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FRANCE - EUROPE

TIME

French President Emmanuel Macron Hosts Rival Leaders of Libya

Elaine Gainley
and Nicholas Garriga / AP

Jul 25, 2017

(LA CELLE SAINT-CLOUD, France) — President Emmanuel Macron opened meetings on Tuesday with the two main rival leaders of chaotic Libya, trying to play peacemaker for a country where the stakes are high for both Europe and Africa.

The series of meetings at a chateau in La Celle Saint-Cloud, west of Paris, bring together Fayed Serraj, prime minister of the U.N.-backed unity government, and Gen. Khalifa Hifter, the Egyptian-backed commander of Libya's self-styled national army. Macron was meeting separately with each ahead of an encounter between the two Libyans in the presence of U.N.'s newly appointed special envoy for Libya, Ghassan Salame.

The encounters were expected to end with a joint declaration between the two Libyans which the French have billed as a first.

Talks were centered on creating a propitious climate for elections next

year — which the Libyan prime minister announced plans for in May — security and military issues, respect for human rights and economic development of the oil-rich nation where residents struggle despite the resources, French officials said.

Macron, Salame and Serraj, along with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, walked into the chateau to begin the first set of talks after shaking hands before Republican Guards in their ornate gear. Hifter arrived later, with no greeting from the president already at a table with his rival.

French officials hope the meetings will facilitate a political entente. The joint declaration that will close off the meetings is to include, among other things, the need for a political — not military — solution to the crisis. It would also lay down the principle of a cease-fire — except for fighting Islamic militants, an official of the French presidential palace said. The declaration would be "simple but constructive," according to the official, and be a first between the two protagonists

despite past meetings. The official could not be named in keeping with presidential policy.

The encounter is not expected to resolve the knotty problems of Libya, politically fractured and awash in militias and human traffickers preying on migrants who use the Libyan coast as a jumping off point to Europe, mainly Italy. But it would be a basis for the U.N. envoy to come up with proposals in the weeks and months ahead.

Libya's instability, triggered by the fall of leader Moammar Gadhafi in 2011, has an impact beyond its borders, for Europe and for France, and for African neighbors. Macron's bid to work toward laying the groundwork for a state with a functioning government and institutions is a priority of his presidency.

For French officials, the time is ripe for forward movement in the search for a resolution to the Libyan crisis. Sharing the international spotlight with Macron, elected less than three months ago, could boost the resolve of the Libyan rivals to seek a way out of their impasse.

Serraj and Hifter met in early May in Abu Dhabi, and the United Arab Emirates said later there had been a "significant breakthrough." Libya TV said the men agreed on holding presidential and parliamentary elections next year in the fractured country.

Paris has made clear that the French initiative is not meant to brush aside numerous initiatives by others, including the European Union, the African Union and individual countries, like Morocco.

France "wants to facilitate a political entente" and "mark its support for efforts to build a political compromise, under the auspices of the United Nations," that includes all actors in the fractious country, a statement Monday by the president's office said. The challenge, it added, is to "build a state capable of responding to the fundamental needs of Libyans" with one regular army "under the authority of civilian power," considered necessary for the control of borders and stability within Libya.

Bloomberg

U.K. Joins France, Says Goodbye to Fossil-Fuel Cars by 2040

Charlotte Ryan

The U.K. became the latest European country to mark the end of the line for diesel and gasoline fueled cars as automakers such as Volvo race to build electric vehicles or face the consequences of getting left behind.

In London, the government said it will ban sales of the vehicles by 2040, two weeks after France announced a similar plan to reduce air pollution and become a carbon-neutral nation. For the auto industry, the end of an era for fossil-fuel powered cars poses a challenge not everyone is welcoming.

"We could undermine the U.K.'s successful automotive sector if we don't allow enough time for the industry to adjust," said Mike Hawes, chief executive officer of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. "Outright bans risk undermining the current market for new cars and our sector, which supports over 800,000 jobs across the U.K.," he said. "The industry instead wants a positive approach

which gives consumers incentives to purchase these cars."

Daimler AG, the maker of Mercedes-Benz cars, is keen to shore up diesel, since it powers many of its lucrative sport utility vehicles and big sedans, but others are embracing the new reality. Sweden's Volvo Car Group said that by 2019 all of its cars will have an electric motor, while BMW AG will build an electric version of its iconic Mini compact car in Britain.

The global shift toward electric vehicles will create upheaval across a number of sectors, from oil majors harmed by reduced gasoline demand to spark plug and fuel injection makers whose products aren't needed by plug-in cars. In the U.K., the decision is partly brought on by stringent European Union emission rules that the country must follow even as it is set to leave the bloc.

"We can't carry on with diesel and petrol cars," Environment Secretary Michael Gove said on BBC Radio 4's "Today" show. "It's important we all gear up for a significant change

which deals not just with the problems to health caused by emissions but the broader problems caused in terms of accelerating climate change."

[Click here to read more about why it's the end of cars as we know it](#)

The environmental push comes as the U.K. plans to invest more than 800 million pounds (\$1 billion) in driverless and zero-emission technology and outlined plans to invest 246 million pounds in battery technology research. For activists, the new targets are not ambitious enough.

Electric Surge

Electric vehicles will likely grow in popularity in the second half of the next decade due to plunging battery prices, according to a report from Bloomberg New Energy Finance. The analysts see the proportion of fully electric cars sold in the U.K. rising to one in 12 by 2030, from one in 200 today.

"Our modelling shows that 79 percent of new cars could be electric

by 2040 in the U.K. even under existing policies, thanks to rapidly falling battery costs," said Albert Cheung, analyst at Bloomberg New Energy Finance. "To close the gap to 100 percent, we'll need to see much greater investments in charging infrastructure, to make sure people have somewhere to plug in."

Not all countries are on the same page. With tens of thousands of jobs at stake, Germany is looking for ways to reduce automotive emissions without moving toward an outright ban on vehicles with combustion engines. State and federal officials are set to meet next week in Berlin with auto-industry executives to discuss possibly retrofitting cars currently on the street with new technology to reduce pollution from exhaust.

Critics are also concerned that it will be up to local authorities to impose tough levies on the most polluting diesel vehicles as soon as 2020. The plan is to urge local jurisdictions to reduce emissions first, by fitting diesel vehicles with filters, changing

road layouts and removing speed humps.

"What we're saying to local authorities is: Come up with an imaginative solution to these proposals," Gove told the BBC.

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French philosopher Anne Dufourmantelle drowns trying to rescue children in danger

By Kyle Swenson

"If you want to risk, it means you are going to put your life at danger," Anne Dufourmantelle told a classroom of students at the European Graduate School in 2011, the topic a detour from the usual stodgy lecture hall babble filling university coursework. "But risk is not integrated as a normal path of life itself," the Frenchwoman continued.

Dufourmantelle's subject choice wasn't random. Risk — putting one's life on the line, and the limited options for doing so in the modern world — was the centerpiece of the French philosopher, psychoanalyst and columnist's well-respected body of thought.

"The spell of risk is really about what is being in life," Dufourmantelle said later in the English-language lecture. "Is being in life just being born? Probably not. To me, risking your life is not dying yet, it's integrating that you *could* be dying in your own life. Being completely

The U.K. has the largest fleet of diesel vehicles in Europe after drivers were encouraged to switch from gasoline because diesel has more range and emits less carbon dioxide. But emissions from the fuel are between eight and 10 times more toxic, according to Stephen Holgate, medical research professor at the University of Southampton

alive is a task, it's not at all a given thing. It's not just about being present to the world, it's being present to yourself, reaching an intensity that is in itself a way of being reborn."

Dufourmantelle lived by her philosophy last weekend — and tragically died by it as well. On Friday, the French thinker died in St. Tropez. According to the BBC, she was killed in an attempted rescue situation during rough weather. The accident has thrown the academic and intellectual orbits of France and Europe into mourning. Following reports of Dufourmantelle's death, France's Minister of Culture Françoise Nyssen wrote on Twitter that the writer "helped us to live, to think of the world of today."

Stories that will be the talk of the morning.

On Friday evening, Dufourmantelle was at Pampelonne beach when the weather changed, with rough chop and heavy wind kicking in. The BBC has reported lifeguards on the

and special adviser on air quality at the Royal College of Physicians.

Britain has now switched emphasis and is seeking to position itself as a leader in electric and driverless car technology, hoping to create jobs and export opportunities as it quits the European Union. Today's decision represents a more ambitious update to last month's Queen's Speech, which said the

scene changed the flag at the area from orange to red, a signal meaning wave conditions were too dangerous for swimmers.

Dufourmantelle, however, spotted children still in the water — either one or two, depending on the reports. When she attempted to reach them, she was swept out by the current. Le Monde has reported one of the children was the 10-year-old son of Dufourmantelle's friend, and that the 53-year-old philosopher succumbed to a cardiac arrest during her attempt to save him.

Lifeguards eventually rescued the children, who were unharmed.

The writer's tome on risk, "Eloge du Risque" (In Praise of Risk) was published in 2011, one of the nearly 30 books she wrote or co-authored in her career. Her thesis argued the "zero-risk" attitude of contemporary existence left a gaping hole in human life. "When there is really a danger to be faced, there is a very strong incentive to devotion, to

government would set a target for almost every car and van to be zero emission by 2050.

Plug in cars are still only about one percent of all U.K. vehicle sales, yet the country is one of only a handful worldwide to have more than 100,000 plug-in automobiles on the road.

surpassing oneself," Dufourmantelle wrote in a 2015 piece for French newspaper Liberation, according to a translation by ABC News. "A life with absolute security — like zero risk — is a fantasy ... being alive is a risk."

She was friends with intellectual heavyweights such as Avital Ronell and Jacques Derrida. Dufourmantelle was educated at the Paris-Sorbonne University and Brown University. In addition to lecturing at universities in America and Europe, Dufourmantelle practiced psychoanalysis.

Kyle Swenson is a reporter with The Washington Post's Morning Mix team. He previously worked at the New Times Broward-Palm Beach and Cleveland Scene.



Editorial : Greece Still Hasn't Turned the Corner

Greece returned to the private debt market this week for the first time in years, raising 3 billion euros at a relatively affordable interest rate of 4.6 percent. That's encouraging news -- but it doesn't mean the euro zone's most flattened economy is on course for sustained growth.

The economy is showing signs of life, growing a bit in the first quarter, and the government has gotten a tighter grip on the budget. But Greece's long-term debt position is still dire, and its deeper structural reforms have barely begun. Greece hasn't yet put its problems behind it.

Investors are apparently willing to

take an optimistic view of their likelihood of getting repaid. The International Monetary Fund has helped fuel this optimism by approving "in principle" new assistance to Greece, which serves as a seal of approval for its policies and those of its euro-zone official creditors.

But note that the IMF is stretching the meaning of "in principle" beyond the bounds of ordinary usage. It says the so-called standby arrangement will become effective only after its officials get "specific and credible assurances from Greece's European partners to ensure debt sustainability." It's been asking for such assurances for

months and Europe's governments still haven't delivered. It's unclear why the fund thinks this state of affairs warrants its support, even "in principle."

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Greece's position isn't hopeless by any means. Europe as a whole is doing better, and the short-term outlook for growth in Greece is fair. But the situation remains serious. The budget stringency demanded by the EU, and achieved against the odds, won't support future growth:

That has to come from supply-side reforms to liberalize the labor market, promote investment and encourage domestic competition. Long-term financial stability depends on progress in those areas -- and on long-delayed measures to make the country's debts manageable.

It's good that Greece is growing again, albeit hesitantly, and that private investors are willing to lend. But the last thing Greece needs is complacency about its prospects.



Galston : Brexit and the Disunited Kingdom

William A. Galston

Institute of International Affairs, widely known as Chatham House. It was a bracing discussion.

Regarding his country's domestic scene, Mr. Niblett said that "I've never seen British politics as chaotic as it is now." The two major parties,

he declared, are "tearing themselves apart." The disastrous snap election undermined Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May's authority. If

I met last week with Robin Niblett, director of the London-based Royal

she had prevailed by the margin she expected when she called it, many new members of Parliament would have supported her approach to Brexit. Instead, more than half of the Conservatives' diminished parliamentary ranks probably favor remaining in the European Union. Although a leadership challenge could occur this fall, there is no obvious candidate around whom the party is prepared to rally.

Many MPs from the opposition Labour Party were as disappointed by the election results as were the Tories. They had hoped that a poor outcome would help them oust their hard-left leader, Jeremy Corbyn, whom they regard as an inconceivable prime minister. Instead, they got the worst possible outcome: Labour's performance was strong enough to undercut the anti-Corbyn effort but too weak to form a government. In Mr. Niblett's view, Labour probably will be stuck with Mr. Corbyn for the next five years, during which the party will continue to struggle with the tension between its upscale, urban-based professional supporters and anti-immigration, pro-Brexit working-class voters in Northern England.

This disarray comes at the worst possible time,

because there is serious business to be done on a tight timetable. As things now stand, the U.K. and EU have less than two years to negotiate the terms of their separation. Because Prime Minister May's authority is so diminished, it will be impossible for Britain to do so from a position of strength. Instead, each step will have to be fought out among contending Conservative factions as well as outside forces. The business community, for example, is intensifying its pressure on cabinet ministers to shape a post-Brexit world compatible with its core interests.

The British public is gradually awakening to the implications of its decision to leave the EU. As with all hangovers, it is not much fun. The public's desire to have its cake and eat it too is giving way to reality. "There is only one Brexit," declared Mr. Niblett—hard Brexit. If Brexit goes through, Britain will not be a member of the common market or the customs union. If it wants to end the free flow of labor from EU countries and regain sovereignty over its own affairs, Britain will have to pay the price.

Because this price is higher than many people understood a year ago, said Mr. Niblett, "There is a

sense emerging that Brexit may not go through." While separation from Europe remains the most likely outcome, the current Parliament lacks the authority to ratify the eventual deal. The odds of a second public referendum are small but rising. If the people are asked to render judgment on terms of an actual agreement—rather than an abstract concept onto which they projected their various hopes—who knows what they will do?

On Europe's relations with the U.S., Mr. Niblett was equally trenchant: "Once you say 'America First,' you can't take it back." Soothing remarks from senior administration officials don't make much difference. The idea of the U.S. as the ever-present guardian of Europe "doesn't have the currency it once did." Europeans are becoming more comfortable, instead, with the idea that America serves as an "insurance policy of last resort" and that they will have to take more responsibility for themselves. "Europe is growing up," he said, and that's not altogether a bad thing.

It remains to be seen whether the institutions designed to foster European cooperation will prove equal to the task. Europe may be moving out of the woods

economically, but it remains politically fragile. Economic growth will not efface concerns about immigration, identity and sovereignty that have come to the fore during the past decade. A divided Europe will find it hard to take on the added responsibilities that "America First" imposes.

In the end, said Mr. Niblett, "the values dimension is what's most worrying." Along with his repeated criticisms of the EU, President Trump's support for Poland's Law and Justice Party and for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's hard-line immigration policy have led increasing numbers of Europeans to wonder whether the U.S. remains aligned with them on political fundamentals. In the immediate wake of Mr. Trump's visit to Warsaw, the Polish government's move to curb the independence of the Constitutional Court underscores these doubts.

Such a breach in the unity of the West would represent the ultimate success of the long game Vladimir Putin is playing.



Editorial : Britain Sees Brexit's Threats More Clearly

The Editorial Board

It is now more than a year since the British voted to leave the European Union and nearly four months since Prime Minister Theresa May formally started the two-year clock to negotiate the divorce, and so far the only results are increasingly gloomy prognoses for Britain.

Mrs. May, her party and her standing weakened in a general election last month, has had trouble controlling feuds within her government; banks are considering leaving London; investors are wary; and a campaign to reverse course is gaining momentum. A letter in The Financial Times on Friday signed by, among others,

Lord Kerr, a former ambassador to the United States and to the union, called for a halt to Brexit, saying that the "disastrous consequences" were becoming clearer by the day.

Friday also brought the news that Bank of America had chosen Dublin as its future European Union hub, joining Citigroup and others in making contingency plans for the day when London loses the "passporting" privileges under which a lender licensed in one E.U. state can work in all. Businesses are equally nervous that leaving the European customs union would disrupt supply chains.

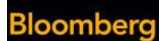
With grandees in Mrs. May's Conservative Party sensing vulnerability, the knives are out, with

people in or close to the party denouncing one another as "pirates," "lazy as a toad" or "government morons." The infighting has heightened the sense that the government lacks a coherent strategy, while making it even more difficult for it to shape one.

Officially, Mrs. May is still seeking a clean break with the bloc, one that emphasizes full British control of immigration and the courts more than the interests of the economy. But the chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, has championed a "soft Brexit" that prioritizes the economy. Last month's election further muddled matters by revoking the Conservatives' majority in Parliament.

As negotiations progress, visions of a painless divorce and new opportunities for a "global Britain" will most likely wither further, but the infighting will not. Calls to halt Brexit will grow, but that way is also not easy. Blocking the process would be seen as a rebuff of the public will. The idea of another referendum is not popular, and the result would be uncertain.

But there is nothing undemocratic about reviewing the pros and cons of Brexit as the trade-offs become clearer. A move this fateful should not be declared off-limits to a continuing national debate. That would be undemocratic.



Bershidsky : The U.K. Should Be Wary of a Trump Trade Deal

Leonid Bershidsky

President Donald Trump tweeted on Tuesday that he was working on a potentially "very big & exciting" trade deal with the U.K. that would shame the "very protectionist" European Union. He's right that such a deal could be politically advantageous for both governments. For U.K. consumers, though, it might deliver little more than chlorinated chicken.

U.K. International Trade Secretary Liam Fox, whose talks with U.S. trade officials prompted Trump's tweet, estimates that a deal could boost trade between the two countries by 40 billion pounds (\$52.2 billion) a year by 2030. That's ambitious but not outlandish: Back in 2013, when the U.S. was negotiating the ill-starred Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the EU, a U.K.-commissioned study found that it would increase trade between the

two countries by some 38 billion pounds a year by 2027.

The TTIP is a logical template for any new deal. The U.K. hasn't negotiated a trade agreement since it joined the EU, so piggybacking on the experience of the bloc's master negotiators makes sense. That said, achieving Fox's trade-volume goal will require going to the limit of what the TTIP contemplated. That means removing all tariffs and 50 percent of all "actionable non-tariff

barriers," including 75 percent of restrictions on chemicals, vehicles and business and technology services. Among the highest non-tariff barriers are those for food: They increase U.S. importers' cost of accessing the U.K. market by an estimated 46 percent.

The food issue is likely to be the most controversial. The TTIP died in part because Europeans -- Germans in particular -- feared a drop in quality standards and the growing

power of U.S. multinationals. In the U.K., EU membership has raised the quality of local produce and -- at least in London -- improved the availability good food from Italy, France and Spain. Anyone who has had a chance to compare the food in the average European store -- including a Tesco in the U.K. -- with its U.S. counterpart knows how obvious the quality and taste gap is.

Understandably, the public discussion of a potential deal with the U.S. has focused on food, and specifically on the American practice of washing chicken carcasses in a chlorine solution (banned in the EU since 1997). Pressed by pro-EU campaigners to eat chlorinated chicken on his U.S. trip, an irate Fox remarked that the media were "obsessed" with an issue that wouldn't come up until a late stage in the talks. But Brits can be forgiven for worrying about U.S. chicken flooding their supermarket shelves:

**The
New York
Times**

MacFarquhar

LONDON — European Union officials are worried about a move to toughen United States sanctions against Russia, saying they may cause upheaval in Europe's energy market.

But as usual, the 28-nation bloc is divided, with central European countries more willing to limit the bloc's dependence on Russian oil and gas.

The new round of sanctions has been driven by the United States Congress, which is intent on punishing Russia for its meddling in last year's presidential election. The House overwhelmingly approved sanctions legislation on Tuesday afternoon. Bipartisan support in Congress for the new sanctions is so strong that the White House has suggested that President Trump will sign the bill that emerges.

But the new sanctions have important implications for Europe because they target any company that contributes to the development, maintenance or modernization of Russia's energy export pipelines.

That would almost surely affect a controversial pipeline project between Russia and Germany known as Nord Stream 2, which is owned by Gazprom but includes financial stakes from European companies. The project aims to carry Russian natural gas under the Baltic Sea, bypassing countries like Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States.

Even if it is safe and 20 percent cheaper than poultry produced in the U.K. to EU standards, many Britons would rather stick with the kind of food to which they have become accustomed. And no matter how many scientists defend genetic modification and the various additives that are permissible in the U.S., freeing up the markets for these imports won't be popular.

Meanwhile, the balance of power in the negotiations doesn't bode well for the U.K. side. It's the smaller market, accounting for less than 3 percent of U.S. trade, and the government of Prime Minister Theresa May needs a quick success with a major trading partner. Fox has already been building up expectations: In a recent article in *The Sunday Times*, he promised that the U.S. deal would be "just the beginning" of opening up post-Brexit U.K. to global trade.

The new pipeline, in rough parallel to the existing Nord Stream 1, is being built to carry another 55 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year, underscoring Europe's continuing need for Russian energy.

"We are following the draft bill on Russia sanctions with some concern, notably because of its possible impact on the E.U.'s energy independence," a European Commission spokesman, Margaritis Schinas, said on Monday.

Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, the bloc's bureaucratic arm, has called for an urgent review of how the European Union should respond.

Brussels should be prepared to act "within days" if the sanctions are adopted "without E.U. concerns being taken into account," argued a position paper drafted by the European Commission dated July 19. The paper said the sanctions could affect the maintenance or upgrading of existing pipelines from Russia into Ukraine and elsewhere around the Caspian Sea.

It also raised concerns that unity could be broken between the United States and the European Union on how to deal with Russia over its annexation of Crimea and its sponsorship of warfare in eastern Ukraine.

The European Union — which does much more business with neighboring Russia than the United States does — imposed a series of sanctions on Russia, including on specific energy companies, beginning in 2014 over its actions in Ukraine.

