding to this story on Friday after it was published late Thursday, one of Trump's attorneys, John Dowd, said it was "not true" and "nonsense."

"The President's lawyers are cooperating with special counsel Robert Mueller on behalf of the President," he said.

Other advisers said the president is also irritated by the notion that

Mueller's probe could reach into his and his family's finances.

Trump has been fuming about the probe in recent weeks as he has been informed about the legal questions that he and his family could face. His primary frustration centers on why allegations that his campaign coordinated with Russia should spread into scrutinizing many years of Trump dealmaking. He has told aides he was especially disturbed after learning Mueller would be able to access several years of his tax returns.

Trump has repeatedly refused to make his tax returns public after first claiming he could not do so because he was under audit or after promising to release them after an IRS audit was completed. All presidents since Jimmy Carter have released their tax returns.

[Analysis: Asking about a pardon for himself is a quintessentially Trumpian move]

Further adding to the challenges facing Trump's outside lawyers, the team's spokesman, Mark Corallo, resigned on Thursday, according to two people familiar with his departure. Corallo did not respond to immediate requests for comment.

"If you're looking at Russian collusion, the president's tax returns would be outside that investigation," said a close adviser to the president.

Jay Sekulow, one of the president's private lawyers, said in an interview Thursday that the president and his legal team are intent on making sure Mueller stays within the boundaries of his assignment as special counsel. He said they will complain directly to Mueller if necessary.

"The fact is that the president is concerned about conflicts that exist within the special counsel's office and any changes in the scope of the investigation," Sekulow said. "The scope is going to have to stay within his mandate. If there's drifting, we're going to object."

Sekulow cited Bloomberg News reports that Mueller is scrutinizing some of Trump's business dealings, including with a Russian oligarch who purchased a Palm Beach mansion from Trump for \$95 million in 2008.

"They're talking about real estate transactions in Palm Beach several years ago," Sekulow said. "In our view, this is far outside the scope of a legitimate investigation."

The president has long called the FBI investigation into his campaign's possible coordination with the Russians a "witch hunt." But now, Trump is coming face-to-face with a powerful investigative team that is able to study evidence of any crime it encounters in the probe — including tax fraud, lying to federal agents and interference in the investigation.

"This is Ken Starr times 1,000," said one lawyer involved in the case, referring to the independent counsel who oversaw an investigation that eventually led to House impeachment proceedings against President Bill Clinton. "Of course, it's going to go into his finances."

Following Trump's decision to fire FBI Director James B. Comey — in part because of his displeasure with the FBI's Russia investigation — Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein appointed Mueller as special counsel in a written order. That order gave Mueller broad authority to investigate links between the Russian government and the Trump campaign, as well as "any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation" and any crimes committed in response to the investigation, such as perjury or obstruction of justice.

Mueller's probe has already expanded to include an examination of whether Trump obstructed justice in his dealings with Comey, as well as the business activities of Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law.

Trump's team could potentially challenge whether a broad probe of Trump's finances prior to his candidacy could be considered a matter that arose "directly" from an inquiry into possible collusion with a foreign government.

The president's legal representatives have also identified what they allege are several conflicts of interest facing Mueller, such as donations to Democrats by some of his prosecutors.

Another potential conflict claim is an allegation that Mueller and Trump National Golf Club in Northern Virginia had a dispute over membership fees when Mueller resigned as a member in 2011, two White House advisers said. A spokesman for Mueller said there was no dispute when Mueller, who was FBI director at the time, left the club.

Trump also took public aim on Wednesday at Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Rosenstein,

whose actions led to Mueller's appointment. In an interview with the New York Times Wednesday, the president said he never would have nominated Sessions if he knew he was going to recuse himself from the case.

[Sessions learns loyalty can be a one-way street with Trump]

Some Republicans in frequent touch with the White House said they viewed the president's decision to publicly air his disappointment with Sessions as a warning sign that the attorney general's days were numbered. Several senior aides were described as "stunned" when Sessions announced Thursday morning he would stay on at the Justice Department.

Another Republican in touch with the administration described the public steps as part of a broader effort aimed at "laying the groundwork to fire" Mueller.

"Who attacks their entire Justice Department?" this person said. "It's insane."

Law enforcement officials described Sessions as increasingly distant from the White House and the FBI because of the strains of the Russia investigation.

Traditionally, Justice Department leaders have sought to maintain a certain degree of autonomy from the White House as a means of ensuring prosecutorial independence.

But Sessions's situation is more unusual, law enforcement officials said, because he has angered the president for apparently being too independent while also angering many at the FBI for his role in the president's firing of Comey.

As a result, there is far less communication among those three key parts of the government than in years past, several officials said.

Currently, the discussions of pardoning authority by Trump's legal team are purely theoretical, according to two people familiar with the ongoing conversations. But if Trump pardoned himself in the face of the ongoing Mueller investigation, it would set off a legal and political firestorm, first around the question of whether a president can use the constitutional pardon power in that way.

"This is a fiercely debated but unresolved legal question," said Brian C. Kalt, a constitutional law expert at Michigan State University

who has written extensively on the question.

