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FRANCE - EUROPE

Bloomberg

Editorial : Macron's Mandate for Change

So the presidential election was no fluke: The voters of France have put Emmanuel Macron's new République En Marche (Republic on the Move) party on course for a big parliamentary majority. If this is confirmed in the June 18 runoff, Macron will control not just foreign policy but domestic policy as well.

His task in reforming the French economy, as he's promised to do, certainly won't be easy. What's remarkable is that he might now conceivably succeed.

Not long ago, Macron was a little-known minister in the administration of former President Francois Hollande. Today he's president, slayer of political opponents, and leader of a mighty parliamentary force. His allies are projected to win as many as 455 of the 577 seats in the lower house. (One problem: The

largest meeting room in the National Assembly can only accommodate 350.)

The mainstream parties of the left and center-right, which ran the country for decades, weren't beaten so much as crushed. The Socialist presidential candidate, Benoit Hamon, was eliminated in the first round of voting; his party's hope now is to clear the 15-seat minimum to be recognized as a parliamentary group. The Republicans are expected to have between 70 and 110 seats.

It's a stunning rejection of the traditional parties -- but not of centrism. Voters didn't buy the anti-EU, anti-immigrant line of Marine Le Pen's National Front; her party has shed 4 million votes since the presidential runoff. Le Pen herself is on course to finally win a seat in the French parliament; her party is in crisis.

Even so, Macron's path to reform will be hard. His support isn't as overwhelming as it looks. The election turnout was only 49 percent, the lowest in the history of the Fifth Republic. Just 15 percent of the country's registered voters cast ballots for Macron's candidates. And his plans will face plenty of militant opposition on the streets, even if not in parliament.

His flagship labor-market reforms aim to cut costs and encourage businesses to hire. They're essential if France is to restore a satisfactory pace of economic growth and get unemployment down. Macron met leaders of organized labor to talk about this immediately after he was elected president. So far, the unions have been subdued. It would be another historic first if they stayed that way.

Clear thinking from leading voices in business, economics, politics, foreign affairs, culture, and more.

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One of Macron's first moves was to introduce a "moralization" law banning members of parliament, local officials and senior civil servants from employing family members, and requiring them to declare personal interests and produce receipts for their expenses. That was smart. It's one measure his supporters and most of the country can get behind. The rest of his domestic program is bound to prove contentious.

Nonetheless, voters have given him the means. He's been granted an astonishing opportunity. He ought to seize it.

**The
New York
Times**

Macron's Unfettered Powers

Emmanuel Macron's grip on political power seems unshakable after the first round of France's legislative voting on Sunday. Mr. Macron won the presidency of France in May, a mere 13 months after starting his political movement, a remarkable achievement ratified by Sunday's vote.

Projections indicate that his party, La République en Marche (The Republic on the Move), may win more than 400 seats in France's 577-seat National Assembly after a final round of voting on Sunday. That would give Mr. Macron the ability to freely enact promised reforms to jump-start France's lagging economy and encourage job creation, something his three immediate predecessors tried but failed to do.

Sunday's election does not, however, reflect enthusiasm on the part of a majority of French voters. More than half stayed away from the polls, the highest rate of voter abstention since 1958. And with the political opposition in tatters, and many political novices owing their seats to the president, Mr. Macron could face temptations to abuse executive power.

Mr. Macron has already moved rapidly to bolster security in the face of the continuing terrorist threat by creating a national counterterrorism center at the Élysée Palace, reporting directly to him. He has also drafted a bill, which will be presented at a cabinet meeting on June 21, that would permanently legalize much of the state of emergency declared by President François Hollande shortly after the

terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015.

A counterterrorism center makes sense, given the failure to prevent attacks by individuals undetected when agencies failed to share information. The absence of a role for the judiciary to check the executive's overarching power, however, is troubling. Even more alarming is enshrining the state of emergency in ordinary law, resulting in a permanent curb on French citizens' constitutional rights. The bill would allow the police to conduct warrantless searches, place individuals under house arrest, order the wearing of electronic tags or bracelets and demand the passwords of people's computers and cellphones. Such measures have done little to fight terrorism that existing law can't accomplish, while doing real harm to citizens' rights.

The only thing preventing the bill from becoming law may be France's Constitutional Council. On Friday, the council wisely rejected one vaguely worded provision of the state of emergency that allowed authorities to bar individuals from areas where they might hamper police action, say, by participating in demonstrations.

The council must not allow what was meant to have been an extraordinary, temporary suspension of citizens' rights to become permanent. Otherwise, the promise of Mr. Macron's fresh start for France could result in a more repressive republic and set the stage for other abuses of executive power beyond his mandate.

**The
Washington
Post**

Editorial : Radical centrism dominates in France

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

IN A year of popular revolts against Western political establishments, none has been more sweeping than

that of France. In the first round of parliamentary elections on Sunday, the two parties that have dominated the political system since 1958 suffered devastating losses, while a new movement, founded only 14 months ago, appeared to be on its way to capturing up to three-quarters of the National Assembly.

Like its leader, President Emmanuel Macron, nearly half the candidates of the Republic on the Move party had never run for public office. Half are women, and the average age is under 50.

The most remarkable fact about France's new leadership, however,

is its politics — which is neither the left-wing populism of Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn nor the right-wing version offered by President Trump and Marine Le Pen. Mr. Macron espouses what he calls "radical centrism" — a pragmatic approach to tackling the structural problems that have held

back France for decades, along with a similar commitment to unstick the floundering European Union. If it works, it could revitalize European global leadership at a time when the United States under Mr. Trump looks erratic and unreliable.

When Mr. Macron, a 39-year-old former banker, easily won a runoff against Ms. Le Pen in May, many analysts dismissed his chances of winning a parliamentary majority — much less a supermajority — with his newly formed party. But Mr. Macron has been pitch-perfect during his first month in office. He made a show of standing up to Mr.

Trump at a NATO summit and days later did the same to Russia's Vladimir Putin. He recruited a leading center-right politician to be his prime minister and surrounded him with a cabinet that transcended partisan lines.

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True, turnout in the parliamentary vote was low by French standards — under 50 percent — and nearly half of voters backed extreme candidates of the right or left just seven weeks ago in the presidential

election's first round. But Mr. Macron clearly has momentum to push ahead with his ambitious reform plan.

Mr. Macron's labor reform, which he hopes to enact in July, would make it easier and less expensive for companies to hire and fire workers. Past attempts to tackle the labor code have triggered massive demonstrations and strikes, and probably will again. But many French have had enough of an unemployment rate that is just barely below 10 percent — more than twice the German level. Other

reforms would cut government spending and corporate taxes.

After Germany's election in September, Mr. Macron will seek to revitalize the partnership of Paris and Berlin. He wants to take bold steps to stabilize the euro, such as establishing a common investment fund and even a euro-area treasury and parliament. If she is reelected, German Chancellor Angela Merkel will be skeptical, but she should listen. If radical centrism fails in France, it is likely to be supplanted by radical populism.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Marine Le Pen's National Front Faces Reckoning After Loss in French Vote

William Horobin and Stacy Meichtry

PARIS—After knocking at the gates of power only a month ago, Marine Le Pen saw support for her far-right party crumble in Sunday's first round of parliamentary elections, dashing its hopes of becoming France's opposition party and an entrenched menace to the Europe Union.

President Emmanuel Macron's fledgling party, La République en Marche, trounced mainstream parties across the political spectrum but forced the once-buoyant antiestablishment National Front in particular into a reckoning. Ms. Le Pen on Monday faced a final election result that showed the momentum that carried her in to last month's second-round presidential vote had perished.

National Front candidates garnered only 13.2% of Sunday's vote, compared with 13.6% in the last parliamentary election five years ago. Pollster Ipsos Sopra-Steria projected the party would end up with only between one and five seats in the 577-seat National

Assembly, compared with between 415 and 455 for Mr. Macron's party and its centrist ally.

What caused the collapse, pollsters and party officials say, is that the National Front's primarily young, working-class base decided to sit out the parliamentary races. Around 57% of people who voted for Marine Le Pen in the presidential election stayed home for the parliamentary ballot, Ipsos Sopra-Steria said. The abstention rate among Macron voters was 38%.

The numbers stand in contrast to the National Front's high expectations going into the 2017 races. In recent years, the party had drawn nearly a third of the vote in local, regional and European Parliament elections.

"This clearly marks a pause in a very, very strong progression," Ms. Le Pen said Monday while campaigning for a seat in the north of France.

Supporters who expected Ms. Le Pen to win the first round of the presidential race were disappointed

when she finished behind Mr. Macron. Her 33.9% score in the runoff also fell far short of the 40% mark she was hitting in the polls.

What followed was soul-searching. Ms. Le Pen floated the possibility of renaming and restructuring her party before deserting the idea. She also promised to hold a party congress after the parliamentary elections to discuss the National Front's anti-euro stance, which many of the rank-and-file blamed for her presidential loss.

"All voters have is disappointment from the presidential election, and all they hear about is internal difficulties," said Jérôme Fourquet, a pollster with IFOP.

Mr. Fourquet and other analysts say Ms. Le Pen is likely to retain leadership of the National Front, because the party's identity is built around her family. They say the only figure who might have challenged her for leadership was her niece, Marion Maréchal Le Pen, who quit the party shortly after the

presidential loss, saying she wanted to spend time with family.

In 2012, Ms. Maréchal Le Pen won the party's only seat in the National Assembly, winning 34.65% of the first-round vote in a southern French district. The National Front candidate now running for her seat, Hervé de Lépinau, won 31.81% of the vote on Sunday behind the La République en Marche candidate.

The party's best shot for landing a parliamentary seat is in Pas de Calais, an area hard-hit by migrant flows and industrial decline, where Ms. Le Pen herself is running.

Ms. Le Pen scored 46.02% on Sunday, nearly 30 points ahead of her La République en Marche rival, Anne Roquet.

But Ms. Le Pen and other National Front candidates face the same hurdle she tripped over in the presidential race: People who voted for other candidates in the first round are expected to coalesce behind her rival.

The New York Times

For Macron's Party in France, Success Is Broad. But How Deep?

Alissa J. Rubin

PARIS — By almost any measure, the party of President Emmanuel Macron achieved overwhelming success in the first round of parliamentary elections on Sunday.

The candidates of his newly formed party, La République en Marche, finished first in 449 of 577 districts, leaving them poised to dominate the National Assembly, the lower and more powerful house of French Parliament, after the second round of elections next Sunday.

That success built on Mr. Macron's strong early performance as president, analysts said, but was also greatly helped by the vacuum

left when successive parties on the left and right collapsed in the face of his strong showing in the presidential race and by historically low turnout — just 49 percent of the French went to the polls.

The combination of factors has left some analysts and historians wondering if perhaps Mr. Macron is even succeeding too well. The vulnerability inherent in his success is that while he will be able to push through his agenda, he will lack a broad base of support because only one in two eligible French citizens voted and his party's likely crushing majority in the Parliament will overwhelm opposition voices.

In addition, because he is expected to have such a large margin in the National Assembly, his program could win approval with little resistance, allowing him to skip the step of assembling a broad-based coalition. That could come back to haunt him, leaving some, perhaps even many, feeling disenfranchised.

"There will be rather weak political opposition within the Parliament, but we are going to face it on the street, on the social networks, outside of institutions," said Jean Garrigues, a historian at the University of Orléans.

"And it is always dangerous when political opposition hardens outside of institutions," he said.

The left-leaning newspaper Liberation on Monday likened Sunday's results to a "takeover" of the nation's politics.

None of that undercuts Mr. Macron's formidable political skills or that of his party, La République en Marche (The Republic on the Move). He managed to take France's rather querulous desire for change and infuse it with a sense of optimism, with the idea that people could be better off.

Past presidents who had proposed changes in labor laws and the

French social safety net had not been able to convince the public that the benefits would outweigh the pain.

"People are wondering what kind of fairy dust he used to make this happen," said Édouard Lecerf, global director for polling and research for Kantar Public.

Since 2002, when the timing of the French legislative elections changed so that they directly followed the presidential elections, the ballot has served as confirmation of the president's win, reliably sending a majority of representatives of the president's party to Parliament. Although pundits initially expressed doubts that Mr. Macron could secure a majority because of how new his party and its candidates were, he helped ensure that outcome by quickly impressing the French during his first days as president.

"He had series of impressive international events with the NATO summit, the G-7 and the meeting with Putin at Versailles," said Bruno Cautrès, a political scientist at the Center for Political Research at Sciences Po in Paris.

He was referring to Mr. Macron's star turns both in Brussels where he met President Trump and won the 'I can shake hands harder than you can' competition, and at Versailles where he went toe to toe with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, bringing

up sensitive topics like the treatment of gay people in Chechnya during a joint news conference.

Mr. Cautrès said the new president's shrewd choices of people, from both the left and right, to fill the ranks of his government had also helped.

Mr. Macron has benefited from the weakness of the other parties; even those parties that were relatively strong as recently as the presidential election have seen a sudden drop in popularity. For instance, the far-right party of Marine Le Pen, the National Front, received 21 percent of the vote in the election's first round, and the far-left party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, France Unbowed, took close to 20 percent.

Both lost ground during the legislative contest. Ms. Le Pen's party got about 13.5 percent of the vote nationwide in the weekend elections, a precipitous drop, and France Unbowed did not quite reach 11 percent.

"The National Front was unable to capitalize on the 11 million votes it won in the presidential election," Mr. Cautrès said. "The far right appears divided and Marine Le Pen's leadership could be challenged if she does not win her legislative race on Sunday."

Ms. Le Pen won 46 percent in a district in the northeast of France where she is running, making it

likely that she will win. Less clear is whether more than a bare handful of other National Front candidates will garner the votes necessary to get into Parliament.

On the left, Mr. Mélenchon, who by dint of his personality and debating skills was a strong presence in the presidential election, was unable to project himself into the scores of races nationwide where his candidates were competing.

The Socialist Party of Mr. Macron's predecessor, François Hollande, fared badly in the legislative elections. It had been accused of betrayal by unions and its own left wing after the government pushed pro-business changes to the labor laws that it had once shunned.

About 100 Socialist Party representatives and their allies in the National Assembly lost their seats on Sunday, including Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, the head of the party; the Socialists' presidential candidate, Benoît Hamon; and a number of Mr. Hollande's former ministers.

"It paid dearly for its contradictions," Mr. Cautrès said.

But the most potentially dangerous element for Mr. Macron is one that helped his party do so well: a historically high abstention rate — 51 percent of the French decided not to vote last Sunday.

The low turnout helped Mr. Macron's candidates by reducing their competition, but the darker side is that many workers and poorer people in cities as well as in the countryside will not be represented, several historians and political sociologists said.

"There's a spectacular underrepresentation of the National Front and of the France Unbowed party," Mr. Garrigues said.

"It is the case that this National Assembly is going to represent the France that is favored to the detriment of the France that is suffering," he said.

Myriam Revault d'Allonnes, a philosopher and specialist in political representation, sees in the abstention a form of protest rather than apathy. "You don't abstain because you prefer to go fishing," she said.

It is not only a sign of a lack of interest in politics, she said in an interview published on the Franceinfo news website, "it is also a sign of protest."

"The state of grace will not last forever," said Mr. Lecerf, the pollster. "Once he starts changing the pensions and work laws, it is going to get much more complicated."

"The state of grace will not last forever," said Mr. Lecerf, the pollster. "Once he starts changing the pensions and work laws, it is going to get much more complicated."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Split in European Politics Prompts Investors to Buy Italy and France, Sell Britain

Christopher Whittall

French and Italian bonds rose in value and the British pound continued its fall on Monday, with investors taking very different views of the politics currently affecting three of Europe's largest economies.

Weekend ballots in France and Italy showed signs that the popularity of the antiestablishment parties that had spooked investors earlier this year continues to wane. But the pound has been falling since the U.K.'s ruling Conservative Party failed to secure a parliamentary majority in last Thursday's election, spurring investors' concern that this will make Brexit negotiations even harder for Britain.

The yield on French 10-year government bonds dropped around 0.05 percentage point to 0.595%, according to Tradeweb, its lowest close since November. That came after French President Emmanuel Macron's La République en Marche party won the first round of parliamentary elections Sunday,

putting the upstart centrist party on course to secure a sweeping majority. Yields fall as prices rise.

The yield on Italy's 10-year government bond fell about 0.09 percentage point to 2.00%, its lowest close since January, after no candidates from the antiestablishment 5 Star Movement made it through to the runoff vote for any of the main cities contested in Italian municipal elections.

But sterling was down 0.8% against the dollar in late afternoon trading in Europe, on the heels of the currency's 1.7% decline against the U.S. currency Friday. In late New York trading on Monday, the pound was 0.6% lower on the day at \$1.2660, compared with \$1.2741 late Friday.

The yield on 10-year U.K. government bonds fell 0.03 percentage point to 0.977%, however, as investors sought havens amid the continuing political uncertainty.

"In the near term, the risk of populism across Europe is in retreat," said Nicola Mai, global sovereign credit analyst at Pacific Investment Management Co. "Both on the macro side, where the data are really strong in Europe, and on the politics side, things have been quite encouraging for markets."

There are early signs also that the U.K. and eurozone's economies are taking divergent paths, which will influence where investors put their money. Analysts have become increasingly bullish on the eurozone's economy just as Britain's—typically Europe's second or third largest—has slowed after years of outperforming its neighbors.

The eurozone economy grew at its quarterly fastest rate in the first three months of 2017 since the first quarter of 2015. Britain's economic growth was revised lower to 0.2% in the first quarter of the year, according to figures released last month.