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Trump, by contrast, is in no hurry. A deal makes sense for him only if he wins in zero-sum terms. U.S. negotiators might not take Trump's urge to stick it to the EU too seriously, given that annoying the world's largest economic bloc isn't in the country's strategic interests. But they won't be able to ignore Trump's desire to do only deals that improve the U.S. trade balance. Trump likes imagining trade in terms of tangible objects, such as cars or, yes, chickens. So, perhaps for a better deal on services, the U.K. will need to give on things like cars and food -- and the U.K. government won't rule out changing some quality regulations to do a deal.

Weak as the U.K. may be in the Brexit talks, it has a stronger hand

than with the U.S. It's a bigger trading partner, absorbing between 8 and 17 percent of the exports of the remaining 27 EU nations (depending on the measurement method). And EU negotiators haven't attended the Trump school of economics: They aren't aiming to increase their trade balance with the U.K. at any cost.

The U.K. ought to concentrate on the more important trade relationship with the EU. With the right concessions, it can still get a good deal. Hoping for a victory with the outwardly friendly Trump administration is delusional.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

E.U. Is Uneasy, and Divided, About U.S. Sanctions on Russia

Steven Erlanger
and Neil

MacFarquhar

The new pipeline, in rough parallel to the existing Nord Stream 1, is being built to carry another 55 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year, underscoring Europe's continuing need for Russian energy.

The European Commission is seeking assurances from Washington that, if passed, the new measures would not be applied in a way that affects European Union interests or energy companies. It has suggested that European law could be used to prevent the application of "extraterritorial" measures by the United States, and it hinted at trade retaliation.

The tensions over the potential new sanctions on Russia come on top of other recent disputes on trade issues with the Trump administration.

Mr. Juncker earlier threatened rapid retaliation in response to Mr. Trump's contemplated new punitive tariffs on steel imports, which would affect more than a dozen countries, including some in Europe. "We are prepared to take up arms if need be," he said this month at the G-20 summit meeting in Hamburg.

Retaliatory targets for the bloc could include American whiskey imports. "I don't want to tell you in detail what we're doing," Mr. Juncker said then. "But what I would like to tell you is that within a few days — we won't need two months for that — we could react with countermeasures."

Russia has been greeting the prospect of a new round of American sanctions with a certain coolness, waiting to see what the White House will do and expecting reciprocal action by President Vladimir V. Putin. Russian analysts

have focused more on the sparring between Congress and Mr. Trump over Russia policy than on any fallout at home.

Depending on the final version of the bill, the most immediate impact is expected in the oil and gas sector, including deals involving Russian-state-run companies outside its borders, and on investments from abroad.

"The sanctions bill leaves no space for compromises and cements America's hostile policy toward Moscow for decades ahead," Ivan Timofeev, program director of the Valdai discussion club, a Kremlin effort to court Russian experts abroad, wrote on the group's website.

Russia often accuses the United States of using sanctions to further its own interests, and this time is no exception. Alexey Pushkov, a legislator and frequent commentator on international relations, wrote on Twitter: "The exceptional nation wants to block Russian gas supplies to Europe and to sell expensive shale gas from the U.S. to its European servants. That's the entire 'morality' of Congress."

Russians appeared to be giving little credence to the idea that American anger over Russian cyberattacks during the election might be playing a role.

Mr. Trump has opposed further sanctions on Russia. The push has come from a Congress that wants to tie the president's hands on Russia and prevent him from lifting earlier sanctions imposed by President Barack Obama over Ukraine.

That earlier round of sanctions was carefully calibrated between the United States and its European allies to keep everyone on board and preserve a united response to Russia's land grab in Ukraine.

Energy, which divides even European partners, was a crucial part of that calculus.

Nord Stream 2 is important for Germany. But it has been fiercely

criticized by central and eastern Europeans. Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council and a former Polish prime minister, is a vocal critic of the pipeline, urging strict regulation of a project

he has said would strengthen Moscow.



At 15, she joined ISIS after converting to Islam. Now this German teen wants to go home.

When 15-year-old Linda W. started to wear long-sleeved clothes early last year, it quickly struck her classmates and teachers in the sleepy eastern German town of Pulsnitz as odd. Her conversion to Islam was noticed almost immediately in a part of Germany where only 0.5 percent of the population is Muslim and where the backlash against Chancellor Angela Merkel's pro-refugee policy had been stronger than almost anywhere else in the country.

Linda W.'s school soon reached out to her mother and stepfather about the subtle changes, a local official said. But when the teenager told her parents one day last July that she would sleep at a friend's place over the weekend and be back Sunday afternoon, they later said, they did not suspect anything unusual.

By that time, the 15-year-old had decided to join the Islamic State, investigators believe. They said that after chatting online with members of the extremist group, she left her parental home and traveled to Islamic State territory, where she is believed to have remained for at least 12 months. The case prompted criticism of German authorities, with many questioning why the teen had not been stopped from traveling

abroad despite having shown signs of possible radicalization.

[Could Europe's refugee crisis be the undoing of Angela Merkel?]

More than a year later, Linda W. has been arrested by Iraqi authorities, although the exact circumstances of the operation that led to her being taken into custody remain unclear. German officials have spoken to the teen, now 16, at an Iraqi military site where U.S. doctors are treating her for injuries, according to the German TV network ARD and the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper.

Germany has not officially requested an extradition, indicating that she could face charges in Iraq and in Germany. If sentenced in Iraq, Linda W. could face the death penalty, although German intelligence officials are reportedly in talks with their Iraqi counterparts about her return to Europe. On Monday evening, German prosecutors announced that they had relaunched an investigation that was halted last year.

Speaking to ARD and Sueddeutsche Zeitung, the 16-year old said that she hoped for a quick return to Germany and that she regretted her decision to join the Islamic State, also known as ISIS and ISIL. "I want to go home to my family," she said.

As officials are deliberating how to transfer her back to Germany, prevention specialists and researchers are wondering why she left Europe in the first place. Her case has renewed the spotlight on the Islamic State's continued ability to attract boys and girls across Europe to its cause, even as the overall number of adult recruits has dropped.

Underage terrorists have been a particular concern in Germany, where multiple plots by minors were foiled last year. In February 2016, a 15-year-old girl stabbed a police officer in an attack allegedly inspired by the Islamic State. Last July, a 17-year-old Afghan refugee attacked passengers on a train in Bavaria after pledging allegiance to the group. And in December, a 12-year-old boy with Iraqi parents was caught planning a nail-bomb attack targeting a German Christmas market.

[Europe may face a grim future with terrorism as a fact of life]

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

"ISIL has turned terrorist recruitment and radicalization effectively into a mass product mostly on young adults aged between 17 and 23 for the simple reason that they are unlikely to be government

spies," said Daniel Koehler, director of the German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization Studies.

The Islamic State has frequently used videos, songs and even games to recruit younger Europeans online. Children, however, are particularly susceptible because they lack experience in separating fact from fiction and are often not targeted in counter-radicalization schemes set up by government agencies and nongovernmental organizations.

With a federal structure that puts regional governments in charge of police and domestic security issues, Germany has been even slower than other European nations in formulating such schemes. In several German states, concerned teachers or family members would have been able to call a hotline associated with local authorities by last July. There was no such program in the state of Saxony, where Pulsnitz is located, however.

There, a counter-radicalization center was opened by authorities in March — four years after the Islamic State seized its de facto capital, the Syrian city of Raqqa, and long after Linda W. and an estimated 900 other Germans had left their homes for the group's territory.

INTERNATIONAL



Russia Looks to U.N. to Help It Profit From Syria Conquests

Colum Lynch

Russia has stepped up a campaign to get the United Nations to demine Syria's majestic Roman ruins in Palmyra, but some Western diplomats fear the Kremlin is only seeking to get other countries to help it exploit the city's rich natural resources.

The Russian government's push to protect Syria's ancient ruins, these diplomats note, coincides with reports of an effort by Russia to convince private security companies to secure territory around Palmyra

from Islamic State militants in exchange for the rights to lucrative gas and mining rights.

"Palmyra is literally sown with mines and unexploded ordnance," Russian diplomat Evgeniy Zagayanov told the Security Council back in March, noting that Russian demining efforts underway in Palmyra were insufficient to get the job done. He called it "vital" that the U.N. and other governments make a "significant financial investment" in ridding Palmyra of its explosives.

Humanitarian aid organizations say there is clearly a need to disarm deadly explosives, including in cities like Palmyra. But the most pressing challenge, they argue, is securing access to hundreds of thousands of Syrians enduring extreme hardships in cities and towns under siege primarily by Syrian forces and their allies but also by the Islamic State and other anti-government forces.

"Is there anything wrong with demining? Of course not," said Joel Charny, the director of the Norwegian Refugee Council USA. "But are mines the fundamental

obstacle to humanitarian access? The answer is clearly no."

The main obstacle to reaching civilians in need of assistance is the Syrian government, according to Charny. "What we need from Russia," he said, "is to put pressure on the Syrian authorities to allow people who need aid to be assisted."

Critics charge that Moscow is pushing demining as part of a broader diplomatic gambit to reframe the international humanitarian debate on Syria,

moving it away from a focus on pursuing war crimes prosecution against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government for starving hundreds of thousands of civilians in besieged opposition-controlled towns. Instead, Russia is appealing to colleagues to view humanitarian assistance — including the clearance of land mines — to towns and cities captured by the Syrian government and its allies as a priority.

"The issue of humanitarian assistance to Syria cannot be reduced to the issue of blockages and hard-to-reach regions," Vladimir Safronkov, a senior Russian diplomat, told the council on May 30. "The reality is that most of the people who need assistance live in areas that are controlled by the government."

Moscow has urged the U.N. to test its proposition in Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage site that Syria, backed by Russia air power, seized last March from the Islamic State, which reportedly laid booby traps and mines around some of the city's historic sites.

For Russia, the conquest of Palmyra serves as a powerful symbol of the civilizing nature of its military intervention in Syria. In May 2016, the Russian conductor Valery Gergiev led the Mariinsky Orchestra in a performance of Johann Sebastian Bach and Sergei Prokofiev at a Roman amphitheater that the Islamic State had used to execute prisoners.

But Palmyra is also a key gateway to the country's most lucrative natural resources, including gas deposits and phosphate mines outside the city and oil farther east near Deir Ezzor. The Syrian government has signed contracts with Iranian and Russian firms to exploit those resources once the Islamic State is driven from the region. The *New York Times* cited reports indicating that private Russian security companies have been hired to drive Islamic State fighters out of the natural gas fields in exchange for lucrative exploitation contracts.

"All the phosphate mining is centered [on] Palmyra," said Joshua

Landis, a Syria scholar at the University of Oklahoma. "If you want the country to rebuild and be successful, you have to get the oil, gas, and mining industries going."

While Russia stands to benefit economically in Palmyra, not everyone is convinced that natural resources alone are the driving force behind Kremlin policy there.

David Butter, an expert on Middle East energy and associate fellow at Chatham House, said there are Russian contractors that do have an interest in the region, particularly in gas and phosphates. "It's broadly true that there are gas equipment contracts going on and some interest in the phosphate mines," he said. But he doubted there were enough reserves to "shake the world market."

"I wouldn't think anyone is going to get rich in that area," Butter said.

Russia has argued that the world needs to come together to preserve one of the world's great archaeological treasures. The prospect of inviting U.N. mine experts to Syria has surfaced on the sidelines of ongoing talks in Astana, Kazakhstan, among Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

During closed-door negotiations, Moscow brokered a provisional deal with Tehran and Ankara to issue a joint statement calling on Syria to work with the U.N. to establish an international demining coalition to help fund and coordinate efforts to eliminate "unexplored hazards planted by terrorist organizations," according to a confidential draft statement by Russia, Iran, and Turkey obtained by Foreign Policy. "There exists a large-scale threat of deliberate destruction and mining of world historical monuments and UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Syria by terrorist organizations."

The draft, which has not yet been agreed upon, calls on governments to "take urgent and necessary measures to preserve historical heritage for future generations."

So far, that effort remains stalled.

Still, the development has provided a fresh opportunity for the U.N., which has been seeking for years to

play a broader role in demining Syrian war zones. In 2015, the U.N. Mine Action Service (UNMAS) set up a program to support mine education and training of deminers in Syria, but the agency has been forced to run it out of Turkey.

Throughout the civil war, Syria has made extensive use of cluster bombs and has vigorously opposed efforts by the United Nations to help clear land mines. Syrian government forces have systematically mined opposition-controlled towns, placing some 6,000 mines alone around the besieged town of Madaya, according to a July 2016 report by Physicians for Human Rights and the Syrian American Medical Society.

In 2016, the Syrian government bluntly rejected a U.N. proposal to spend \$20 million on demining operations, according to a well-placed diplomatic source. Syrian authorities warned the U.N. that they would consider the deployment of deminers as an "act of war" and that they would respond militarily, according to the source.

A Security Council diplomat said Syria has long been "paranoid" that deminers — who are generally recruited from the ranks of Western ex-military personnel — are really serving as spies or bringing explosive materials into opposition-controlled areas. They also feared that foreign munitions experts might collect evidence that could be used to prove the Syrian government committed war crimes.

But with Russian and Syrian forces taking cities in the west from the rebels, and seizing territory in the east from the Islamic State, Moscow and Damascus have come to see the benefits of demining.

Last month, the U.N. dispatched Agnès Marcaillou, the UNMAS director, to Astana to participate in cease-fire talks sponsored by Russia, Turkey, and Iran. She has also traveled to Moscow and Damascus to discuss a possible role for the U.N. in clearing mines in Syria and educating locals on how to steer clear of deadly explosives, an ambitious program that could require more than \$300 million in funding.

Marcaillou's outreach has unnerved some of her diplomatic colleagues, who fear she may conclude a deal that primarily serves Russia and Syria's commercial and military goals while doing little to relieve civilians in territory controlled by the opposition. There are a far more urgent needs for humanitarian demining in heavily populated areas in western Syria, these officials said.

"Our view is that demining is a good thing, but it should be prioritized according to humanitarian needs," said one council diplomat.

Marcaillou countered that any program would be scrupulously tailored to address the country's most pressing humanitarian needs and would not, she said, be used to help enrich any government.

"I am not promoting Russian commercial interests," Marcaillou said. "If I'm called to go to [Syria], it is not because there is oil or whatever it is, [but] because people are dying. The people of Syria are facing a level of contamination that is pretty much unprecedented."

Still, it remains unclear whether the United States and other key donors will underwrite the program. While U.S. President Donald Trump has been looking for ways to work with Russia in the fight against terrorists in Syria, American and allied diplomats say it is unlikely that they would help fund a U.N. demining operation limited to Palmyra and other government-controlled towns.

"Who is going to pay for it?" said a second council diplomat. "I hope no one is going to pay until there is a clear humanitarian plan" with the list of population centers most in need. "There's no way Palmyra would be high on that list because it's a bunch of rocks — very historic rocks."

Marcaillou said that in her private talks with Russian officials, they did not state which locations in Syria they would like her to work. But if there is a need to come to the aid of civilians in Palmyra, then "why not?"

But she said her office has never agreed to "demine old stones."

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**
Totakhil

Afghan Leader Struggles to Build Working State Amid Dysfunction

Jessica Donati and Habib Khan

cable in a remote region, scrutinizing grainy slides projected on a meeting-room wall.

KABUL—On a recent Sunday morning, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani spent hours inside the fortresslike presidential palace mulling plans to expand the capital's water supply and install fiber-optic

Outside, new two-story blast walls and checkpoints have further restricted access to Kabul's diplomatic enclave after a May truck bomb near the German embassy

killed over 150 people, prompting an exodus of diplomats.

Mr. Ghani faces growing opposition in his fragile unity government and Taliban insurgents are inflicting mounting casualties on civilians and security forces. But he says he is determined to stay focused on building the machinery of a

functioning state in a country plagued by chaos and corruption.

"My task is to create a system that my successor can run," Mr. Ghani said in an interview. "The new generation demands a different voice, accountability and responsibility."

Mr. Ghani invited reporters with The Wall Street Journal to observe his daily routine one day earlier this month. Over nearly 14 hours, Mr. Ghani immersed himself in the minutiae of governance and showed his impatience with the pace of progress nearly three years into his five-year term.

During a series of meetings, the 66-year-old former World Bank official and ex-finance minister berated a senior United Nations envoy over plans to fund parliamentary elections and threatened to fire about half a dozen senior government officials for incompetence.

Critics say Mr. Ghani is mired in details and missing the big picture, including deteriorating security and rising ethnic tension. The Taliban claimed responsibility for a Monday bomb attack on a minibus carrying government workers in Kabul, which killed at least 31 people.

His long-promised plan to revamp the country's armed forces is still under review. Meanwhile, U.S. airstrikes have quadrupled in recent months, to levels last seen in 2012, in an effort to keep the Taliban at bay.

Weeks after May's truck bombing, leading members of Afghanistan's three main ethnic minorities announced a new coalition against Mr. Ghani, who is a Pashtun, the country's largest ethnic group. Coalition members include Afghanistan's acting foreign minister and the exiled vice president, who is under investigation for kidnap and rape.

The Afghan state "is collapsing on itself," said Mohammad Mohaqiq, a senior government official who helped start the coalition.

The New York Times (UNE)

Mark Landler and James Risén

WASHINGTON — President Trump, searching for a reason to keep the United States in Afghanistan after 16 years of war, has latched on to a prospect that tantalized previous administrations: Afghanistan's vast mineral wealth, which his advisers and Afghan officials have told him could be profitably extracted by Western companies.

Mr. Trump has discussed the country's mineral deposits with President Ashraf Ghani, who promoted mining as an economic opportunity in one of their first conversations. Mr. Trump, who is deeply skeptical about sending more American troops to Afghanistan, has

Mr. Ghani argues that providing effective public services, stamping out corruption and imposing order and discipline on the bureaucracy, far from being a distraction, are critical to tackling Afghanistan's security challenges. That view is a central thesis of a book he co-wrote, titled "Fixing Failed States."

Mr. Ghani stuck to his schedule the day of the truck bomb even though it shattered palace windows, rushing to find a room to meet a visiting foreign dignitary and complaining when an economic council meeting was canceled, said an aide, describing Mr. Ghani's ability to focus.

The president dismisses his opponents, saying they are motivated by a fear of losing out in a transparent system. "You think people that lose hundreds of millions in contracts are going to come praising us?" he asked.

Mr. Ghani, who gave up U.S. citizenship to run for president in 2009, said his efforts to build a competent bureaucracy have persuaded foreign backers, predominantly the U.S., to stick with Afghanistan after 16 years of war.

The Trump administration is weighing sending more U.S. troops to Afghanistan, and Washington and its allies have pledged more than \$15 billion in reconstruction aid over the next four years.

"Winning our foundational partnership with the United States has been fundamental," Mr. Ghani said. "This has taken intense work."

A veteran Western diplomat in Kabul said Mr. Ghani's pro-American stance was welcome in Washington, but that concerns remain.

suggested that this could be one justification for the United States to stay engaged in the country.

To explore the possibilities, the White House is considering sending an envoy to Afghanistan to meet with mining officials. Last week, as the White House fell into an increasingly fractious debate over Afghanistan policy, three of Mr. Trump's senior aides met with a chemical executive, Michael N. Silver, to discuss the potential for extracting rare-earth minerals. Mr. Silver's firm, American Elements, specializes in these minerals, which are used in a range of high-tech products.

"The risk is that he will anger so many political factions that he may not limp his way to the 2019 presidential elections," the diplomat said.

Mr. Ghani describes himself as a workaholic who skips both lunch and dinner and eschews lavish official entertaining. Aides describe him as an energetic but intimidating presence, with a propensity to lose his temper and fire officials on the spot.

On the day Journal reporters observed him, Mr. Ghani met with foreign ambassadors, the U.N. and Afghan officials in the afternoon to review plans for next year's parliamentary elections.

After participants had spoken, Mr. Ghani turned to the deputy head of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Pernille Dahler Kardel.

"With enormous respect, it seems that the discussion has not moved very far. You are still raising the issues that you were raising six months ago," he said, demanding to know the amount and type of funding available.

Ms. Kardel in a written statement to the Journal said that "decisions have been taken that will allow funding to flow" without providing details.

He then turned to officials with Afghanistan's election commission, demanding to know its plan for holding the elections on time next July 7.

"You must have worked backwards!" he exclaimed.

In the evening, Mr. Ghani oversaw a meeting of the National Procurement Council which, at his insistence, reviews every government contract valued at more

than \$1 million. There were more than a dozen items, including deals to build walls at remote military bases and acquire three armored vehicles for a ministry.

Two officials who had failed to provide requested documents for a contract to provide vaccinations to Afghans attending the annual pilgrimage to Mecca hung their heads after Mr. Ghani demanded to know which one was at fault.

"Who was responsible for the vaccinations? Please?" Mr. Ghani shouted. "Right now go to the office, and within two hours bring the document! Otherwise, you are suspended tomorrow. Understood?"

The officials fled. Mr. Ghani's office said they returned the next day with the documents and the contract was approved.

As the clock ticked toward 10 p.m., Mr. Ghani turned on officials from the national electric company for failing to fulfill a contract in time. "I want written resignations from you," he exclaimed.

U.S. officials who attend the weekly council said it was a standard Sunday night for the president.

Afterward, a modest Afghan dinner was offered in the dining room, but Mr. Ghani didn't join. He smiled, thanked everyone for attending and left the room.

Write to Jessica Donati at Jessica.Donati@wsj.com

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Trump Finds Reason for the U.S. to Remain in Afghanistan: Minerals

(UNE)

Mark Landler and James Risén

WASHINGTON — President Trump, searching for a reason to keep the United States in Afghanistan after 16 years of war, has latched on to a prospect that tantalized previous administrations: Afghanistan's vast mineral wealth, which his advisers and Afghan officials have told him could be profitably extracted by Western companies.

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Stephen A. Feinberg, a billionaire financier who is informally advising Mr. Trump on Afghanistan, is also looking into ways to exploit the country's minerals, according to a person who has briefed him. Mr. Feinberg owns a large military contracting firm, DynCorp International, which could play a role in guarding mines — a major concern, given that some of Afghanistan's richest deposits are in areas controlled by the Taliban.

In 2010, American officials estimated that Afghanistan had untapped mineral deposits worth nearly \$1 trillion, an estimate that was widely disputed at the time and has certainly fallen since, given the eroding price of commodities. But

the \$1 trillion figure is circulating again inside the White House, according to officials, who said it had caught the attention of Mr. Trump.