The power to pardon is granted to the president in Article II, Section 2, of the Constitution, which gives the commander in chief the power to "grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offences against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment." That means pardon authority extends to federal criminal prosecution but not to state level or impeachment inquiries.

No president has sought to pardon himself, so no courts have reviewed it. Although Kalt says the weight of the law argues against a president pardoning himself, he says the question is open and predicts such an action would move through the courts all the way to the Supreme

Court.

"There is no predicting what would happen," said Kalt, author of the book, "Constitutional Cliffhangers: A Legal Guide for Presidents and Their Enemies." It includes chapters on the ongoing debate over whether presidents can be prosecuted while in office and on whether a president can issue a pardon to himself.

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

Other White House advisers have tried to temper Trump, urging him to simply cooperate with the probe and stay silent on his feelings about the investigation.

On Monday, lawyer Ty Cobb, newly brought into the White House to handle responses to the Russian

probe, convened a meeting with the president and his team of lawyers, according to two people briefed on the meeting. Cobb, who is not yet on the White House payroll, was described as attempting to instill some discipline in how the White House handles queries about the case. But Trump surprised many of his aides by speaking at length about the probe to the New York Times two days later. Cobb, who officially joins the White House team at the end of the month, declined to comment for this article.

Some note that the Constitution does not explicitly prohibit a president from pardoning himself. On the other side, experts say that by definition a pardon is something you can only give to someone else. There is also a common-law canon

that prohibits individuals from serving as a judge in their own case. "For example, we would not allow a judge to preside over his or her own trial," Kalt said.

A president can pardon an individual at any point, including before the person is charged with a crime, and the scope of a presidential pardon can be very broad. President Gerald Ford pardoned former president Richard M. Nixon preemptively for offenses he "committed or may have committed" while in office.

Devlin Barrett and Sari Horwitz contributed to this report.



Kayyem : Why Trump should resist temptation to pardon his team

CNN analyst Juliette Kayyem is the author of the best-seller, "Security Mom: An Unclassified Guide to Protecting Our Homeland and Your Home." She is a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School, a former assistant secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in the Obama administration, host of the national security podcast, "The SCIF," and founder of Kayyem Solutions, a security consulting firm. The opinions expressed in this commentary are hers

(CNN)This Saturday, President Donald J. Trump is scheduled to participate in the commissioning of the USS Gerald Ford, the US Navy's newest aircraft carrier. It's an occasion to remember President Ford, who was a complicated President, one who tried to steer this nation past the tumult of Watergate and related crimes. Historians differ on whether Ford's pardoning of his predecessor, President Nixon, was a mistake, but it's a common view that it tarnished Ford's legacy and damaged any chance he had for another term.

The timing for President Trump is, to say the least, ironic.

Talk of

pardons

is in the air. Senator Mark Warner has warned against them. President Trump's lawyer,

Jay Sekulow

, has been asked about it. It is time to talk about the

possibility

that President Trump will utilize his expansive pardon power to save the people around him -- including his son and son-in-law -- well before

any criminal charges can be filed, if they are merited.

It is true that President Trump and his legal team have a variety of potential responses to growing accusations of collusion during the campaign or other possible crimes related to financial and business dealings -- including allowing the investigation to progress and run its course. But the attacks on investigators, special prosecutor Robert Mueller, and even the firing of former FBI Director James Comey suggest that that isn't the Trump team's strategy.

In addition -- after last week's bombshell and its aftermath that

Donald Trump Jr.

, his brother-in-law Jared Kushner, and then-campaign manager Paul Manafort met with a group of Russians they thought had information from the Russian government that would be damaging to Hillary Clinton -- President Trump's options are narrowing. This story is as close to a smoking gun as many of us could have imagined.

It is hard to imagine that pardons of those closest to the President, including family members, haven't been part of the Trump team's discussions of legal strategy; indeed, it would be bad lawyering if they had not been. As a nation, we have to brace for this possibility. But it would also be wrong to view potential pardons as simply a debate amongst lawyers about how feasible and effective they would be. The

political consequences

for Donald Trump of pardoning the likes of Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn, or his own son and son-in-

law to thwart any potential criminal charges related to campaign collusion or financial dealings would be devastating -- many members of Congress, not to mention the public at large, would be outraged. That's hardly the best way to move his political agenda forward.

At this stage, we do not know what evidence Mueller has or the specific crimes he might be able to charge, if any. But President Trump doesn't need to wait for Mueller to finish his investigation. The President is permitted to pardon someone at any stage --

before an investigation is complete

or before any specific indictment is brought. But as President Ford could attest, giving out "get out of jail free" cards is a harsh business that can result in staff resignations and revolt by both houses of Congress, for starters.

Ford pardoned Richard Nixon

to try to move the country past Watergate; instead, that exercise of presidential power came to define his own tenure in the office.

But most importantly, if President Trump were to pardon his team for its involvement with Russia, if any legal wrongdoing were proven, it would irrevocably harm our national and homeland security. We are the United States, and our values -- including democratic norms and objective elections -- serve as a beacon to many who do not have such freedoms.