Investors dumped French bonds earlier this year on concerns that

far-right candidate Marine Le Pen could clinch the French presidency. Ms. Le Pen favored pulling France out of the euro, a move many feared would presage a messy breakup of the currency bloc.

But Mr. Macron won a convincing victory in May and Sunday's vote in France has put his party and its centrist ally, MoDem, on course to win a majority of as much as 455 seats in the 577-seat National Assembly in the second-round vote on Sunday, according to polling firm Ipsos Sopra-Steria. That would strengthen Mr. Macron's hand in efforts to loosen France's rigid labor laws.

"Political risk in France has disappeared, and it's good for structural reforms over the long term," said Thomas Page-Lecuyer, a strategist at CPR Asset Management.

In Italy, the euroskeptic 5 Star Movement failed to reach the second round of voting for any of the major cities in local elections—a

contrast with its victories in Turin and Rome last year.

Italian government bonds had already been boosted last week after the risk of a snap general election receded when Italy's largest political parties failed to agree on a new electoral law. The European Central Bank on Thursday reaffirmed its commitment to keep in place its huge bond-buying program, which has supported Italian debt in recent years, lending further support to the market.

The 5 Star Movement's "impetus seems to have lost some momentum," Fabio Fois, an

economist at Barclays, wrote in a note to clients.

Still, Mr. Fois said he expected the 5 Star Movement to keep polling neck-and-neck with the ruling center-left Democratic Party at the national level. Meanwhile, the risk of no party securing enough seats in parliament to win an outright majority remains high ahead of the country's next general elections, he said.

Pimco's Mr. Mai said the risk of populism in Europe hasn't gone away. "While populism might be on the decline while the macro [economy] improves in Europe, at the next crisis there is going to be

significant risk again of populism rising," he said.

Meanwhile, in the U.K., investors are scrambling to assess what Thursday's election means for Britain's negotiations with Brussels. Some investors say reduced Conservative Party influence could lead to a softer Brexit, which could be good for the economy, but others argue that the increased uncertainty will make the divorce even more tortuous and unpredictable.

In the meantime, though, the direction has been lower for the pound, which is the main barometer

of investor sentiment toward the U.K.

"The bit of opacity is around what happens in the negotiations" with the European Union, said Stephen Macklow-Smith, a portfolio manager at J.P. Morgan Asset Management.

—Jon Sindreu contributed to this article.

Write to Christopher Whittall at christopher.whittall@wsj.com

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Pop

BRUSSELS—Pressure is mounting on U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May to seek closer ties to the European Union after Britain leaves the bloc in March 2019, following her election setback last Thursday.

Some senior Conservatives say the party's loss of its parliamentary majority in last week's vote was, in part, a rejection of Mrs. May's insistence on a clean break with the EU. They say the government will struggle to pass legislation needed to prepare Britain for exit without a change in approach.

Ruth Davidson, the influential leader of the Scottish branch of the Conservative party, said last weekend the government should look again at its Brexit approach and "move to a consensus within the country about...what we seek to achieve as we leave."

Yet for Mrs. May, there are no easy alternatives. Whether she seeks to maintain closer economic ties with the EU or simply drops her threat that no deal is better than a bad deal, there are risks involved.

For now at least, Mrs. May is suggesting her pre-election Brexit plans are unchanged. She says her government is ready to start negotiations with the EU team next week as planned, although no date was agreed during discussions in Brussels on Monday.

U.K.'s May Faces Pressure to Soften Brexit Approach

Laurence Norman and Valentina

Her plan is for Britain to leave the EU's single market of goods and services, a zone of common regulation that allows a British company to operate and sell its products across the bloc.

Mrs. May has also pledged to take the U.K. out of the EU's customs union—which imposes zero tariffs on trade among EU members and a common set of tariffs on imports from nonmembers—although she has said she is open to a future U.K.-EU customs union arrangement. She also wants an end to the jurisdiction of EU courts over British laws and regulations.

In the short-term, the least economically disruptive alternative would be to remain in the single market either inside the customs union or, like Norway, outside it.

The Norway model has delivered strong economic benefits, yet it would require Britain doing two things Mrs. May has ruled out: maintaining freedom of movement of EU citizens into the U.K. and continuing large budget payments to the EU.

It would also continue to give EU courts a key role in shaping British rules. In other words, Britain would have to accept some of the least attractive parts of EU membership while surrendering any influence over the bloc's direction.

"Make no mistake, the Norway option is not going to be an easy sell to euroskeptics, and has never been seen by Brussels as a credible

model for the U.K.," said Mujtaba Rahman, Europe director with Eurasia Group, a London-based consultancy. "Norway...pays into the EU budget amounts that would basically be the same were it a full EU member."

Another alternative would be to leave the single market but seek customs-union membership. That would ensure Britain retained the benefits of the EU's 38 regional and bilateral trade deals and nullify one of the biggest risks from Brexit—the imposition of EU tariffs and onerous customs checks on U.K. imports and exports to the EU.

It would also help resolve one of the thorniest issues sparked by Brexit: how to avoid a hard border in Ireland—which is a specific pledge of the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party that looks set to enter an agreement to prop up a minority Conservative government. If Britain is in the customs union, major customs checks on the border with the Republic of Ireland won't be needed.

But staying in the customs union would thwart perhaps the strongest economic argument used by Brexiteers: It would prevent Britain from being able to negotiate and sign its own trade deals. The U.K. would have to continue to apply the common external tariff and rely on Brussels to negotiate new trade deals. EU courts would also likely continue to have oversight of U.K. rules and regulation.

There are two other options for the U.K. One would be to join the European Free Trade Association, an organization Britain helped found. That could offer some economic protection by allowing Britain access to EFTA's 27 trade deals covering 38 countries while also allowing the U.K. to start negotiating its own trade deals. Yet it isn't clear if EFTA would take Britain back and, in any case, it could take some time for Britain to have full access to those deals.

Most significant, the benefits in terms of new export markets would be relatively small compared with the EU single market and EU trade deals. That is why three of EFTA's four members—Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein—all joined the EU's single market. Switzerland didn't, though it has some benefits and obligations of the single market through bilateral deals with the EU.

There is also one other option Britain could push: negotiating a long transitional agreement with the EU which allowed one of these alternative models to stand for a number of years before Britain fully exited.

That looks difficult. EU officials and lawmakers have said any transitional deal should be short-lived, no more than three years, according to the European Parliament.



Walker : May's Brexit to-do list is getting longer

By Carole Walker

Carole Walker is a political analyst who worked as a political news correspondent for the BBC. The opinions in this article belong solely to the author.

(CNN)Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, is clearly running low on patience. He has urged the UK to get on with appointing a negotiating team so that the formal Brexit talks can finally start. "I can't negotiate with myself," he said in an

interview with various European publications.

However frustrating this waiting period might be for Barnier, he should be prepared for it to last a little longer. Negotiating Britain's departure from the EU was always

going to be a fraught and complex process.

But now, following last week's election in the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Theresa May's failure to secure an overall majority means that she now faces a number of new

battles to fight at home -- before she can even think about dealing with the likes of Barnier and his colleagues in Brussels.

May called the election saying she needed her own strong mandate to deal with other EU leaders. Her disastrous campaign has left her severely weakened, lacking authority at home and abroad. She was described over the weekend by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne as a "dead woman walking."

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and other leading Brexiters are insisting there can be no "backsliding" from the government's original Brexit objectives.

That means leaving the EU Single Market, controlling immigration from the EU and leaving the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

But MPs and ministers who want to retain close ties with the EU say the government will have to compromise to get a deal through the House of Commons.

A key figure in all this is Ruth Davidson, who leads the Scottish Conservative Party. She is a heroine

to many in her party after leading a campaign in Scotland which yielded an additional 12 Tory seats and saved the Conservatives from defeat.

Davidson, who campaigned to remain in the EU, has said it is time to rethink the government's blueprint for Brexit talks to prioritize access to EU markets for UK businesses.

May will also have to get the backing of the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland for its negotiating position: she will need the backing of its 10 MPs to survive key votes. The DUP does support Brexit, but does not agree with every aspect of the government's approach to date.

The DUP's biggest concern is the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. At the moment, it is an open border, without barriers or checks, and the DUP want to keep it that way. May has also said there should be no hard border. But the DUP are worried that could be in doubt if the UK left the EU without a deal -- as May has repeatedly said she is willing to do, asserting that "no deal is better than a bad deal."

The minister in charge of the Brexit process, David Davis, has insisted that the government must be prepared to walk away if it cannot get what it wants. He argues that without that option, the government's position would be weakened.

On this the government is also facing opposition from the newly strengthened opposition Labour Party. Its leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who defied expectations and boosted his party's standing, has said it would be an "economic disaster" to leave the EU without agreement. Any final Brexit arrangement will be put to Parliament and both Labour and the Scottish Nationalists will use every opportunity to push their agenda for a close trading relationship with the EU and a deal which protects jobs and workers' rights.

Leaving the European Union will require up to a dozen new laws, covering issues such as immigration rules, customs arrangements, sovereignty and workers' rights. There will be a Great Repeal Bill, bringing all EU legislation affecting the UK back to Britain.

The opposition parties are ready to oppose every proposal they don't like. Without a majority in the House of Commons, the government will struggle to get its way. A rebellion by just a handful of Conservative MPs will result in defeat for the government.

The Brexit workload will leave little time for other parliamentary business.

Some MPs are arguing for a cross-party commission or committee to try to achieve consensus on the way ahead. Ministers are already conceding they may have to prune back their ambitions.

The clock is already ticking: Britain will leave the EU in the spring of 2019 unless it can get agreement with the rest of the EU for an extension to the timetable.

May spent months telling us that "Brexit means Brexit." It will also mean battle after battle -- not just with 27 other EU nations, but with her parliamentary opponents and her own disgruntled party.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.K.'s May Vows to Deliver Conservatives From 'Mess' Caused by Election Setback

Jenny Gross and Jason Douglas

LONDON—Prime Minister Theresa May addressed Conservative lawmakers for the first time since last week's election and sought to convince them that she would take the party out of the "mess" she created, after a disappointing outcome weakened her grip on power.

Mrs. May's failure to secure a majority in last week's vote puts the country's objectives in coming Brexit negotiations in flux. With no clear mandate, control over the shape of Brexit is likely to hang on lawmakers more than with Mrs. May's own views, raising the prospect that the U.K. is heading for a less-abrupt break with the European Union than seemed likely before the election.

The electoral gamble has damaged Mrs. May's authority within her party. At the Monday meeting, she sounded contrite and took responsibility for the disastrous election results.

"I'm the person who got us into this mess and I'm the one who will get us out of it," Mrs. May told a roomful of lawmakers, one who was there said.

Jacob Rees-Mogg, a Conservative lawmaker who backed leaving the EU, said Mrs. May answered

questions from members of Parliament including ones pertaining to the party's campaign strategy and its policy proposals.

"She was humble, she apologized and set out a clear purpose for the future," Mr. Rees-Mogg said. "She got the tone spot on."

But rumors swirled over how long she could last, and to what extent she could see through the definitive break with the EU she had set out—including leaving the bloc's single market for goods and services to get control over immigration. Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon said supporters of a clear break with the EU have been left dead in the water in the wake of the election result. Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Scottish Conservative party, said she wanted to put economic advancement at the heart of any Brexit deal.

Mrs. May's team continued to seek a deal with a small Northern Irish party, the Democratic Unionist Party, which it is hoping it can rely on to pass legislation through Parliament. The DUP is likely to demand concessions in exchange for its support, including guarantees that Brexit won't disrupt trade between Northern Ireland and Ireland, an EU member.

Kathrin Muehlbronner, senior vice president of Moody's, said in a research note that the Conservative Party's reduced share of parliamentary seats may mean there is a higher likelihood of a Brexit involving compromises that Mrs. May wouldn't have earlier considered.

"This could potentially include a request to remain inside the EU single market or the customs union," Mrs. Muehlbronner said.

She also expected the election outcome to delay the start of negotiations or lead to a period where no substantive issues are discussed.

Like the Conservative Party, the main opposition Labour Party is also divided on what Brexit should look like. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his close ally John McDonnell, the party's finance spokesman, have sent a strong signal that they believe the U.K. should quit the EU's single market for goods and services, as well as its customs union.

Mr. McDonnell, in an interview with broadcaster ITV on Sunday, said a Brexit deal that preserves Britain's single-market membership would be interpreted "as not respecting the result of that referendum," referring to last year's Brexit vote.

Their stance aligns with the party's election platform, which said a Labour government would seek to preserve the benefits of single-market membership and the EU's customs union, while ending free movement of people. It pledged to "build a close cooperative future relationship with the EU, not as members but as partners."

Yet some in the party have left the door open to less of a clear break. Barry Gardiner, trade spokesman and one of a three-person team driving Labour's Brexit policy, said on Monday that some kind of "reformed membership" of the single market and customs union was another possibility, though it isn't clear if such an offer would even be on the table.

Others in the party have been more explicit. Chuka Ummuna, a former Labour business spokesman, has said the U.K. could leave the EU but maintain single-market membership by seeking a similar status to Norway, which pays into the EU budget and accepts the free movement of people from the bloc.

Uncertainty over the direction of Brexit weighed on business leaders. The U.K.'s Institute of Directors said it quizzed 700 executives and found a sharp deterioration in confidence about the U.K. economy's prospects

following the election result. The institute said 57% of respondents were pessimistic about the

economy, compared with 37% before the vote.

**The
Washington
Post**

Britain's Theresa May comes under pressure to soften her stance on Brexit

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LONDON — When Britain voted last week in an election that ended with Prime Minister Theresa May hanging onto her job by a thread, Brexit wasn't on the ballot.

Even though the country had split nearly down the middle in last year's referendum — 52 percent to 48 — and continues to be closely divided, none of the major parties ran on a platform of reversing the public's decision to leave the European Union.

The vote has nonetheless been a jolt to the country's exit plans, raising the fears of die-hard Brexiters, the hopes of those favoring a more limited separation from European allies and the question of whether May will be around to steer the course she's charted toward a sharp rupture.

Although May on Monday managed to quiet talk of any immediate ouster, she is still considered unlikely to stay on over the next two years, as exit talks unfold.

May had called the election expecting a mandate for her hard Brexit agenda as the country prepares to launch formal divorce talks with the E.U. next week.

But the voters delivered instead a muddled message that leaves Britain without a clear direction as it prepares for the most important change to its global role in decades.

"We now have a Parliament that's gridlocked," said John Springford, research director for the London-based Center for European Reform. "It doesn't appear that there's a majority for hard Brexit, a majority for soft Brexit, or certainly not a majority for remain. It's a very confused picture."

In a measure of just how confused, Springford said he could see the results pushing in either direction — toward "a chaotic, hard Brexit because they can't reach a deal," or

toward a much less severe break "because the soft Brexiters are emboldened."

"It's very hard to say which way it will go," he said.

What is clear, however, is that events have not gone Theresa May's way.

Until Monday, May had refused to give an inch on her Brexit plans, which she announced to great fanfare earlier this year. Despite an election in which she and her Conservative Party lost their majority in Parliament, she and her surrogates had insisted in recent days that the country's plans to ask Europe for a clean break following nearly a half-century of union would not be affected.

But late Monday afternoon, May suggested that there may be some flexibility after all, promising in a contrite appearance before her party's backbenchers to "listen to all voices" in the party on Brexit and build a more consensual approach.

The statement — part of an appearance in which May also vowed that "I got us into this mess, and I'm going to get us out of it" — followed days of growing agitation from within her party over a strategy of simply soldiering on.

May's willingness to take blame for the election loss Monday appeared to have won her favor from her party colleagues, who said she had effectively ended talk of an imminent coup.

But party members said she would still have to prove she understands that while she may have the will to continue on as normal with her Brexit plans, she no longer has the votes.

Just how vulnerable she has become was underscored Monday when Ruth Davidson, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, emerged from a meeting with the prime minister and emphasized that the government would have to "put our

country's economic future first and foremost in our minds as we go ahead with Brexit."

It was a coded but clear message, one that runs counter to May's consistent refrain that controlling immigration will be the country's top priority in talks, and that economic impacts will come well behind.

It was also an implicit threat: If Davidson, who passionately favored the "remain" side in the Brexit referendum, withholds the support of Parliament's 13 Scottish Tories, May no longer has a majority.

The same applies for May's would-be coalition partner — the right-wing Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland. The party, which was locked in negotiations with the Tories on Monday, also favors a less rigid break, fearing the consequences of a hard Brexit for an area that depends heavily on trade with an E.U. member — the Republic of Ireland.

And top members of May's cabinet — including Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond — have reportedly taken up the cause of soft Brexit behind the scenes in recent days, emboldened by May's sudden fragility.

"The debate over soft versus hard Brexit is back on the table — and soft Brexit now has more points of influence," Mujtaba Rahman, an analyst with Eurasia Group, wrote in a briefing note Monday.

May's proposed version of Brexit involves a complete severance from the central elements of European Union membership, including the single market, the customs union and the European Court of Justice.

May has said she wants a free trade deal with the E.U. instead, one that would allow Britain to continue swapping goods and services with its European partners on preferential terms, but that would also permit the country to limit the flow of European citizens to British shores.

European leaders have scoffed at such proposals.

Those favoring a soft Brexit have pushed for the country to formally exit the E.U. but to stay in the single market — perhaps by following a model pioneered by Norway, which is not a member of the 28-nation bloc but enjoys many of the privileges.

What the Nordic country can't do, however, is control E.U. immigration. That has made the Norway model a non-starter for Brexit true believers, who have watched with growing alarm in recent days as pressure on May has escalated.