The lure of Afghanistan as a war-torn Klondike is well established: In 2006, the George W. Bush administration conducted aerial surveys of the country to map its mineral resources. Under President Barack Obama, the Pentagon set up a task force to try to build a mining industry in Afghanistan — a challenge that was stymied by rampant corruption, as well as security problems and the lack of roads, bridges or railroads.

None of these hurdles has been removed in the last eight years, according to former officials, and some have worsened. They warn that the Trump administration is fooling itself if it believes that extracting minerals is a panacea for Afghanistan's myriad ills.

"It would be dangerous to use the potential for resource exploitation as a selling point for military engagement," said Laurel Miller, a senior analyst at RAND who served until last month as the State Department's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. "The barriers to entry are really quite considerable, and that kind of argument could fuel suspicion about America's real intentions in Afghanistan."

But for Mr. Trump, as a businessman, it is arguably the only appealing thing about Afghanistan. Officials said he viewed mining as a "win-win" that could boost that country's economy, generate jobs for Americans and give the United States a valuable new beachhead in the market for rare-earth minerals, which has been all but monopolized by China.

China already has a \$3 billion contract to develop a copper mine about 25 miles southeast of the Afghan capital, Kabul. Officials said Mr. Trump was determined not to spend American lives and treasure in Afghanistan only to watch China lock up its rare-earth deposits, which are used to make products from wind turbines to computer chips.

Mr. Silver, the chemical executive, may head an effort to maximize the

rights for American companies to extract these minerals, according to a senior official.

Mr. Trump's interest also reflects how his military advisers have struggled to present him with other persuasive reasons to send troops to the country, where the United States has been at war since 2001.

The White House's review of Afghanistan policy — led by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and the national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster — was supposed to be finished by the middle of July. Instead, it bogged down after Mr. Trump expressed displeasure with a proposal from General McMaster for a modest troop increase and a multiyear commitment to the country.

Policy meetings have become increasingly heated, officials said, as Mr. Trump and his chief strategist, Stephen K. Bannon, have squared off against General McMaster. Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson is also said to be unhappy with the current proposals.

Vice President Mike Pence, not General McMaster, will lead a meeting Wednesday of National Security Council principals on Afghanistan. Some officials said that reflected General McMaster's isolation; others said that the general welcomed Mr. Pence's involvement and that the two were closely aligned on the policy.

But Mr. Trump, it is clear, is not. In June, he grudgingly agreed to give Mr. Mattis the authority to send additional troops — a number believed to be about 4,000 — as a

stopgap measure to stabilize security in Afghanistan. But Mr. Mattis has not yet used his authority, perhaps reflecting his recognition that the commander in chief is uncomfortable with it.

When reporters last week asked Mr. Trump at a meeting at the Pentagon whether he planned to send more troops, he answered, "We'll see," and added, "ISIS is falling fast," suggesting he viewed the counterterrorism threat in Afghanistan as declining.

Worried that Mr. Trump will be locked into policies that did not work for the last two presidents, Mr. Bannon and the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, have brought in outside voices, including Mr. Feinberg and Erik D. Prince, a founder of the private security firm Blackwater International. Both have urged using more private contractors and giving the C.I.A. an oversight role in the conflict.

In addition, Mr. Feinberg has reached out to people involved in the Obama administration's effort to build Afghanistan's mining industry. Some warned him that the prospects for a profitable business are worse now than in 2009, given the decline in commodities prices and the deteriorating security in areas where the deposits are believed to lie.

Afghanistan's deposits of copper and iron ore are trading at about a third of their 2010 prices. Most of the undiscovered deposits of rare-earth minerals are believed to be in Helmand Province, large parts of which are controlled by the Taliban.

"There are undoubtedly minerals to be exploited in Afghanistan, which could help provide economic stability to the country in the future," said Daniel F. Feldman, a former special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. "But given all the obstacles, it could be many years before mining yields dividends for the Afghan people."

One advantage is that the Trump administration would have a willing partner in the Afghan government. During the Obama administration, President Ghani resisted the rapid development of the mining industry, largely because he worried about the threat of widespread corruption that would come with it.

But as soon as Mr. Trump was elected, Mr. Ghani reversed his position, contacting the Trump team and promoting Afghanistan's mineral wealth. He realized that Mr. Trump would be intrigued by the commercial possibilities, officials said.

Mr. Trump has said little publicly about Afghanistan since being elected. But his thinking about what the United States should reap for its military efforts was made clear in another context soon after his inauguration. Speaking to employees of the C.I.A., the president said the United States had erred in withdrawing troops from Iraq without holding on to its oil.

"The old expression 'To the victor belong the spoils,'" Mr. Trump declared. "You remember?"

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Saudi Arabia and Allies Add New Names to Qatar Terror List

Margherita Stancati

BEIRUT—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain have added new organizations and individuals allegedly linked to Qatar to their terror lists, intensifying the protracted diplomatic standoff between U.S. allies.

They include three Qatari citizens who have been accused of raising funds in support of extremist groups fighting in Syria, including Syria Conquest Front, formerly known as the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front, according to a joint statement released on Tuesday.

Overall nine individuals and nine organizations have been added to the list, among them entities in Yemen that the Saudi camp alleges

have aided al Qaeda using funding from Qatari charities.

Also on the list are several Libyan media outlets that have received Qatari funding and that the four countries say contributed to "spreading chaos" in Libya. Boshra News Agency, one of the designated entities, is known for coverage that is sympathetic of radical Libyan militants.

Qatari officials didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Egypt and Bahrain last month abruptly severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, citing its ties to Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas and its alleged links to terrorist groups like Al Qaeda.

Pointing to its counter-terrorism legislation, Doha has denied supporting extremist groups while saying it has the right to pursue an independent foreign policy.

The crisis in the Gulf has complicated joint efforts to fight against Islamic State. Qatar is home to the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East, key to the fight against the extremist group.

The U.S. and countries including Kuwait, France and Turkey have dispatched top officials to the Gulf in a bid to help defuse the crisis. Earlier this month, during a visit to Doha by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the U.S. and Qatar signed an agreement to crack down on terrorist financing. Qatar also amended its terrorism law.

Saudi Arabia and its allies said that agreement is insufficient to guarantee Qatar will change its behavior. "Qatari authorities have a long history in breaking all signed and binding agreements and legal obligations," they said in Tuesday's statement, noting Qatar "continued harboring terrorists, financing attacks and promoting hate speech and extremism."

The Saudi-led group said it will continue to campaign against Qatar until the country commits to meeting all their demands, including prosecuting individuals and groups on the terror list.

— Hassan Morajea in Tunis, Tunisia contributed to this article.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.S. Navy Patrol Ship Fires Warning Shots at Iranian Vessel

Dion Nissenbaum

WASHINGTON—The U.S. Navy said it fired warning shots at an Iranian patrol boat in the Persian Gulf on Tuesday in what American military officials called an “unsafe and unprofessional” incident in the region.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps boat came within 150 yards of American and coalition ships carrying out an exercise in the northern Persian Gulf, the Navy said.

The U.S. Navy tried unsuccessfully to reach the Iranian ship by radio, then fired flares and twice gave five

short whistle blasts to signal a warning to the Iranian boat, according to the Navy.

When the Iranian patrol boat failed to shift course, the USS Thunderbolt, a 175-foot-long American coastal patrol ship, fired warning shots at the vessel.

The Iranian boat stopped dead in the water, an official said, but remained in the area for several hours.

“It was unsafe and unprofessional due to the aggressive movement” of

the Iranian boat, said one U.S. defense official.

The IRGC said a U.S. warship moved toward a patrol boat in international waters and fired two shots in the air in an attempt “to provoke and intimidate,” according to a statement that was published by the IRGC’s official news agency.

“Ignoring their unprofessional and provocative behavior, the Guards vessel continued its mission, and after a short while the U.S. ship left the area,” the statement said.

The incident comes amid rising tensions between the U.S. and Iran. President Donald Trump has taken a tough line with Iran, which has sought to contest American military moves in Syria and Iraq.

—Asa Fitch contributed to this article.

Write to Dion Nissenbaum at dion.nissenbaum@wsj.com

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**The
Washington
Post**

A young Palestinian vowed to die a martyr, then stabbed 3 members of an Israeli family to death

HALAMISH, West Bank — Just a few hours before he walked to the Jewish settlement, before he climbed over the security fence and knocked politely on the front door of the Salomon family home, Omar al-Abed posted his last will and testament on his Facebook page.

“All I have is a sharpened knife,” he wrote last week, “and it answers the call of al-Aqsa.”

The young Palestinian, who was majoring in business administration in college, rambled on in his social media posts in badly written Arabic. He wore a clean white shirt and pressed jeans, and carried a large knife to the murder scene.

He vowed to die a glorious martyr’s death and left instructions for his imagined burial rites. He thumped his chest as a true “Son of Palestine.” He ranted against some on the Palestinian side — and he called Jews “pigs and monkeys.”

Abed stabbed three members of the Salomon family to death Friday night in the Jewish settlement of Halamish, as they began to lay the table with food and drink, with sweets and whiskeys, to celebrate the birth of the newest grandson.

First responders described the scene as horrific, with the victims suffering from multiple, frenzied stabs, including the household’s 70-year-old patriarch.

Abed was shot and lightly wounded by an off-duty soldier from a nearby house. He is being held by Israeli authorities.

The gruesome attack was part of an 11-day surge in violence in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the capital of Jordan that left 15 dead.

It may or may not be over.

Early Tuesday, in an abrupt reversal, Israeli security forces

began removing the metal detectors that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had ordered placed at the entrances to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem’s Old City.

The scanners enraged Palestinians, who said the devices were not for their safety but to increase Israel’s control over access to the mosque.

Netanyahu and his supporters said the detectors were needed after three Arab Israeli gunmen smuggled homemade machine guns into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound on July 14, then shot and killed two Israeli policemen at the site, which both Muslims and Jews regard as holy.

The Palestinians say their fury — expressed in mass protests, both peaceful and violent, and the killing of three Israelis at the Jewish settlement on Friday — are driven by fear that their sacred mosque is under threat.

The Islamic committee that administers the mosque said it would call off the impasse only if the situation was returned to how it had been before July 14.

Inflamed by killings, and jostling now for political advantage, Israelis and Palestinians see the latest spasm of bloodshed from vastly different vantage points.

They disagree about what started the violence, who escalated and who incited — and this deep division is at heart of the latest crisis and familiar to anyone who has watched the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past 30 years.

Now into this volatile mix President Trump sends his untested Middle East team to make peace, led by his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, special envoy Jason Greenblatt and U.S. Ambassador David Friedman, all Jewish men with long histories of supporting Israel.

This is what they will hear.

“I blame Netanyahu for what my son has done. I blame him and the Israeli army for all the blood,” said Abdul Jaleel al-Abed, the knife attacker’s father, who gathered with neighbors at his home, which is now slated for demolition by Israel, in a Palestinian village whose roads have been blocked with high dirt berms by the Israeli army.

“All of us would gladly die for al-Aqsa,” he said.

He quickly added that he was opposed to his son’s “operation,” using the Arabic euphemism for a deadly attack.

He asked, “What about the Palestinians killed?”

Around him, men began to scroll their mobile phones and point to videos showing an Israeli soldier kicking a Muslim worshiper or an Israeli security guard at a settlement firing his rifle at Palestinian protesters.

The father said he understood his son’s motivation but did not endorse the killing, especially of the old man and a woman.

Abed said his son spared the children in the house.

“He kept them safe,” the father said.

According to neighbors, survivors of the attack said Abed did no such thing. The wife of one of the slain said at the funeral that she rushed the children into a safe room while her husband struggled with the attacker in the kitchen.

Abed’s mother was arrested Monday by Israeli forces after a video appeared of her sharing sweets with well-wishers and saying she was proud of her son.

Netanyahu called Abed “a beast incited by wild hatred.”

The father of the assailant said his son spent Friday watching televised images of Muslims praying at the barricades outside al-Aqsa, refusing to pass through the metal detectors. He watched as violent demonstrations began afterward, when three Palestinian youths were shot and killed, witnesses said by Israeli forces.

“This is all about the metal detectors,” the elder Abed said. “Take them away and the situation will immediately calm down.”

A Jewish settler who lives in the community where the Salomon family was killed said the metal detectors had little to do with the attack.

“They don’t really need a reason to stab Jews,” said Miri Maoz Ovadia, whose parents live across the street from where Friday’s attack took place. “We don’t see any connection between this act of terror and their mosque.”

Ovadia and her family live in a Jewish settlement in the West Bank that the international community calls illegal, although Israel disputes that.

For their part, many Israelis say the metal detectors are an excuse, and they believe the root cause of the violence is Palestinian hatred, incitement and rejection of Israel as a Jewish state.

“The metal detectors? That is not the reason. There were no metal detectors when they murdered the Fogels, no metal detectors when they throw rocks at our cars, no metal detectors when they toss molotov cocktails,” said Victor Waknine, 47, who lives in Halamish and works as a school administrator.

Waknine was referring to a killing in 2011 at a nearby Jewish settlement, when two Palestinian assailants entered the home of Ehud and Ruth Fogel and stabbed them to death

alongside three of their six children. One of the victims was a 3-month-old baby.

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

Waknine said, "Most settlers do not want to evict the Palestinians. We want good relations with our neighbors. We want peace and quiet."

Several Israeli government ministers said Abed should face the death penalty, which is on the Israeli law books but rarely used.

"They want to execute my son," Abed's father said. "What can I say? He is my son. He did what he did."

But many support him. They think what he did was for al-Aqsa."

Ruth Eglash and Sufian Taha contributed to this report.

The Daily 202 newsletter

The New York Times

Metal Detectors Vanish, but Tensions in East Jerusalem Remain

Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM — The Muslim authorities in Jerusalem instructed worshippers to remain outside the Aqsa Mosque compound on Tuesday, even after Israel removed the metal detectors from entrances to the holy site that had prompted days of violent clashes and bloodshed.

Thousands of Palestinians performed evening prayer in the streets in East Jerusalem as the 11-day crisis teetered between resolution and a broader contest over control of the sacred plateau. After prayer, clashes with the police resumed by the Lion's Gate of the Old City.

Israel had removed the detectors before dawn, along with some surveillance cameras, after a day of intensive talks with Jordan, the custodian of the shrine, and with American mediation.

But the Islamic Waqf, which administers the day-to-day running of the site, issued a statement saying the boycott would continue pending a review of the situation in and around the mosques, and until Israel restored it to its previous status before the crisis began on July 14.

President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority said the suspension of ties and security coordination with Israel would also continue until Israel removed all additional security measures from

the area and pending an examination of the situation, according to Wafa, the official Palestinian news agency. Mr. Abbas spoke at his headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah before a leadership meeting.

"Now everybody is mobilized," said Zakaria al-Qaq, a Palestinian professor and expert in national security at Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem. "This is multidimensional," he said, adding, "Everyone wants to be part of the political equation."

Mr. Qaq said he believed that calm could be restored if Israel removed every trace of the new equipment it had installed. But pointing to the volatility of the site and its centrality particularly for the Palestinians of Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem, he said, "Al Aqsa is the last place left for people to express themselves religiously or politically."

The true test of where things are going may come on Friday. On regular Fridays tens of thousands of Palestinians from Jerusalem and the West Bank, and Arab citizens of Israel, come to pray at the site.

The crisis began on a Friday, with a brazen attack on the morning of July 14, when three armed Arab citizens of Israel emerged from the compound and fatally shot two Israeli Druze police officers who were guarding it. In a rare move, Israel temporarily closed the holy esplanade to conduct searches and quickly installed metal detectors and

cameras at some entrances to the site, which is revered by Jews as the Temple Mount and by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary.

Several other entrances to the site for Muslims remained closed. Refusing to pass through the metal detectors, worshippers took the extraordinary step of praying outside.

Immediately after the July 14 attack, Mr. Abbas's mainstream Fatah party whipped up emotions by calling on Palestinian Muslims via Twitter and Facebook to turn out in large numbers to pray at Al Aqsa in defiance of the Israeli decision to close it, and called the next week for a "Day of Rage."

Since the metal detectors went up, three members of an Israeli family were stabbed to death in an attack at their home in a West Bank settlement and four Palestinians were killed in clashes with security forces in and around East Jerusalem.

Adding to the predicament, an Israeli security guard in the Israeli Embassy compound in Amman, Jordan, came under attack on Sunday night and opened fire, killing two Jordanians. The ensuing diplomatic standoff with Jordan, an important ally of Israel, precipitated efforts to calm the volatile atmosphere around Al Aqsa.

Hours after the Israeli embassy staff, including the security guard, returned home from Jordan, the

Israeli security cabinet decided to replace the metal detectors with less obtrusive security measures it said would be introduced over a period of six months.

Although all visitors to the nearby Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray, pass through metal detectors, Palestinians considered the detectors outside Al Aqsa as a symbol of Israel asserting its claim to sovereignty there.

The Israeli police have not specified exactly what will replace the metal detectors, though Micky Rosenfeld, a spokesman for the police, said it might involve "facial recognition" equipment.

The alleyways of Jerusalem's Old City already bristle with security cameras. But rumors have abounded among Palestinians that Israel will now install X-ray cameras around the mosque compound capable of seeing through clothing, fueling new tensions in a conservative society where many women wear long robes and head coverings.

The police issued a denial on Tuesday, saying in a statement: "The Israel Police does not use any type of camera that harms privacy in any way and has no intention of using such cameras in the future. The purpose of the cameras is to protect and guard public safety."

The New York Times

Intelligence Agencies Say North Korean Missile Could Reach U.S. in a Year

David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON — American intelligence agencies have shortened their estimate — to one year — of how long it is likely to take North Korea to put the finishing touches on a missile that can reach the continental United States, according to several administration officials briefed on the new assessment.

Until a few weeks ago, the official estimate was that it would take roughly four years, give or take 12 months, for North Korea to develop a missile that could carry a nuclear

weapon small enough to fit into the missile's warhead and capable of surviving the stresses of re-entry and deliver it to the United States.

But the realities of the past few months, especially a July 4 test that crossed a major threshold — if just barely — has forced intelligence experts to conclude that their estimates have been too conservative. In the test this month, a missile carried a warhead 1,700 miles into space, and returned it at high speed in a sharp parabola.

If the trajectory was flattened out, the missile could strike Alaska. That

forced government experts, reflexively cautious after overestimating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction 14 years ago, back to the drawing board.

Behind the new assessment, officials said, was a growing recognition that they underestimated the determination of Kim Jung-un, North Korea's leader, to race ahead with a weapon that could reach American soil, even if it is crudely engineered and inaccurate.

General Paul Selva, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, put the best case forward last week

when testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee. The most recent test, he said, stopped short of demonstrating that North Korea possesses "the capacity to strike the United States with any degree of accuracy or reasonable confidence of success."

But that statement went far beyond what most Pentagon officials had been allowed to say in public before the most recent test. And it reflects a growing view, from the Defense Intelligence Agency to the C.I.A., that at this point Mr. Kim's missile engineers, while still refining the

technology, have cleared most of the major hurdles.

It is unclear how, if at all, that will change the calculus for President Trump. He has vowed to dispense with the Obama-era strategy of “strategic patience” toward North Korea. American military officials have been asked to come up with new potential strategies, from stepped-up economic pressure to increased cyber attacks on the missile testing regimes. But there is a lurking sense, one senior intelligence official said last week at the Aspen Security Forum, that at this point the best the United States can do is delay the day when North Korea demonstrates it can reach beyond Alaska and Hawaii.

“It’s a big long supply chain to build this thing out,” the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mike Pompeo, said at the security conference, the first public reference

to a long-running covert program to undermine the parts and technologies that flow into North Korea. “As for the regime, I am hopeful we will find a way to separate it” from its missile and nuclear capabilities.

But the essence of the new assessment, which was first reported by the Washington Post, is that Washington has no more time. If the 2018 estimate is right, North Korea will have a crude capability to reach the continental United States before the nation’s missile defenses are upgraded.

Quietly, the Pentagon has been refining longstanding contingency plans, from intercepting missile parts at sea to attempting, if Mr. Trump should decide to do it, to destroy a missile on the launchpad, before it is tested. But it is more likely that the United States would first try a variant of the effort developed

during the Obama administration to sabotage the launches with cyber and electronic warfare techniques, and with a steady flow of bad parts.

A spokesperson for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence issued a statement from Scott Bray, the national intelligence manager for East Asia, that walked to the edge of acknowledging that judgments are shifting.

“North Korea’s recent test of an intercontinental range ballistic missile — which was not a surprise to the Intelligence Community — is one of the milestones that we have expected would help refine our timeline and judgments on the threats that Kim Jong Un poses to the continental United States,” Mr. Bray wrote.

“This test, and its impact on our assessments, highlight the threat that North Korea’s nuclear and

ballistic missile programs pose to the United States, to our allies in the region, and to the whole world.”

The steady frequency of the North Korean missile tests, using a new solid fuel technology, came as a surprise to many intelligence experts, providing a different lesson than the one that emerged from Saddam Hussein’s weapons-of-mass destruction program in Iraq.

In the Iraq case, the intelligence agencies overestimated Saddam Hussein’s ability to reconstitute what was once a healthy nuclear weapons program. In the North Korean case, one senior intelligence official noted last week, the speed and sophistication of the program have been consistently underestimated — much as it was with the Soviet Union 70 years ago, and China more than 50 years ago.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Ian Talley

WASHINGTON—The U.S. soon will issue new sanctions against Chinese entities for violating United Nations sanctions against North Korea, a senior State Department official said Tuesday.

Susan Thornton, acting assistant secretary of the State Department’s East Asian bureau, told a Senate Foreign Affairs subcommittee the Treasury Department shortly will be targeting more Chinese entities involved in supporting Kim Jong Un’s regime.

Ms. Thornton said the escalation in economic pressure follows the failure of Beijing to take action on its own against Chinese firms and individuals the U.S. warned were in violation of the U.N. sanctions.

The U.S. is pushing the U.N. Security Council to approve fresh punitive actions against North Korea in the aftermath of a July 4 test of a new intercontinental ballistic missile with the potential to reach Alaska.