Any pardon would change that calculus because it would be empowering to our enemies and embarrassing and unnerving to our allies. To embrace a foreign hostile power purporting to assist your side in an election emboldens other

nations to do the same: the Chinese, the Iranians, even our own allies who may favor one side over the other.

Any pardon would serve as a welcome mat and a "come hither" to other nations that this White House would protect them, and itself, in such dealings. And it could embolden them to seek favor with some candidates, and seek information about others, depending on the inclinations and policies of their country.

Donald Trump is already enabling Russia with his lack of action. He

doesn't even affirm

the assessment by our intelligence agencies that Russia disrupted our elections; in statements, he still caveats the possibility that Russia did it with asides that it could have been others. He appears not to have challenged Russian President Vladimir Putin in any meaningful way when they met at the G20. States and localities have not been given any advice about how to protect their election systems going forward.

A pardon of anyone involved in his administration's

relationship with Russia

would only add to this enabling, not just for Russia but for all nations. I do not know whether Donald Trump's own party would respond meaningfully against any steps toward a pardon, but what is clear is that the pardon power doesn't raise just a legal question. This is about our national security and our own willingness to defend its sovereignty against enemies and allies alike. Any pardon would tell the world we're not even interested in the fight.

Editorial : President Trump's Contempt for the Rule of Law

In less than an hour on Wednesday afternoon, President Trump found a way to impugn the integrity and threaten the livelihoods of nearly all of the country's top law enforcement officials, including some he appointed, for one simple reason: They swore an oath to defend the Constitution, not him.

For a president who sees the rule of law as an annoyance rather than a feature of American democracy, the traitors are everywhere.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions endured the worst abuse, which came during Mr. Trump's gobsmacking Oval Office interview with *The Times*. Mr. Sessions's offense? Recusing himself in March from all investigations related to the 2016 presidential campaign, a decision that infuriated Mr. Trump. "If he was going to recuse himself, he should have told me before he took the job and I would have picked somebody else," the president said. He called the recusal "extremely unfair — and that's a mild word — to the president."

Never mind that Mr. Sessions had no real choice but to step aside. Given his proximity to the campaign — Mr. Sessions

was one of Mr. Trump's earliest and most vocal supporters — his ability to be impartial was reasonably in doubt. The "unfairness," as Mr. Trump saw it, was that Mr. Sessions's partiality was exactly what he hoped to exploit, mainly to help quash the F.B.I.'s inquiry into his campaign's possible ties to the Russian government, whose meddling was aimed at tipping the election in Mr. Trump's favor.

Mr. Sessions said on Thursday that he would continue as attorney general "as long as that is appropriate." But propriety left the building long ago. It's hard to imagine he will be there much longer, since the president has, in so many words, invited him to resign for failing to block the Russia investigation. That inquiry lives on for now, but all those associated with it would be justified in fearing that they could well end up like James Comey, the F.B.I. director Mr. Trump fired in May in the hope of shutting it down.

Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who took charge after Mr. Sessions's recusal, and Robert Mueller, the special counsel Mr. Rosenstein appointed to run the investigation after Mr. Comey's firing, were also in the president's

sights. Both men, he complained, were guilty of "conflicts of interest" — which Mr. Trump seems to define as anything that conflicts with his own interests.

For Mr. Mueller, who led the F.B.I. for more than a decade and who is one of the most respected law enforcement officials in the country, Mr. Trump had a clear message: Watch your back. Any investigation into the Trump family's finances, unrelated to Russia, the president said, would constitute a "violation" of Mr. Mueller's mandate, and possibly would be grounds for his dismissal. That's simply wrong. The special counsel is authorized to investigate "any matters" that might arise during the course of the Russia investigation — in fact, he's already doing so.

In the end, Mr. Trump is concerned with nothing so much as saving his own hide, which means getting rid of the Russia inquiry for good. He previously said this was why he fired Mr. Comey, and it may yet be the undoing of Mr. Sessions, Mr. Rosenstein and Mr. Mueller.

The one person who avoided the president's wrath was the only one who has not yet had the chance to defy him: Christopher Wray, Mr. Trump's pick to replace Mr. Comey.

"I think we're going to have a great new F.B.I. director," Mr. Trump said Wednesday.

Perhaps he forgot that Mr. Wray told senators during his confirmation hearing that he would not hesitate to prosecute the Trump Organization for foreign-corruption crimes if the evidence pointed that way. Or perhaps he thinks he can bend Mr. Wray to his will because, as he told *The Times*, "the F.B.I. person really reports directly to the president."

Wrong again: The F.B.I. director reports to the attorney general, precisely to protect the independence of which Mr. Trump is so openly contemptuous. It's true that the president may fire the director, but that power is, or used to be, reserved for the most extraordinary circumstances.

Mr. Trump's cavalier attitude toward this carefully designed system is an affront to the people who have spent their careers respecting and protecting it. It's also the clearest sign yet that he values the rule of law only to the extent that it benefits him personally.

Editorial : Sessions Hangs In There

The White House said Thursday that President Trump still has confidence in Attorney General Jeff Sessions, but after the past two days the better question is whether Mr. Sessions still has confidence in the President. Mr. Trump needs the AG at this point more than the reverse.