So far, however, they are sticking by her. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, who helped lead the "leave" campaign and was reported Sunday to be mounting a challenge to May, wrote a column in Monday's Sun newspaper in which he dismissed the reports.

Today's Headlines newsletter

The day's most important stories.

"To those that say the PM should step down, or that we need another election or even — God help us — a second referendum, I say come off it," he wrote. "Get a grip, everyone."

But that's unlikely to stop the speculation — either over whether May will stay, or what the future holds for the country's Brexit plans.

"Anybody in British politics who claims to know with any authority what will happen with Brexit as a result of this election is lying," said Robert Ford, a politics professor at the University of Manchester.

William Booth in London and Brian Murphy in Washington contributed to this report.

**The
New York
Times**

Theresa May Battles to Hold On as U.K. Prime Minister

Stephen Castle

Conservative Party lawmakers and promising to consult them more.

LONDON — Battling to hold on as prime minister of Britain after losing her majority in Parliament in the election last week, Theresa May shored up her position on Monday by expressing contrition to fellow

"I got us into this mess, I'm going to get us out of it," Mrs. May told the lawmakers, according to several who attended a private meeting with her in Parliament on Monday. They

said she got a generally positive reception.

Mrs. May met for more than an hour on Monday with the Conservative caucus in the House of Commons, known as the 1922 Committee, after shaking up her cabinet over the

weekend to broaden its appeal to her party's rank and file.

To survive for long as the head of a minority government, she will need all of the caucus members' votes. The defections of even a few could block major legislation and force her

to resign, or she could be toppled through a party leadership challenge.

Mrs. May was greeted at the meeting by lawmakers banging their desks as a sign of approval, an indication that she had at least bought herself some time. "She knows what went wrong, and that she played a part in that — and she said what I think colleagues wanted to hear," said Alistair Burt, a Conservative lawmaker who attended the meeting. Mr. Burt said the prime minister's approach had combined humility with a focus on the task of forming a government.

In a sign that Mrs. May had not yet nailed down the backing she needs from her own party and an alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party, there were indications on Monday that the Queen's Speech might be delayed. The speech, which lays out the government's legislative agenda, was expected to be delivered June 19, but Mrs. May's office refused on Monday to confirm that date.

Mrs. May's future remains in grave doubt after her party's setback at the polls. She had called the early election hoping to bolster her position and receive a clear mandate as negotiations begin over

Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, known as Brexit. But what at first looked to be an easy victory turned into an electoral debacle for the Tories, prompting George Osborne, the former chancellor of the Exchequer who now edits *The London Evening Standard*, to describe Mrs. May on Sunday as a "dead woman walking."

Even so, the Conservatives appear to want to draw a breath and help her to stay on as leader and prime minister, at least for the time being. The talks with the European Union, perhaps the most consequential set of negotiations Britain has faced since World War II, are scheduled to begin next week. And with British voters in an unpredictable mood, few Conservatives want to risk a change of party leadership that would generate pressure for another election.

Though Mrs. May's office insisted on Monday that there was no change to her strategy of seeking a clean break with the European Union, withdrawing from its single market and customs union in March 2019, that strategy is being questioned by leading Conservatives, threatening to reawaken a latent civil war within the party over Europe.

Mrs. May also has yet to finalize an arrangement with the Democratic Unionists, the Northern Irish party whose 10 votes she now needs to form a majority. A deal with the D.U.P. is seen as controversial in Britain because of the party's social conservatism, its opposition to same-sex marriage and its hostility to abortion. It would also be likely to cause complications in Northern Ireland, where the British government tries to act as an impartial mediator in restoring the power-sharing arrangement between the mainly Protestant D.U.P. and the main Catholic nationalist party, Sinn Féin.

Having made the decision to call a snap election and then run a personalized campaign, Mrs. May owns its disastrous outcome. She tried on Saturday to defuse some of the anger at her leadership style and her habit of relying heavily on a small circle of advisers by parting ways with her two closest aides, Fiona Hill and Nick Timothy. Both had developed reputations for secrecy and highhanded, arrogant treatment of colleagues.

Then, on Sunday, she reconstructed her cabinet. The biggest surprise in the reshuffle was the return of

Michael Gove, whom she had fired last summer when she first became prime minister.

Mrs. May and Mr. Gove had frequently clashed when both were in government, and only last week, when an interviewer asked her about him, Mrs. May answered dismissively, saying, "I seem to remember Michael was secretary for state for education at one point."

Now he will be secretary of state for the environment, food and rural affairs, prompting Tom Watson, deputy leader of the opposition Labour Party, to ask publicly whether his return had been requested by Rupert Murdoch, whose tabloid newspapers lean heavily toward the Conservatives. Mr. Gove conducted an interview with President Trump for one of the Murdoch papers.

Mrs. May's reshuffled cabinet retains Philip Hammond as chancellor of the Exchequer. There had been news reports before the election that Mrs. May was planning to reassign him because he has argued behind the scenes for a softer, more business-friendly exit from the European Union.



Britain Has One More Shot at Stopping the Brexit Car Crash

Philippe Legrain

For a country that prides itself on its political stability, Britain is doing a good impression of chaos. Plunged into turmoil a year ago by the referendum decision to leave the European Union, the country seemed set for the hardest of breaks with the EU under the leadership of its seemingly impregnable prime minister, Theresa May, who replaced David Cameron last July. But in elections on June 8, which May had called to seek a mandate for herself and her vision of Brexit, voters deprived her Conservative Party of its parliamentary majority. Suddenly, the Brexit process is up in the air again. The outcome could be a car-crash exit without a deal — or a much softer break than May envisaged.

Chaotic situations are, by definition, unpredictable. For now, May hobbles on as prime minister. She is seeking to cobble together a slim parliamentary majority with the backing of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), a hard-line, social conservative, evangelical Protestant party in Northern Ireland. She insists that she is ready to start the Brexit negotiations as planned on June 19.

But with May living on borrowed time and no majority to pass the

legislation required to implement the various steps in the Brexit process, it is hard to see how meaningful negotiations can proceed. If and when May is toppled — Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson unconvincingly denies that he is plotting to oust her — the Conservative Party will need to spend months choosing a new leader. There is also the risk of fresh elections, either because the government loses a no-confidence vote or because a new Conservative leader and prime minister will want to seek their own mandate and majority.

Meanwhile, the Brexit clock is ticking.

With May having triggered the formal EU exit process on March 29, Britain is set to leave the EU two years from then, with or without a deal.

With May having triggered the formal EU exit process on March 29, Britain is set to leave the EU two years from then, with or without a deal. While the U.K. government could seek a two-year extension, all 27 remaining EU governments (the EU-27) would need to unanimously agree to the request. That is highly unlikely, since it would reduce their negotiating leverage and they are also keen to get the Brexit process

over and done with. So there is a significant risk that Britain could crash out of the EU without a deal, simply because the government lacks the time or the means to agree to one.

But there is also the possibility of a much rosier outcome. With the Conservatives deprived of both a majority and a mandate for May's hard Brexit, extreme Brexiteers who seek a rupture with the EU at any cost can no longer impose their will on the party and thus the country (although they can still cause trouble by rebelling). Instead, the election has emboldened moderate Tories who sought to remain in the EU and now seek a softer exit. Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, who bucked the anti-Tory swing by winning 12 more seats in Scotland, thereby keeping the Conservatives in office for now, has been quick to flex her muscles. She is demanding an "open Brexit" that "puts our country's economic growth first." And in her limited post-election reshuffle, May has appointed as her deputy Damian Green, one of the most Europhile Conservatives.

Most non-Conservative members of Parliament — including those of the DUP — also want a softer break with the EU that minimizes the damage to the economy and jobs.

Some are now even suggesting seeking a broader, cross-party consensus on how best to proceed with Brexit. That seems very hard to achieve. Labour's hard-left leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who did better than expected in the elections, thinks he is now on the brink of power (wrongly, in my view) and is thus likely to let the Conservatives deal with the mess that they have created. Even so, the government will now have to take on board the views of some opposition MPs if it is to pass any Brexit legislation, since any rebellion would otherwise deprive it of a majority.

If a weak and divided Britain decides that it wants a softer Brexit, it isn't guaranteed to get one, however; the EU-27, which are in a stronger position than ever, would also have to agree. In response to Prime Minister May's letter in March setting out Britain's negotiating position, they have agreed on their own. Their initial priorities are entrenching the rights of EU citizens in Britain after Brexit, obtaining a big financial payment for spending commitments that Britain made while it was an EU member, and avoiding a "hard" border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that could destabilize the peace process.

To restore some goodwill, the U.K. government ought to move quickly

to unilaterally guarantee EU citizens' post-Brexit rights. The divorce bill would also loom less large if Britain committed to continue paying into the EU budget during a post-Brexit transition period during which it remained in the EU single market. As for the Irish border issue — a common priority, especially with a DUP-backed government — a transition period in which the U.K. remained in the customs union would address it temporarily. Only once the EU-27 deem that "sufficient progress" has been made on these topics are they willing to start negotiating a post-Brexit trade relationship.

Economically, both the EU-27 and Britain share an interest in the softest of Brexits: one that involves Britain remaining in both the EU single market and its customs union.

Economically, both the EU-27 and Britain share an interest in the softest of Brexits: one that involves Britain remaining in both the EU single market and its customs union. Trade would scarcely be disrupted. London could remain Europe's financial center. Cross-border supply chains could continue unimpeded. So too would the two-way free movement of people — a bugbear for many of those who voted to leave the EU and for May herself, who wants to control immigration from the EU.

Politically, however, the EU-27's overriding interest is in ensuring that leaving the club is seen to make Britain worse off, so as to deter other restless members from leaving. Meanwhile, every financial center in the EU is also keen to grab some of London's lucrative business. Even if Britain were to seek a softer Brexit, it might not be able to get it.

But it would unwise for the EU-27 to spurn an olive branch from a suitably chastened British government. Having to back down from its nationalist bravado about walking away without a deal would be humiliation enough. At a time when President Donald Trump is threatening a trade war with Germany (and thus the EU) and has cast doubt on his commitment to defend NATO allies, it would be foolish to alienate Britain, a valuable security ally and economic partner, if it sued for peace on EU terms — as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other leaders ought to recognize.

A soft Brexit deal could initially consist of a transition period for several years after Britain exits the EU in 2019 during which the U.K. would remain in both the single market and the customs union. During that period, a future trading relationship would be negotiated. By

then, passions may have cooled and pragmatism been restored.

Politicians ought to prepare the ground by starting to try to persuade British voters that EU migrants are not the source of all their problems — or at least convincing them that the economic price of imposing immigration controls is too great. If the U.K. were willing to retain free movement, perhaps with an emergency brake like Norway has, it could remain in the single market.

Failing that, Britain could still seek to remain in the customs union. That way, trade in goods could continue unimpeded by tariffs, customs checks, and other red tape (including on the Irish border); foreign car factories wouldn't relocate. While this would prevent the U.K. striking trade deals with non-EU countries on goods, it could still seek to negotiate agreements on services trade, in which the U.K. specializes.

At the very least, in a constructive spirit and with goodwill, the U.K. and the EU-27 should aim to negotiate a deep and wide-ranging free trade agreement that allows people to move as freely as politically possible.

We live in times of political upheaval. Nothing is settled. That poses huge dangers, but it also offers opportunities to reverse bad decisions and make positive changes. There is still all to play for.

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To be more exact, they've been pointed at the cybergang known as the Lazarus Group, the group of hackers linked to the 2014 attack on Sony Pictures and the theft of \$81 million from a Bangladeshi bank. But journalists have tended not to draw any distinction between the Lazarus Group and the regime of Kim Jong Un, which is understandable. North Korea has relied on such criminals and thugs to do its bidding for years.

This puts the Hermit Kingdom, for once, ahead of the curve. There's growing evidence that other states — particularly Russia — are increasingly turning to organized crime groups as proxies, intelligence assets, and sometimes even as hired killers.

Welcome to the modern age of hybrid war, when even crime has been weaponized.

Welcome to the modern age of hybrid war, when even crime has been weaponized.

The gangster-spook nexus

There's no doubt that North Korea has led the way in turning organized crime toward state ends. Its infamous Bureau 39 is essentially

the government's mafia office, dedicated to generating resources by illegal means to support the state (especially its nuclear program) and keep the Kims in imported luxuries. It arranges for methamphetamines to be brewed inside government chemical works, the state mint helps produce some of the highest-quality counterfeit bank notes in the world, and the state-owned Korea National Insurance Corp. (KNIC) runs systematic insurance frauds abroad.

Thae Yong-ho, a former diplomat who was the highest-ranking defector in 20 years, claimed in 2017 that these schemes earn Pyongyang "tens of millions of dollars" annually. (In 2009, KNIC managers in Singapore reportedly sent then-leader Kim Jong Il \$20 million in cash as a birthday present.) Turning to cybercrime has been a logical step. Cheap, potentially lucrative, and not relying on physical contact, cybercrime is the ideal operation for an impoverished and isolated pariah. Other states committed to challenging the international order are learning from Pyongyang's example, though — if with a little more subtlety. Unlike the North Koreans, they are typically cutting deals with the underworld rather than simply moving into it themselves. Gangsters, after all, have all kinds of skills and capacities that can be of value to intelligence agencies and covert operations in the modern world, whether moving goods or people untraceably across borders, raising funds for political purposes, or simply putting a bullet into an inconvenient enemy of the state.

Of course, intelligence agencies have long used criminals as proxies from time to time. The Sicilian Mafia provided local knowledge and muscle for the Americans before the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943. In the 1990s, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency used the D-Company criminal organization to launch terror attacks in India.

In the main, though, these connections tended to be quite rare, one-off necessities more than actual policy. After all, criminals are essentially self-interested and intrinsically untrustworthy.

Increasingly, though, states are turning to this on a more regular basis. The Turkish security forces have used rival heroin-smuggling gangs as weapons against the Kurdistan Workers' Party to penetrate Turkish expatriate communities, for example. Chinese triads are being used by Beijing's Public Security Bureau to intimidate protesters and gather intelligence abroad. And when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard wanted to kill

the Saudi ambassador to the United States in 2011, they used someone they thought was a Mexican drug cartel hit man. (He was actually an agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration.)

However, as they look to prosecute their "political war" against the West, the Russians are emerging as the most enthusiastic users of gangsters' services. Given that their intelligence services are now up to Cold War levels, it seems ironic that they would even need such amateur auxiliaries. However, so ambitious and numerous are their operations that even they sometimes need some extra capacity or deniability.

Mobilizing Moscow's mob

Some of the instances when Russia has used criminals as proxies are well known. Russia's seizure of Crimea, for example, and the subsequent undeclared war in Ukraine's Donbass region were carried out not just by Russian special forces, but by local gangsters serving as so-called self-defense volunteers. Similarly, many Russian cyberattacks, especially large-scale ones, involve mobilizing criminal hackers. (Indeed, the cyberespionage division of the Federal Security Service has actually recruited hackers by giving them the choice of prison or service.)

But most of this state-sponsored organized crime is more low-profile. We are seeing more and more cases, especially in Europe, where local counterintelligence services believe gangsters are acting as occasional Russian assets. Some work on behalf of the Russia state willingly. In other cases, these criminals have been turned into assets without their knowledge, thinking they are simply doing a service for a Russian gang. And yet for others, they are made an offer they can't refuse. In a recent report for the European Council on Foreign Relations, I call these "Russian-based organized crime" — whether ethnically Russian or not (because many are Georgians or the like), they are criminals with business or personal interests back in Russia, a fact the Kremlin can use as leverage.

To be sure, most of the time direct links between criminals and the Russian state are hard to establish. What good would it be to hire them if they weren't? But in some cases, the politically convenient patterns are plain to see. In Istanbul, Russian gangsters have killed Chechen rebel supporters, according to Turkish intelligence. In Ukraine, only a few days ago, a Chechen gangster tried to kill an anti-Russian militia commander.

In the Czech Republic, the authorities warn of the links between Russian intelligence and questionable businesses involved in corruption and money laundering. In Finland, the security police suspect Russian criminals are buying up strategically placed properties from which military facilities can be monitored or even attacked.

Criminal hackers — those not recruited straight into the intelligence services — are being used for both targeted information heists and crude cyberattacks. Putin has even hinted, with a nod and a wink, that such “patriotically minded” cybercriminals may have been behind the Democratic National Committee hack.

Remember Anna Chapman, the brunette bombshell in the circle of “illegals” whom deep-cover Russian spies uncovered in the United States in 2010? The likely ringleader and most serious of the team was Pavel Kapustin, who went by the name Christopher Metsos. When the FBI finally came calling, he was

no longer in the country. He was later arrested in Cyprus, where he was bailed out and then disappeared. According to intelligence sources, he may have been spirited out of Cyprus under the CIA’s nose by people traffickers.

The use of criminals on the part of the Russian government even seemingly leads to the provocative cross-border raid into Estonia by Federal Security Service (FSB) commandos in 2014, during which they snatched Estonian security officer Eston Kohver. He was convicted on trumped-up espionage charges before being swapped for a Russian spy in an Estonian prison, but the main aim appears to have been to disrupt his investigation into a cigarette-smuggling ring. The criminals were moving untaxed or counterfeit cigarettes over the frontier with the FSB’s protection. In return, the Russians got a cut of their proceeds as *chernaya kassa* — “black account” — secret funds that could be used to pay off friends or support convenient political

movements without revealing Moscow’s fingerprints.

A dangerous gambit

So what’s not to love? Why shouldn’t everyone, Washington included, get into the gangster-spook game? Apart from the ethical issue, there is the political cost. Criminals make unreliable agents, prone to unprofessionalism in action, and an eager willingness to tell all in return for a lighter sentence when caught. Pyongyang hardly has any credibility or legitimacy to lose, but countries routinely engaging in these activities risk being considered pariahs.