U.S. Readies More Sanctions Against Chinese Entities Over North Korea

But amid complaints by the U.N.’s own experts that sanctions compliance among the institution’s member countries has been inadequate, many U.S. analysts say such a multilateral strategy has failed to put a dent in Mr. Kim’s aspirations for a nuclear weapon that can strike the U.S.

That is one reason Congress has rallied behind legislation that will require the administration to levy tougher sanctions against North Korea as part of a larger sanctions bill that also targets Russia and Iran. It also accounts in part for the unilateral U.S. action.

“We’re definitely in the process of trying to elevate that pressure and change the calculus,” Ms. Thornton said.

China, a North Korean ally that shares a long border with the country, is the nation’s biggest trade partner. Analysts say cutting off financing for Pyongyang’s weapons program and military requires

ratcheting up sanctions on Chinese banks, firms and individuals.

“The Chinese are now very clear that we’re going to go after Chinese entities if need be,” Ms. Thornton said.

The Chinese embassy in Washington didn’t respond to requests for comment, but Beijing has said it opposes U.S. unilateral sanctions against North Korea.

Although administration officials have said they are not targeting China’s government, the State Department’s senior East Asia official said Beijing needed to do “a lot more work” implementing U.N. sanctions, including stopping illicit cross-border trade flows and tracking financial transactions.

But while many U.S.-based analysts are calling the administration to roll out a comprehensive sanctions strategy, Ms. Thornton said Washington will move gradually.

“Ratcheting up sanctions pressure is not like a cobra strike, it’s definitely

a slow squeeze, a slow tightening of the screws,” she told the subcommittee.

In a major new phase of unilateral sanctions, the U.S. Treasury last month move to cut off Chinese Bank of Dandong from U.S. financial markets. The move, while only targeting one small bank, is meant to chill financing for North Korea more broadly by sending a signal to other institutions facilitating the regime that they could lose access to the world’s most important financial market.

But many U.S. analysts say only an Iran-style sanctions regime—where the administration effectively cut off the flow of dollars into the country over the last decade—will force Pyongyang to negotiate a halt to his nuclear and ballistic missile development.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

BEIJING— Li Xiaoping once idolized the West. While a student, he broke through China’s internet firewall to read news from abroad, revered the U.S. Constitution and saw the authoritarian Chinese government as destined to fade away.

New Challenge to U.S. Power: Chinese Exceptionalism (UNE)

Te-Ping Chen and Josh Chin

Now the 34-year-old urban consultant, who studied at both Cambridge and Harvard, thinks it’s China that is ascendant and the U.S. that is terminally weakened by income inequality, divided government and a polarized society. He says so volubly to his more than 80,000 followers on social media.

“In the end, China will supplant America to be the world’s No. 1

strong country,” he wrote on Weibo, China’s homegrown version of Twitter.

President Xi Jinping is holding up China as a confident global power at a time when U.S. leadership seems uncertain. Increasingly, his government can count on swelling national pride among its own citizens.

A generation after China’s late reformist leader Deng Xiaoping exhorted his fellow citizens to “keep our light hidden and bide our time,” Chinese exceptionalism is on the rise. While some Chinese still believe the country will need to embrace democracy to reach its full potential, many others are convinced the country has reached this point, not in spite of the government’s crushing of pro-

democracy protests in 1989, but because of it.

Annual surveys by the Pew Research Center since 2010 show more than 80% of Chinese are satisfied with the direction of their country. Three-quarters of the Chinese surveyed by Pew last year see China playing a bigger role in global affairs than 10 years ago, and 60% view China's involvement in the global economy as positive.

On his blog, between digressions on Socrates and Ming Dynasty economic policy, Mr. Li writes at length on the superiority of the Chinese political system. Unlike the U.S., where he says charisma is prized over professionalism and money is needed to win office, he argues that China promotes officials based on their performance in spurring economic growth and managing large cities and bureaucracies.

"Among people in my generation, there aren't many of us now who think we should totally study the West," says Mr. Li. "To them, China is already a great country."

The sense that China is on the right track challenges a decades-old tenet of U.S. foreign policy, one that argued exposure to the West would lead Chinese to embrace Western values.

In the wake of Brexit and Donald Trump's election, and amid global fears about terrorism, a generation of Chinese patriots like Mr. Li are projecting an assurance about China as a beacon of strength and stability in an uncertain world.

President Xi's signature slogan, the "China Dream," appeals to Chinese who aspire to a middle-class lifestyle and cheer China's return to international prominence. On the global stage, Mr. Xi has portrayed China as an alternative to the West, with a unique political system and culture, and as a leader in areas including trade, inequality and climate change.

"What people are starting to feel is pride. It's the pride of being listened to, or forcing people to listen to you," says Orville Schell, director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the Asia Society. "The idea of greatness for China—because they've experienced weakness—gravitates around the idea of power."

China's government exercises near-absolute authority over education, media and the internet. That, along with determined campaigns to quash dissent, give the Communist Party unparalleled power to frame public debate. As a result, patriotism and pro-government views are

amplified. Criticisms tend to get drowned out.

After communications professor Deng Xiangchao posted messages on Weibo in December lamenting the millions who died in Mao Zedong's political campaigns, he was hounded online as a "public enemy," saw his account deleted and was fired by Shandong Jianzhu University for "erroneous remarks."

Writer Lu Yang protested the professor's treatment at the hands of "a gang of ignorant internet goons" in online posts. His Weibo account was also expunged. "The space for free speech in China grows smaller by the day," says Mr. Lu.

A spokesman for Weibo said he wasn't clear on the circumstances surrounding the closure of accounts belonging to Deng Xiangchao and Lu Yang.

More-aggressive forms of nationalism are usually directed at foreign countries seen as standing in China's way. After South Korea agreed to deploy a U.S. antimissile system as protection against North Korea, Beijing condemned the move as endangering Chinese security. Soon some Chinese began posting videos online showing themselves trampling goods from South Korean stores in China. A beef-noodle shop in Beijing advertised that it wouldn't serve South Koreans.

Chinese businesses, students and tourists crisscross the globe in record numbers, and international news features prominently in the media. More than anything, Chinese say, their current patriotic sentiment is built on pride about how rapidly the country has emerged from poverty and how well its economy compares with others.

In seven out of 10 European countries surveyed by the Pew Research Center, including the U.K. and Germany, China is now considered the world's leading economic power, according to data released in July. The gap in global popularity between the U.S. and China has also narrowed dramatically in recent years, with 47% of people now expressing a positive view of China, compared to 49% for the U.S., according to Pew.

A record 328,547 Chinese students were enrolled in the U.S. in the 2015-2016 academic year, up 160% from six years prior, drawn to the quality of the higher education system and eager to bypass China's grueling college-entrance exams. In the past, most would stay on after graduating. Now around 80% choose to return home, where, many say, better job prospects await.

A small survey of 131 Chinese students studying in the U.S., Europe, Australia, Japan and South Korea published in 2014 in the journal *China Youth Study* found that while most weren't markedly patriotic before leaving China, close to 80% reported feeling more patriotic after going abroad. Roughly two-thirds said they agreed with Mr. Xi's "China Dream."

Chen Hesheng, a 22-year-old recent college graduate, spent a month in a summer study program at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles in 2014. Two Chinese graduate students were gunned down while sitting in a BMW near campus in 2012. He felt scared to go out at night and shocked at the U.S.'s poor public safety.

Mr. Chen resents the preaching from the U.S. and other Western governments about democracy and human rights: "Young people aren't convinced that the West is better. Who are you to tell us that it is?"

These days, Mr. Chen is part of a generation of patriotic online activists known as "little pinks"—named for the background color of a website known for passionate, patriotic political discussions.

Like others in this mostly millennial cohort, Mr. Chen says the internet and travel enable them to see China more accurately. He leaps internet barriers mostly to watch uncensored videos on YouTube and occasionally to counter what he sees as inaccurate views about China on Facebook.

In 2016 he twice joined swarms of mainland activists in posting tens of thousands of pro-China comments on the Facebook pages of Taiwan's president and media outlets seen as favoring the democratically ruled island's formal independence from China—long a hot-button issue for patriotic Chinese.

For Chinese students in the West who take positions that offend their fellow citizens, blowback can be swift. In May, a Chinese graduate at the University of Maryland sparked a furor of online criticism after she praised free speech and America's air quality in a commencement address. Even the country's Foreign Ministry weighed in on the controversy, declaring that "any Chinese citizen should be responsible for the remarks he or she makes." The student later publicly apologized, saying she hadn't meant to belittle her home country.

For Mr. Li, the urban consultant, his experience overseas was formative.

As a child in rural Sichuan, he lived in a home without running water. Rice was rationed. School closed so

students could help with the harvests. Visiting relatives meant walking for hours through fields.

Still, he was raised to be grateful to the Communist Party. His parents, a schoolteacher and a shop worker, gave him Mao's collected writings to inspire him.

After his high score on the politics portion on the college entrance exam landed him a spot studying law at one of the nation's top schools, Beijing's Renmin University, his world view began to change.

His more liberal teachers brought their ideas into classroom discussions. "They'd say China has no rule of law, no human rights," he recalls. He had internet access in his dorm room and used circumvention software to reach sites outside China to read uncensored news and commentary. "They said that Mao Zedong was a despot, and that China's ancient history was one of autocratic rule," he said.

The more Mr. Li learned, the more his certainties about his society crumbled and the more he came to admire the West, with its wealth, its respect for civil liberties and its political checks and balances. He devoured works on the U.S. legal system. The Watergate scandal's toppling of Richard Nixon impressed him.

"We thought the West's political system was really good, and that we should use it to change China," he says. That change would surely come, he says: "We thought it was just a question of time."

Doubts about the West crept in when he spent a half-year at the University of Cambridge as part of his doctorate in economics. Compared with China's brand-new infrastructure, the buildings in most British cities looked shabby. Getting a bank card took days.

A year at Harvard University's Kennedy School as a visiting fellow starting in 2010 accelerated his change in thinking. He was appalled at the number of panhandlers in subway stations and how unsafe he felt.

The U.S. was just emerging from a financial crisis that left China largely unscathed. Amy Chua's "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother," which extolled the benefits of hard-line Chinese parenting, became a best seller. "If Americans admire China so much, maybe the way we saw China before wasn't so accurate," he thought.

He sifted through U.S. census data found online and concluded inequality was weakening America.

He saw its divided political system as too in thrall to special interests to serve the broader public.

"For decades, America's politicians have come and gone, and put forward pleasant-sounding slogans about how they'll promote the

middle class and social equality. But basically, it's a bad check," he wrote on his blog in December. In a separate posting, he extolled China's scientific achievements, including its No. 1 spot in supercomputing, as evidence of the

country's burgeoning strength. "It's astonishing the world!" he wrote.

Seeing the West up close, Mr. Li says, was a defining experience for him. He's fond of citing an expression now common among Chinese youth: Once you leave your

country, you love your country. "If you don't go abroad, you don't actually know how great China is," says Mr. Li.

**The
Washington
Post**

North Korea could cross ICBM threshold next year, U.S. officials warn in new assessment (UNE)

North Korea will be able to field a reliable, nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile as early as next year, U.S. officials have concluded in a confidential assessment that dramatically shrinks the timeline for when Pyongyang could strike North American cities with atomic weapons.

The new assessment by the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), which shaves a full two years off the consensus forecast for North Korea's ICBM program, was prompted by recent missile tests showing surprising technical advances by the country's weapons scientists, at a pace beyond what many analysts believed was possible for the isolated communist regime.

The U.S. projection closely mirrors revised predictions by South Korean intelligence officials, who also have watched with growing alarm as North Korea has appeared to master key technologies needed to loft a warhead toward targets thousands of miles away.

The finding further increases the pressure on U.S. and Asian leaders to halt North Korea's progress before Pyongyang can threaten the world with nuclear-tipped missiles. President Trump, during his visit to Poland this month, vowed to confront North Korea "very strongly" to stop its missile advances.

The DIA has concluded that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will be able to produce a "reliable, nuclear-capable ICBM" program sometime in 2018, meaning that by next year the program will have advanced from prototype to assembly line, according to officials familiar with the document. Already, the aggressive testing regime put in place in recent months has allowed North Korea to validate its basic designs, putting it within a few months of starting industrial production, the officials said.

North Korea showed off a lot of missiles. What might be their targets?

The DIA and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence declined to address any classified assessments.

But Scott Bray, ODNI's national intelligence manager for East Asia, said in a statement: "North Korea's recent test of an intercontinental range ballistic missile — which was not a surprise to the intelligence community — is one of the milestones that we have expected would help refine our timeline and judgments on the threats that Kim Jong Un poses to the continental United States. This test, and its impact on our assessments, highlight the threat that North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs pose to the United States, to our allies in the region, and to the whole world. The intelligence community is closely monitoring the expanding threat from North Korea."

[Kim Jong Un's rockets are getting an important boost — from China]

One of the few remaining technical hurdles is the challenge of atmospheric "reentry" — the ability to design a missile that can pass through the upper atmosphere without damage to the warhead. Long regarded as a formidable technological barrier for impoverished North Korea, that milestone could be reached, beginning with new tests expected to take place within days, U.S. analysts said. U.S. officials have detected signs that North Korea is making final preparations for testing a new reentry vehicle, perhaps as early as Thursday, a North Korean national holiday marking the end of the Korean War.

"They're on track to do that, essentially this week," said a U.S. official familiar with the intelligence report who, like others, insisted on anonymity to discuss sensitive military assessments.

North Korea has not yet demonstrated an ability to build a miniaturized nuclear warhead that could be carried by one of its missiles. Officials there last year displayed a sphere-shaped device the regime described as a miniaturized warhead, but there has been no public confirmation that this milestone has been achieved. Preparations reportedly have been underway for several months for what would be the country's sixth underground atomic test. The last one, in September, had an

estimated yield of 20 to 30 kilotons, more than double the explosive force of any previous test.

North Korea startled the world with its successful July 4 test of a missile capable of striking parts of Alaska — the first such missile with proven intercontinental range. The launch of a two-stage "Hwasong-14" missile was the latest in a series of tests in recent months that have revealed startlingly rapid advances across a number of technical fields, from mastery of solid-fuel technology to the launch of the first submarine-based missile, current and former intelligence officials and weapons experts said.

The North Korean regime hates the United States. Everyday, North Koreans are told that the Americans are 'imperialists,' 'aggressors,' and 'hostile.' North Korean children are taught that 'cunning American wolves' want to kill them. To understand why, we need to go back to the Korean War. Why does North Korea hate the U.S.? Look to the Korean War. (Anna Fifield, Jason Aldag/The Washington Post)

(Anna Fifield, Jason Aldag/The Washington Post)

"There has been alarming progress," said Joseph DeTrani, the former mission manager for North Korea for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and a former special envoy for negotiations with Pyongyang. "In the last year they have gained capabilities that they didn't have, including ones that we thought they would not have been able to obtain for years."

The July 4 missile test also caught South Korea's intelligence service off guard, prompting a hasty revision of forecasts, according to South Korean lawmakers who have received closed-door briefings. "The speed of North Korea's ICBM missile development is faster than the South Korean Defense Ministry expected," said lawmaker Lee Cheol-hee of the left-wing Minjoo party, who attended an intelligence committee briefing after the July 4 test.

[The message behind the murder: North Korea's assassination sheds light on chemical weapons arsenal]

The South Korean government, which is actively trying to engage the regime in Pyongyang, has declined to call the most recent test a success. North Korea still has not proved it has mastered some of the steps needed to build a reliable ICBM, most notably the reentry vehicle, Lee said.

Still, officials across the political spectrum acknowledged that North Korea is rapidly gaining ground. "Now they are approaching the final stage of being a nuclear power and the owner of an ICBM," said Cha Du-hyeogn, who served as an adviser to conservative former president Lee Myung-bak.

U.S. spy agencies have detected multiple signals that North Korea is preparing to test a reentry vehicle. Analysts believe that the July 4 test was intended to demonstrate range — the ability of its new two-stage ICBM prototype to reach altitude and distance milestones — while the new launch will seek to validate engineering features designed to protect the warhead as it passes through the upper atmosphere and then is delivered to a distant target.

The latest designs appear to cobble together older systems — including portions of a missile frame used to launch satellites into orbit — with a more advanced engine that North Korea began testing earlier this year. Much of the technology is based on old Soviet-era designs that have been reworked by what U.S. experts describe as an increasingly capable cadre of homegrown engineers, goaded along by a leadership that has pursued nuclear weapons and delivery systems with single-minded zeal.

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

Kim vowed in January to successfully test a nuclear-capable ICBM in 2017, achieving a long-sought goal that North Koreans believe will serve as the ultimate deterrent against threats to the communist regime's survival. At the time, the U.S. intelligence community's formal assessment still held that a credible ICBM threat

would not emerge until 2020 at the earliest.

"North Korea's timeline moved faster than we expected," said the U.S. official familiar with the new DIA assessment. "We weren't expecting an ICBM test in July."

Former U.S. officials and weapons

experts said a successful test of a nuclear-capable ICBM would dramatically raise the stakes in the North Korean crisis, putting new pressure on North Korea's neighbors and increasing the risk of miscalculation. "The danger is that decision time and warning is greatly reduced when North Korea has the weapons, and that escalation can

happen quickly," said Jon Wolfsthal, senior director for arms control and nonproliferation with the Obama administration's National Security Council.

The specter of a nuclear-armed, ICBM-capable Kim "takes the risk to a new level but does not change the nature of the threat we have faced

for some time," Wolfsthal said. "We have to deter North Korea from ever using any nuclear weapons and make clear that any move to use these weapons is suicide."

**The
Washington
Post**

House passes Russia sanctions bill, setting up veto dilemma for Trump

The House on Tuesday voted overwhelmingly to advance new financial sanctions against key U.S. adversaries and deliver a foreign-policy brushback to President Trump by limiting his ability to waive many of them.

Included in the package, which passed 419 to 3, are new measures targeting key Russian officials in retaliation for that country's alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election, as well as sanctions against Iran and North Korea in response to those nations' weapons programs.

Members of the Trump administration, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, have resisted the congressional push — in particular a provision attached to the Russian measures that would require Congress to sign off on any move to relieve those sanctions.

[U.S. attempt to handcuff Trump on Russia could backfire, Europe says]

The legislation was revised last week to address some administration concerns, including its potential effect on overseas oil and gas projects that include Russian partners. But the bill passed Tuesday retains the congressional review requirement.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders on July 23 said President Trump's administration "is supportive" of new legislation imposing sanctions on Russia. Senators from both parties said Trump ought to sign the bill after it passes. White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders says President Trump's administration "is supportive" of new legislation imposing sanctions on Russia. (Video: Bastien Inzaurrealde/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

"These three regimes in different parts of the world are threatening vital U.S. interests, and they are destabilizing their neighbors," House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Edward R. Royce (R-Calif.) said Tuesday. "It is well past time that we forcefully respond."

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders declined to say Monday whether Trump would sign or veto the bill, adding that the president "has been very vocal about his support for continuing sanctions on those three countries." The administration did not issue a formal statement laying out its position, as is customary for major bills.

"He has no intention of getting rid of them, but he wants to make sure we get the best deal for the American people possible," Sanders said. "Congress does not have the best record on that. ... He's going to study that legislation and see what the final product looks like."

The House voted hours after one of Trump's closest advisers, son-in-law Jared Kushner, visited the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence to give testimony on possible Russian involvement in the presidential campaign. Also Tuesday, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence interviewed former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort, who has had close ties with Ukraine's former Moscow-aligned government.

Kushner was interviewed Monday by the Senate panel and issued a statement afterward denying wrongdoing. "I did not collude with Russia, nor do I know of anyone else in the campaign who did so," he said.

[Analysis: Jared Kushner's 'I did not collude' statement, parsed]

But the administration's posture toward Russia has emerged as one of the few areas where congressional Republicans have been willing to openly buck the White House's wishes.

An initial Senate bill targeting Iran and Russia passed in June on a vote of 98 to 2, with only Sens. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) opposed.

That bill hit a procedural snag over claims that it ran afoul of the constitutional requirement that revenue bills originate in the House. The roadblock came as Trump administration officials stepped up a lobbying campaign against it, prompting Democrats to accuse

House GOP leaders of stalling on Trump's behalf.

New obstacles emerged earlier this month. House Democrats objected to Senate changes to the bill that could freeze out the House minority's ability to block sanctions relief. The energy industry also raised concerns that U.S. companies could be frozen out of projects with Russian partners.

House leaders agreed to vote on an expanded version of the bill last week after adding sanctions aimed at freezing North Korea's nuclear program and targeting banks that aid its government. The measures against Pyongyang, which passed the House 419 to 1 as a stand-alone bill in May, were inserted at the request of House Republican leaders.

Democrats were more aggressive during floor debate Tuesday than Republicans in casting the bill — and its congressional review requirement — as a rebuke of Trump's foreign policy.

"This is critical at a moment when our allies are uncertain about where this administration stands with respect to Russian aggression," said House Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), who brokered a deal on the bill with GOP House leaders. He said that Congress could pursue additional sanctions targeting the Russian energy industry if Russian President Vladimir Putin and allies "fail to heed the message of this bill that their business as usual cannot and must not continue."

The House voted under special procedures for noncontroversial bills expected to pass with a two-thirds majority. The near-unanimity means the House could override a presidential veto.

"The bill we just passed with overwhelming bipartisan support is one of the most expansive sanctions packages in history," Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) said in a statement after the vote. "It tightens the screws on our most dangerous adversaries in order to keep Americans safe."

The Senate has not yet had the chance to vet the sanctions against Pyongyang, but Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), chairman of the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee, told reporters Monday that he expects the House bill to pass the Senate, with "minor details" about procedure still to be worked out.

Corker said he was exploring ways to ensure the bill would be sent to Trump before the end of the week, when House members are set to leave Washington for a five-week recess. "We'd like to get this thing passed and into law," he said.

"It seems we may be on the floor before we ironed out all the differences with the other body," said Rep. Eliot L. Engel (D-N.Y.), the top Democrat on the Foreign Affairs panel, pointing to differences on the North Korean provisions. "I hope that's not the case."

The Health 202 newsletter

Your daily guide to the health-care debate.