Mr. Trump is like no other President, and he proved it on Wednesday by telling the *New York Times* that he would never have tapped Mr. Sessions for AG if he had known he would recuse himself from the investigation into Russia's 2016 campaign meddling. "He should have told me before he took

the job and I would have picked somebody else," Mr. Trump said, but Mr. Sessions didn't know at the time he would be presented with such a choice. He did so after news came out that he had met with the Russian ambassador during the campaign, and Mr. Sessions didn't want any political doubt hanging over the investigation.

Mr. Trump is understandably upset about the special counsel probe into Russia, but Deputy AG Rod Rosenstein didn't appoint counsel Robert Mueller until months after Mr. Sessions recused himself. The political trigger for the special counsel appointment was Mr. Trump's dismissal of FBI Director

James Comey followed by his tweet implying that he had tapes of his meetings with Mr. Comey.

Mr. Sessions might have resigned after this presidential outburst, but we're glad he didn't. The AG said Wednesday he'd serve "as long as that is appropriate" and that "we love this job." We have our policy differences with the AG (see nearby on asset forfeiture), but no one doubts that he is a man of integrity who will defend the Justice Department against improper political interference.

President Trump has shown he isn't bound by political norms, and he needs advisers like Mr. Sessions to

say when one of his impulses would be a mistake. The same goes on national security with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, or on economic policy with adviser Gary Cohn. Working for a President who can be as willful and rash as Mr. Trump can't be easy, and some advisers may find it impossible over time. But Mr. Trump needs people who can protect him and the country from his worst instincts, and if Mr. Sessions quits, Mr. Trump might not find anyone else who'll take the job.

Trump's Fury Erodes His Relationship With Sessions, an Early Ally (UNE)

Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman

WASHINGTON — President Trump's staff is used to his complaints about Attorney General Jeff Sessions, but the Republican senators who attended a White

House dinner on Monday were stunned to hear him criticize the man who was once Mr. Trump's most loyal supporter in the Senate.

It turned out to be a preview of even more cutting remarks Mr. Trump would make two days later in an

interview with *The New York Times*: an extraordinary public expression of dissatisfaction with one of his top aides based on Mr. Sessions's decision in March to recuse himself from the expanding federal investigation into whether the

Trump campaign colluded with Russia.

Despite Mr. Trump's avowal in the interview that he would not have picked Mr. Sessions if he had known he would recuse himself, Mr. Sessions said on Thursday that he

intended to serve “as long as that is appropriate.” And a spokeswoman for Mr. Trump, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, tried to moderate her boss’s remarks, telling reporters later, “Clearly, he has confidence in him, or he would not be the attorney general.”

But even if Mr. Sessions remains in his job, the relationship between him and Mr. Trump — the Alabama lawyer and the Queens real estate developer, an odd couple bound by a shared conviction that illegal immigration is destroying America — is unlikely to ever be the same, according to a half-dozen people close to Mr. Trump. And this is not the typical Trump administration feud.

The two men, divided by temperament, culture and geography, became surprisingly close in 2016, with Mr. Trump showing uncharacteristic deference toward Mr. Sessions, a Southern senator whose support he valued deeply.

Mr. Sessions was the president’s first cabinet appointment. As attorney general, he has taken on as broad a policy purview as any member of the cabinet, with an ambitious law-and-order agenda — much admired by conservatives — that is focused on ending illegal immigration, attacking urban crime and restarting the Republican Party’s 30-year-old devotion to a “war on drugs.” Two of Mr. Sessions’s aides, Stephen Miller and Rick Dearborn, worked on the Trump campaign and have key roles in the White House.

But for Mr. Trump, preoccupied by investigations that he believes are unfairly aimed at him, Mr. Sessions’s decision seems impossible to forgive. “Everything that is happening was triggered by Sessions’s recusal,” said Roger Stone, a longtime Trump political adviser whose own activities are being scrutinized by investigators.

Mr. Stone listed a chain of events Mr. Trump often

ticks off against Mr. Sessions: Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein took over the Russia investigation after Mr. Sessions’s recusal, which led to the appointment of Robert S. Mueller III, a former F.B.I. director, as special counsel, which, in turn, led to irrepressible presidential rage.

“The president initially bonded with Sessions because he saw him as a tough guy,” said Mr. Stone, who has urged Mr. Sessions to investigate Obama-era officials instead of Trump campaign operatives. “Now he’s saying: ‘Where’s my tough guy? Why doesn’t he have my back?’”

“There’s a lack of aggressiveness with Sessions, unless it involves chasing people for smoking pot,” he added, referring to the attorney general’s recent focus on marijuana offenses largely ignored under President Barack Obama.

But Mr. Sessions was there during some of Mr. Trump’s lowest moments.

He was the first senator to back Mr. Trump, lending some credibility to a candidate whom many in the party viewed as either a joke or a menace. When an audiotape became public of Mr. Trump talking to an “Access Hollywood” host in explicit terms about grabbing women, and Reince Priebus, then the Republican National Committee chairman, suggested that Mr. Trump drop out of the race, he urged Mr. Priebus to wait and see how things played out.