Then there is the risk of blowback. While the state is working out how to use the criminals, the criminals are working out how to exploit the state. The result is often a vicious circle of further corruption and criminalization. When Canadian naval intelligence officer Sub-Lt. Jeffrey Delisle began selling secrets to the Russians, for example, he was given the shopping list of

secrets that Moscow wanted. Over time, there were unexpected additions. Moscow wanted to find out what the Canadians knew about the Russian gangsters operating there. The odds are this wasn’t because the Kremlin itself was interested, so much as that someone in the chain of command saw an opportunity to get hold of information that could then be sold to the criminals.

But this is the age of so-called hybrid war, of the blurring of the boundaries between war and peace, overt and covert, espionage and information. And what could be more hybrid than the gangsters? Certainly for the foreseeable future they will remain assets not just in the shadow war between Russia and the West, but a range of geopolitical struggles carried out by countries that are looking to outsource operations from espionage to sabotage to these deniable mercenaries of the underworld.

INTERNATIONAL

The
New York
Times

How the Saudi-Qatar Rivalry, Now Combusting, Reshaped the Middle East

The crisis convulsing the Persian Gulf, entangling the United States and now threatening to pull in Turkey and Iran, can be traced to a dilemma facing a man who had just deposed his own father.

When Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the crown prince of Qatar, took power in a bloodless coup in 1995, he seized a barely independent nation about the size of Connecticut, with one-seventh its population. It had been dominated since independence in 1971 by its far larger and more powerful neighbor, Saudi Arabia.

He believed Qatar could find security only by transforming itself from Saudi appendage to rival. But how?

The audacious plan he put in motion set off something of a regional cold war, in time remaking not just the politics of the oil-rich Persian Gulf, but also those of the entire Middle East, culminating in last week’s crisis.

It would be as if Cuba sought to break from American influence by becoming a global superpower overnight, competing with the United States across Asia and Europe.

Qatar’s strategy seemed to finally collapse this past week, with Saudi Arabia and its allies imposing a blockade. But Qatar has its own allies. The consequences of this rivalry may still be unfolding.

Solving a Problem

In the years before Sheikh Hamad took power, a few incidents deepened his desire to break from Saudi domination.

In 1988, his father had established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, a Saudi adversary, giving Qatar a taste of an independent foreign policy.

In 1992, a clash with Saudi Arabia along their short but disputed border left two Qatari soldiers dead. Two years later, when Yemen fell into a brief civil war, Qatar and Saudi Arabia backed opposing sides.

Autonomy, Sheikh Hamad learned, could be both feasible and desirable.

Marc Lynch, a political scientist at George Washington University, put Sheikh Hamad’s view as: “Why be under the thumb of the Saudis if you don’t have to be?”

The Qatari emir also had ambitions to prove himself more than a Saudi vassal.

“A lot of it does come down to personality,” Mr. Lynch said. “When the new emir comes in, he really does have a chip on his shoulder.”

A Rise to Rivalry

Few countries have ever grown from client state to regional power. Qatar managed it in just a few years.

“From the late 1990s on, Qatari foreign policy is a combination of: ‘What can we do to get ourselves on the map?’ and ‘What can we do to annoy the Saudis?’” Mr. Lynch said.

Qatar cultivated ties with Iran and established trade relations with Israel. It became host to a large American air base, in part to guard against Saudi bullying.

It established the satellite news channel Al Jazeera, using it to project soft power, promote allies and needle the Saudi royal family.

It also made use of its history as a once-remote haven for Islamist exiles. If foreign governments had to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Palestinian group Hamas,

Chechen separatists or even the Taliban, they often went through Qatar.

Then, in the 1990s, technological and economic developments created a global market for liquefied natural gas, which can be loaded onto ships, bypassing pipelines that would run through Saudi territory. Qatar controls some of the world’s largest gas reserves, so its economy expanded from \$8.1 billion in 1995 to an astonishing \$210 billion in 2014.

Sheikh Hamad and his foreign minister jettied from one Arab capital to another, offering their services as mediators and generous donors.

The United States found Qatar’s diplomacy useful, if sometimes annoying, using it as a base for Afghan peace talks. It relied on its Qatari air base for the war in Iraq and, later, strikes in Syria.

In 2002, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador to Qatar, nominally over Al Jazeera’s criticism of the Saudi government.

“It takes until 2008 for Saudi Arabia to really digest the notion that Qatar is a fully independent state,” said

David B. Roberts, a professor at King's College London.

The Saudi ambassador returned to Qatar in 2008, and the two neighbors might have found equilibrium if not for what came next.

'Open Proxy Warfare'

The Arab Spring, which saw uprisings across the region in 2011, provided Qatar with an opening.

For all its rising influence, Qatar had never been able to crack Saudi regional dominance. Now, with Saudi-aligned autocrats under threat, it saw opportunity.

It backed antigovernment movements, both secular and Islamist, with Al Jazeera airtime, diplomatic support and, later, money and sometimes weapons, hoping to install friendly new governments. When Islamists showed the most promise, Qatar threw its support behind them.

To Saudi Arabia, the uprisings imperiled both the regional order and, potentially, its own rule; populist Islamist movements had long challenged it at home.

Every time a vacuum opened, both gulf rivals would rush to fill it first. "From 2011 to 2013, they're in open proxy warfare across the region," Mr. Lynch said.

In Tunisia, for instance, each supported opposing political parties.

Elsewhere, their rivalry fueled violence. In Libya, each backed armed groups that would later fight a civil war. In Syria, they sought to outbid each other in financing rebels, including extremists.

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It is a striking and dangerous contradiction: Qatar invests billions of dollars in the U.S. and Europe and then recycles the profits to support Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and groups linked to al Qaeda. Qatar hosts the American military base from which the U.S. directs the regional war against extremism, yet it also owns media networks responsible for inciting many of the same extremists.

When the United Arab Emirates and like-minded countries took diplomatic and economic measures against Qatar last week, it was not done lightly or in haste. Rather it was prompted by the accumulation of years of bewildering Qatari behavior that poses a direct threat to the U.S., U.A.E. and Qatar itself. If

In Egypt, Qatar backed the Muslim Brotherhood, whose candidate won the country's first real presidential vote in 2012. The next year, when the Egyptian military took power in a coup, Saudi Arabia and its allies awarded the new rulers a \$12 billion aid package.

These interventions, in addition to shaping the Arab Spring, helped realign the region's geopolitics.

Turkey, for its own reasons, joined Qatar in backing the uprisings, forming the basis of Qatar's first real alliance.

Sunni monarchies like the United Arab Emirates, fearing uprisings at home, consolidated behind Saudi leadership and against Qatar.

The rivalry even extended to Washington, where Qatar spent lavishly on lobbying and think tank donations. The United Arab Emirates did the same, seeking to keep pace with Qatar's influence in the United States.

An Uneasy New Order

"In 2013, you have more or less a rout of the Qatari position," Mr. Lynch said.

Qatar's Arab Spring allies suffered devastating setbacks. Sheikh Hamad, in poor health, abdicated the throne and was succeeded by a 33-year-old son with less experience. The country's brief tenure as a regional power ended.

Still, Qatar retained the autonomy and network of connections that had been its original goal.

Saudi Arabia tolerated Qatar's autonomy, to focus on another regional proxy war, against Iran. This also served the interests of the

United States, which relied on both Saudi Arabia and Qatar in fighting the Islamic State and wanted their rivalry stabilized.

The 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, which Saudi Arabia opposed, further complicated the issue. It left Saudi Arabia more concerned by Qatar's links to Iran, however limited, but less willing to pressure Qatar, which the Saudis knew would inflame tensions with Washington over the Iran deal.

The rivals were left in a tenuous, uneasy balance.

A Saudi Gamble

Though Qatar had stepped back, its campaign taught Saudi Arabia a lesson: An uncontrolled Qatar posed a grave threat.

Saudi Arabia, joined by other gulf states and Egypt, finally found its opportunity to reimpose dominance with last week's blockade.

This would also force fence-sitters to choose sides, at a moment when Saudi Arabia is stronger. Riyadh is still working to re-establish regional dominance, under growing pressure from Iran.

But Saudi Arabia appeared to quickly win the greatest prize of all: American backing.

President Trump, who received a rapturous welcome in Riyadh last month, welcomed the blockade of an American ally, a stunning policy reversal that seemingly happened overnight. On Twitter, he seemed to imply that the blockade had been his idea.

But forcing hands can be risky.

Iran has offered food aid to Qatar, betting that it can expand its influence there and perhaps with two other gulf states, Kuwait and Oman, that seek a balance between it and Saudi Arabia.

Morocco, initially neutral, announced on Monday that it would send food aid to Qatar, according to Moroccan reports.

The most significant move could come from Turkey, which has sided vocally with Qatar. Its Parliament approved a measure allowing Turkey to deploy up to 3,000 troops to its base in Qatar, where 100 are currently stationed.

Aaron Stein, an analyst at the Atlantic Council, a think tank based in Washington, said Turkey had recently patched up relations with Saudi Arabia, seeking a middle ground, "but there are limits to that."

Turkey's state-dominated media, which has few pro-Saudi voices, has championed the defense of Qatar, an ally, as a nationalist cause.

Though Turkey is a NATO member, over the past year it has joined Iran in aligning its regional strategy with Russia's. Moscow's position could gain in the crisis as American allies quarrel.

Though few expect the standoff to escalate to violence, it remains far from clear how it will be resolved. This may be the end of the two-decade Saudi-Qatar rivalry, or it could bring just another layer of instability and crosscutting alliances to a region that already has plenty.

Al Otaiba : Qatar Cannot Have It Both Ways

Yousef Al Otaiba

Qatar sows the wind, it will reap the whirlwind.

President Trump said it well on Friday: "the time had come to call on Qatar to end its funding [of extremism]. . . . For Qatar, we want you back among the unity of responsible nations."

Qatar can no longer have it both ways. It must now decide whether it is "all in"—or not—in the fight against extremism and aggression.

For years, Qatar has supported and sheltered extremists. In the mid-1990s, it harbored the notorious terrorist Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who became one of the principal plotters of the Sept. 11 attacks. Today it hosts and promotes the Muslim Brotherhood's spiritual leader Yusuf al-Qaradawi, as well as Khaled Mashal, leader of Hamas, a

U.S.-designated terrorist organization.

Last week the U.A.E. and other states designated Mr. al-Qaradawi, along with 58 others and 12 organizations, as providing material support for terrorists. Many live in, operate from, or receive backing from Doha. Some are linked directly to the ruling family. They will not be lonely—along with Iran, Qatar has the unseemly distinction of having one of the world's highest concentrations of internationally designated terror financiers.

A 2015 Wall Street Journal article noted: "For years, Islamist rebel fighters from Libya and Syria traveled to Qatar and returned with suitcases full of money." Doha has provided financial and logistical support to the Nusra Front (now known as Tahrir al Sham), the

Syrian branch of al Qaeda. The Manchester suicide bomber was associated with an al Qaeda-aligned militia in Libya supported by Qatar.

The Financial Times reports that two months ago Qatar paid a hostage ransom of as much as \$1 billion to a variety of terror organizations in Syria and Iraq that are subject to sanctions, including Iran's local Hezbollah franchise. In Egypt, Qatar has given a blank check to the Muslim Brotherhood, the launching pad for many of the most violent Islamist groups.

And just when responsible nations are focusing attention on confronting radicalization in all of its forms, Qatar-owned media, led by Al Jazeera, continue to incite violence and fanaticism across the Arab world. Like a twisted version of "The Daily Show," the cleric al-Qaradawi

has used his TV program to promote a fatwa encouraging suicide bombers, as well as to defend the killing of American soldiers in Iraq as a “religious obligation.”

Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates said in May: “General [John] Abizaid was convinced that Al Jazeera was working against our troops and actually providing information to our enemies. There was concern about—broader concern about Al Jazeera providing a platform for terrorists.”

The comments by Mr. Gates, who led the Pentagon under both Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, demonstrate that Qatar has been a festering concern

for Washington across parties and administrations. The Bush administration began the concerted global effort to target terrorist financing. The Obama administration concluded in 2016 that Qatar “lacks the necessary political will and capacity to effectively enforce” laws against terror financing. Obama officials also considered pulling a U.S. fighter squadron from the Al Udeid air base over Qatari refusal to take action against terrorist financiers.

The American presence at Al Udeid is critical to protecting U.S. and allied interests in the Middle East. While the current measures against Qatar remain in place, the U.A.E. and America’s other friends in the

region will continue working closely with the U.S. military to sustain the base’s full war-fighting capabilities. We also welcome U.S. involvement in facilitating a diplomatic resolution that will allow Qatar, a neighbor and treaty ally, to return to the community of responsible nations.

What must Qatar do? It should first acknowledge what the world already knows: Doha has become a financial, media and ideological hub for extremism. Then it must take decisive action to deal once and for all with its extremist problem—to shut down this funding, stop interfering in its neighbors’ internal affairs, and end its media incitement and radicalization.

With terrorists rampaging through the streets of European cities and hatching plots against targets in the U.S., there can be no equivocation, no hedging and no delay in taking on the radical menace. Qatar cannot own stakes in the Empire State Building and the London Shard and use the profits to write checks to affiliates of al Qaeda. It cannot plaster its name on soccer jerseys while its media networks burnish the extremist brand. It cannot be owners of Harrods and Tiffany & Co. while providing safe haven to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Mr. Otaiba is the United Arab Emirates’ ambassador to the U.S.

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Satter : From Russia With Chaos

David Satter

As U.S politicians plunge into the hall of mirrors that is Russian intelligence, they are assuming that Russians think as they do—a perfect way to misunderstand Moscow’s real intentions.

Portions of the “resistance” to President Trump are convinced he colluded with Russia to win the 2016 election. But the known facts do not support a Russia-Trump plot to defeat Hillary Clinton. Russia’s actions are consistent instead with an attempt to turn Americans against each other and sow distrust between the president and the American intelligence services.

For Russians, the difference between Mr. Trump and Mrs. Clinton simply was not that significant. Mr. Trump made naive and uninformed remarks during the campaign. But Mrs. Clinton, as secretary of state, showed no grasp of Russian realities. She launched the “reset” policy after the murders of Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian intelligence agent who had been granted asylum in Britain, and Anna Politkovskaya, Russia’s leading investigative journalist. In both cases, the regime of Vladimir Putin was directly implicated.

Instead of trying seriously to deter Russian aggression, which in Ukraine so far has claimed more than 10,000 lives, the Obama administration in 2009 created the McFaul-Surkov commission. Michael McFaul, Mr. Obama’s chief adviser on Russia, was tasked with

building civil society alongside Vladislav Surkov, a Kremlin aide responsible for suppressing it.

The reset was intended to support Dmitry Medvedev, who was Russia’s president from 2008 to 2012 before Mr. Putin returned for a third term. But while Mr. Medvedev was chairman of Gazprom from 2001 to 2007, 6.4% of the state energy conglomerate’s shares—\$20 billion worth—went missing. When nationwide anticorruption protests were held in Russia this March, the target was now-Prime Minister Medvedev, who was treated as “the face of state corruption.”

Russia’s 2015-16 hacking operation was also carried out in a way that would have made a focused and tightly held conspiracy nearly impossible. Last October my emails were stolen by Fancy Bear, the same Russia-linked group that hacked John Podesta, Mrs. Clinton’s campaign chief. Citizens Lab, a University of Toronto cybersecurity project found that I was part of an operation aimed at 218 unique targets—officials, journalists and military—in at least 39 countries. Former FBI Director James Comey said during his recent testimony that since 2015 there could be more than 1,000 entities targeted by Russian hackers in the U.S. alone.

Hacking on this scale would have been difficult to coordinate with any American political operatives, let alone in the heat of a presidential race. Further, Russian influence operations are almost always a matter of facilitation rather than subordination. Victor Louis, a KGB

agent and the father of Soviet disinformation, successfully insinuated lies into the Western press by presenting them as inside information. “American reporters,” he once told me jokingly, “always steal my best ideas.”

WikiLeaks’s Julian Assange may be sincere when he says that “our source is not the Russian government,” but only because he is more useful to Moscow if he thinks he is acting independently. The Russian practice of achieving objectives “through the hands of others” would make it nearly impossible to coordinate with the Trump campaign as some have alleged.

Perhaps most important, Russian intelligence also acted to sabotage Mr. Trump. The “Trump dossier,” full of unverified sexual and political allegations, was published in January by BuzzFeed, despite having all the hallmarks of Russian spy agency “creativity.” The dossier was prepared by Christopher Steele, a former British intelligence officer. It employed standard Russian techniques of disinformation and manipulation. The dossier depicts Mr. Putin as dedicated to “Nineteenth Century ‘Great Power’ politics,” determined to prosecute “oligarchs” and “motivated by fear and hatred of Hillary Clinton.”

After the publication of the Trump dossier, Mr. Steele went into hiding, supposedly in fear for his life. On March 15, however, Michael Morell, the former acting CIA director, told NBC that Mr. Steele had paid the Russian intelligence sources who

provided the information and never met with them directly. In other words, his sources were not only working for pay. Furthermore, Mr. Steele had no way to judge the veracity of their claims.

The payments are likely to have been high. So who provided the money? An April Vanity Fair article determined that the research that became the dossier was originally funded by a “Never Trump” Republican. After Mr. Trump sewed up the GOP nomination, however, “Democratic donors” kept the effort alive. Perhaps the time has come to expand the investigation into Russia’s meddling to include Mrs. Clinton’s campaign as well.