The version of the bill passed by the House on Tuesday addresses concerns about in which chamber the bill would originate, removes the provision that blacklists energy companies from entering into oil development projects if any Russian firm is involved, and delays defense and intelligence sector sanctions while asking the administration to clarify which Russian entities would fall within those sectors.

The bill also protects a 30-day window for Congress to take steps to block the president if he tries to roll back any sanctions imposed against Russia — signaling that lawmakers were unmoved by the Trump administration's lobbying effort to get them to ease up.

Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) issued a statement Tuesday praising the bill and calling for swift passage.

"Senate Republican leaders should move this bill as soon as possible, so that it can be on the President's desk without delay," he said. "Passing the bill on a bipartisan basis will send a strong signal to the White House that the Kremlin needs to be held accountable for meddling in last year's election."

ETATS-UNIS



Stewart : A small but important step for GOP in health care marathon

Alice Stewart (CNN) A heartfelt standing ovation from both sides of the aisle welcomed Sen. John McCain as he cast the 50th vote to take up Obamacare repeal. The decorated veteran and war hero, who returned to Washington after being diagnosed with brain cancer last week, said "to hell" with the "bombastic loudmouths" -- it's time to get something done.

With that, Senate Republicans have taken the first step in what will likely be a marathon effort to reform health care by voting to proceed with repealing Obamacare. Vice President Mike Pence cast the tiebreaking vote. Zero Democrats supported the measure.

The 2016 election was a call for change after Americans lost faith in the failed policies of the Democratic Party. Republicans campaigned and won on the promise to repeal Obamacare. They must deliver on their promises.

Congress needs to continue taking steps to follow through on its promise to repeal Obamacare.

After the Senate vote, President Trump said

, "This is the beginning of the end of the disaster known as Obamacare."

After pulling the original Senate bill due to lack of support, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell managed to move some Senate GOP votes by making the pitch to simply open the debate on a couple of options.

The motion to proceed begins discussion on support for the 2015 repeal bill or the Better Care Reconciliation Act, known as BCRA.

The proposed BCRA

is a patient-centered, free-market approach that will cut the deficit, lower premiums and increase options. The bill will expand tax-free health savings accounts, give more funding control back to the states, protect pre-existing conditions, and allocate \$45 billion to combat the opioid epidemic.

McConnell's strategy of starting a marathon with a few small steps won the day.

Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky had been a confirmed "no" until now. But he voted in support of the motion to proceed,

saying

to CNN's Wolf Blitzer on Tuesday, "Let's start small and see how many pieces of repeal we can agree on."

Sen.

Dean Heller

of Nevada (who is facing a tough re-election campaign next year) also opposed the first pass at health care repeal because it didn't protect Medicaid funding in his state. The former holdout voted to proceed because,

as he told CNN

, "Doing nothing to try and solve the problems it [Obamacare] has created isn't the answer either."

Sen. Ted Cruz also supported the motion to proceed,

saying

, "The American people rightfully expect us to keep our promises and get the job done."

The reality is that Obamacare has been dying on the vine. In 2009, Democrats made

promises

: if you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor; if you like your plan, you can keep your plan. For millions of Americans, that was not the case.

Although Obamacare implemented a higher standard for policies, a report

from the Department of Health and Human Services noted that, since 2013, premiums have more than doubled nationwide and next year, people buying insurance in Obamacare exchanges in

45 counties

across the country could have no insurance carriers to choose from.

Voters sent Republicans to Washington to make good on their campaign promises to deliver relief from the Obamacare nightmare, and Congress needs to follow through and do just that.

As Ronald Reagan liked to

say

: "There are no easy answers, but there are simple answers."

The same principle applies to health care reform. We all knew repealing Obamacare would be difficult, but the simple fact remains: The time is now for Republicans to act on health care, even if they have to do it by taking small steps at a time.



GOP bill is voted down as divided Senate dives into health-care debate (UNE)

The Senate embarked on a freewheeling process to rewrite the Affordable Care Act on Tuesday, as Republicans overcame deep divisions to bring their proposals up for debate by the narrowest possible margin.

But those same schisms threatened to leave the party far short in the coming days of its ambitious goal to undo major parts of the ACA, which the GOP has been vowing for seven years to dismantle. On Tuesday night, just hours after opening debate, Senate Republican leaders were unable to pass a bill that they had spent weeks crafting but that never gained sufficient traction with the rank and file.

Fifty-seven senators — including nine Republicans — opposed the

updated version of the measure known as the Better Care Reconciliation Act (BCRA), while 43 supported it, portending a difficult road ahead for the GOP rollback effort.

The earlier vote to start debate marked a momentary political victory for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and President Trump. The president managed to resuscitate the GOP's months-long effort to unwind President Barack Obama's signature 2010 law by convincing more than half a dozen wavering senators that they could not afford to walk away from an enduring political promise. Republicans passed the procedural hurdle by a slim 51-to-50-vote margin, with Vice President Pence breaking the tie.

The health-care debate is likely to spark a chaotic, unpredictable couple of days on Capitol Hill — with senators voting on everything from abolishing much of the law to what is being called a "skinny repeal." The result of these ensuing votes, many think, will be far more modest changes to the ACA than the party has long advertised.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) arrived on the Senate floor on July 25, to vote on the motion to proceed to debate on the Republican health-care bill, a week after being diagnosed with brain cancer. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) arrives on the Senate floor to vote on the motion to proceed to debate on the Republican health-care bill. (U.S. Senate)

(U.S. Senate)

"The endgame is to be able to move something at the end of this process across the Senate floor that can get 50 votes and then to get into conference with the House," said Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), a top McConnell lieutenant.

['Skinny repeal'] could be the Senate's health-care bill of last resort

Tuesday's proceedings were marked by high drama, including the return of Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) to the Capitol just 1 1/2 weeks after he underwent surgery related to his recent diagnosis of brain cancer, and Pence's move to cast the tiebreaking vote. The intensity of the debate, including

protesters who yelled "Kill the bill!" in the Senate chamber after the voting had begun, underscored the stakes involved in overhauling a health-care system that affects one-sixth of the U.S. economy and how tens of millions receive medical care.

All 48 members of the Democratic caucus voted against the procedural motion to start debate, along with two GOP centrists, Susan Collins (Maine) and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska).

Republicans have struggled mightily to get to this point, and there is no guarantee they will win final passage of the bill. In a sign of how muddled the situation remains, McCain took to the floor after voting to move ahead and declared, "I will not vote for the [BCRA] as it is today. It's a shell of a bill right now."

[McCain returns to Senate for health care vote to emotional applause from his colleagues]

Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) echoed these sentiments, tweeting, "I support a full repeal of Obamacare & will continue to oppose the BCRA."

Which GOP senators have concerns with the health-care bill

Trump has been pushing aggressively for Republicans to pass a repeal-and-replace plan, saying opposing the procedural motion to proceed with debate would be tantamount to endorsing the law known as Obamacare.

Speaking at a joint news conference in the Rose Garden on Tuesday, the president said he is "very, very sad" for the Republicans who opposed the motion but "very happy with the result" of the vote.

"Now we're all going to sit together and try to come up with something really spectacular," he said. "It's a very, very complex and difficult task, something I know quite a bit about."

Now, Senate GOP leaders plan to move ahead with votes they hope will culminate at the end of the week in the passage of at least narrow changes to the ACA that will become the basis for negotiations with the House. This "skinny repeal" strategy would keep the overhaul effort alive but amount to a tacit acknowledgment that broader efforts to revise

or repeal the law cannot succeed, even as Republicans control both Congress and the White House.

"They expect us to tackle the big problems," McConnell said on the Senate floor, referring to American voters. "So all we have to do today is to have the courage to begin the debate. ... Let the voting take us where it will."

At least two of the votes were largely for show, as the measures at stake were expected to be defeated. The first was on an altered version of the Senate GOP bill to repeal and replace the law, which included proposals from Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.), a conservative, and Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), a moderate, and was subject to a 60-vote threshold. That was defeated, 57-43, with 60 votes required for passage. Later, senators will move on to an attempt to repeal the law, which as of last week lacked enough Republican support to succeed.

The "skinny repeal" option would repeal the ACA's mandates that individuals buy plans and that employers with 50 or more employees provide coverage, said lobbyists and Senate aides, as well as eliminate the law's tax on medical device manufacturers.

Democrats signaled that they won't stand in the way of plans to vote on different versions of the legislation.

"These votes, frankly, are a lot tougher for them than they are for us. They are squeezed in both directions," Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) told reporters.

Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.), the party's top vote-counter, acknowledged that some Democrats might support GOP-written amendments to the bill that have bipartisan support. But he said Democrats will focus mostly on process over policy, and keep pushing Republicans to return the legislation to committee and proceed with regular procedure. There have been bipartisan complaints that the legislation was drafted — by McConnell and a handful of leaders — without enough transparency.

Recognizing their lack of leverage in the chamber, Senate Democrats decried Republicans' policies and

procedural approach in a rally with supporters outside the Capitol. "How about we fill the streets outside every Republican office in America?" said Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.).

Several patient-advocate organizations and progressive groups decried the vote, warning that it could open the door to rollbacks in the expanded coverage the ACA has provided through new benefits requirements and greater federal support for insurance coverage.

"Republican leaders are using undemocratic and unprecedented means to rob coverage and critical services from millions of women, sending them back to a time when Women's Health Care Services were not considered essential," Nancy Northup, president and chief executive of the Center for Reproductive Rights, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Nathan Nascimento, vice president of the conservative group Freedom Partners, urged senators to use the votes to partly repeal the law and then keep pushing for full repeal. "And then use the next available opportunity to keep their promise by repealing the rest of Obamacare, including its costly regulations and choice-stifling mandates," he said.

But one key way Senate leaders won Tuesday's procedural vote was by assuring several centrist Republicans that they may end up with a modest bill.

McConnell and his deputies were still bartering with a handful of GOP holdouts in the hours leading up to the vote. Among the skeptics were about half a dozen Republicans from states that expanded their Medicaid programs under the ACA to cover able-bodied adults and low-income parents earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

Although it was clear that some, such as Collins, were unlikely to support McConnell's repeal plan, Portman and Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) remained in talks with leaders until the final days.

The group's members have met regularly since talks started earlier this year, and they have generally banded together to ward off

conservative demands that the bill slash funding for Medicaid. The group was largely quiet in the days leading up to the vote, but Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.) said he thinks leaders won it over with a spate of last-minute bartering, including a pledge to include Portman's amendment.

That provision would add \$100 billion more in federal funding to help consumers with out-of-pocket medical costs, said senators and aides, and would allow states to provide cost-sharing assistance to low-income people who transition from Medicaid to buy private insurance with a federal tax credit.

"They've been very diligently working to make sure their concerns were addressed," Cornyn said. "As recently as the last couple of days, they indicated they were likely willing to proceed based on the improvements to the underlying bill that they've been working on."

Conservatives, meanwhile, lobbied for concessions. Senate leaders have agreed to include Cruz's amendment in their revised plan, thereby allowing insurers to offer bare-bones health plans on the ACA market as long as they provide at least one option that meets the current law's minimum requirements.

The Finance 202 newsletter

Your daily guide to where Wall Street meets Washington.

After McCain's floor speech, most Senate Democrats headed down the stairs of the Capitol, where TV cameras were waiting for them. But even as they sought to rally with protesters, Republicans had put up an obstacle to their plans. Pence's motorcade was speeding away, leaving the activists temporarily stranded on the other side of the street.

Amy Goldstein, Ed O'Keefe, David Weigel and Paige Winfield Cunningham contributed to this report.

The New York Times

Senate Votes Down Broad Obamacare Repeal (UNE)

Thomas Kaplan and Robert Pear

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted narrowly on Tuesday to begin debate on a bill to repeal major provisions of the Affordable Care Act, but hours later, Republican

leaders suffered a setback when their most comprehensive plan to replace President Barack Obama's health law fell far short of the votes it needed.

The Tuesday night tally needed to reach 60 votes to overcome a

parliamentary objection. Instead, it fell 43-57. The fact that the comprehensive replacement plan came up well short of even 50 votes was an ominous sign for Republican leaders still seeking a formula to

pass final health care legislation this week.

For Republicans, the failure ended the day on a sour note, hours after a more triumphant scene on the Senate floor. Lawmakers from both parties had risen to their feet in the

afternoon and applauded when Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, showed up in the chamber despite his diagnosis of brain cancer. He cast a crucial vote in favor of opening what promises to be a freewheeling, hard-fought debate over the future of the Affordable Care Act.

The 51-50 vote to start debate, with Vice President Mike Pence breaking a tie, came only a week after the Republican effort to dismantle a pillar of Mr. Obama's legacy appeared all but doomed. It provided an initial win for President Trump, who pushed, cajoled and threatened senators in recent days to at least begin debating the repeal of the health care law.

But the victory could be fleeting: Senate Republicans still have no agreement on a repeal bill that they can ultimately pass to uproot the law that has provided health insurance to millions of Americans.

After John McCain's dramatic return, the Senate narrowly votes to begin work on the repeal of Obamacare — then votes down a plan to do exactly that.

The Senate is now moving ahead with debate, amendments and ultimately a final vote in the coming days on legislation that would have a profound effect on the American health care system — roughly one-sixth of the United States' economy. But it is entirely possible that by week's end, the senators will have passed nothing.

"Now we move forward towards truly great health care for the American people," Mr. Trump said from the White House Rose Garden, where he was holding a news conference with the visiting prime minister of Lebanon. "This was a big step."

Only two Republicans, Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, voted against the procedural motion, though at least several other Republicans had been seen as possible holdouts. No Democrats voted in favor of the motion.

The Tuesday night vote was on a comprehensive amendment that included disparate proposals calculated to appeal to conservatives and moderates in the Republican caucus.

One proposal, offered by Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, would have allowed insurers to sell stripped-down health plans, without maternity care or other benefits required by the Affordable Care Act, if they also sold plans that included such benefits.

"You shouldn't have to buy what the federal government mandates you must buy," Mr. Cruz said. "You should choose what meets the needs for you and your family."

The amendment also included money to help pay out-of-pocket medical costs for low-income people, including those who buy private insurance after losing Medicaid coverage as a result of the Senate bill. This proposal was devised by Senator Rob Portman, Republican of Ohio, and other senators from states that have expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.

But nine Republicans, spanning the party's ideological spectrum, voted against the package.

The debate to come will have broad implications for health care and households in every state, and emotions are high.

Before senators voted to start the debate in midafternoon, protesters in the Senate gallery chanted, "Kill the bill, don't kill us!" and "Shame, shame, shame!"

Despite his vote to move ahead, Mr. McCain offered harsh words for the secretive process by which Senate Republican leaders came up with their bill to repeal and replace the health law, and he delivered a pessimistic take on its chances.

"Asking us to swallow our doubts and force it past a unified opposition — I don't think that's going to work in the end, and probably shouldn't," Mr. McCain said, adding that it "seems likely" that the current repeal effort would end in failure. Still, Mr. McCain voted with Republican leaders in favor of the comprehensive replacement plan on Tuesday night.

Arizona is one of the 31 states that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, and Mr. McCain's remarks could reflect concerns of other senators from states that expanded Medicaid, including the junior Republican senator from his state, Jeff Flake.

"We are ground zero for the failure of the exchanges, but we are also an expansion state," Mr. Flake said. "I think all of us are concerned that we don't pull the rug out from people."

Just before the Senate vote, the Democratic leader, Chuck Schumer of New York, made an impassioned plea to Republicans.

"We know that A.C.A. is not perfect," Mr. Schumer said. "But we also know what you've proposed is much worse. We can work together to improve health care in this

country. Turn back now before it's too late and millions and millions and millions of Americans are hurt so badly in ways from which they will never, ever recover."

John McCain to Senate: 'We're Getting Nothing Done'

Senator John McCain, who was recently diagnosed with brain cancer, spoke to the Senate after casting his vote to begin debating legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS. Photo by Gabriella Demczuk for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

Given the divisions within their caucus, Senate Republican leaders were considering a new approach to keeping their repeal quest alive: They could try to reach agreement on a slimmed-down bill that would repeal a few major provisions of the Affordable Care Act, like the penalties imposed on people who go without insurance and businesses that do not offer insurance to their employees. Republican leaders would not intend such a bill to become law, but they believe that it could win approval in the Senate.

That "skinny" bill could then be a basis for negotiations with the House.

Republican leaders in Congress have struggled all year to fulfill their promise of repealing the 2010 health care law. By a vote of 217 to 213, the House approved a repeal bill in early May, but only after Republicans overcame their own difficulties in that chamber.

Mr. Trump kept up pressure on the Senate on Tuesday with Twitter posts. After the procedural vote, he applauded the Senate, but was cutting toward Ms. Collins and Ms. Murkowski: "We had two Republicans that went against us, which is very sad, I think. It's very, very sad for them."

The successful procedural vote was also a moment of redemption, at least temporarily, for Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, who just last week appeared to have failed in his effort to put together a health bill that could squeak through the narrowly divided Senate.

That said, it remained far from certain whether Republicans would be able to agree on a bill in the days to come — and what exactly the contents of that bill would be. Mr. McConnell promised an "open amendment process" in which members of both parties could propose changes.

Majority needed to pass Yes No

Republicans	51	2
Democrats	0	48
Total	51	50

"This is just the beginning," Mr. McConnell said. "We're not out here to spike the football."

For weeks, Mr. McConnell has been promoting and revising a comprehensive bill that would repeal the health law while also replacing it, but he has struggled to nail down the support needed to pass that measure. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has yet to assess the most complete version of that legislation, which includes the proposals by Mr. Cruz and Mr. Portman.

Without that assessment, the measure needed 60 Senate votes, and it failed that test on Tuesday night.

The Senate is also expected to vote on a measure that would repeal the health law without putting in place any replacement, but that approach does not appear to have enough support to pass, either.

That proposal resembles a bill passed by the Senate in 2015 and vetoed by Mr. Obama in early 2016. But it would increase the number of people who are uninsured by 32 million in 2026, the budget office said.

Mr. Portman had anguished for weeks over provisions of Mr. McConnell's repeal bill that would make deep cuts in projected Medicaid spending and roll back the expansion of the program under the Affordable Care Act.

Mr. Portman voted to move ahead with the debate on Tuesday after being assured that the Senate would vote on his plan to provide financial assistance to people moving from an expanded state Medicaid program to private health insurance.

States could have used the money, totaling \$100 billion, to help low-income people pay deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs when they receive medical care.

Mr. Portman worked on the plan with the Trump administration and with several other Republican senators from states that have expanded Medicaid, including Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia and Dean Heller of Nevada.

Mr. Heller voted Tuesday to open the debate, but he made no commitment to vote for the repeal bill itself.

"If the final product isn't improved for the state of Nevada, then I will

not vote for it," Mr. Heller said. "If it is improved, I will support it."



Inside the GOP's Plan to 'Skinny Repeal' Obamacare

Andrew Desiderio

impossibly small margin for error with which they must now work.

the House so that the process can simply continue.

approach to health care reform both on policy and process. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.V.), who dropped prior opposition to side with leadership on Tuesday, said just last week that she would "only vote to proceed to repeal legislation if I am confident there is a replacement plan that addresses my concerns." It's not clear if a "skinny repeal" would do that.

Senate Republican leaders scored a significant victory on Tuesday in the fight to repeal and replace Obamacare by getting a majority of senators to agree to debate a mystery bill.

Related in Politics

Just 50 of the 52 Republican senators voted in favor of the procedural measure to open debate on a health care bill, with moderate Sens. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Susan Collins (R-ME) and all Democrats voting against it. Vice President Mike Pence had to be brought in to break the tie and that was after Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) was summoned back to Washington to vote on the measure, just one week after he was diagnosed with brain cancer. McCain was given a hero's welcome and a standing ovation in the legislative body where he's served for three decades.

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The path forward remains uncertain at best, with party leadership still forced to navigate internal policy disputes and anger over a disjointed legislative process.

Even if the Senate manages to push a bill through the chamber, it may very well be rejected by conservative Republicans in the House. One such lawmaker suggested to The Daily Beast that his colleagues won't simply accept a "yes or no" vote on anything the Senate sends them.

But even as he cast the deciding vote to proceed to debate, he made it clear that his support for the end-product shouldn't be taken for granted.

"We've tried to do this by coming up with a proposal behind closed doors, in consultation with the administration—and then springing it on skeptical members, trying to convince them that it's better than nothing," McCain said. "Asking us to swallow our doubts and force it past a unified opposition? I don't think that is going to work in the end. And it probably shouldn't."

What lawmakers will ultimately vote on is not entirely clear, though Republican aides previewed to The Daily Beast a final product that would repeal the individual and employer mandates as well as the tax on medical device manufacturers while leaving in place Obamacare's Medicaid expansion. Known as a "skinny repeal," the legislation, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would still leave an estimated 15 million people uninsured by 2026. But, according to aides, it represents the best possible vehicle—at least at this juncture—for the Senate to move forward.

"I think it is a binary choice—is that what we've heard before? Binary choices are really good in Congress. They work for monkeys and computers?" Rep. Raul Labrador (R-ID) told The Daily Beast. "Oh wait, was I being sarcastic?"

He was.

"No," he added, when asked if the House will simply swallow what the Senate produces. "You've got to give freedom to the states at a minimum. In my opinion, we should get rid of the entire bill—the entire Obamacare—but that's not going to happen... This is our one chance to repeal Obamacare and to give the states flexibility."

Neither Democratic nor Republican lawmakers and aides said on Tuesday that they definitively knew whether the chamber would actually pass a final bill. But the expectations for doing so have notably brightened in recent days.

And even that might be an impossible task.

Though Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) has indicated that he would drop his conservative-minded opposition to a "skinny repeal" bill provided he got a vote on full repeal beforehand, other conservatives—in both houses of Congress—may still vote no. (Labrador told The Daily Beast that he would not support a so-called "skinny repeal.") On Tuesday night, Paul was already teasing the clean repeal bill, adding it will come to a vote on Wednesday.