People close to Mr. Trump are not sure if his remarks signaled an intention to fire Mr. Sessions, or were meant to coax him into a forced resignation, or were just the president’s attempt to let off a plume of public rage — or all three at once.

Months ago, Mr. Trump mused to his family members in the White House and to other advisers that if he fired Mr. Sessions, and Mr. Rosenstein became acting attorney

general, Mr. Rosenstein would have to recuse himself from the investigation because he had written a letter recommending the firing of James B. Comey, the former F.B.I. director. That way, Mr. Trump would be able to push through a new attorney general fairly quickly.

But in recent weeks, Mr. Trump has become more aware of how hard it could be, given the investigations, to win Senate confirmation of a new attorney general, especially one who possesses the iron loyalty the president demands of Mr. Sessions.

Former colleagues expressed sympathy for Mr. Sessions on Thursday for having to deal with the mercurial Mr. Trump. And they expressed doubt that Mr. Sessions, a legislative loner who represented the far right wing of the Republican conference, would quit his job, which he views as personal vindication for the Senate’s refusal to confirm him to a federal judgeship in 1986.

“Watching Senator Sessions for the six years we served together, he never seemed particularly taken aback by anybody criticizing a position he took or a position that was uniquely his,” said Senator Roy Blunt, Republican of Missouri. “He was often the only voice on an issue and had no problem being the only voice.”

But Senator Richard J. Durbin, an Illinois Democrat who served on the Judiciary Committee with Mr. Sessions, questioned how Mr. Sessions could continue in his job after the president undermined him.

“If there was ever a clear vote of no confidence by a president in his attorney general, it was the New York Times interview,” Mr. Durbin said. “I don’t see how he can continue in this critical role in this administration.”

Mr. Durbin said he believed Mr. Sessions had made a new assessment on the Russia investigation when he took over the

Justice Department and realized that he had to recuse himself given questions about his failure to disclose his own contacts with Russian officials.

“For his own reputation and for his name, he stepped aside,” Mr. Durbin said. “The president didn’t hire him to step aside.”

Mr. Sessions has fretted about being frozen out by Mr. Trump, and their interactions have been clipped and businesslike recently, according to a senior administration official close to both men. But on Thursday, he vowed to soldier on.

In his five months as the nation’s top law enforcement official, Mr. Sessions has made a notable mark on the Justice Department, rolling back some of the Obama administration’s signature policies while emphasizing his own agenda.

He has directed federal prosecutors to pursue the toughest possible charges and sentences in all criminal cases, overriding guidance from former Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr., who sought to ease penalties for some nonviolent drug offenses and reduce the harsh prison sentences such crimes can automatically bring.

This week, Mr. Sessions revived another controversial policy, further empowering the police to seize the personal property of people suspected of crimes but not charged, a practice many states have restricted.

“We are serving right now. The work we are doing today is the kind of work that we intend to continue,” he said at a news conference announcing what he described as the dismantling of an online operation that sold narcotics and other illicit goods.

“I am totally confident that we can continue to run this office in an effective way,” he added.



Jeff Sessions says he plans to stay in role, despite Trump’s comments about him (UNE)

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Thursday that he plans to stay in his job despite comments from President Trump that he would not have nominated Sessions to the post had he known that he would recuse himself from the investigation of Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential campaign.

Sessions said that he had the “honor of serving as attorney general,” and that he plans “to

continue to do so as long as that is appropriate.” Asked whether he could keep running the Justice Department given Trump’s comments, he responded: “I’m totally confident that we can continue to run this office in an effective way.”

But Sessions’s public expression of confidence masked deeper private tensions regarding his position in the administration and his rapport

with a president who once turned to him as a confidant and policy guide.

Since his decision to recuse himself from the Russia investigation in March, Sessions has rapidly lost his standing as one of Trump’s most trusted advisers and has drifted from the president’s inner circle, according to two White House officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to be candid.

Trump has frequently cited Sessions’s recusal to aides in private as one of the reasons he thinks his administration is under siege on Russia matters and has vented to friends that Sessions’s decision has left him vulnerable to attack, the officials said.

In recent weeks, those complaints from Trump have not abated as the White House has dealt with near daily twists regarding Russia. Trump has turned to new legal

advisers on those developments rather than his longtime ally Sessions, who was the first senator to endorse Trump at a time when few in the Republican establishment supported the candidate, and has felt increasingly isolated from the White House, people close to Sessions and Trump say.

Although Sessions and his deputies are in close touch with some Trump advisers on issues of law enforcement, they are no longer driving the president's thinking or highly influential with Trump as he navigates the controversies and plots out his agenda.

The attorney general speaks less regularly with the president, these people say, and instead has buried himself in his work at the Justice Department putting in place some of the policies Trump touted on the campaign trail, in essence remaining an ally but not a confidant.

Deputy White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Thursday that although the president was "disappointed" in Sessions's decision to recuse himself, "clearly he has confidence in him or he would not be the attorney general."