Investigating the role of Russian disinformation in the 2016 election requires understanding the layers of deception in which Russian intelligence specialize. This won’t be possible if Mr. Trump and his adversaries are more determined to destroy each other than to face the Russian threat. Americans must understand that the Putin regime wants to paralyze the U.S., but would rather have Americans do it with their own hands.

Mr. Satter is affiliated with the Hudson Institute and Johns Hopkins University. His book, “The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia’s Road to Terror and Dictatorship under Yeltsin and Putin” (Yale), will be out in paperback this summer.

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James Marson

Hundreds, Including Kremlin Critic Alexei Navalny, Detained Amid Russia Protests

MOSCOW—Police on Monday detained hundreds of anticorruption

protesters across Russia, including opposition leader Alexei Navalny,

who is hoping to harness a surprise surge in rallies against the Kremlin

to challenge President Vladimir Putin in elections next year.

The protests in dozens of cities across Russia—from Vladivostok in the east to Norilsk in the Arctic—were the first since the largest anti-Kremlin demonstrations in five years in March.

Riot police in Moscow dragged protesters out of a crowd carrying Russian flags and shouting “Russia without Putin!” in chaotic scenes on one of the capital’s main streets, as the unsanctioned protest mixed with official celebrations of Russia Day, a national holiday. More than 150 people were detained in Moscow and around 500 in St. Petersburg, police told Interfax news agency. Monitor group OVD-Info put the figure for Moscow significantly higher, at more than 700 detained.

The White House said Monday that the U.S. “strongly condemns the detention of hundreds of peaceful protesters throughout Russia.

“Detaining peace protesters, human rights observers and journalists is an affront to core democratic values,” said press secretary Sean Spicer, calling on Moscow to release peaceful protesters.

The New York Times (UNE)

Neil MacFarquhar and Ivan Nechepurenko

MOSCOW — An extraordinary wave of antigovernment protests swept across Russia on Monday, as thousands of demonstrators gathered in more than 100 cities to denounce corruption and political stagnation despite official attempts to stifle the expression of outrage.

Riot police officers in large cities and small detained hundreds of participants, with more than 700 apprehended in Moscow and 300 in St. Petersburg, according to OVD-Info, an independent organization that tracks arrests. There were reports of about 100 detentions elsewhere across Russia.

In Moscow, the police arrested the Kremlin foe and anticorruption crusader Aleksei A. Navalny, the main architect of the protests on Monday and similar ones in March, as he left his apartment to attend the demonstration downtown. A Moscow court quickly sentenced him to 30 days in jail for organizing an unauthorized protest.

The recent outpourings of popular discontent, spurred on by Mr. Navalny, have been the biggest antigovernment demonstrations in Russia in years.

He added: “The Russian people, like people everywhere, deserve a government that supports an open marketplace of ideas, transparent and accountable governance, equal treatment under the law, and the ability to exercise their rights without fear or retribution.”

Mr. Navalny, a 41-year-old anticorruption blogger, has energized Russia’s weak and divided opposition with videos and blog posts that expose what he calls egregious examples of corruption at the top levels of the Russian state.

He has spread his campaign for the presidency to cities across Russia in recent months, even though a conviction for embezzlement, which he calls politically motivated, may prevent him from running, and opinion polls show overwhelming support for 17-year Kremlin incumbent Mr. Putin.

Police detained Mr. Navalny on Monday near the entrance to his home, his wife said in a message on his Twitter .

Mr. Navalny had received permission to stage a rally in Moscow, but he said Sunday he was switching the venue to the capital’s

main drag near the Kremlin, blaming authorities for pressuring companies into not providing equipment for a stage at the agreed location.

The General Prosecutor’s Office said that a protest in the new location would be illegal, and warned that police would take measures to prevent disorder. Late Monday, a court jailed Mr. Navalny for 30 days on a misdemeanor charge of repeated violation of the law on organizing public meetings, Interfax reported.

Members of Mr. Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation, which uses the internet to appeal to young voters, said electricity at their office was cut and their streaming video stopped, before they moved to a backup that worked.

Authorities had warned that people carrying placards or who appeared to be protesting would be detained. But thousands, many of them in their late teens and twenties, still came to Tverskaya Street in Moscow, where they swarmed around metal detectors that police had set up for Russia Day celebrations.

People re-enacting events from Russia’s history, including men in metal helmets and chain mail wielding wooden shields, mixed with crowds shouting, “We’re in charge!” and “Putin’s a thief!” Police tried to hold protesters back at certain points, beating some with batons and dragging others from the crowd to waiting police vans.

The geographical spread of the protests, including cities in Russia’s far east, Siberia and Arctic north, represents rare progress for the opposition movement in tapping discontent outside Moscow and St. Petersburg, although attendance was largely modest.

Numbers varied from city to city from dozens to hundreds to thousands. Russian state television largely ignored the demonstrations, instead covering official events including sports competitions, musical performances and the unfurling of a huge Russian flag by service members from the Ministry of Emergency Situations and children in red berets from a government-backed youth military group called Yunarniya.

Across Russia, Protesters Heed Navalny’s Anti-Kremlin Rallying Cry

After witnessing the geographic sweep of the protests on Monday and the enthusiastic resolve of the mostly young participants in the face of a harsh police presence, some analysts came away saying that Russian politics was being reborn.

“I think we are seeing the beginning of a youth protest movement,” said Anatoly Golubovsky, a Russian historian surveying the crowd at one corner of Moscow’s Pushkin Square, which erupted in vigorous jeers of “Shame” whenever a phalanx of riot police officers rushed into the crowd to drag someone away.

Mr. Golubovsky ticked off cities across Russia where protesters had turned out: an estimated 4,000 in Novosibirsk, as well as in Omsk and other large Siberian cities. There were energetic demonstrations in Vladivostok in the Far East, and in large cities in southern Russia like Rostov-on-Don and Krasnodar.

“All these regions were considered to be very conservative and not politicized, very loyal to the power,” he said, referring to the Kremlin. “And they turned out to be politicized.”

It was difficult to assess the exact number of cities or people involved in the demonstrations across this vast continent of a country with 11

time zones. But the proliferation of protests and the predominantly youthful crowds seemed to indicate that Mr. Navalny had succeeded in broadening his movement beyond the more than 80 cities that took part in demonstrations in March.

Officials had tried to prevent a repeat by vilifying Mr. Navalny and issuing thinly disguised threats of force and dire consequences for those attending demonstrations, as well as for their parents. Russian politics had been generally somnolent since mass protests in 2011 and 2012 were met with harsh prison sentences.

“I cannot remember, and old-timers, as they say, cannot remember, when was the last time in Russia that so many people attended demonstrations in different cities,” said Georgy Albuov, the deputy head of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, started by Mr. Navalny.

As the crowd in Moscow surged this way and that to avoid the charging police officers, Mr. Albuov expressed a sense of accomplishment. “We are very happy that so many people share our views and are ready to go to demonstrations,” he said.

The protests were ostensibly focused on government corruption,

but other issues, like economic doldrums and the mass demolition of apartments, brought people onto the street. Many participants said they were disgusted at the gradual dismantling of democracy in Russia, and of any semblance of a real opposition.

“I came here not because of the corruption,” said Nikita Orlov, 18, a student in international law. “I came here because we have no democracy, our Parliament is not real, our politicians are not real and our mass media is not real.”

Those sentiments were not limited to Moscow.

In Naberezhnye Chelny, a usually dormant city of 500,000 that lies 600 miles east of Moscow, around 230 people turned out.

Officials authorized the rally, but, as in many cities, they relegated the protesters to a long-neglected park in the outskirts where they were practically hidden among the trees and anonymous apartment blocks.

Sergei Trokhin, one of the organizers in Naberezhnye Chelny, turned 20 on Monday. Two years ago, he was studying at a local college to become a construction worker, and said he ignored politics. That changed as economic

hardships worsened in the town, which, like hundreds of towns across Russia, is heavily dependent on one industry: in this case, a truck factory.

"My mother didn't get a raise for four years, while prices only grew," Mr. Trokhin said, adding that the protests were about more than Mr. Navalny, even if the director of his college warned him that the protests would help Mr. Navalny "destroy Russia."

The latest confrontation between Mr. Navalny, 41, and the Kremlin began on March 2, when he released a video depicting Prime Minister Dmitri A. Medvedev as the crooked beneficiary of palaces, yachts and other luxuries paid for by some of Russia's richest tycoons.

The demonstrations were also an effort by Mr. Navalny to force the Kremlin to let him run against President Vladimir V. Putin in the March 2018 presidential election, even if he has virtually zero chance of winning. A felony conviction, which Mr. Navalny has called politically motivated, bars him from running.

Mr. Navalny has plenty of critics. Sergei Markov, a political analyst close to the Kremlin, accused him of "radicalizing" the protest movement and said on Facebook that he

doubted the numbers had exceeded those of the March protests.

In Naberezhnye Chelny, some onlookers expressed skepticism, too. "Mr. Navalny is a thief, just like all of them," said Dmitri Ivanov, 34, a factory manager. "Look at these people," he said, pointing to the crowd. "They are just kids. They know nothing. They need to graduate from school first."

Mr. Navalny called the rally on Russia Day, a national holiday, to underscore the idea that protesters are patriots, too. The Interior Ministry said that more than seven million people had participated in various celebrations around the country. That would dwarf the protest participation.

In Moscow, officials organized historical re-enactments to celebrate Russian achievements from medieval times through World War II. The juxtaposition of the protests and the re-enactments caused some confusion.

A wall of sandbags erected across Tverskaya Street in Moscow, by the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, seemed designed to block protesters but turned out to be part of the re-enactments. Walls of riot police officers and police vehicles lining the street were all too real.

At one point, men dressed as medieval knights held a sword fight in the middle of a street as chants of "Russia without Putin" erupted from protesters nearby.

On Pushkin Square, protesters were being physically carted off while a singer at a free Russia Day concert belted out a Russian version of "Those Were the Days."

Mr. Navalny, jailed for 15 days for organizing the March protests, was sentenced to 30 days on similar charges this time after moving the Moscow demonstrations downtown, away from a street approved by the city.

Organizers in more than 200 cities filed requests to hold demonstrations on Monday. Around 120 were granted, 50 were rejected, and the fate of the rest was unclear. Some cities tried to play games with the organizers.

In Vladivostok, 4,000 miles east of Moscow and home to Russia's Pacific Fleet, protesters were told that they could not rally on the central square opposite the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway because it had been booked by Cossacks, descendants of the fierce horsemen who secured the frontiers of the Russian Empire under the czar.

In an unsubtle hint, the burly Cossacks who gathered in camouflage uniforms or czarist-era outfits put on a display of how to smash eggs with a horsewhip.

After gathering nearby to chant against corruption and to wave copies of the Russian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and assembly, the demonstrators paraded through narrow streets with Russian flags to an esplanade overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

"Russia without Putin," they shouted. One banner said "Power must be changeable," a reference to tightly controlled elections that mostly consolidate the power of Mr. Putin and his allies.

The rally broke up after riot police officers plunged into the crowd and dragged away protesters. At least 11 protesters were detained, according to OVD-Info.

Correction: June 12, 2017

Because of an editing error, an earlier version of a picture caption with this article misidentified the men in uniform at a protest in Vladivostok, Russia. They were Cossacks participating in a separate event, not police officers.



Russian activist Alexei Navalny jailed as tens of thousands rally across Russia (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/david.filipov>

MOSCOW — Shouting "We demand answers," and "Stop lying and stealing," tens of thousands of protesters turned out Monday across Russia in a nationwide anti-corruption rally called by opposition leader Alexei Navalny as part of his long-shot bid to unseat President Vladimir Putin.

Russian authorities met the challenge with helmet and truncheon: Police said they had rounded up 650 protesters at illegal rallies in Moscow and St. Petersburg alone, although the Russian OVD-info nongovernment group put the number of detained at more than 1,000.

Navalny was detained outside his home, fined and, according to the independent Meduza news agency, sentenced to 30 days in jail, after he defied authorities by telling his supporters to crash a massive street festival of historical reenactments staged for the official Russia Day state holiday.

"He asked me to pass on to you that the plan hasn't changed," Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, tweeted after her husband's detention. She told protesters he wanted them to head to central Tverskaya Street despite a warning by Moscow authorities that a demonstration there was illegal.

As a result, a crowd chanting "Russia without Putin!" came upon a reenactment of a medieval sword battle on Tverksaya Street, the broad central Moscow avenue that leads south to the Kremlin. A tangle of protesters and police surged towards the reenactors, some of whom locked their wooden shields in a real effort to fend off possible danger as other members of the troupe hid behind them.

[Who is Alexei Navalny?]

Navalny's campaign said anti-corruption protesters staged rallies in 187 Russian cities Monday, in one of the most widespread anti-government protests since Putin's return to the presidency in 2012.

This turbulence is not likely to prevent Putin, who has enjoyed an

approval rating above 80 percent for more than three years, from winning reelection next March, Denis Volkov, a pollster with Russia's independent Levada Center, said in a recent interview. But it does point to weakness of the system Putin has created. The protests target the legitimacy and lack of accountability of his government, which some analysts call its greatest vulnerability.

In Washington, where President Trump has faced increasing controversy over the investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election, the White House criticized Moscow's response to the protests.

"Detaining peaceful protesters, human rights observers and journalists is an affront to core democratic values," White House press secretary Sean Spicer read from a prepared statement. "The Russian people, like the people everywhere, deserve a government that supports an open marketplace of ideas, transparent and accountable governance, equal treatment under the law and the

ability to exercise their rights without fear of retribution."

Amnesty International also denounced the mass arrests, saying the Kremlin had shown "utter contempt for fundamental human rights."

Protesters in Vladivostok, Russia, rallied against corruption on June 12, which is also Russia Day, a national holiday there. Protesters turn out in Vladivostok, Russia to rally against corruption. (korotyia/twitter)

(korotyia/twitter)

Russian state television ignored the protests and focused on the fairs and commemorative events, which attracted tens of thousands in Moscow alone. It ran a live broadcast of Putin handing out state awards, and periodically showed a countdown to the Kremlin leader's annual televised "direct line" Thursday, in which ordinary citizens can phone in requests.

[Putin uses the Soviet defeat of Hitler to show why Russia needs him today]

The Russia Day holiday commemorates the 1990 declaration of sovereignty within the Soviet Union orchestrated by Boris Yeltsin, the upstart leader of what was then called the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. It presaged the eventual collapse of the U.S.S.R., and Yeltsin's rise to the Kremlin as the first president of independent Russia.

Navalny, who faces an uphill battle just to get on the 2018 ballot, is nowhere near being able to defy Putin on that scale. But to listen to the people who came out Monday, Navalny has tapped into a vein of disgust with the current Russian leadership.

"I'm angry, my family is angry, but they're not going to come to this because they're scared," said Alexander Fomenko, a 17-year-old student. "I don't have this kind of fear. I will be here on this street until they throw me in jail. And there's a lot of people who think like me; my friends think like me."

The number of young demonstrators was among the many surprises when tens of thousands turned out across Russia on March 26 for an "anti-corruption" protest called by Navalny.

[Russian police arrest more than a

thousand in anti-corruption rallies]

The Kremlin had clearly been caught off guard. Authorities made a show of arresting people involved in the protest, and educators forced students to watch documentaries about the evils of protesting. Some Russian parliament members expressed support for a ban against minors attending street rallies, calls that are likely to be renewed after Monday's demonstration.

Youthful protesters scurried in and out of cafes Monday, taunting riot police to come after them, and then sitting at tables, pretending to be ordering food when the officers confronted diners.

Navalny, who was briefly jailed after the March protest, had received permission to hold Monday's rally at a venue just north of the center, but on late Sunday called on his supporters to come to Tverskaya, saying that authorities had refused to provide a stage and sound system at the agreed-upon place.

Authorities had barricaded Tverskaya from all sides except for carefully controlled security points lined by helmeted police. But the police presence took on a surreal air because of the reenactors camped out in the center of the nine-lane thoroughfare.

Fencers feinted and darted to wild applause from children, while a 14th-century battle between ancient Russians and the Golden Horde took place nearby. World War I troops gave tips on bayonet thrusts, and a company of infantry in War of 1812 gear bivouacked not far from a blacksmith and an impressive array of medieval swords.

Protesters began to infiltrate the audience at 2 p.m., and by 4 p.m., riot police squads were wading into the crowd, dragging and carrying out protesters by their arms and legs and beating them with batons, as the demonstrators shouted "Shame!"

Recent polls suggest that Navalny — portrayed on state media as an unpopular and marginal figure, the creation of out-of-touch Westernizers — would not win more than 10 percent of the vote if he runs for president in 2018, though pollsters say Navalny's best bet is to try to unite people fed up with government indifference and abuse.

At the venue in Moscow originally approved for Navalny's protest, about 2,000 people gathered Monday to protest the city's plan to relocate as many as 1.6 million residents of Soviet-era low-rise apartment buildings to new high-rise apartment buildings.

Some Muscovites believe the plan amounts to a violation of their rights to own property and to choose where to live, and a gift to political insiders who own construction firms.

[Moscow's massive relocation plan turns middle class into protesters]

"I don't want to live in a 30-floor ant-house. Their whole project is total corruption, money laundry, initiated by the construction lobby," said Zamira Medvedeva, a retiree who lives in a communal apartment building.

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She said she didn't trust Navalny, either.

"But we came here today because this is an anti-corruption event and we are strongly against corruption!" she said.

David Nakamura in Washington and Natalya Abbakumova in Moscow contributed to this report.