Reflecting the tough path still ahead, GOP leaders spent little time on self-congratulation following Tuesday's vote. Instead, they began gaming out the next few days of legislative activity, which will involve consideration of a host of amendments, numerous—potentially tricky—votes, and arcane parliamentary procedures. Making the path even trickier is the

On Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell was able to effectively persuade his members that it was vital to move forward with debate even without knowing exactly what health care legislation the body was to consider. He is expected to make the same pitch for the final vote: encouraging Republicans to get some, any, bill into a conference committee with

Both Collins and Murkowski have remained consistent in their opposition to Senate Republicans'

McCain has called for a return to a legislative process that involves congressional committees and Democrats. Whether that, or his health, precludes him from backing the final bill is anyone's guess. In his speech on the Senate floor, he said would consult with his home state's governor, Doug Ducey, before voting.

Ultimately, however, the threat of being blamed for doing nothing may outweigh specific concerns with the final piece of legislation—whether that's "skinny repeal" or something else. That's the card that President Trump has played, successfully, in the run-ups to the House and Senate votes.

"Any senator who votes against starting debate is telling America that you are fine with the Obamacare nightmare," the president said Monday at the White House.

And momentum is now definitively on the Republican party's side. Leaders are aiming to finish the process by the end of this week and send a bill to the House, which is scheduled to begin its August recess next week. Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) has pledged that the House would remain in session if the Senate sends over a bill.

"We're going to stay and finish health care," Ryan previously said.



Editorial : A GOP Gallows Reprieve

Louisiana Republican John Kennedy cracked to Politico this week that "the sight of the gallows focuses the mind," and perhaps that explains why after months of group therapy Senate Republicans finally voted Tuesday to open debate on repealing ObamaCare. Whatever the impetus, the vote kept GOP reform hopes alive and may have saved the GOP Congress.

The 51-50 vote—with Vice President Mike Pence breaking the tie—was as close as it gets but vindicates Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's decision to force Senators to be accountable. Maine Senator Susan Collins's defection was expected, and at least she was consistent with her opposition to repeal in 2015.

The same can't be said for Alaska's Lisa Murkowski, who also voted against allowing even a debate on repeal. We look forward to her explaining how this squares with her May 2016 press release in which she "called for action in the Senate to repeal and fix this unworkable law." She added that "while a full repeal of the law would be the best course of action, it is simply not possible under the Obama

Administration." Apparently she only meant that when her vote didn't matter.

Democrats continued their pattern of total resistance, but Mr. McConnell corralled every other Republican to pass the bill under the Senate's arcane reconciliation rules. John McCain made a heroic entrance after his recent diagnosis with brain cancer to cast a

necessary vote. And perhaps his fortitude inspired reluctant colleagues to take responsibility after seven years of repeal promises.

Ron Johnson of Wisconsin cast the 50th vote, though only after a visibly tense conversation on the Senate floor with Mr. McConnell. Mr. Johnson has been unhappy with the Majority Leader's consultation, and he fears the bill won't repeal as much of the law as it should. But Mr. Johnson has always said that

ObamaCare propelled him to leave private business and run for the Senate in 2010, and killing debate would have blocked any chance at even partial repeal.

The Senate will now move to debate and an amendment vote—a rama, and where that ends nobody knows. One vote to watch would repeal ObamaCare with a two-year window to replace it, which is similar to a bill that 51 Senate Republicans voted for in 2015. We'll see how many have changed their minds.

The GOP will need enormous discipline to defeat poison-pill amendments—from Democrats and maybe some Republicans—to emerge with a bill that can get 50 votes at the end of the debate. Toward that end GOP leaders began floating the possibility of passing a “skinny bill” version of reform. This could include killing the individual and employer mandates and perhaps the medical-device tax. But it would not include the House bill's biggest prize, which is Medicaid reform.

This would be disappointing, but it beats failure and would allow the bill to go to a House-Senate conference. Republicans could then work out how much reform the politics will bear. They might keep in mind that the political gallows they avoided on Tuesday can always be reconstructed—and will be if they renege on this core campaign promise.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Senate Health Debate Rolls On After First Option Fails (UNE)

Stephanie Armour, Kristina Peterson and Michelle Hackman

WASHINGTON—Senate Republicans overcame a range of internal fissures in narrowly voting on Tuesday to begin debate on their health-care overhaul, but the party suffered a setback hours later when a proposal replacing major portions of the Affordable Care Act failed to attract enough votes to pass.

In a dramatic day at the Capitol, Vice President Mike Pence broke a 50-50 tie, allowing Senate Republicans to clear a procedural hurdle and setting up a days-long stretch of debate and amendment votes on the GOP effort to dismantle and replace much of former President Barack Obama's 2010 Affordable Care Act.

The two GOP defections came from Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who joined all Senate Democrats in voting against proceeding to debate the legislation.

The vote, punctuated by an emotional last-minute appearance by Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.), who was diagnosed recently with brain cancer, delivered a come-from-behind victory for President Donald Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.), who persuaded Republicans skeptical of the GOP bill to band together long enough to begin debate.

Mr. Trump said after the vote that his party had taken “a big step” that would “move forward to truly great health care.”

Even with their surprise win on the procedural motion, which seemed a long shot just last week, Republicans were subdued Tuesday about their prospects of passing a sweeping overhaul of the ACA by week's end.

“We knew this wasn't going to be easy, and there's a lot of work ahead of us,” said Sen. John Thune

of South Dakota, a member of the Senate GOP leadership.

On Tuesday night, the first of Senate leaders' health-care options, a bill toppling and replacing major portions of the ACA, gained only 43 votes to 57 against. That measure included a much-debated proposal from Sen. Ted Cruz (R., Texas) allowing insurers who offer one ACA-compliant health plan to also sell cheaper insurance options that don't meet ACA rules.

Senate leaders had expected the measure to fail, as Senate rules made it ineligible to pass on a simple majority vote. But the defection of nine GOP Senators—enough to sink the bill even under a simple majority—underscored the lack of support within the party for the ACA replacement that leaders had cobbled together.

On Wednesday, the Senate is expected to take up a separate bill that would largely repeal the ACA with a two-year expiration date, to give lawmakers time to craft a replacement.

The Senate debate will culminate later this week in a marathon session of amendment votes, but it isn't clear GOP leaders have the 50 votes needed to pass any of the proposals, fueling the uncertainty over where the week's legislative twists will end.

Democrats said that while the ACA can be improved, it has provided health insurance to 20 million Americans, and it should be built upon rather than dismantled. Many Republicans say it has resulted in higher premiums and less choice, and that an entirely new approach is needed.

In a memorable moment on the Senate floor, Mr. McCain criticized the GOP's legislative effort, despite flying across the country to prevent the procedural motion from falling short due to his absence. He delivered a sobering rebuke to GOP leaders, even while agreeing that

they should at least begin debate on the health legislation.

“It's a shell of a bill right now,” Mr. McCain said. “We've tried to do this by coming up with a proposal behind closed doors in consultation with the administration, then springing it on skeptical members, trying to convince them it's better than nothing, asking us to swallow our doubts and force it past a unified opposition. I don't think that is going to work in the end. And it probably shouldn't.”

Mr. McConnell on Tuesday pitched GOP senators on a backup proposal, if they can't agree on any other plans for repealing and possibly replacing the ACA. Under this “lowest common denominator” proposal, Republicans would cobble together just the elements that they all agree on, including repealing the individual and employer mandates and a tax on medical devices.

That would knock down the most controversial elements of the ACA, including the requirement that most people pay a penalty if they don't have insurance. But it would likely increase the number of people without insurance, compared with the ACA, making it a potentially hard sell for centrist senators. But centrists may like the fact that it would leave the Medicaid program for low-income Americans unchanged, unlike the current bill's \$756 billion in cuts to federal Medicaid funding.

“We'll see where we get to in the end,” said Sen. Bob Corker (R., Tenn.). “They're going to see what the broadest measure is that they can get people to support.”

GOP leaders hope that passing just a scaled-back bill as a default would at least start negotiations with House Republicans over their version of a health overhaul, which passed in May, keeping alive the effort to repeal the ACA.

It could also provide the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office more time, while those negotiations are

under way, to provide an estimate of the cost and coverage impact of some Republican proposals that could be incorporated into the legislation.

Those measures include an additional \$100 billion so states can assist people who lose Medicaid coverage due to the Republican bill, as well as a proposal to allow insurers to sell less expensive plans with fewer benefits if they also sell more robust plans.

Still, it isn't clear Republicans can secure 50 GOP votes for the scaled-back repeal plan. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.) called the proposal a “political punt,” and other senators uneasy over the bill could also emerge as opponents.

Many Republicans said opening debate was a good first step, while generally being cautious about the path ahead.

“This vote is the first step toward solving the problems created by Obamacare,” said Sen. Tom Cotton (R., Ark.). “And as the Senate continues to deliberate, I will be carefully monitoring any legislative changes that are proposed. It's important we get this right.”

Democrats said the “skinny repeal” strategy exposed Republicans' difficulties in coalescing around a health-care plan, despite promising voters for seven years they would repeal the ACA as soon as they took power in Washington.

“It shows the bankruptcy of Republicans' policy efforts,” said Sen. Chris Coons (D., Del.), calling the plan “a naked political move to get it off the floor of the Senate” that “does nothing to move us closer to actually addressing the health-care needs of Americans.”

The vote to proceed to debate was somewhat dramatic, in part because the outcome wasn't entirely certain when it began.

When Sens. Collins and Murkowski voted no, it became clear that just one more defection would end the

GOP health overhaul push for now. Mr. McCain's plane from Arizona was landing in Washington around the same time, and he raced to the Capitol.

Meanwhile, Sen. Ron Johnson (R., Wis.), who hasn't always seen eye-to-eye with GOP leaders, withheld his vote until the last minute,

The New York Times

McCain Returns to Cast Vote to Help the President Who Derided Him (UNE)

Jennifer Steinhauer

WASHINGTON — Senator John McCain is less the lion of the Senate than its wildcat, veering through the decades from war hero to Republican presidential nominee to irascible foil for an unlikely president.

On Tuesday, Mr. McCain ambled gingerly into the Capitol to sustained applause less than two weeks after brain surgery, casting a vote to aid President Trump, who has served as more tormentor than ally.

But moments later in a speech on the Senate floor, Mr. McCain turned what had been an uplifting moment for his Republican colleagues — whom he saved from an embarrassing failure on the floor — into an ominous cloud for any health care legislation.

He said that although he had voted to begin debate on repealing the Affordable Care Act, he would definitely not vote for a Senate health care bill without major changes.

Audio

After John McCain's dramatic return, the Senate narrowly votes to begin work on the repeal of Obamacare — then votes down a plan to do exactly that.

As it turned out, however, Mr. McCain did side late Tuesday with most Senate Republicans who voted — unsuccessfully — to replace the health care law with the most comprehensive plan his party has offered so far.

"I stand here today looking a little worse for wear, I'm sure," Mr. McCain, an Arizona Republican, said in his earlier speech, the marks of an incision for the removal of a blood clot and tumor clearly visible over his left eye. Noting that he has never been president, Mr. McCain began his remarks celebrating the history and traditions of the Senate,

engaging in a long talk with Mr. McConnell on the Senate floor. Mr. Johnson later said he had been discussing with Mr. McConnell how he could continue "to be a positive influence."

Democrats, for their part, refrained from voting until all Republicans had cast their votes, saying they wanted

a body he has served in for a generation.

"Make no mistake," Mr. McCain said, "my service here is the most important job I've had in my life."

Mr. McCain quickly moved on to critique the current state of the Senate and his own role in a partisan, quarrelsome era of American governing. The Senate, Mr. McCain said, has not "been overburdened by greatness lately; they aren't producing much for the American people. Both sides have let this happen."

In self-reproach, he added: "Sometimes I've let my passion rule my reason. Sometimes I made it harder to find common ground because of something harsh I said to a colleague."

Majority needed to pass Yes No

Republicans	51	2
Democrats	0	48
Total	51	50

Mr. McCain cautioned his colleagues to ignore "bombastic" pundits. "To hell with them," he said to applause as he implored his colleagues to work in a bipartisan manner — a provocative message after a hyperpartisan vote. (Fifty Republicans voted to take up the health care debate and two voted no. Forty-six Democrats and two independents voted no.)

On social media, Mr. McCain took a beating in the 24 hours after he said he would make the five-hour flight to Washington to vote for what many viewed as a bill to take away health care from poor people when Mr. McCain was receiving the best treatment available. In 2008, Senator Edward M. Kennedy had the same tumor that has sickened Mr. McCain, and the Massachusetts Democrat made a surprise appearance to help Democrats break a filibuster they said would

to highlight all of the GOP senators who were voting to advance an effort that has been broadly unpopular in recent polls.

—Louise Radnofsky, Byron Tau and Janet Hook contributed to this article.

Write to Stephanie Armour at stephanie.armour@wsj.com

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protect access to doctors by older Americans.

Over the last year, Mr. McCain, 80, has displayed every element of his disputatious, droll, scolding, informed, press-loving, press-hating, senatorial self. He has zipped around the world at a pace that has exhausted colleagues decades younger, trying to assure allies rattled by Mr. Trump's tweets and remarks.

He has remained watchful and characteristically hawkish on all things Russia-related, even as his fellow Republicans have largely shied from the issue since Mr. Trump entered the White House. He has remained bizarrely captivated by the vexing problem of catfish inspection processes. He has cooperated loyally with the party, except when he hasn't. He brought down a Republican measure to end emissions curbs on methane because he was mad about the Trump administration's choice for United States trade representative.

But his Teflon veneer showed cracks this spring when he seemed to be occasionally confused and at times more testy than usual. Last month, Mr. McCain seemed muddled while questioning James B. Comey, the former F.B.I. director, at a hearing. Mr. McCain later said his befuddlement was because of a late night watching an Arizona Diamondbacks game. This month, Mr. McCain learned he had brain cancer.

Mr. McCain's wife, Cindy McCain, outside the Senate chamber as he delivered remarks after voting on Tuesday. Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

It was striking enough that Mr. McCain, held and tortured for five years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, returned dangerously sick to the Capitol to help put a health care bill over the line. It was stunning that he did it for Mr. Trump, who as a candidate derided

Mr. McCain's military service — "I like people who weren't captured," Mr. Trump said in 2015 — and who ridiculed scores of policy and political conventions that Mr. McCain has embodied over a generation.

This was the John McCain who, rather than attend the 2016 Republican National Convention, chose instead to stomp around his home state and to take a train to his beloved Grand Canyon.

On Tuesday morning, Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, expressed his thanks on the Senate floor. "Senator McCain is a fighter," he said. "That's evidenced by his remarkable life of public service, just as it's again evidenced by his quick return to the Senate this afternoon. I know he's eager to get back to work, and we'll all be very pleased to have him back with us."

Mr. McCain does not expect the health care vote to be the culmination of his congressional career, which began when he won a House seat in 1982. It is Mr. McCain's intense wish to oversee the annual Pentagon policy bill, and he has repeatedly told Republican leaders he will manage the passage of the legislation.

"I've had so many people say such nice things about me recently that I think some of you must have me confused with someone else," Mr. McCain said, suggesting that he would get the Pentagon bill moving in the next few days before going home for treatment. His colleagues rose to applaud him.

Mr. McCain, who will soon undergo treatment for his cancer, said he would be back. "I have every intention of returning here," he said, "and giving all of you cause to regret all of the nice things you said about me."

The New York Times

Editorial : The Senate's Health Care Travesty

Ignoring overwhelming public opposition to legislation that would destroy the Affordable Care Act, Senate Republicans voted on Tuesday to begin repealing that law without having any workable plan to replace it.

The majority leader, Mitch McConnell, browbeat and cajoled 50 members of his caucus to vote to begin a debate on health care without even telling the country which of several competing bills he wanted to pass. Vice President Mike Pence provided the tiebreaking vote. The proposals vary in severity, but all of them would leave millions more people without health insurance and make medical care unaffordable for many low-income and middle-class families. It is clear that Mr. McConnell does not much care which of these proposals the Senate passes; for whatever reason — pride, White House pressure, sheer cussedness — he just wants to get a bill out of the Senate. It could then go into conference with the House, which passed its own terrible bill in May.

That committee would hash out a compromise behind closed doors, sending whatever it comes up with to both chambers, which would then vote with limited public debate

and no opportunity for amendments. This is far less transparent than the process that produced the A.C.A. and that the Republicans have been complaining about for seven years. Former President Barack Obama and a Democratic-led Congress spent a year working on the law with many public hearings and amendments from both parties.

In a moment Tuesday that was almost surreal, Senator John McCain, back from surgery and a brain cancer diagnosis, said that Republicans were making a big mistake with their partisan approach to health care, among other subjects. "We have been spinning our wheels on too many important issues because we keep trying to find a way to win without help from across the aisle," he said. The substance of what he said accurately described the fecklessness of his party. What made it surreal was that only moments earlier he had voted along with almost every other member of his party to endorse Mr. McConnell's obsession; Senators Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski were the exceptions.

There are three main proposals before the Senate. On Tuesday night the Senate failed to muster enough votes to advance one of those: the Better Care

Reconciliation Act. That bill would have gutted Medicaid and slashed insurance subsidies, taking coverage away from about 22 million people, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Another, the Obamacare Repeal Reconciliation Act, would eliminate important parts of the law without a replacement, stripping 32 million Americans of health insurance. The third option is called "skinny repeal" because it would leave much of the A.C.A. in place but eliminate one of the law's taxes and the mandates that individuals buy insurance and that employers offer it to their workers. That plan could increase the uninsured population by up to 15 million. It would also cause insurance companies to raise premiums by 20 percent.

The details are complicated, but most Americans understand that these proposals would be incredibly cruel and needlessly devastating, which is why polls have shown that few people support the partisan repeal effort. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll found just 28 percent supported the Senate bill to repeal and replace the A.C.A., while 71 percent wanted Republicans and Democrats to work together to improve the law.

Republicans seem oblivious to those concerns, and to the danger

that voters who lose access to health care could retaliate at the ballot box in the 2018 and 2020 elections. Some lawmakers may have decided that voters will in fact reward them for living up to their promises to repeal Obamacare, and that because actual repeal would be delayed two or more years, they will pay no price. Still others may have voted yes because they were afraid of losing primary elections to challengers further to the right than them.

Whatever their reasons, Republican senators sent a troubling message to insurers, doctors and hospitals. Many insurers must soon finalize rates and policies for next year, and experts say some might decide not to participate because they think the A.C.A. insurance marketplaces will go away, or jack up premiums due to the political uncertainty.

Obamacare is not collapsing, as President Trump and Republicans claim. But they're doing their best to make that happen, even as they scramble to kill it altogether.

**The
Washington
Post**

'We're getting nothing done': McCain, in emotional return, laments what the Senate has become (UNE)

paul.kane

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

Sen. John McCain was greeted by applause from both sides of the aisle Tuesday as he walked onto the Senate floor, delivering Republicans a crucial vote to begin debate on an unknown plan to overhaul the health-care industry.

Then the Arizona Republican, done with the niceties, delivered a 15-minute exhortation of the modern Senate. A Senate riven by partisan infighting and almost no effort to work across the aisle. A Senate that has abandoned the principle that legislative committees had ownership of the process.

A Senate so broken that the only way to even begin a health-care debate was to drag an 80-year-old man, diagnosed last week with brain cancer, 2,300 miles across the nation from Phoenix to cast that critical vote.

"Let's trust each other. Let's return to regular order. We've been spinning our wheels on too many

important issues because we keep trying to find a way to win without help from across the aisle," McCain told his colleagues, who gave him the floor for an unusual address usually reserved for a retiring senator. "We're getting nothing done, my friends. We're getting nothing done."

His mere presence gave Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) his biggest victory since the April confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Neil M. Gorsuch, allowing debate on a still unformed legislative package designed to replace the Affordable Care Act. McConnell joined a long line of senators embracing McCain upon his arrival.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) called for more senators to reach across the aisle and be less concerned with winning on July 25. "Stop listening to the bombastic loudmouths on the radio and television and the Internet," he said. "To hell with them!" "Stop listening to the bombastic loudmouths on the radio and television and the Internet," Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) said on July 25. "To hell with them!" (U.S. Senate)

(U.S. Senate)

While McCain cast blame far and wide for the Senate's shrunken status, he left no hint of subtlety in singling out the GOP leader's secretive, zigzagging effort to draft the health-care bill.

"All we've managed to do is make more popular a policy that wasn't very popular when we started trying to get rid of it," McCain said, noting rising support for the 2010 Affordable Care Act. "I voted for the motion to proceed to allow debate to continue and amendments to be offered. I will not vote for this bill as it is today. It's a shell of a bill right now."

Despite this warning, McCain's vote on Tuesday helped enable the broken process on health care that he came to the floor to decry. It allows McConnell to continue to circumvent the committee work and bipartisan negotiations McCain said represent the best of the Senate. A no vote would have forced leaders back to the drawing board, possibly into a bipartisan negotiation, but now, they will barrel ahead, possibly for weeks or months, on the Republican-only effort.

There was nothing new about a defiant McCain speech. On July 12, two days before his surgery to remove a blood clot that led to the diagnosis of a brain tumor, McCain delivered a fiery speech with the same themes — it was delivered to an almost empty chamber. Just McCain being McCain.

But Tuesday, McCain wasn't just being McCain.

He spoke for more than 225 years of Senate history, trying to force his colleagues to break free of this era's political spell. No one quite knew where he would end, almost sounding as if he were about to announce his retirement.

Almost every senator sat in his or her seat, hanging on every word. McConnell and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) twisted themselves sideways so they could look directly at McCain, his left eye still deeply swollen from the surgery.

Both leaders grew visibly emotional at times, McConnell's face bright red as Schumer's eyes glistened.

Whether his words will have any lasting impact remains to be seen

and, frankly, is not very likely. When McCain concluded, Vice President Pence cast the tiebreaking vote, and both sides marched out to partisan news conferences blaming one another for the gridlock in Washington.

"This legislation is open for amendment, not just by Republicans but by Democrats as well," Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.), the majority whip, told reporters. "Should our Democratic colleagues, in the spirit of Senator McCain's remarks, decide to participate in the process and build a bipartisan piece of legislation, this could well be the beginning of that healing process for this institution."

Yet Cornyn knows full well that is not going to happen, that the process being used now is a fast-track effort under rules that allow budgetary measures to pass on a simple majority without having to clear a 60-vote threshold to defeat a filibuster. Long ago, Democrats said they wanted no part of the work on an Affordable Care Act repeal, and McConnell was more than happy to take them up on that non-offer.