There was minimal communication between the White House and the Justice Department following Sessions's statement Thursday that he wouldn't resign, according to people in the administration. Justice Department officials said they were not surprised to hear the president's criticism of Sessions, because they have been aware for months of Trump's anger about the recusal.

Sessions, who served as a prosecutor before his career in the Senate, described the attorney general job Thursday as "something that goes beyond any thought I would have ever had for myself" and showed no sign of being ready or willing to resign from his job.

A Justice Department news conference Thursday took on a surreal quality with Sessions announcing a major case busting a shadowy online marketplace that became a hub for drug trafficking. It should have been a triumphant moment for the Justice Department in its effort to crack down on crime and narcotics, a top priority for the president. Instead, Sessions faced reporters questioning how he could continue serving as attorney general.

"We're serving right now," he said. "The work we're doing today is the kind of work that we intend to continue."

On Wednesday, the New York Times published highlights from an interview with Trump in which the president suggested that he regretted nominating Sessions.

"Sessions should have never recused himself, and if he was going to recuse himself, he should have told me before he took the job, and I would have picked somebody else," Trump said, according to the New York Times.

Sessions's recusal came in March after The Washington Post reported that he had met with Russia's ambassador to the United States and had not disclosed the contacts when the matter came up at his congressional confirmation hearing. When Sessions announced the recusal, he cited his involvement with the Trump campaign.

[Sessions met with Russian envoy twice last year, encounters he later did not disclose]

Trump said Sessions's recusal was unfair to him as president.

"How do you take a job and then recuse yourself?" he said. "If he would have recused himself before the job, I would have said, 'Thanks, Jeff, but I'm not going to take you.' It's extremely unfair — and that's a mild word — to the president."

In the attorney general role, Sessions has proved to be one of Trump's most loyal foot soldiers, methodically enacting policies the president supports on criminal justice.

When Sessions directed federal prosecutors nationwide in April to make immigration cases a higher priority, for example, he declared in no uncertain terms, "This is the Trump era."

Sessions, 70, has been working long hours. He arrives at the Justice Department from his Capitol Hill home every day about 6 a.m., said several people who work with him. The back of the nameplate on his desk that he has had since he was the attorney general of Alabama says, "Be prepared," a reference to his days as an Eagle Scout.

He has breakfast, a bowl of oatmeal heated in his microwave, in his fifth-floor office overlooking Constitution Avenue, people close to him said. Then he works out on a treadmill in a side room and showers before his meetings start at 8:20 a.m. He often doesn't leave work until 8 p.m.

After a bruising confirmation battle, Sessions arrived at the Justice Department in February with big plans to undo many of the Obama

administration's policies on criminal justice.

[Jeff Sessions testifies: Refuses to say whether he spoke to Trump about Comey's handling of Russia investigation]

With the Russia scandal enveloping the White House, Sessions has forged ahead with his agenda aimed at empowering law enforcement and putting more criminals behind bars.

One of Sessions's most significant changes has been to reverse an Obama-era policy aimed at changing how prosecutors treat nonviolent drug offenders, part of an effort to end mass incarceration. Sessions, instead, has instructed lawyers to pursue "the most serious, readily provable offense," including charges that carry mandatory minimum sentences. He also overturned the Obama administration's decision to stop using private prisons.

This week, Sessions issued a new policy on asset forfeiture to increase seizures of cash and property by police — undoing another policy by his predecessor designed to curb abuse by law enforcement officials.

Sessions also has begun a campaign to step up the deportation of undocumented immigrants, adding 25 immigration judges to handle deportation proceedings with the promise of 125 more over the next two years. The attorney general has vowed to punish "sanctuary cities" by withholding federal funding.

Sessions is going in a different direction on voting rights issues, reversing the department's position on a Texas voter ID law that several courts have found unconstitutional.

He has tied a recent increase in violent crime in some cities to a lack of respect for police officers and vowed that his department will be more supportive of law enforcement. Sessions has ordered Justice Department lawyers to review all reform agreements with troubled police forces nationwide to ensure that they don't work against Trump administration goals — and he tried to delay moving forward with a police consent decree in Baltimore.

Next week, Sessions's task force on crime reduction is set to present him with recommendations on a range of policies, including federal drug policy on marijuana. Sessions has argued for years that the Justice Department should enforce federal laws regarding marijuana, even as states have legalized the drug.

But Sessions also has faced roadblocks, including his deteriorating relationship with the president. At one point in recent months, things grew so tense between Trump and his attorney general that Sessions offered to resign.

Nearly six months into his tenure, the attorney general also has faced a personnel vacuum at the highest levels of the department and in field offices nationwide.

The nominees to head the Justice Department's criminal, civil and national security divisions, as well as the designated solicitor general, have not had Senate confirmation hearings. And although 25 of 93 U.S. attorneys have been announced by the White House, none have been confirmed. Only two Senate-confirmed U.S. attorneys are in place across the country — and they were appointed by President Barack Obama.

[Sessions greenlights police to increase seizures of cash and property from people suspected of crimes but not charged]

Sessions's weekends have been consumed with trying to find candidates to fill key positions to implement his law enforcement agenda. Former Justice Department officials say that acting U.S. attorneys and other high-ranking officials do not operate with the same authority as those who are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

"We're all a little frustrated about the delay and the time that it takes to get our folks confirmed," Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein said. "It certainly would be easier to have everybody on board more quickly."