Russia has developed a cyberweapon that can disrupt power grids, according to new research

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

Hackers allied with the Russian government have devised a cyberweapon that has the potential to be the most disruptive yet against electric systems that Americans depend on for daily life, according to U.S. researchers.

The malware, which researchers have dubbed CrashOverride, is known to have disrupted only one energy system — in Ukraine in December. In that incident, the hackers briefly shut down one-fifth of the electric power generated in Kiev.

[Russian hackers suspected in attack that blacked out parts of Ukraine]

But with modifications, it could be deployed against U.S. electric transmission and distribution systems to devastating effect, said Sergio Caltagirone, director of threat intelligence for Dragos, a cybersecurity firm that studied the malware and issued a report Monday.

And Russian government hackers have shown their interest in targeting U.S. energy and other utility systems, researchers said.

"It's the culmination of over a decade of theory and attack scenarios," Caltagirone warned. "It's a game changer."

The revelation comes as the U.S. government is investigating a wide-ranging, ambitious effort by the Russian government last year to disrupt the U.S. presidential election and influence its outcome. That campaign employed a variety of methods, including hacking hundreds of political and other organizations, and leveraging social media, U.S. officials said.

Dragos has named the group that created the new malware Electrum, and it has determined with high confidence that Electrum used the same computer systems as the hackers who attacked the Ukraine electric grid in 2015. That attack, which left 225,000 customers without power, was carried out by Russian government hackers, other U.S. researchers concluded. U.S. government officials have not officially attributed that attack to the

Russian government, but some privately say they concur with the private-sector analysis.

[Russian hackers used 'zero-day' to hack NATO, Ukraine in cyber-spy campaign]

"The same Russian group that targeted U.S. [industrial control] systems in 2014 turned out the lights in Ukraine in 2015," said John Hultquist, who analyzed both incidents while at iSight Partners, a cyber-intelligence firm now owned by FireEye, where he is director of intelligence analysis. Hultquist's team had dubbed the group Sandworm.

"We believe that Sandworm is tied in some way to the Russian government — whether they're contractors or actual government officials, we're not sure," he said. "We believe they are linked to the security services."

Sandworm and Electrum may be the same group or two separate groups working within the same organization, but the forensic evidence shows they are related, said Robert M. Lee, chief executive of Dragos.

The Department of Homeland Security, which works with the owners of the nation's critical infrastructure systems, did not respond to a request for comment Sunday.

Energy-sector experts said that the new malware is cause for concern, but that the industry is seeking to develop ways to disrupt attackers who breach their systems.

"U.S. utilities have been enhancing their cybersecurity, but attacker tools like this one pose a very real risk to reliable operation of power systems," said Michael J. Assante, who worked at Idaho National Labs and is a former chief security officer of the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, where he oversaw the rollout of industry cybersecurity standards.

CrashOverride is only the second instance of malware specifically tailored to disrupt or destroy industrial control systems. Stuxnet, the worm created by the United States and Israel to disrupt Iran's nuclear capability, was an advanced military-grade weapon designed to affect centrifuges that enrich uranium.

In 2015, the Russians used malware to gain access to the power supply network in western Ukraine, but it was hackers at the keyboards who remotely manipulated the control systems to cause the blackout — not the malware itself, Hultquist said.

With CrashOverride, “what is particularly alarming . . . is that it is all part of a larger framework,” said Dan Gunter, a senior threat hunter for Dragos.

The malware is like a Swiss Army knife, where you flip open the tool you need and where different tools can be added to achieve different effects, Gunter said.

Theoretically, the malware can be modified to attack different types of industrial control systems, such as

water and gas. However, the adversary has not demonstrated that level of sophistication, Lee said.

Still, the attackers probably had experts and resources available not only to develop the framework but also to test it, Gunter said. “This speaks to a larger effort often associated with nation-state or highly funded team operations.”

[Declassified report says Putin ‘ordered’ effort to undermine faith in U.S. election and help Trump]

One of the most insidious tools in CrashOverride manipulates the settings on electric power control systems. It scans for critical components that operate circuit breakers and opens the circuit breakers, which stops the flow of electricity. It continues to keep them

open even if a grid operator tries to close them, creating a sustained power outage.

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The malware also has a “wiper” component that erases the software on the computer system that controls the circuit breakers, forcing the grid operator to revert to manual operations, which means driving to the substation to restore power.

With this malware, the attacker can target multiple locations with a “time bomb” functionality and set the malware to trigger simultaneously, Lee said. That could create outages in different areas at the same time.

The outages would last a few hours and probably not more than a couple of days, Lee said. That is because the U.S. electric industry has trained its operators to handle disruptions caused by large storms. “They’re used to having to restore power with manual operations,” he said.

So although the malware is “a significant leap forward in tradecraft, it’s also not a doomsday scenario,” he said.

The malware samples were first obtained by ESET, a Slovakian research firm, which shared some of them with Dragos. ESET has dubbed the malware Industroyer.

The New York Times ‘No Such Thing as Justice’ in Fight Over Chemical Pollution in China (UNE)

Javier C. Hernández

DAPU, China — The small boy could no longer recognize the sound of his mother’s voice. Bony and pale, vanishing beneath a winter coat, he spoke mostly in grunts and screams, the language of his malady. He stumbled as he walked, never certain of the ground beneath him.

Wang Yifei, 5, was destined for a better life, his family thought. To ensure years of good fortune, they relied on traditions that had always guided them: making certain his mother stepped over hot coals on her wedding day and lining his crib with white cloth to fend off wayward spirits.

But Yifei had fallen ill, and like more than 300 other children in Dapu, a town of 62,000 in Hunan Province, in central China, he suffered hearing loss, impaired speech and difficulty walking. Many other children also struggled with memory problems, stunted growth, anemia and seizures.

Doctors eventually determined that the children had lead poisoning and pointed to a nearby factory, Meilun Chemical Materials, which produced pigments for use in paints and makeup powder. Upset and demanding accountability, dozens of families prepared to sue.

Cases of Lead Poisoning in Dapu

A chemical plant in Dapu, China, was sued by families over lead pollution.

Wang Yifei

Yet in Dapu, as in much of China’s rural heartland, the chemical industry is king — the backbone of

years of above-average economic growth. Local Communist Party officials depended on Meilun and other plants for their livelihoods and political fortunes, and they had a history of ignoring environmental violations to keep the factories humming.

Yifei’s father, Wang Jiaoyi, did not anticipate the backlash to the lawsuit. First, he said, his co-workers at a local farm warned that he might lose his job packing vegetables. Then thugs showed up at his door, threatening to hurt his family. After months of pressure, Mr. Wang decided to drop the case.

“There’s no way to win,” he said. “There’s no such thing as justice.”

After a decade in which companies in wealthier nations exported to poorer ones much of the dirty business of making hazardous substances, China is now the world’s largest manufacturer of industrial chemicals, claiming a third of global production by some estimates.

But as the Chinese government has promoted the sector’s rapid growth, it has struggled with its impact on the environment. The chemical industry has quashed calls to strengthen oversight and force companies to publicly disclose what substances they produce. Local environmental bureaus are often politically feeble and understaffed. Even when companies acknowledge some responsibility for harming public health, as Meilun did, the remedies given to communities often fall far short of the victims’ needs.

“It’s a dwarf regulating a giant,” said Ma Jun, a prominent Chinese environmentalist.

Under President Xi Jinping, the government promised a chance for people to fight back, declaring a “war on pollution” and enacting a law in 2015 to make it easier to sue companies and force them to cover the cost of cleaning up neighborhoods. The law was supposed to level the playing field by enabling nonprofit groups to file public interest lawsuits against polluters. Environmentalists heralded it as a breakthrough.

But progress has been limited. In the Chinese courts, the Communist Party controls the decisions of judges, and they routinely rule on cases in consultation with officials who have a political and financial interest in the outcome. The police, at the behest of the local authorities, often harass lawyers and activists, hoping to deter them from bringing cases, advocates say. And the government decides which nonprofit groups can file public interest lawsuits.

As a result, those who stand up to the chemical industry in China rarely prevail.

Wang Zhenyu, a lawyer based in Beijing who has taken on cases on behalf of pollution victims, said the new law had failed to deter what he called a “privileged class” from intervening in environmental cases. “The elite see pollution victims as their enemies,” he said, “and they will do everything possible to undermine them and keep their grip on power.”

Signs of Something Wrong

Staff members at Dapu Elementary School were startled. Children at the school were showing signs of hyperactivity and memory loss at an alarming rate. Teachers spent hours drilling geography and math into their students, but the next morning, many seemed to have forgotten the material.

Seeking answers, parents took their children to hospitals in the provincial capital, Changsha, and in Shanghai, 600 miles away. Doctors ordered blood tests and discovered a pattern: The children showed unusually high levels of lead in their blood. By the spring of 2014, lead poisoning had been diagnosed in more than 300 children.

For years, residents had accused Meilun of polluting the town. The plant stood in the center of a densely populated stretch of homes, vegetable markets and rice paddies.

When Dapu residents challenged the wisdom of allowing Meilun to operate so close to homes and schools, local officials were defiant. Meilun, formerly a state-owned plant, was one of the town’s biggest employers, with more than 100 workers at its peak, and it generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax revenue.

Across China, a similar refrain was spreading. Chemical plants were popping up by the hundreds of thousands — alongside train tracks, public housing complexes, rivers and farms.

China forbids facilities with hazardous chemicals to operate less than two-thirds of a mile from public buildings and major roads, but the rules are often violated. Lax enforcement contributed to a series

of accidents, including the deadly explosion at a chemical plant in the port city of Tianjin two years ago, one of the worst industrial disasters in China's history.

In Dapu, few companies could rival Meilun's influence. When officials from the local environmental bureau accused the Meilun plant of violating emissions rules in 2013 and 2014, the plant's leaders called senior party leaders in Hengdong County to object, employees said. The regulators quickly dropped their complaints.

As public anger grew, China Central Television, the influential state broadcaster, aired a report that outlined the problems in Dapu and featured students who complained of stomach pain and nausea.

In one segment of the report, Su Genglin, the head of Dapu's government, said students might have been poisoned by chewing on pencils, though they contain graphite, not lead.

The report stirred popular outrage and forced the factory to halt production.

But Mr. Su stayed in office. The land remained highly toxic, according to tests by local environmental activists, and there was no plan to clean it up. Many children continued to be afflicted with symptoms related to lead poisoning. The government offered free milk to treat them, suggesting incorrectly that it could flush the lead out of their bodies.

On a recent morning, Mao Baozhu, 63, watched over her young grandson, who suffered chronic stomachaches and memory loss. They lived across the lane from the former Meilun plant, and tests showed the lead in his blood at six times international safety standards, one of the worst cases in Dapu.

Ms. Mao said she had once walked among cedar trees as a young woman. Now the earth was a wasteland, covered with tree stumps and jasmine bushes that had lost their scent. She held her grandson's hand. "This isn't the life we

imagined," she said.

Intimidating the Families

The trial was about to begin, and Dai Renhui was anxious. He had devoted his career to defending pollution victims. But rarely had he found himself in a case as contentious as the lead pollution lawsuit in Dapu.

Even before Mr. Dai filed the case, Meilun had waged a campaign to intimidate the families of the sick children, according to Dapu residents. Groups of unidentified men would show up at dusk, warning residents that they could lose their jobs or face violence if they continued to pursue the case. They offered bribes of \$1,500 to those who would withdraw, some families said.

By the spring of 2015, when Mr. Dai went to court, 40 people had abandoned the suit. Only 13 remained.

They were seeking more than \$300,000 from Meilun to pay medical bills for 13 children who had high levels of lead in their blood.

In court, Meilun's lawyers moved to dismiss the suit by questioning whether the children had proper paperwork to show that they resided near the factory, even though many of their families had lived there for decades.

At one point, the lawyers even suggested that poor hygiene among the children in Dapu might be to blame, provoking shouts of protest from the audience, according to relatives who were in the courtroom.

The challenges the Dapu families faced in court were just some of the many obstacles that confront pollution victims in China.

Collecting evidence is expensive, with even the most basic tests of soil or water pollution costing tens of thousands of dollars. Many plaintiffs spend years and small fortunes trying to build a case.

Adding to the difficulties, judges often question data collected by third parties, favoring official reports,

which local governments sometimes refuse to release.

Victims of pollution can band together to hire lawyers and cover the cost of collecting evidence and soliciting expert opinions. But Chinese courts are often unwilling to hear cases with multiple plaintiffs, worried they might embolden citizens to organize protests.

The new environmental law promoted by President Xi was meant to help people like the families in Dapu by empowering nonprofits to take on powerful companies.

But courts have dampened the law's effects by favoring nonprofit groups that enjoy good relationships with the government or are controlled by the party. In 2015, only nine nonprofits managed to file cases under the law, even though more than 700 environmental groups across China were eligible.

Zeng Xiangbin, a lawyer in the central city of Wuhan, represented residents of a village in the southwestern province of Yunnan that had been contaminated with cadmium. Several villagers, including a 15-year-old boy, died suddenly, and residents blamed the pollution.

The case received wide attention in the Chinese news media in 2012. But there has been little action since. A court accepted the case, Mr. Zeng said, but has refused for years to hold a hearing.

"It keeps stalling, and that's it," he said. "That's China's way of solving the problem."

Victory, but Little Reward

Ms. Mao, whose grandson has lead poisoning, struggled to grasp the number before her.

A Hengdong County court ruled last year that Meilun was responsible for seriously poisoning two of the 13 children whose cases made it to court, including Ms. Mao's grandson. But it ordered the company to pay her and relatives of

the other child only 13,000 renminbi each, or \$1,900.

The money was barely enough to cover legal fees and the cost of collecting evidence, she said, let alone medical bills. The other families would get nothing.

In April, a Hengdong court agreed to hear the case again. Still, Ms. Mao said she worried that the outcome would be the same.

"Sometimes I lose hope and feel this will never end," she said. "Nobody wants to take responsibility for what has happened to our children."

In Dapu, the local government has tried to restore a sense of calm. Officials acknowledge that some children, but no more than 100, showed signs of serious lead poisoning but insist they have all been treated. Tan Zhenli, a propaganda official in Hengdong County, said that all the children were now healthy and that the polluted land had been cleaned.

"It's old news," Ms. Tan said. "The factory has been closed. Everything is improving here."

But Ms. Tan would not allow people in Dapu to speak with reporters unless she was present. Several said the authorities had ordered them not to accept interviews and warned they could be imprisoned for continuing to speak out.

Meilun has relocated to a nearby town, and its old factory in Dapu sits abandoned. Yifei plays nearby, splashing in puddles and pushing a yellow racecar down the sidewalk.

On Tuesdays, he goes to the hospital to check the level of lead in his blood, which was once nine times international standards and remains dangerously high. His condition is mostly unchanged, his parents said, but his memory shows signs of weakening.

"We're powerless to change our situation," his father said. "There's nothing we can do to win."



U.S. Asks China to Crack Down on Shadowy Firms That Trade With North Korea

Jay Solomon in Washington and Jeremy Page in Dandong, China

The Trump administration has asked Beijing to take action against nearly 10 Chinese companies and individuals to curb their trading with North Korea, according to senior U.S. officials, as part of a strategy to decapitate the key networks that

support Pyongyang's nuclear-weapons program.

Although there is no firm deadline, the U.S. has indicated the Treasury Department could impose unilateral sanctions on some of these entities before the end of the summer if Beijing doesn't act, the U.S. officials said.

Without such action, U.S. officials fear that Pyongyang, which has conducted nine missile tests since President Donald Trump took office, would be able to develop a missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead as far as the continental U.S. within a few years.

The Trump administration, like the Obama administration, has voiced

hope China would increase pressure on Pyongyang, and it has praised Beijing's moves to reduce coal imports from its communist ally in recent months. Still, senior U.S. officials acknowledged that China has indicated in the past that it would punish North Korea, only to dash the hopes of successive U.S. administrations. As a result, the Trump administration needs to be

prepared to act unilaterally, these officials said.

The U.S. officials declined to name the entities being targeted.

But several Chinese entities of concern are identified in a report to be released Monday by a Washington nonpartisan research group, C4ADS, which works to expose illicit trading networks. Those identified in the report include a Chinese businessman and his sister said to be connected to a ship intercepted by Egypt last year while smuggling 30,000 North Korean rocket-propelled grenades.

U.S. officials say the report is in line with part of the Trump administration's strategy toward North Korea. While C4ADS is a private organization, its reports have been shared widely with U.S. government agencies and Congress. The Justice Department used C4ADS findings in its indictment last September of a Chinese businesswoman and Communist Party member accused of aiding Pyongyang's military programs, according to current and former U.S. officials involved in the case.

While thousands of Chinese firms trade with North Korea, many are interconnected through parent companies or shared ownership, according to U.S. officials and C4ADS. That means shutting down even a handful of these connected networks would make it harder for North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to finance and supply his nuclear program, current and former U.S. officials said.

Pyongyang conducts roughly 90% of its recorded foreign trade through China, according to Chinese trade data.

"We've told the Chinese we hope they'll act against certain companies

and people," said a senior U.S. official briefed on North Korea policy. "But we've also said that we're prepared to act alone and can reach North Korea if we choose."

China's foreign ministry didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. Beijing has said repeatedly that while it implements United Nations sanctions on North Korea, it is opposed to unilateral action and favors a negotiated solution. U.S. sanctions on North Korea target virtually the nation's entire economy; U.N. sanctions are less stringent and still allow for significant nonmilitary trade.

Mr. Trump first asked Chinese President Xi Jinping to crack down on North Korean trade during a summit at the president's Florida resort in April, U.S. officials said. It remains unclear whether Beijing would take action against the Chinese companies of concern to the U.S.