The Washington Post Editorial : This is not okay

WHEN PRESIDENT TRUMP attacked Attorney General Jeff Sessions in a tweet Tuesday for not aggressively investigating Hillary Clinton, most attention focused, understandably, on the implications for Mr. Sessions. Yet even more alarming than the president's assault on his own attorney general is Mr. Trump's return to the "lock her up" theme of his 2016 campaign. We need to recall, once again, what it means to live under the rule of law. Since his inauguration six months ago, so many comparisons have been made to "banana republics" that it is almost unfair to bananas. But there is a serious point to be made about the difference between the United States of America and a state ruled by personal whim.

In a rule-of-law state, government's awesome powers to police, prosecute and imprison are wielded impartially, with restraint and according to clearly defined rules. These rules apply equally to rich and poor, powerful and weak, ruling party and opposition. In such states, individuals advance on the basis of their talent and initiative, not whom they know. Companies invest where they think the returns will be highest, not to please those in power. The result is that, over time, rule-of-law states prosper. Banana republics do not.

McCain now finds himself among the last of a generation in the Senate. He is venerated across the nation for surviving more than five years of captivity and torture during the Vietnam War. But he is worshiped inside the Senate for the latter half of his 30 years here, when he took on the role of bipartisan elder statesman.

McCain acknowledged that he has not always lived up to his own ideal. His temper legendary, his clashes with some colleagues have been incendiary. "Sometimes I've let my passion rule my reason. Sometimes I made it harder to find common ground because of something I said to a colleague," he said.

He and McConnell have had an on-again-off-again relationship. Its rockiest patch came 15 to 20 years ago as they clashed over campaign finance legislation restricting large donations to political parties. McCain beat McConnell on the Senate floor, but McConnell won in court, leading the legal battle that gutted McCain's eponymous bill.

When McCain returned to the Senate following his loss in the 2008 presidential election,

No country ever has attained perfection in this regard, but the United States has been the envy of the world because certain norms have been accepted. After hard-fought elections, the losing side concedes and the winning side leaves the loser in peace to fight another day. Leaders are expected to speak truthfully to their citizens. They respect the essential nonpartisan nature of law enforcement and the military and key civic organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America. They show respect, too, for the political opposition.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

[Trump's latest rage tweets reveal a lawless, out-of-control president]

To list those basic expectations is to understand how low Mr. Trump is bringing his office. Just in the past few days, he urged Navy men and women to call Congress on behalf of his political goals and turned the National Scout Jamboree into an unseemly political rally, calling the nation's politics a "cesspool" and a "sewer" and disparaging his predecessor and the media.

McConnell effectively deputized him to lead the GOP caucus on national security issues. In recent years, McConnell has sometimes relied on McCain as an emissary to Democrats, particularly Schumer, who grew close to McCain during the 2013 effort to overhaul immigration and border laws.

But in recent weeks, McCain has grown increasingly angry with the way McConnell abandoned any hint of regular order, working with an ad hoc group of Republicans in his office and then drafting the legislation on his own, reworking it each time he ran out of support from within the GOP caucus.

The Finance 202 newsletter

Your daily guide to where Wall Street meets Washington.

"I don't think that's going to work in the end and probably shouldn't," McCain said.

Democrats applauded the call for bipartisan effort, prompting McCain to remind them that Democrats

Routinely he trades in untruths, even after they have been exposed and disproved. He has launched an unprecedented rhetorical assault on the independence of the Justice Department, the FBI and the special counsel's office — and now he is again threatening his defeated 2016 opponent.

Donald Trump won the presidential election. Yet, since Trump Nov. 8, he's tweeted about Democratic rival Hillary Clinton dozens of times. Donald Trump won the presidential election. Yet, since Trump Nov. 8, he's tweeted about Democratic rival Hillary Clinton dozens of times. (Victoria Walker/The Washington Post)

(Victoria Walker/The Washington Post)

Members of Congress who are, properly, investigating Russia's interference in the 2016 race have not questioned Mr. Trump's legitimacy. Ms. Clinton herself graciously conceded. The FBI thoroughly investigated her email practices and found no basis to prosecute. Yet Mr. Trump attacks Mr. Sessions for taking "a VERY weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes," implying that a politically inspired reinvestigation might help the attorney general keep his job. It is disgusting.

passed the Affordable Care Act with only their votes eight years ago.

As Republicans cheered at those remarks, Schumer made a bowing gesture toward McCain, acknowledging the point.

"We're not getting much done apart," McCain told his colleagues. "I don't think any of us feels very proud of our incapacity. Merely preventing your political opponents from doing what they want isn't the most inspiring work. There's greater satisfaction in respecting our differences but not letting them prevent agreements."

Read more from Paul Kane's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.

Paul Kane is The Post's senior congressional correspondent and columnist. His column about the 115th Congress, @PKCapitol, appears throughout the week and on Sundays.

Timidly, belatedly, but encouragingly, members of Mr. Trump's party are beginning to push back. Last week, Rep. Michael McCaul, a Texas Republican who chairs the Homeland Security Committee, told NBC's Andrea Mitchell that there would be "a tremendous backlash" from Republicans as well as Democrats if Mr. Trump attempted to fire special counsel Robert S. Mueller III, who is investigating Russia's behavior in 2016 and any possible Trump campaign involvement. On Monday, House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (Wis.) also came to the counsel's defense. "I don't think many people are saying Bob Mueller is a person who is a biased partisan," Mr. Ryan said. "He's really sort of anything but."

What's at stake is much more than the careers of a particular attorney general or special counsel. The United States has been a role model for the world, and a source of pride for Americans, because it has strived to implement the law fairly. When he attacks that process and seeks revenge on his opponents, Mr. Trump betrays bedrock American values. It's crucial that other political leaders say so.

National News AlertsToday's Headlines newsletter

Editorial : Trump's Sessions Abuse

Donald Trump won't let even success intrude on his presidential ego, so naturally he couldn't let the Senate's health-care victory stand as the story of Tuesday. Instead he continued to demean Jeff Sessions, and in the process he is harming himself, alienating allies, and crossing dangerous legal and political lines.

For a week President Trump has waged an unseemly campaign against his own Attorney General, telling the New York Times he wished he'd never hired him, unleashing a tweet storm that has accused Mr. Sessions of being "beleaguered" and "weak."

Mr. Trump is clearly frustrated that the Russia collusion story is engulfing his own family. But that frustration has now taken a darker turn. This humiliation campaign is clearly aimed at forcing a Sessions resignation. Any Cabinet appointee serves at a President's pleasure, but the deeply troubling aspect of this exercise is Mr. Trump's hardly veiled intention: the commencement of a criminal prosecution of Hillary Clinton by the Department of Justice and the firing of special prosecutor Robert Mueller.

On Tuesday morning Mr. Trump tweeted that Mr. Sessions "has taken a very weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes." This might play well with the red-meat crowd in Mr. Trump's Twitterverse, but Sen. Lindsey Graham was explicit and correct in describing the legal line Mr. Trump had crossed.

"Prosecutorial decisions should be based on applying facts to the law without hint of political motivation," Sen. Graham said. "To do otherwise is to run away from the long-standing American tradition of separating the law from politics regardless of party." Republican Sen. Thom Tillis also came to Mr. Sessions' defense, citing his "unwavering commitment to the rule of law," and Sen. Richard Shelby called him "a man of integrity."

We will put the problem more bluntly. Mr. Trump's suggestion that his Attorney General prosecute his defeated opponent is the kind of crude political retribution one expects in Erdogan's Turkey or Duterte's Philippines.

Mr. Sessions had no way of knowing when he accepted the AG job that the Russia probe would become the firestorm it has, or that

his belated memory of brief, public meetings with the Russian ambassador in 2016 would require his recusal from supervising the probe. He was right to step back once the facts were out, not the least to shelter the Trump Administration from any suspicion of a politicized investigation.

If Mr. Trump wants someone to blame for the existence of Special Counsel Robert Mueller, he can pick up a mirror. That open-ended probe is the direct result of Mr. Trump's decision to fire FBI Director James Comey months into his Russia investigation and then tweet that Mr. Comey should hope there are no Oval Office tapes of their meeting. That threat forced Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to appoint a special counsel.

As a candidate, Mr. Trump thought he could say anything and get away with it, and most often he did. A sitting President is not a one-man show. He needs allies in politics and allies to govern. Mr. Trump's treatment of Jeff Sessions makes clear that he will desert both at peril to his Presidency.

No matter how powerful the office of the Presidency, it needs department

leaders to execute policy. If by firing or forcing out Jeff Sessions Mr. Trump makes clear that his highest priority is executing personal political desires or whims, he will invite resignations from his first-rate Cabinet and only political hacks will stand in to replace them. And forget about Senate confirmation of his next AG.

Even on the day that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell was scraping together enough Republican votes to avoid a humiliating defeat for the President on health care, Mr. Trump was causing Senators to publicly align themselves with Mr. Sessions. Past some point of political erosion, Mr. Trump's legislative agenda will become impossible to accomplish. Mr. Trump prides himself as a man above political convention, but there are some conventions he can't ignore without destroying his Presidency.

Appeared in the July 26, 2017, print edition.

The standoff between Trump and Sessions escalates (UNE)

The public standoff between the White House and the nation's senior law enforcement official took another strange turn Tuesday as President Trump escalated his verbal attacks on Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who was urged by fellow conservatives to stand his ground.

Trump was asked at a Rose Garden news conference if he would fire the attorney general, who angered the president by recusing himself from the criminal probe into possible connections between the Trump campaign and Russia.

"We'll see what happens," said Trump — a potentially ominous choice of phrase, considering the president used the same expression when talking to FBI Director James B. Comey before he was fired.

"I'm disappointed in the attorney general," Trump said. "If he was going to recuse himself, he should have told me prior to taking office, and I would have picked somebody else. It's a bad thing not just for the president, but also for the presidency. I think it's unfair to the presidency."

He said he wanted Sessions "to be much tougher on leaks in the intelligence agencies that are leaking like they never have before. . . . You can't let that happen."

President Trump said on July 25 that he wanted Attorney General Jeff Sessions to be "tougher" on leaks. President Trump said on July 25 that he wanted Attorney General Jeff Sessions to be "tougher" on leaks. (Reuters)

(Reuters)

[Trump leaves Sessions twisting in the wind while considering replacements]

It is unheard of for a Cabinet-level official to be subjected to such visceral and public criticism, which has now gone on for a week. But Sessions showed no sign of buckling Tuesday, and in fact his position was bolstered by support from prominent conservatives taking his side in the fight with Trump.

In a recent conversation, Sessions's chief of staff, Jody Hunt, told White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus that the attorney general had no intention of stepping down. Hunt, according to people familiar with the conversation, made it clear to

Priebus that Sessions "plans to move forward with his agenda in the department and he has no plans for resigning," according to one person familiar with the exchange. Priebus, for his part, did not say Trump planned to fire Sessions if he did not leave, these people said.

Trump's reluctance to act on his anger and fire Sessions may be based in part on the lack of an immediate plan for a successor at the Justice Department. While Trump has discussed potential candidates to replace Sessions, senior White House officials have not settled on anyone, and may not anytime soon, administration officials said. If Sessions were to be fired without even a temporary replacement lined up, the deputy attorney general who oversees the Russia probe, Rod J. Rosenstein, would assume authority over the entire Justice Department.

One Republican close to the White House said a number of senior aides, including newly hired communications director Anthony Scaramucci, have urged Trump to sit down with Sessions and work through their differences. So far, there has been little enthusiasm for

that suggestion, the Republican said.

One informal adviser to the Trump White House said there is another reason Trump has yet to fire Sessions: "The president doesn't want to be seen as firing another law enforcement official."

After Trump fired Comey, one unintended consequence was the appointment of Robert S. Mueller III as special counsel overseeing the Russia probe.

[As Mueller builds his Russia team, every hire is under scrutiny]

Earlier Tuesday, Trump had tweeted that Sessions was "very weak" on investigating Hillary Clinton's "crimes" and had not aggressively hunted those who have leaked intelligence secrets since he has been in office.

The president's insistence that Clinton be investigated runs contrary to his own past statements, and the decision by the Justice Department and the FBI last year to close the investigation into her use of a private email server when she was secretary of state. Sessions has recused himself from Clinton-related matters, citing his

involvement with the presidential campaign as one of Trump's major advisers.

The public humiliation of Sessions at the hands of the president he helped get elected was galling to many conservatives, who see Sessions as the Cabinet official who has most assiduously pursued Trump's policy goals, from cracking down on illegal immigration to targeting street gangs.

Officials said Sessions is due to announce in coming days a number of criminal leak investigations based on news accounts of sensitive intelligence information. And within hours of Trump's public broadside, the Justice Department announced it would change a police funding program to add new requirements that cities help federal agents find undocumented immigrants to receive grants.

On Tuesday, Republicans publicly rallied to Sessions's defense. Sen. Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah) said Sessions "is among the most honorable men in government today ... I have full confidence in Jeff's ability to perform the duties of his office and, above all, uphold the rule of law."

And Breitbart, the conservative website, posted an article saying the president's public attack on Sessions "only serves to highlight Trump's own hypocrisy" and it warned that the president's stance could "fuel concerns from his base [which sees] Sessions as the best hope to fulfill Trump's immigration policies."

Even among Democrats, Trump's treatment of Sessions raised concerns. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (Calif.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said, "What's happening is just terrible. The attorney general did the right thing. The attorney general was nothing but loyal to Donald Trump. He took an oath of office to represent the Constitution, the law and the people."

Current and former Justice Department officials said they hope Sessions holds out, refusing to resign as a means of defending the department's independence.

One former Justice Department official said the president's anger seems to stem from a misunderstanding about how the department actually works. The White House, he said, should not be interfering with criminal investigations.

"For those of us that want this administration to succeed, this is incredibly self-destructive behavior," the official said.

Justice Department employees said the president's comments are damaging the reputation and morale of the department.

"It's just insanity," said one employee who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to speak frankly. Another official said there was still hope in the building that Sessions could survive, and that Trump's fury might abate. "This might be the one instance where everyone else just kind of rolls their

eyes and moves on," the official said.

The surge of support for Sessions is remarkable, considering how isolated he has been within the government. Sessions is viewed warily by many at the FBI for his role in Comey's firing, and he is increasingly distant from the White House, despite the fact that some of his former Senate staffers serve there.

Administration officials said the president and his staff are also upset that Sessions held a news conference last Friday, in which he said he planned to remain on the job. Some in the White House saw that statement as unnecessarily antagonizing the president.

"Can you imagine any other president having to go this far to tell someone you need to go?" said a person informally advising the White House. "When Sessions said he wouldn't resign, it's like poking fire. You know who you're dealing with."

Yet within the Justice Department, that reaction was viewed as another indication of how little White House officials appear to understand what the Justice Department does. The news conference had been scheduled a week earlier based on an arrest overseas, and a senior European law enforcement official had flown in to participate.

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

Canceling the news conference, Justice Department officials reasoned at the time, would be a bigger problem than going forward. Sessions tried to keep his answers low-key, they added.

Officials at Justice said the standoff is beginning to affect the department's work. One official said the pace of meetings with senior leaders has slowed, and the dust-up has distracted from some policy goals.

At a confirmation hearing Tuesday, Brian Benczkowski, a former Sessions aide and a nominee for assistant attorney general, said he had "every confidence" that his ex-boss made the right decision to recuse himself on the Russia investigation, and forcefully asserted that Mueller — whose work he said he did not consider a "witch hunt" — would do the right thing.

"He is someone who is widely understood to be a man of integrity, a man of independence, and someone who I believe will conduct his investigation with those characteristics right at the forefront, and I also believe he'll insist on those same things from the people who work for him," Benczkowski said.

Matt Zapposky, Robert Costa and Ed O'Keefe contributed to this report.

Checkpoint newsletter

POLITICO Trump and Sessions locked in silent battle

By Josh Dawsey

Donald Trump is playing an elaborate game of chicken with Jeff Sessions. And they are not on speaking terms.

Sessions has sent word to the White House that he has no plans to resign and wants to stay as attorney general even amid daily humiliation from the boss, according to two people familiar with his thinking. But he hasn't told Trump that himself.

Story Continued Below

Trump, meanwhile, has complained to anyone who will listen about Sessions recusing himself from the Russia probe and has weighed firing him. And he has told his advisers he has no desire to speak to Sessions, an early campaign supporter.

"I'm very disappointed in Jeff Sessions," Trump said in the Rose Garden Tuesday, sending a

message to his top law enforcement official from a public microphone.

Trump's public criticisms of his attorney general have led to an unusual spectacle where the two men aren't talking — but sending messages through their aides and waiting for a resolution to the fate of the country's top law enforcement official, according to interviews with six White House aides and advisers, as well as Sessions allies.

The zone of confusion has led to conservatives, liberals, West Wing aides and others wishing for a resolution and end of a tired storyline without having any idea when that resolution will come.

Trump has called his attorney general "beleaguered" and "VERY weak" on Twitter while criticizing him to the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and, on Tuesday, in the Rose Garden.

At its core is Trump's anger, which has only grown, over Sessions

recusing himself from the Russia investigation without advising Trump. With every story, Trump blames Sessions "more and more," one West Wing official said.

Sessions, meanwhile, told allies he did not understand the public angst and thought he was doing at the department what Trump wanted him to do. And recusing was a "no-brainer," Sessions has told people.

"I have called people in the West Wing, and no one understands why Trump is doing this and why he's still mad," one Sessions ally said.

Inside the White House, a heated battle has broken out over Sessions' future. His supporters, led by Steve Bannon, are trying to walk Trump "down from the brink," according to one. They have told him how badly the move could play in conservative media and how bad the fallout might be.

"Bannon is a huge fan and trying to keep him alive," one adviser said.

"Bannon will do anything he can to stop that."

Meanwhile, conservative groups and leaders, from the Tea Party Patriots to former Sen. Jim DeMint, have complained. Usual supporters of Trump have urged the White House to help Trump come to his senses.

"Everyone on the right loves Sessions," said one White House adviser. "It won't be good for us if he goes and we are hearing that."

Another senior White House official said the West Wing didn't need another confirmation fight and that it would be tough to confirm anyone under the current circumstances, with the Russia probe.

But Trump remains angry — and doesn't care about that. Every Russia investigation story reminds him of the attorney general's decision to recuse himself. And when he watches TV, the coverage,

partially fueled by him, further angers him.

"He wants to fire him but he doesn't want the confrontation," said one adviser who frequently speaks to him. "He doesn't mind the long negative storyline. He will torture him every single day."

This person said Trump also wants to see how Sessions will respond to

humiliation and has mocked his response so far.

In the West Wing, there is a growing consensus that Sessions is not long for this world, several officials said. "It's kind of clear how this ends."

Trent Lott, a Sessions ally, said Trump would be making a big mistake to fire Sessions. He said he hoped Rick Dearborn, a Sessions

ally, could be a "catalyst" to saving the attorney general's job.

"But I think Dearborn is in between a rock and a hard place," he said, referencing to his longtime boss and his current boss, the president.

Lott said he thought Sessions would prove to be a "great" attorney general.

"I don't really understand what's going on with that," he said.

After another surreal day, people close to Trump and Sessions all agreed with Lott.

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**The
New York
Times**

In Trump's World, 'Very Weak' Sessions Twists in Wind (UNE)

Peter Baker,
Jeremy W.

Peters and Rebecca R. Ruiz

WASHINGTON — In the annals of cutthroat Washington politics, it would be hard to find a cabinet secretary left abandoned and humiliated in the way President Trump has left Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

After days of questioning Mr. Sessions's decisions, Mr. Trump all but signed his political death warrant on Tuesday by dismissing the attorney general as "VERY weak," perhaps the most cutting assessment for a president who prizes strength above all else. He made no effort to dispel the impression that he wants Mr. Sessions out. "We will see what happens," he told reporters. "Time will tell."

The consequences go beyond the fate of one cabinet officer. In escalating his unforgiving campaign against Mr. Sessions, Mr. Trump opened a rift with conservatives who see the attorney general as their champion. And he put the White House in a virtual state of war with the Justice Department amid a high-stakes investigation in a way that it has not been since President Richard M. Nixon's administration.

Even if the standoff does not end in Mr. Sessions's departure — and the conventional wisdom in Washington assumes it will eventually — the spectacle raised questions about the future of the investigation into Russia's election interference, led to criticism from conservative news organizations that are usually deferential to the president and left Republican lawmakers unsettled as they defended the attorney general.

While Mr. Sessions remained silent, other cabinet members reached out to allies to express anxiety about what they were witnessing and what it might mean for them. White House aides sought to defuse the situation, but found it impossible to mollify the president, who was angered that Mr. Sessions's recusal paved the way for the appointment of a special counsel to lead the

investigation now threatening his team.

"If an early supporter like this is thrown under the bus, then who is safe?" asked Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies and a supporter of stricter immigration policies like those promoted by Mr. Sessions. "You can imagine what the other cabinet secretaries are thinking."

That may not bother Mr. Trump, who seems to thrive on slapping those close to him and keeping them on edge. Notoriously fickle, he left Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, on the hook for six months before his resignation last week. Reince Priebus, the chief of staff, is still on the bubble and said to be looking for a graceful exit of his own.

But that does not necessarily mean that Mr. Trump will push out Mr. Sessions. Stephen K. Bannon, the chief White House strategist, was in trouble a few months ago, but survived. For Mr. Trump, the former reality-show star, the suspense over Mr. Sessions is a season-ending cliffhanger: Stay tuned to see whether he gets voted off the island.

Mr. Trump raised the dramatic tension on Tuesday with a morning message on Twitter: "Attorney General Jeff Sessions has taken a VERY weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes (where are E-mails & DNC server) & Intel leakers!"

Mr. Trump repeated at a news conference later in the day what he told The New York Times last week: that he would not have appointed Mr. Sessions if he had known that the attorney general would step back from the Russia inquiry. "I am disappointed in the attorney general," he said in the White House Rose Garden.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, Mr. Trump dismissed the notion that Mr. Sessions, as the first senator to endorse his candidacy, deserved special loyalty.

"When they say he endorsed me, I went to Alabama," Mr. Trump said.