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Armand DeKeyser, Sessions's former chief of staff in the Senate, visited the attorney general in his new office earlier this spring.

"There were a lot of empty offices," said DeKeyser, executive director of the Alabama Humanities Foundation. "He said, 'I am trying to get people up here as quick as I can.' He kind of laughed and said, 'I need some help up here.'"

Devlin Barrett contributed to this report.

The strange legal battle that is pitting Trump's secretaries of the Treasury and State against each other (UNE)

By Damian Paletta and Carol Morello

Two of President Trump's most senior cabinet members became embroiled Thursday in an unusual legal battle over whether ExxonMobil under Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's leadership violated U.S. sanctions against Russia.

Treasury officials fined ExxonMobil \$2 million Thursday morning for signing eight business agreements in 2014 with Igor Sechin, the chief executive of Rosneft, an energy giant partially owned by the Russian government. The business agreements came less than a month after the United States banned companies from doing business with him.

Hours after the fine was announced, Exxon filed a legal complaint against the Treasury Department -- naming Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin as the lead defendant -- while calling the actions "unlawful" and "fundamentally unfair."

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Trump sought to stack his cabinet with titans of industry, hoping that their corporate expertise would help them confront global problems.

But this new entanglement shows the flipside of such an arrangement. Cabinet secretaries may bring into office unresolved questions about corporate practices that are now subject to scrutiny by the government they help run. In this case, an agency led by one of Trump's top advisers is alleging improper behavior from a company that was run by another.

Former ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson, President-elect Trump's nominee for secretary of state, outlined the process by which he is divesting himself from his business interests in preparation for serving as a Cabinet appointee, during his confirmation hearing on Jan. 11 at the Capitol. Tillerson details steps he's taken to separate himself from business interests (Photo: Melina Mara/The Washington Post/Reuters)

Former ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson, President-elect Trump's nominee for secretary of state, outlined the

process by which he is divesting himself from his business interests in preparation for serving as a Cabinet appointee, during his confirmation hearing on Jan. 11 at the Capitol. (Reuters)

"I can't think of another case where that's happened, where you've had a senior government official on both sides of the 'v,' essentially," said Adam Smith, a former top official in the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

The Treasury Department informed Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan of the impending Exxon fine, and he told Tillerson, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said. That chain was in keeping with Tillerson's promise to recuse himself from anything involving Exxon, she said.

"The secretary recused himself," she said. "He is living up to the ethical commitments he agreed to when he became secretary of state." The State Department declined to answer questions over whether Tillerson was involved in the 2014 business deals with Rosneft.

"There's not a whole lot that we can say about this right now," said Nauert, when asked whether Tillerson would address the matter in person. She referred further questions to the Treasury.

A Treasury spokesman said Tillerson did not personally sign the documents sealing the agreements with Rosneft.

But in its announcement, the Treasury said top Exxon officials showed a "reckless disregard for" the sanctions against Sechin, adding that the company's "senior-most executives knew of Sechin's status" and that they "caused significant harm to the Ukraine-related sanctions" by engaging in business agreements with him. Tillerson and Sechin have had a long-standing relationship, which was critical for ExxonMobil's ability to maintain its access to Russia's lucrative oil industry.

The eight business deals were signed when Tillerson was chief executive of ExxonMobil, a role he recently described as "the ultimate decision-maker."

The \$2 million fine represents a tiny fraction of Exxon's earnings, but it could complicate ExxonMobil's future dealings with Rosneft, one of the largest energy companies in the world, which Sechin still leads.

The sanctions against Sechin were part of a broader set of actions meant to economically isolate Putin and the Russian government following its support for separatists in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. When the measures were announced, Treasury said Sechin in particular "has shown utter loyalty to Vladimir Putin -- a key component to his current standing."

The sanctions applied only to Sechin, not his company. Rosneft and the Russian Embassy did not respond to a request for comment.

ExxonMobil didn't deny that it entered into the business agreement with Sechin, but it says that guidance from the Obama administration at the time allowed such an arrangement. It also argued that it reached agreements with Sechin in his role as the head of Rosneft and not in a personal capacity.

"Tillerson as a major CEO almost certainly know Sechin was on the blacklist," said Cliff Kupchan, chairman of the Eurasia Group, which analyzes business risk. "The question is whether OFAC issued clear guidance on whether deals with Rosneft were off limits."

In the company's legal complaint against Mnuchin and the Treasury, ExxonMobil also called the Treasury's allegations "arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, and otherwise not in accordance with law."

Treasury had instituted the sanctions against Sechin on April 28, 2014, when it said "transactions by U.S. persons or within the United States involving the individuals and entities designated today are generally prohibited."

At the time, Tillerson told reporters that the new U.S.-imposed sanctions would not impact Exxon's relationship with the Russian oil giant.

"There has been no impact on any of our business activities in Russia to this point, nor has there been any discernible impact on the

relationship" with Rosneft, Tillerson said at the time, according to the Associated Press. "The organizations continue to work business as usual."