C4ADS said Chinese corporate and trade records show 5,233 local companies traded with North Korea between 2013 and 2016. Many of them share Chinese owners, addresses or other identifying features, it said.

"You need to deny these networks access to Chinese markets and more broadly the international financial system," said David Thompson, author of the C4ADS report.

While noting that much of China's trade with North Korea is legal, the report identified several Chinese companies exporting potential "dual use" items that could be used either for civilian purposes or in North Korea's missile programs.

Among the key players it identified was Sun Sidong, a businessman in the northeastern Chinese city of Dandong. Relatives identified one of

his business partners as his elder sister, Sun Sihong, and Chinese corporate records show them using the same address.

C4ADS said the pair were connected to a ship that U.N. sanctions experts say was seized near the Suez Canal last year while illegally transporting the North Korean rocket-propelled grenades hidden under iron ore.

That ship—the Jie Shun—was owned at the time by a Hong Kong-based company controlled by Sun Sihong and had previously been owned by Sun Sidong via another Hong Kong company, according to the Equasis shipping database and Hong Kong corporate records.

Ms. Sun declined to comment.

Another of Mr. Sun's companies, Dandong Dongyuan Industrial Co., exported \$28.5 million of goods to North Korea—including trucks, machinery and electrical goods—between 2013 and 2016, according to Chinese customs data provided by a U.S.-based firm, Panjiva.

C4ADS said Dandong Dongyuan was the biggest exporter of potential "dual use" items in its sample and that last year they included navigational apparatus in a category that could be used in vehicles or in ballistic missile guidance systems.

"Once charted, not only do links between top firms become more apparent, but it becomes much more apparent that a very small number of key executives control a disproportionate share of the trade," said C4ADS.

Mr. Sun agreed to meet a Wall Street Journal reporter in Dandong, but soon afterward a dozen of his staff pulled over the reporter's taxi, boxed it in with their vehicles and called local police, who briefly detained the reporter.

Mr. Sun and his staff then came to the police station and answered a few questions in the presence of several officers before leaving with his entourage. He denied doing any trade with North Korea or having any knowledge of the Jie Shun.

But he acknowledged having a business in the U.S. called Dongyuan Enterprise USA, which is based in Queens in New York City. He declined to answer further questions.

C4ADS said the U.S. business could "provide him the ability to register for business services within the U.S., including sending or receiving shipments, establishing bank accounts, or applying for employment visas."

Dandong Dongyuan reported that it was exporting to North Korea in corporate filings from 2010 on but removed the reference in November 2016. From 2011 to 2016, it had approval to export trucks and in 2015 it was allowed to join a trade exhibition in Pyongyang, according to Chinese government notices.

The Trump administration has been seeking in recent months to increase economic pressure on North Korea beyond just China, senior U.S. officials said. This has included dispatching top diplomats on missions to Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa, all places where the North Koreans have conducted trade.

"When countries are under extended sanctions...they look for the cracks and seams," said a senior U.S. diplomat involved in North Korea policy. "So everything goes to unlikely spots in the world where they are less likely to be tracked down."

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Editorial : South Korea's Defense Blunder

Moon Jae-in's decision to suspend deployment of a missile-defense system last week signals how the new South Korean President will approach the threat from North Korea as well as relations with the U.S., China and Japan. Like his center-left predecessors, Mr. Moon wants to play a balancing role between the regional powers and convince North Korea to negotiate an entente. This naïvete puts South Korea's security in peril.

The ability of the U.S.-made Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (Thaad) to protect against missile attacks from the North isn't at issue. Nor is cost, since

Washington is picking up the \$1 billion tab. The system is only controversial because China is angry that the radar can peer into its airspace. Beijing is imposing unofficial economic sanctions on Seoul to force it to abandon Thaad.

Mr. Moon has buckled under Chinese pressure and decided to delay the placement of new launchers for up to two years as his government conducts an environmental assessment. National Security Adviser Chung Eui-yong tried to reassure the U.S. that Seoul will adhere to the agreement to deploy Thaad.

But Mr. Chung's promise was undermined by an unidentified

presidential official who told the media last week that the need for Thaad is "not urgent." That prompted incredulity among many Koreans, since the North continues to test its missiles almost every week along with apocalyptic threats.

The Joongang Daily newspaper wrote, "We are absolutely dumbfounded by the remarks," while the Korea Herald opined, "Given the higher frequency of the North's missile tests in recent months, the complete deployment of the system is urgent. Anti-missile capability has become a matter of survival for the South."

Mr. Moon also tried to reassure Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the second-

ranking Senate Democrat, who visited Seoul in late May, that he wouldn't reverse the decision to deploy Thaad. But Mr. Durbin came away even more concerned about the new President's plans. "It's my fear that he thinks—I hope I'm wrong—that [Moon] thinks that South Korea has a better chance working with China to contain North Korea than working with the United States," he told the Washington Examiner.

Anything short of dismantling the Thaad radar and the two sets of launchers deployed by the previous government is unlikely to appease Beijing. Abroad and at home, Mr. Moon's attempt to please everyone is bound to backfire. Meanwhile,

North Korea may be emboldened to escalate its missile and other military provocations to test the new administration.

Mr. Moon still has time to fix his mistake before he meets President Trump in Washington later this month. Environmental assessments can and should be waived when

national security is at stake. If Thaad doesn't satisfy that requirement, it's hard to imagine what does.

**The
New York
Times**

U.S. Cyberweapons, Used Against Iran and North Korea, Are a Disappointment Against ISIS

David E. Sanger and Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON — America's fast-growing ranks of secret cyberwarriors have in recent years blown up nuclear centrifuges in Iran and turned to computer code and electronic warfare to sabotage North Korea's missile launches, with mixed results.

But since they began training their arsenal of cyberweapons on a more elusive target, internet use by the Islamic State, the results have been a consistent disappointment, American officials say. The effectiveness of the nation's arsenal of cyberweapons hit its limits, they have discovered, against an enemy that exploits the internet largely to recruit, spread propaganda and use encrypted communications, all of which can be quickly reconstituted after American "mission teams" freeze their computers or manipulate their data.

It has been more than a year since the Pentagon announced that it was opening a new line of combat against the Islamic State, directing Cyber Command, then six years old, to mount computer-network attacks. The mission was clear: Disrupt the ability of the Islamic State to spread its message, attract new adherents, pay fighters and circulate orders from commanders.

But in the aftermath of the recent attacks in Britain and Iran claimed by the Islamic State, it has become clear that recruitment efforts and communications hubs reappear almost as quickly as they are torn down. This is prompting officials to rethink how cyberwarfare techniques, first designed for fixed targets like nuclear facilities, must be refashioned to fight terrorist groups that are becoming more adept at turning the web into a weapon.

"In general, there was some sense of disappointment in the overall ability for cyberoperations to land a major blow against ISIS," or the Islamic State, said Joshua Geltzer, who was the senior director for counterterrorism at the National Security Council until March. "This is just much harder in practice than people think. It's almost never as cool as getting into a system and thinking you'll see things disappear for good."

Even one of the rare successes against the Islamic State belongs at least in part to Israel, which was America's partner in the attacks against Iran's nuclear facilities. Top Israeli cyberoperators penetrated a small cell of extremist bombmakers in Syria months ago, the officials said. That was how the United States learned that the terrorist group was working to make explosives that fooled airport X-ray machines and other screening by looking exactly like batteries for laptop computers.

The intelligence was so exquisite that it enabled the United States to understand how the weapons could be detonated, according to two American officials familiar with the operation. The information helped prompt a ban in March on large electronic devices in carry-on luggage on flights from 10 airports in eight Muslim-majority countries to the United States and Britain.

It was also part of the classified intelligence that President Trump is accused of revealing when he met in the Oval Office last month with the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, and the ambassador to the United States, Sergey I. Kislyak. His disclosure infuriated Israeli officials.

The Islamic State's agenda and tactics make it a particularly tough foe for cyberwarfare. The jihadists use computers and social media not to develop or launch weapons systems but to recruit, raise money and coordinate future attacks.

Such activity is not tied to a single place, as Iran's centrifuges were, and the militants can take advantage of remarkably advanced, low-cost encryption technologies. The Islamic State, officials said, has made tremendous use of Telegram, an encrypted messaging system developed largely in Germany.

The most sophisticated offensive cyberoperation the United States has conducted against the Islamic State sought to sabotage the group's online videos and propaganda beginning in November, according to American officials.

In the endeavor, called Operation Glowing Symphony, the National Security Agency and its military cousin, United States Cyber Command, obtained the passwords of several Islamic State

administrator accounts and used them to block out fighters and delete content. It was initially deemed a success because battlefield videos disappeared.

But the results were only temporary. American officials later discovered that the material had been either restored or moved to other servers. That setback was first reported by The Washington Post.

The experience did not surprise veteran cyberoperators, who have learned, through hard experience, that cyberweapons buy time but rarely are a permanent solution. The attacks on Iran's Natanz nuclear facility, begun in the George W. Bush administration and code-named Olympic Games, destroyed roughly 1,000 centrifuges and set back the Iranians by a year or so — the amount of time is still hotly disputed. But it created some room for a diplomatic negotiation.

The attacks on North Korea's missile program, which President Barack Obama accelerated in 2014, were followed by a remarkable series of missile failures that Mr. Trump noted in a conversation, which leaked recently, with the president of the Philippines. But recent evidence suggests that the North, using a different kind of missile, has overcome at least some of the problems.

The shortcomings of Glowing Symphony illustrated the challenges confronting the government as it seeks to cripple the Islamic State in cyberspace.

The disruptions often require fighters to move to less secure communications, making them more vulnerable. Yet because the Islamic State fighters are so mobile, and their equipment relatively commonplace, reconstituting communications and putting material up on new servers are not difficult. Some of it has been encrypted and stored in the cloud, according to intelligence officials, meaning it can be downloaded in a new place.

"There were folks working hard on this stuff, and there were some accomplishments that had an impact, but there was no steady stream of jaw-dropping stuff coming forward as some expected," said Mr. Geltzer, who now teaches law at

Georgetown University Law Center. "There was no sort of shining cybertool."

The Obama administration's frustration with the lack of success against the Islamic State was one factor in its effort to oust Adm. Michael S. Rogers, the director of the N.S.A. and the commander of Cyber Command, according to several former administration officials. They complained that the organizations were too focused on traditional espionage and highly sophisticated efforts to use networks to blow up or incapacitate adversary facilities, like those in Iran and North Korea.

The former defense secretary Ashton B. Carter traveled to Admiral Rogers's headquarters in Fort Meade, Md., on several occasions, the officials said, to voice his displeasure at the slow pace of the effort and to stoke new initiatives, like Glowing Symphony.

Obama administration officials backed off around the time that President-elect Trump appeared to be considering Admiral Rogers, who had run the Navy's Fleet Cyber Command operations, as director of national intelligence — and the Trump administration appears to have embraced him.

But the fundamental problem of how to use cyber techniques effectively against the Islamic State remains.

That was evident in the frustration voiced by Prime Minister Theresa May of Britain after the recent attack on London Bridge and in nearby restaurants. She focused on how the internet creates "a safe space" for radical ideology, and said that "the big companies that provide internet-based services" would have to join the fight more fully.

They already police for gruesome videos and overt recruitment, and a former N.S.A. official noted recently that Cyber Command was also highly attuned to taking down anything that seemed to celebrate the deaths of Americans or other Westerners.

But in the United States, any crackdown is likely to run headlong into First Amendment issues, where the

advocacy of an ideology, short of direct incitement to violence, is protected speech.

American officials say that even with the loss of territory in Syria and Iraq, and a broad military effort to disrupt the Islamic State's activities, the militants have proved remarkably resilient.

"The global reach of ISIS right now is largely intact," Nicholas Rasmussen, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, said in a speech in Washington last month. "The group also continues to publish thousands of pieces of official propaganda and to use online apps to organize its supporters and inspire attacks."

Mr. Rasmussen's assessment came a year after some of the best of the

newly created cyber mission teams joined more traditional military units in the fight. The teams are the cyber equivalent of Special Forces teams, dispatched around the world to work on defending Pentagon networks or launching cyberattacks in coordination with more traditional operations.

Cyberoperations are also closely integrated with Iraqi ground combat and allied air missions to maximize the impact on Islamic State fighters hunkered down in the extremist group's two major strongholds: Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqa, Syria.

"We're able to either blind them so they can't see or make sure they can't hear us," Lt. Gen. Jeffrey L. Harrigian, the allied air commander, said in an interview at his headquarters in Qatar in December.

"There are things we are doing both with space and cyber that are being effectively synchronized to achieve important effects even in Mosul and Raqqa."

Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland, who was the top American military commander in Iraq until August, said specialists at Cyber Command had assisted his troops in "disrupting enemy command and control during our offensive operations, and that support improved over the time I was in command."

Other senior military officials said the number and quality of tools in the United States' cyberarsenal against the Islamic State had expanded over the past year. Some of the effects are employed repeatedly over days. Locking Islamic State propaganda specialists

out of their accounts — or using the coordinates of their phones and computers to target them for a drone attack — is now standard operating procedure.

General Harrigian said allied countries were also employing cyberweapons and techniques against the Islamic State that the United States did not. Without identifying specific countries or skills, he said the allies "can do things we can't do — some cyberactivities that they have authorities to execute that we do not."

ETATS-UNIS



Hunt : Trump Fired Comey. Why Not Mueller, Too?

Albert R. Hunt

It's pretty crazy in Washington these days. Soon it could get even crazier.

Prominent lawyers and politicos have started to chatter about the odds that President Donald Trump might fire Robert Mueller, the independent counsel looking into Russian influence in the 2016 presidential election.

This isn't just inside-the-Beltway gossip. Over the weekend, a Trump lawyer publicly refused to rule out that possibility, stressing that the president has the necessary authority. Then on Monday, Trump's friend Christopher Ruddy, a right-wing media executive, told PBS NewsHour: "I think he's considering perhaps terminating the special counsel. I think he's weighing that option." Although Ruddy, who said he spoke to the president by phone over the weekend, said he personally thought it would be a mistake to take that step, other Trump cheerleaders, including former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, have begun assailing Mueller, a former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation with a sterling reputation.

Ruddy said Mueller has some "conflicts" because his former law firm, Wilmer Hale, also represents Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter, and her husband Jared

Kushner. Also, Ruddy said, Mueller was considered for FBI director before he was appointed special counsel.

Democrats, reacting to the chatter, said that if Trump fired Mueller they'd try to enact an independent counsel statute so they could appoint him. They didn't explain how they'd push that idea through a Republican Congress.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions is scheduled to appear Tuesday afternoon before the Senate Intelligence Committee, which is conducting its own inquiry into the matters before Mueller.

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Trump defied conventional wisdom last month when he fired FBI director James Comey after entreating Comey to back away from the FBI's Russia probe. That showed that Trump is not one to be impeded by political protocol — Comey's 10-year term wasn't set to expire until 2023. Mueller was appointed to investigate whether Trump or his associates had links to Russian hackers, and Trump lacks the direct authority to dismiss him.

But he could order the Justice Department to do so. There, the job would first fall to the person who

appointed Mueller, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, because Sessions has recused himself from involvement in the probe.

If Trump instructs Rosenstein to dump Mueller, it would evoke memories of 1973, when the two top Justice Department officials, Elliott Richardson and Bill Ruckelshaus, resigned rather than obey President Richard Nixon's order to fire Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor conducting the Watergate investigation.

Rosenstein would probably refuse. A highly regarded Justice Department careerist, he tapped Mueller -- infuriating Trump -- after the White House tried to pin the Comey firing on him.

It then would get complicated. In 1973, Nixon turned to the third-ranking Justice official, Solicitor General Robert Bork, who fired Cox in his capacity as acting attorney general. Legal experts say that only a Justice official who has been confirmed by the Senate, as Bork had been, would have the authority to fire Mueller.

Apart from Rosenstein and Sessions, the only confirmed Justice official is Rachel Brand, the associate attorney general, whom the Senate approved on a party-line vote. It seems questionable that she would put her reputation at risk by going along with such a directive.

That would leave Sessions himself. First he'd have to reverse his recusal. Trump, who expressed displeasure with Session's withdrawal from the case, wouldn't hesitate to apply pressure. But the counter-pressure would also be strong.

Sessions, a major Trump campaign supporter, disqualified himself on the advice of the department's ethics office after he had failed to disclose several meetings he had with top Russians during his confirmation hearings. At Tuesday's Senate committee hearing, Democrats are likely to press Sessions for a commitment to remain recused.

Mueller has wide authority to look into matters related to Russian election meddling, including collusion with Trump operatives, financial links between Trump and Russia and whether the president tried to obstruct the inquiry.

In 1973, there was such a firestorm following Nixon's move against Cox that the White House was forced to appoint another special prosecutor, Texas attorney Leon Jaworski. He proved as tough as Cox, successfully suing the White House for information, including Oval Office tapes that led to Nixon's resignation nine months later.

Friend Says Trump Is Considering Firing Mueller as Special Counsel (UNE)

Michael D. Shear and Maggie Haberman

WASHINGTON — A longtime friend of President Trump said on Monday that Mr. Trump was considering whether to fire Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel investigating possible ties between the president's campaign and Russian officials.

The startling assertion comes as some of Mr. Trump's conservative allies, who initially praised Mr. Mueller's selection as special counsel, have begun trying to attack his credibility.

The friend, Christopher Ruddy, the chief executive of Newsmax Media, who was at the White House on Monday, said on PBS's "NewsHour" that Mr. Trump was "considering, perhaps, terminating the special counsel."