"I had 40,000 people. He was a senator from Alabama. I won the state by a lot, massive numbers. A lot of the states I won by massive numbers. But he was a senator, he looks at 40,000 people and he probably says, 'What do I have to lose?' And he endorsed me. So it's not like a great loyal thing about the endorsement."

The loyalty Mr. Trump was looking for, aides said, was about protecting him now that he is in office. "The president wants his cabinet secretaries to have his back," said Anthony Scaramucci, the new White House communications director.

Mr. Sessions, however, is more than just another employee who has fallen out of favor with a volatile boss. No cabinet member is more closely associated with the conservative nationalism that helped propel Mr. Trump to the White House. For conservatives skeptical of Mr. Trump, Mr. Sessions has been an insurance policy in an administration stacked with suspect New Yorkers, relatives and Wall Street bankers.

Breitbart News, the conservative nationalist outlet once led by Mr. Bannon, reflected anger on the right. "Trump vs. Trump: Potus Endangers Immigration Agenda," its lead headline read on Tuesday. One article said the attack on the attorney general "only serves to highlight Trump's own hypocrisy" while another said Mr. Sessions's ouster "would be a devastating blow" to the nationalist-populist movement.

The division was clear, too, on the Drudge Report, the conservative-leaning website whose double-barreled headline on Tuesday was "Sessions in Dog House; Republicans on Brink of Civil War."

Frustration among conservatives has been building for some time. Weeks ago, Mr. Bannon brought Ann Coulter, the firebrand pundit, to see Mr. Trump, according to two people briefed on the visit. Ms. Coulter railed at the president that he needed to focus more on his core supporters.

On Capitol Hill, where Mr. Sessions served for 20 years, Senator Mitch McConnell, the majority leader, and other Republicans came to his defense. "Sessions is not weak," said Senator Richard C. Shelby, a former colleague from Alabama. "He's strong. He's a man of purpose, integrity, substance."

Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said: "Jeff Sessions is one of the most decent people I've ever met in my political life. He's a rock-solid conservative, but above else he believes in the rule of law."

Democrats, never fans of Mr. Sessions, nonetheless warned that Mr. Trump should not dump him and install a more sympathetic replacement during the coming Senate break. "Democrats will never go along with the recess appointment," said Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader. In a challenge to Republican leaders, he said, "I can't imagine they would be complicit in creating a constitutional crisis."

As for Mr. Sessions, who does not have a Twitter account, he has stayed out of the fray since he said on Friday that he wanted to continue working "under Trump's direction." On Tuesday, Mr. Sessions announced a new measure to withhold funding from states and cities that do not cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

Critics said Mr. Trump's assault on Mr. Sessions undermined the traditional independence of the Justice Department. "It is an extraordinary departure from how the relationship of the White House and the Department of Justice is supposed to operate and has operated under administrations of both parties," said Matthew S. Axelrod, a department official under President Barack Obama.

Some Democrats criticized Mr. Sessions for remaining quiet. "The fact that the president has talked about politicizing investigations and the attorney general has nothing to say?" said Matthew Miller, a department spokesman during the Obama administration. "I thought

that was a really, really bad moment for him as attorney general."

The question remains whether it might be one of his last moments as attorney general.



Miller : Rexit? Don't quit yet, Secretary Tillerson

Aaron David Miller is a vice president and distinguished scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and author of "The End of Greatness: Why America Can't Have (and Doesn't Want) Another Great President." Miller was a Middle East negotiator in Democratic and Republican administrations. Follow him @aaronmiller2. Richard Sokolsky is a non-resident senior Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He spent over three decades in the Department of State and from 2005-2015 he was a member of the Secretary of State's Office of Policy Planning. The views expressed in this commentary are their own.

(CNN)This past weekend at the Aspen Security Forum, the rumor mill was working overtime on the idea that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was seriously considering resigning, if not immediately then by the end of the year.

However, State Department Spokesman R.C. Hammond

told Politico

that the idea of quitting "never crossed his (Tillerson's) mind."

We have written a number of pieces about Tillerson's travails -- some self-inflicted but most undeniably a result of the stunningly idiosyncratic and harmful way the President's statements and tweets have gummed up the foreign policy machinery.

Tillerson has indeed had a rough time. Having worked for and seen our fair share of secretaries of state come and go, we've never witnessed anything like this. Usually a president will designate the secretary of state as his voice and the key repository of authority on foreign policy. And whether the President chooses to empower the nation's top diplomat on the big issues somewhat (Hillary Clinton) or all the way (Jim Baker), the secretary is the primary adviser to the President on foreign policy.

Not here. White House political advisers help shape key initiatives; and,

according to Politico

, deny Tillerson staff choices and undermine him with well-placed leaks and innuendo. Trump family members are driving all over the Secretary of State's highway without signaling lane changes. And the President runs relationships with key leaders out of his back pocket, sometimes with few, if any, privy to the discussion.

We understand Tillerson's frustrations. But we'd also respectfully argue that, however stacked the deck may be against him, Tillerson shouldn't quit. And here's why.

No compelling explanation

Throughout American history, quite a few secretaries have departed their positions early. But only three have resigned over matters of principle; and in the past 100 years only one -- Cyrus Vance -- left in protest. The point is, Secretary of State is the second-best job in government, the least politicized and the most prestigious in the Cabinet. There are compelling reasons why few have resigned.

And to do so, Tillerson would need a very compelling reason that would not only make sense to him, but would also protect his public reputation and credibility. Vance left because of his profound opposition to Carter's decision to launch an almost certainly doomed military mission to rescue the American hostages in Iran. Frustration with the bureaucracy, unhappiness with the President's governing style or pique over a backbiting White House just aren't compelling reasons commensurate with the status of the job.

Right now, based on everything we know, Tillerson just doesn't have one such reason. And an early out, particularly for a guy who took the job claiming he wanted to serve his country, would damage his reputation and add a sad coda to the end of his State Department stewardship.

Too early

It's true that the headlines for Tillerson don't look all that good. He may have a great deal of contact with the President and have been the one Trump chose to attend the meeting with Putin on the margins at the G20, but unless the President

makes it clear that the Secretary is his main adviser on some issue and Tillerson steps up to take charge of it, he's not going to be seen as having much influence.

Still, it's early. The administration hasn't yet faced an all-hands-on-deck crisis that requires sustained management. And Tillerson -- at least on paper -- has the contacts with key leaders, the international sensibility and enough of the negotiator's mindset to deal with one. Regardless of how frustrating the first six months have been, it's far too short a metric to judge what might follow, let alone to make a judgment that the time has come to depart.

It's unlikely that Tillerson, like most secretaries of state, would serve a second term, should there be one for this President. And as the departure of Ronald Reagan's former secretary of state, Alexander Haig -- largely over infighting with then-Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger -- attests, there's precedent for a Secretary of State resigning after a year.

Give your building a chance

Tillerson has a small army behind him to put out diplomatic fires and manage crises. But like any good general, to achieve the mission he needs to delegate authority and trust his subordinates.

It's not just that Tillerson has been undercut from above; he has also not been well served from below, but this is a self-inflicted wound. The secretary is squandering his most precious asset -- the immensely talented, intelligent, experienced, hardworking and capable people who man the trenches at Foggy Bottom.

News flash: the bureaucracy at State is not the enemy, so Tillerson should stop treating it like one. He's trying to run the department in a highly centralized and tightly controlled manner like Jim Baker. It worked for Baker because he had the horsepower in his inner circle. Tillerson is not as fortunate.

Instead, he should emulate the more decentralized and inclusive management model of George Shultz, who empowered the other senior officials in the department to take the initiative and backed them

100% even when they stumbled. If Tillerson gives these officials the authority, support and tools they need to do their job, they will help him and the department to be more effective.

His successor could be worse

As ineffectual, at times, as Tillerson has been, it cannot be assumed that things couldn't get any worse under new management. For all his stumbles, the Secretary of State has gotten a few big things right. He has, for example, been a soothing voice in reassuring US allies, particularly

Japan and South Korea

of America's defense commitments. He has developed a good relationship with Secretary of Defense James Mattis -- and on some issues (even though he's lost on a couple, like US withdrawal from the Paris accord on climate change), he has moderated some of Trump's worst instincts, such as walking away from the nuclear deal with Iran. He's also

talked tough

on maintaining existing sanctions on Russia, which may have helped stiffen the President's resolve as well.

There's no guarantee that his successor will play well with others, hand-hold the allies rather than throw bombs at them or elevate diplomacy, engagement and dialogue with difficult countries rather than adopt confrontational policies that offer little prospect for success but significant risks of escalation. For all those who hope to wish Tillerson an early and happy retirement, be careful what you wish for, especially if his successor is more ideological and combative and less pragmatic than the more even-keeled Tillerson.

Tillerson does not have a small ego. He doesn't want to be the answer to the question in a game of Trivial Pursuit of which Secretary of State holds the record for the shortest tenure in the modern era. And from his many years as a world class negotiator, he should have a sixth sense for when to hold and when to fold. Now is not the time to fold.

POLITICO To America, It Looks Like Chaos. For Trump, It's Just Tuesday.

By Michael Kruse

It started Monday morning with Donald Trump calling his own attorney general “beleaguered.” It continued with an Air Force One flight to West Virginia and a rambling, partisan speech to thousands of hollering Boy Scouts. And it kept going with another manic jag of tweets on Tuesday, as the president took a second shaming swipe at Jeff Sessions, delegitimized the acting director of the FBI, urged senators to “step up to the plate” on getting rid of Obamacare and railed away in his exclamation-laced syntax about Democrats who are “obstructionists” and the “Witch Hunt” of the Russia investigation. Meanwhile, his new communications director was threatening to fire his entire staff for leaking as rumors swirled about Cabinet-level departures. Chaos bordering on crisis.

This is how Trump ran his business, and it's how he ran his campaign. For six months now, it's how he's run his White House. But within the whirl of these past two nonstop, dizzying days, it has reached blinking-red-light levels. To people who have been around him, and those who still are, from Trump Tower to the West Wing, this can be unnerving. To people across the country and the world, it can feel dismaying or disorienting or just plain insane.

Story Continued Below

For Trump, though, it feels like ... the start to another week.

“This is Donald,” former Trump Organization Vice President Louise Sunshine told me Tuesday. “This is his style.”

“He's operating just like he always has,” former Trump Shuttle President Bruce Nobles said in an interview.

“The prince of chaos,” said Trump biographer Gwenda Blair.

The spawn of Norman Vincent Peale and Roy Cohn, Trump has stomped through life armed with the obstinate, self-centered tenets of optimistic thinking and the sneering,

deep-seated lessons of *attack, attack, attack*. He creates chaos, and then he responds to that chaos, withstanding it, even embracing it, feeding on it—and then he outlasts the outrage, emerging not only alive but emboldened.

“Hey, look, I had a cold spell from 1990 to '91,” Trump said almost a quarter-century ago to a reporter from *New York* magazine, referring to the breakup of his marriage to the mother of his first three children, his affair with a busty, B-movie actress and the reckless spending and negligent management of his company that left him nearly a billion dollars in debt—all of which was covered breathlessly by the press. “I was beat up in business and in my personal life. But you learn that you're either the toughest, meanest piece of shit in the world, or you just crawl into a corner, put your finger in your mouth, and say, ‘I want to go home.’ You never know until you're under pressure how you're gonna react.”

This crisis was formative, and Trump survived because of family money, permissive banks that were tied to him as much as he was tied to them, the Houdini-esque work of a lender-mandated financial rescue artist and far more than his fair share of chutzpah. The close scrape with personal bankruptcy and business ruin didn't chasten Trump. It did the opposite. “The fact that he got through it,” former Trump Organization Vice President Barbara Res said, “made him believe he could accomplish anything, conquer anything.”

His path from *The Art of the Deal* to *The Art of the Comeback* to “The Apprentice” consisted of a media-stoked stew of self-promotion and provocation. WrestleMania antics and celebrity feuds were fuel. And he talked when he could about running for president. It was always a bluff. Until, of course, it wasn't.

His campaign was a rolling crisis. Beset by backstabbing and infighting, careening from one five-alarm fire to the next, Trump's unprecedented presidential bid

seemed perpetually on the edge of political viability. And he won.

“Chaos creates drama, and drama gets ink,” former Trump campaign aide Sam Nunberg told me Tuesday. “This is a new kind of presidency. He's followed the tabloid model, and it got him to where he is, and it's the model that will be followed until it doesn't work. And it *has* worked. He's sitting in the Oval Office.”

On Monday, at the fairly standard hour of 6:40 a.m., he kickstarted a particularly agitated sequence of tweets by labeling Washington not a “Swamp” but a “Sewer” and yelling “Fake News!” He insisted there's “Zero evidence” of his or his campaign's collusion with Russian officials. Then he called Sessions, the first senator to endorse him and for a long period during the campaign his most credible surrogate, “beleaguered.” Then he called a member of Congress “Sleazy.” Then he poked Republicans about their “last chance” to “Repeal & Replace.” Then he boarded the presidential plane to go talk to the Boy Scouts.

In Glen Jean, West Virginia, at the National Scout Jamboree, at a gathering of “the nation's foremost youth program of character development and values-based leadership training,” Trump pledged to the crowd of an estimated 40,000, mostly boys between 12 and 18 years old, that he wouldn't talk about policy fights or political disagreements. “Who the hell wants to speak about politics when I'm in front of the Boy Scouts?” he said. He did. The president talked about Tuesday's health care vote and called Obamacare “this horrible thing that's really hurting us” and found ways to criticize Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and told the amped-up teens stale stories about his big win of 2016. “USA!” they chanted back.

By Tuesday morning, he was back on Twitter, blasting the FBI boss and Sessions, too, for his “VERY weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes” and “leakers.” He also

praised John McCain for being a “Brave” “American hero” after disparaging him for being captured in Vietnam not once but twice before. (Trump never apologized.)

This is not the way it's supposed to work, or at least not how it has. “I have not seen any indication of a normal appreciation of the functioning of government coming from the president,” former Senate attorney and Watergate prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste told POLITICO on Tuesday. But while members of Congress scrambled to respond, their assessments of the president's latest behavior ranging from confusion to condemnation to twisted justification to tepid defense, the people who have watched Trump for a lot longer simply shook their heads.

“Typical Donald,” Sunshine said.

“I'm not surprised by anything I'm seeing,” said Nobles, the former Trump Shuttle boss. “He's always liked chaos.”

“He's spent his life creating and surrounding himself with chaos,” Res said, “so that he can be the one person who can emerge in charge. The winner. The guy on the top. It's a way of slaying his enemies.”

“If you've ever been on a construction site, they're always chaotic,” Billy Procida, another former Trump Organization vice president, told me Tuesday. “And he's good at construction.”

But he's no longer on a construction site. He's the most powerful person in the world.

“This is certainly different. It's certainly new,” Nunberg said. “But it's what people want.”

Chaos? All the time?

“Entertainment,” Nunberg said. “Entertainment.”

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Trump Eyes Tax-Code Overhaul, With Emphasis on Middle-Class Break (UNE)

Gerard Baker, Peter Nicholas and Michael C. Bender

WASHINGTON—On the day the Senate moved on long-promised health-care legislation, President Donald Trump signaled his next priority: overhauling the tax code to push corporate rates down and give middle-class taxpayers a break, even if it means some of the wealthiest pay more.

“The people I care most about are the middle-income people in this country, who have gotten screwed,” Mr. Trump told *The Wall Street Journal* on Tuesday, reiterating that he wants to bring down the corporate tax rate to 15%. “And if there's upward revision it's going to be on high-income people.”

Sitting behind his desk in the Oval Office, Mr. Trump hopscotched

across a variety of policy and personnel topics over the course of the 45-minute interview.

The president repeated his criticism of Attorney General Jeff Sessions for recusing himself from a probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 election, declining to say the former Alabama senator's job was safe.

He said his front-runners to be the next chairman of the Federal

Reserve board of governors early next year would be the incumbent, Janet Yellen, and Gary Cohn, director of the National Economic Council.

On foreign affairs, he said that he expected Iran to be found noncompliant with the terms of a landmark nuclear deal sealed under President Barack Obama when the

issue comes back up for review in September.

And on trade, he said the U.S. and the U.K. are in talks about a comprehensive trade deal that would be ready as soon as the U.K. exits the European Union. Mr. Trump's team is also getting ready to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada, though he said he still regards the pact as "one of the truly bad deals."

Mr. Trump also said his administration's long-expected curbs on steel imports were still being discussed internally, though it may be some time before he acts on the issue.

Ticking off what he sees as his accomplishments, Mr. Trump mentioned his appointment of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, his deregulatory efforts and changes at the Veterans Affairs Department, which has pushed to reduce wait times for patients needing care.

Asked about disappointments, Mr. Trump made a reference to the health-care debate. "I have to see where we are with this," he said in the hours before the Senate voted to advance the debate on its health-care bill. Besides a tax code overhaul this year, he said he placed a priority on improvements in the nation's infrastructure.

His term so far also has been marked by investigations into what U.S. intelligence agencies say was a campaign backed by the Kremlin to influence the presidential campaign in Mr. Trump's favor. Investigations in Congress and by special counsel Robert Mueller are looking into the Russian meddling and whether any members of the Trump campaign colluded, which Mr. Trump has repeatedly denied. Russia has denied any interference.

The Russia investigations often have stymied the White House's ability to make progress on its agenda, and Mr. Trump reiterated his recent criticism of Mr. Sessions.

Mr. Trump on Tuesday blamed Mr. Sessions's recusal as the reason the Justice Department named Mr. Mueller as special counsel. Mr. Mueller's appointment came after Mr. Trump fired former FBI Director James Comey, who had been overseeing the investigation.

When asked whether Mr. Mueller's job is safe, Mr. Trump responded: "I have no comment yet, because it's too early. But we'll see. We're going to see."

He also declined to offer a vote of confidence in Mr. Sessions, who was one of the earliest Washington supporters of Mr. Trump's candidacy. Mr. Sessions's endorsement was seen at the time as a tough blow to Trump rival Sen. Ted Cruz, who was counting on evangelical support in Southern states, including Alabama. Mr. Trump suggested that his own popularity in Alabama was the reason for Mr. Sessions' endorsement.

Mr. Sessions backed Mr. Trump at a rally that drew tens of thousands in Mobile, Ala., one of the largest rallies of the campaign at that point. "He looks at the 40,000 people and he probably says, 'What do I have to lose?'" Mr. Trump said. "So it's not like a great loyal thing about the endorsement."

A Justice Department spokesman declined to comment.

During the interview, Mr. Trump appeared relaxed in the company of close aides, which included his daughter and White House adviser Ivanka Trump, Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, Communications Director Anthony Scaramucci, Hope Hicks, the White House director of strategic communications, and Mr. Cohn.

Mr. Trump praised the arrival of Mr. Scaramucci, who was appointed Friday, suggesting that he would help settle internal unrest and backbiting that has characterized the West Wing.

He quipped that this type of palace intrigue was "White House stuff, where they're fighting over who loves me the most." Mr. Trump said he has no other immediate changes planned for his senior staff.

Mr. Scaramucci had endorsed two of Mr. Trump's rivals during the primary campaign. Mr. Trump shrugged that off on Tuesday. He said Mr. Scaramucci offered his support before he was ready to enter the race. "His first choice was Trump," Mr. Trump said. "It's important to say that."

Asked if Mr. Cohn was a candidate to become the next Federal Reserve chairman, Mr. Trump said,

"He doesn't know this, but yes, he is."

He said he would wait until the end of the year to make a decision, even if it would require a confirmation hearing. He predicted that such a process would "go quickly."

"I've known Gary for a long time, but I've gained great respect for Gary working with him," Mr. Trump said. "So Gary certainly would be in the mix."

Mr. Cohn responded by laughing, and placing his hands over his ears. "This is an interview with the president," he said, declining additional comment.

Mr. Trump said he has "a lot of respect" for Ms. Yellen, praising the decisions to keep interest rates low and crediting her for keeping the U.S. dollar "not too strong." "She is in the running to stay," he said.

Turning to taxes, Mr. Trump echoed some of the populist themes from his presidential campaign. He described twin imperatives in overhauling the tax structure: boosting economic growth and easing the tax burden on middle-class families.

"I have wealthy friends that say to me, 'I don't mind paying more tax,'" the president said.

He added that "we have to take care of middle-income people in this country. They built the country. They started this whole beautiful thing that we have. And we have to take care of them. And people have not taken care of them, and we're going to."

Mr. Trump's aides are working with top Republican lawmakers on a proposal that would bring about the first major rewrite of the tax code in 30 years. Mr. Trump and White House officials have been vague on significant middle-class provisions, such as the personal exemption, while promising specific benefits for high-income households such as the repeal of the estate tax and alternative minimum tax. Mr. Trump didn't elaborate Tuesday on how he planned to favor the middle class.

On Iran, Mr. Trump said the administration had given Iran "the benefit of every doubt" about their compliance with the 2015 multinational nuclear deal. The president must certify to Congress every 90 days that Iran is in

compliance with its obligations. The president made such a certification earlier this month.

But when certification comes up again, Mr. Trump said he believes Iran will be judged not compliant with the agreement. He said he would be prepared to overrule his own advisers in proclaiming that Iran hasn't met the terms of the agreement.

"We've been extremely nice to them in saying they were compliant," Mr. Trump said. "Personally, I have great respect for my people, but if it was up to me, I would have had them noncompliant 180 days ago."

He added: "We'll talk about the subject in 90 days but I would be surprised if they were in compliance."

The interview came hours before the Senate voted to advance health care legislation that in recent weeks had appeared stalled.

Mr. Trump has suggested different approaches toward abolishing the Affordable Care Act signed into law seven years ago. At times he has called for letting Obamacare, as it is known, collapse before ushering in a replacement. At other times he has said the best strategy would be repealing the law and quickly approving a new system.

GOP leaders have primarily pursued a strategy of repealing and replacing the health law simultaneously. In the interview, Mr. Trump said he preferred that option.

The "trouble with [straight] repeal is you'll have millions of people out there that ... will say, 'Well, you know, how do we know we're going to have health care?' And I hate to do that to people," he said.

He added: "So I'd rather see replace. I'd rather add the replace. And we have a very good plan."

—Richard Rubin and Felicia Schwartz contributed to this article.

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