President Trump selected Tillerson to serve as his first secretary of state, even though the two had no history together.

Tillerson faced scrutiny from lawmakers in both parties because of his close ties to Putin and past business dealings in Russia, but he was confirmed for the cabinet position by a 56-to-43 vote. In 2013, Tillerson won an award from the Russian government called the "Order of Friendship" after signing deals with Rosneft that began a drilling program in the Arctic's Kara Sea.

Trump selected Tillerson to be his only adviser during a two-hour and fifteen minute meeting with Putin earlier this month in Hamburg, Germany, and Tillerson said both men had immediate chemistry during the conversation at a briefing later with reporters. At that briefing, Tillerson stood beside Mnuchin and they both addressed the media together.

Trump has faced scrutiny for his efforts to improve relations with Putin, and he has raised questions about U.S. intelligence assessments that found Russia launched a cyberattack campaign to help Trump win the election.

David Mortlock, a partner at Willkie Farr & Gallagher who works on international transactions issues, said the fine from Treasury and the legal complaint filed immediately by Exxon marked a highly unusual chain of events, but he said the company was likely trying to protect its reputation in part because of its extensive international business dealings.

"Compliance with sanctions and whether you have an enforcement action against you really does affect a company's credibility," he said. "And it's certainly something companies prefer to avoid."

THERE IS a danger that Americans become so inured to President Trump's indifference to rule of law that they forget how a president who respected public service and the Constitution — and had nothing to hide — would speak and behave. In the interest of jogging memories, we have matched a few of Mr. Trump's Wednesday comments to the New York Times (reprinted below in italics) with imagined quotations of what an ethical president might say.

Mr. Trump: Well, [Attorney General Jeff] Sessions should have never recused himself, and if he was going to recuse himself, he should have told me before he took the job, and I would have picked somebody else. . . . I think [it] is very unfair to the president.

"Jeff Sessions was very involved in my campaign, so of course he had to recuse himself from any matters having to do with my campaign. Once it came out, after his confirmation, that he had given inaccurate testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee about his meetings with Russian officials, it was doubly a no-brainer.

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"Very properly, he didn't give me a heads-up. After all, an attorney general is supposed to enforce the laws, not be part of a president's political team. And frankly, if he

hadn't recused, I would have called him up and said, 'What are you waiting for? We can't have the slightest appearance of impropriety in my administration!'"

Mr. Trump: I then end up with a second man, who's a deputy . . . and that's Rosenstein, Rod Rosenstein, who is from Baltimore. There are very few Republicans in Baltimore, if any.

President Trump turned on his longtime surrogate Attorney General Jeff Sessions and other members of the Justice Department over the ongoing Russia investigation, and Sessions's recusal from it. President Trump turned on his longtime surrogate Attorney General Jeff Sessions and other members of the Justice Department over the Russia investigation. (Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

(Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

"Fortunately, we had in place a highly respected deputy attorney general, Rod Rosenstein, who consistently in his career — you know, he was the U.S. attorney in Baltimore for many years — has had the support and respect of senators and other politicians from both parties.

"By the way, Baltimore is a city in the United States. I'm president of all the United States — blue state, red state, makes no difference."

New York Times: But did that email concern you, that the Russian

government was trying something to compromise —

Mr. Trump: I just heard there was an email requesting a meeting or something — yeah, requesting a meeting. That they have information on Hillary Clinton, and I said — I mean, this was standard political stuff.

"Concern me? You better believe I have taken Junior to the woodshed over that one. I mean, someone sends a message saying a hostile foreign power is offering opposition research through a government lawyer, what do you do? What does anyone do? You call the FBI and run the other way. Instead, Junior takes the meeting and brings my campaign manager along, to boot. What was he thinking? As we find out how deeply implicated Russia was in interfering in the election, this only becomes more alarming."

New York Times: Last thing, if [special counsel Robert S.] Mueller was looking at your finances and your family finances, unrelated to Russia — is that a red line? . . . Would that be a breach of what his actual charge is?

Mr. Trump: I would say yeah. I would say yes. By the way, I would say, I don't — I don't — I mean, it's possible there's a condo or something, so, you know, I sell a lot of condo units, and somebody from Russia buys a condo, who knows?

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said he is "totally confident that we can continue to run this office in an effective way" on July 20 after President Trump criticized Sessions

for recusing himself from the Russia probe. Attorney General Jeff Sessions said he is "totally confident that we can continue to run this office in an effective way" on July 20. (The Washington Post)

(The Washington Post)

"You know, I don't think I should say anything about what Mueller should or shouldn't do, because his independence is paramount. But let me just say this: I've got nothing to hide. Whatever he wants to look at, he is welcome to look at, and the sooner the better, because the sooner it will prove that I've done nothing wrong.

"And to show you how strongly I feel about that, I've got some documents here you can take on your way out. Here's copies of my tax returns for the past 10 years, and here's my business records, showing every real estate deal I've done with Russian oligarchs, the prices they paid me compared with market price, and so on. Please — read them carefully and report on them.

"Why wouldn't I make them public, after all?"

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