"I think he's weighing that option," Mr. Ruddy said.

His comments appeared to take the White House by surprise.

"Mr. Ruddy never spoke to the president regarding this issue," Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, said in a statement hours later. "With respect to this subject, only the president or his attorneys are authorized to comment."

Allies of the president cast doubt on the idea that Mr. Trump would take such a drastic step, and White House officials said Mr. Ruddy had not met directly with the president while he was there.

Firing Mr. Mueller would be a politically explosive move that would raise new questions about Mr. Trump, whose abrupt dismissal of James B. Comey as F.B.I. director generated accusations of obstruction of justice and led to Mr. Mueller's appointment.

Trump confidant Christopher Ruddy says Mueller has 'real conflicts' as special counsel Video by PBS NewsHour

Mr. Trump has been known, in moments of frustration and stress,

to vent threats of action to members of his inner circle. In the past, some of those private expressions of anger have been made public by friends and associates, only to generate speculation about moves that never take place — including a senior staff shake-up that has yet to happen.

Such moments sometimes reflect the deep division among Mr. Trump's White House advisers about the best course for the president to take in the face of political or legal adversity.

Under Justice Department rules, Mr. Trump would seemingly have to order Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein to rescind department regulations protecting a special counsel from being fired for no good reason, and then to fire Mr. Mueller. If Mr. Rosenstein refused, Mr. Trump could fire him, too — a series of events that would recall the "Saturday Night Massacre" during Watergate, when President Richard M. Nixon sought to dismiss a special prosecutor, Archibald Cox.

White House officials referred questions to Mr. Trump's personal lawyer, Marc E. Kasowitz, as they have recently on all matters relating to the Russia investigation. A spokesman for Mr. Kasowitz declined to comment.

The former House speaker Newt Gingrich, a longtime supporter of Mr. Trump's, said in a tweet on Monday that it was time to "rethink" Mr. Mueller's ability to be fair.

"Republicans are delusional if they think the special counsel is going to be fair," Mr. Gingrich tweeted after praising Mr. Mueller's integrity in recent weeks. Apparently referring to Federal Election Commission reports, he added: "Look who he is hiring. check fec reports. Time to rethink."

The idea that the investigation is illegitimate and politically motivated has been gaining currency on the political right for months. Conservative writers, radio hosts and cable personalities — emboldened by the president

himself, who has called it a witch hunt — have repeatedly sought to discredit the inquiry, its investigators, the mainstream news accounts of it, and the lawmakers on Capitol Hill who are demanding more answers.

Initially, Mr. Comey was the subject of much of their derision. Now they have moved on to Mr. Mueller, whom they are attacking as too compromised and conflicted to lead an independent inquiry.

In the PBS interview, Mr. Ruddy said Mr. Trump had considered replacing Mr. Comey with Mr. Mueller, who served as F.B.I. director during the George W. Bush and Obama administrations. A senior White House official confirmed that the president had interviewed Mr. Mueller for the F.B.I. post in the Oval Office the day before Mr. Rosenstein tapped him to be the special counsel in the Russia investigation.

Mr. Ruddy said the president was weighing whether to dismiss Mr. Mueller because of concerns about conflicts of interest. He said those concerns included the interview for the F.B.I. post and connections between Mr. Mueller's law firm and White House officials.

"There are some real conflicts. He comes from a law firm that represents members of the Trump family," Mr. Ruddy said. "I know for a fact that he was under consideration and that the president did talk with him in the days before he was named special counsel. I think there's a conflict there."

He also said that he believed it would be "a very significant mistake" for Mr. Trump to fire Mr. Mueller, but emphasized that he was concerned about what he described as conflicts.

The criticism of Mr. Mueller has intensified in recent days, spreading from Trump surrogates like Mr. Gingrich to powerful media personalities like Rush Limbaugh. On his radio program last week, Mr. Limbaugh endorsed the suggestion that Mr. Trump fire Mr. Mueller.

Mark Levin, another prominent radio host, has also called for Mr. Mueller's firing. "Mueller must step aside," he wrote on Facebook over the weekend.

Much of the criticism has focused on whether Mr. Mueller is too close to Mr. Comey. The two became friends after working closely together during the Bush administration.

Democrats accused Republicans on Monday of beginning a campaign to smear Mr. Mueller's reputation as he engages in a broad investigation that could include whether Mr. Trump obstructed justice by pressuring Mr. Comey to end parts of the inquiry and then by firing him.

Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, scoffed at the idea that the president might fire Mr. Mueller.

"If President fired Bob Mueller, Congress would immediately re-establish independent counsel and appoint Bob Mueller," Mr. Schiff said in a tweet. "Don't waste our time."

The independent counsel statute, passed after Watergate, allowed the appointment of a prosecutor who would look into high-level executive branch wrongdoing and answer to a panel of judges, and who could not be fired by the president, as Mr. Nixon sought to do.

Both Republicans and Democrats came to dislike the statute, which they saw as permitting prosecutors to run amok in the Iran-contra and Whitewater investigations during the Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton administrations. Congress let it lapse when it expired in 1999.

It would take a two-thirds supermajority in both chambers of Congress to overcome Mr. Trump's likely veto of any similar legislation. It is far from clear that Mr. Schiff's proposal could command such support.

Mibank : Of course Trump called Comey a liar: That's always been his strategy

Accusing others of lying is a bit rich coming from the man who has done more than any other to turn public discourse into a parallel universe of alternative facts. If we were psychoanalyzing Trump,

we might say he is projecting. Of course, if we were psychoanalyzing Trump, we might throw the entire DSM at him, starting with antisocial personality disorder and working our way through narcissistic

personality disorder and then paranoid personality disorder.

But Trump's tendency to accuse others of the flaws he possesses seems to be more than a reflex. It

appears to be a strategy — a verbal jujitsu in which he uses his opponents' strengths against them.

Trump was the old guy in the Republican debates and more than

once seemed to fade partway through — but he managed to brand Jeb Bush “low energy.” He did the same to Clinton, portraying her as weak and tired; now he’s keeping an exceedingly light schedule as president and passing a good chunk of the time at his private retreats. Trump told the most extravagant untruths during the campaign, had the most glaring conflicts of interest and knew the least about governing. But he branded Cruz as “Lyin’ Ted,” Clinton as “Crooked Hillary” and Rubio as a “lightweight” and “Little Marco.”

Trump did not invent this strategy. I first encountered it on the playground of the Old Mill Road elementary school on Long Island in the 1970s: “I’m rubber, you’re glue — whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you.” Other kids used an endlessly entertaining variant: “I know you are but what

am I?”

During the campaign, when the topic turned to Trump’s leadership of the “birther” movement questioning Obama’s U.S. birth, Trump declared that “Hillary Clinton and her campaign of 2008 started the birther controversy.”

When Clinton pointed to racist “alt-right” movement, Trump responded by saying, “Hillary Clinton is a bigot who sees people of color only as votes, not as human beings worthy of a better future.” When Clinton alleged that Trump was “temperamentally unfit” for the presidency, Trump responded by saying it was Clinton who “does not have the temperament to be president.”

On and on it went. Attention to Trump’s thin and vague set of policy proposals led him to say it was Clinton who “never talks about policy.” After a dark GOP

convention full of apocalyptic warnings, Trump claimed that Clinton “is the only one fear-mongering.” Clinton’s charge that Trump is volatile and easily baited, likewise, led him to call her “trigger happy.”

Shortly after Clinton said Islamic State terrorists are “rooting for Donald Trump’s victory,” Trump proclaimed that those very same terrorists “dream all night of having Hillary Clinton” as president. Trump’s answer to questions about self-dealing in his family’s charitable work was to point to “crooked” Clinton’s “criminal” foundation. His routine response, even now, to inquiries into his and his aides’ ties to Russia: They should investigate the Clintons’ Russia ties.

We’ve seen this pattern in the early months of the presidency as well — accusing the Democrats of seeking a government shutdown when it

was his own late demands that threatened to upend a bipartisan spending bill, and now, when accused of lying by the former FBI director, calling that man a liar.

There’s no doubt Trump’s rubber-and-glue strategy has worked. He is, after all, the president, and Crooked Hillary, Lyin’ Ted, Little Marco and Low-Energy Jeb are not. But can the man who has established himself as one of history’s most prodigious prevaricators convince the country that the former FBI director, celebrated for his integrity, is just another lying liar? Polls before and after Comey’s testimony suggest Trump is losing that contest.

After all, who are you going to believe? Trump? Or everybody else?



Ruth Marcus : A tale of two Comeys

In life, as in literature, the more complex character is the more compelling and the more realistic. We may crave heroes, but we end up with humans. The cardboard figure of unblemished rectitude, who performs impeccably under pressure and is impelled only by the purest motives, gives way to a real person, with all the inevitable blemishes and failings that human nature is heir to.

So it is with James B. Comey, the fired FBI director.

The nation’s first introduction to Comey came a decade ago, with his dramatic account of racing to the hospital room of then-Attorney General John Ashcroft to head off an effort to pressure the gravely ill Ashcroft to reauthorize a secret surveillance program.

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Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Comey described the tense scene as top White House aides arrived at Ashcroft’s room in an unavailing effort to secure his signature. FBI agents, dispatched by, yes, then-FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III, were posted outside the door to prevent Comey’s ouster as he faced down the president’s men.

This was Comey as superhero, able to leap up hospital stairs in a single bound. It was Comey as resolute public servant, leader of a brave band prepared to quit rather than waver in defense of the rule of law.

“I couldn’t stay, if the administration was going to engage in conduct that the Department of Justice had said had no legal basis,” Comey testified. “I just simply couldn’t stay.”

Comey, the sequel, presents a figure more nuanced, imperfect — and realistic. He may have an aw-shucks demeanor (“Lordy, I hope there are tapes”), but he exposed himself as a Washington operator and survivor, with all the bureaucratic maneuvering and sail-trimming that entails.

This Comey didn’t confront, he navigated, walking the treacherously narrow path between his desire not to alienate the new president and his mounting alarm at Trump’s heedlessness of proper boundaries.

Thus, according to Comey’s account, he found himself at an uncomfortably intimate dinner with the president in the Green Room, seeking to defuse Trump’s demand for loyalty first with stone-faced silence, next by acceding to the president’s oxymoronic “honest loyalty.”

As Comey recalled, “I decided it wouldn’t be productive to push it further.”

Less than a month later, left alone with the president in the Oval Office, Comey again ducked a direct challenge. As Comey testified, when Trump expressed his “hope” that Comey could drop the case against fired national security adviser Michael Flynn, the FBI director lunged for their common ground: “He’s a good guy.”

Asked why he did not rebuff the president, Comey offered, “Maybe if I were stronger I would have. I was so stunned by the conversation that I just took it in.” This was not Comey the brave but Comey the self-protective bureaucrat. He didn’t confront, but he did write a memo to the file.

Nor was this the first administration in which Comey chose his battles with an eye to political realities. When then-Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch asked him to call the Hillary Clinton email probe a “matter,” not an “investigation,” Comey testified, “I just said, all right . . . this isn’t a hill worth dying on.”

And then there is the matter of Comey’s bank-shot leak, from him to Columbia University law professor Daniel Richman to, anonymously of course, the New York Times — all in the service, Comey testified, of seeing a special counsel appointed. Not exactly the behavior of a Boy Scout, unless there is now a merit badge in Machiavelli.

That is not to say that Comey was wrong to get out the word about his chilling encounter. It’s just that his aura of by-the-book self-righteousness comes with a slightly less honorable tinge. Comey has managed to infuriate both Democrats — with his imperious decision to assume an outside role on the Clinton, ahem, matter — and Republicans, a decade ago and now.

Listening to Comey’s testimony called to mind Benjamin Wittes’s account of a conversation when, Comey, still in his job, expressed “palpable” concerns about deputy attorney general nominee Rod J. Rosenstein, a career prosecutor who had managed to keep his political appointment under Republican and Democratic presidents. “Rod is a survivor,” Comey observed. As Wittes paraphrased: “You don’t get to survive that long across administrations without making compromises.”

Did Comey recognize something of himself? Once he was, or presented himself as, the archetype of unyielding probity, now he has morphed into something more complex — less heroic, more flesh-and-blood. This Comey is more flawed and, perhaps for that very reason, more believable.

Richard Cohen : Trump will never be presidential — and the GOP knows it

In college, I had an anthropology teacher who roamed the Earth studying bizarre folkways. But the people who most fascinated him happened to be in his own back yard — New Yorkers who could remain asleep on a screeching subway train as it started, stopped and even when the power failed and the lights blinked, finally going as dark as President Trump's cold reading lamp.

I now wonder what he would make of official Washington, a place where Republicans await the messiah-like return of a splendidly presidential Trump — gone from political tramp to prince of politicians by occasionally behaving himself. We saw that happen in February when Trump delivered an address to a joint session of Congress and did not break out into 1930s-era German. This was hailed as a historic moment when the new president "normalized himself" and would henceforth presumably read some books, listen to his advisers and tweet no more. Alas, Trump seemed to have not gotten the message and quickly resumed being who he was — President Kong, with Vice President Pence playing the hapless blonde in his fist.

More recently, the task of imagining a new, improved Trump fell to lawyers at the solicitor general's

office. This month, they had to argue in a petition to the Supreme Court that Trump did not really mean what he once said about Muslims. The lawyers said that when he called last year for a "Muslim ban" on entry to the United States, he was in a campaign mode, apparently some kind of hallucinatory trance in which irresponsible speech is excused. The official document begins "Donald J. Trump, et al., Petitioners." It is a stitch.

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"Taking that oath marks a profound transition from private life to the Nation's highest public office, and manifests the singular responsibility and independent authority to protect the welfare of the Nation that the Constitution reposes in the President," the lawyers maintained.

Almost immediately, Trump showed that he had not profoundly transitioned at all and that what really reposes in this president is a furious need to strike back. No lawyer was going to make Donald John Trump seem reasonable. In a series of tweets, he used capital letters and flung lightning bolts of exclamation points at the court and his own lawyers: "I am calling it what we need and what it is, a

TRAVEL BAN!" He cited "certain DANGEROUS countries" and insisted that anything less than a ban "won't help us protect our people!" The Supreme Court may differ.

The second type of Trump supporter my anthropology teacher might want to examine is the one who steadfastly insists that the old football adage has it right: Winning is indeed the only thing. Often this is put in crass terms: Get over it, he won. The people have spoken. A variant is the argument that Trump's supporters are real Americans while his critics are elitist fops. But a more genteel approach was recently outlined in an op-ed by Gary Abernathy, the publisher and editor of the Times-Gazette, a small-town Ohio newspaper, one of only six in the nation to have endorsed Trump. Abernathy shot to sudden fame with that endorsement. Coincidentally or not, Trump won 75 percent of the vote in Abernathy's area.

In a recent Post op-ed, Abernathy mentioned that in the 30 states where Trump won the popular vote, hardly any newspapers endorsed him. "Could there be better evidence of the gulf that exists between what is called the 'mainstream media' and millions of Americans?" he asked. Yes, of course there's a gulf — but to be on

the losing side of a gulf is not proof of error or overweening arrogance.

A gulf also existed between the handful of Southern newspapers such as Hodding Carter's Mississippi's Delta Democrat-Times, which fought Jim Crow, and their communities, which routinely elected segregationists. Alabama Gov. George Wallace vowed "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever" and took great glee in attacking the out-of-touch press as "pointy-headed intellectuals." He was enormously popular in his region. Jim Crow was defeated in the courts, not at the polls — as it happens, by pointy-headed civil rights lawyers.

The odd behavior of many Republicans — the stated belief that Trump, like cheese, will get softer with time or that his truculent ways will be modified by experience — may someday fascinate social scientists like my old teacher. Meanwhile, the GOP's excuses are laughable and its defenses self-serving. Republican members of Congress demean politics with their silence. They are precisely what Trump thinks they are — swamp creatures who slink from taking a stand. Trump has taken their measure. So, in time, will history.

Trump's Cabinet, With a Prod, Extols the 'Blessing' of Serving Him

Julie Hirschfeld
Davis

WASHINGTON — One by one, they praised President Trump, taking turns complimenting his integrity, his message, his strength, his policies. Their leader sat smiling, nodding his approval.

"The greatest privilege of my life is to serve as vice president to the president who's keeping his word to the American people," Mike Pence said, starting things off.

"I am privileged to be here — deeply honored — and I want to thank you for your commitment to the American workers," said Alexander Acosta, the secretary of labor.

Sonny Perdue, the agriculture secretary, had just returned from Mississippi and had a message to deliver. "They love you there," he offered, grinning across the antique table at Mr. Trump.

Reince Priebus, the chief of staff whose job insecurity has been the

subject of endless speculation, outdid them all, telling the president — and the assembled news cameras — "We thank you for the opportunity and the blessing to serve your agenda."

So it went on Monday in the Cabinet Room of the White House, as Mr. Trump transformed a routine meeting of senior members of his government into a mood-boosting, ego-stroking display of support for himself and his agenda. While the president never explicitly asked to be praised, Mr. Pence set the worshipful tone, and Mr. Trump made it clear he liked what he heard.

"Thank you, Mick," he told Mick Mulvaney, his budget director. "Good job," he told Scott Pruitt, his E.P.A. chief. "Very good, Daniel," he said to Dan Coats, the director of national intelligence.

The commander in chief, who has been known for decades as a fan of flattery and who speaks of himself in superlatives, even indulged in a

bit of self-congratulation. He declared himself one of the most productive presidents in American history — perhaps Franklin D. Roosevelt could come close, he conceded — and proclaimed that he had led a "record-setting pace" of accomplishment.

Never mind that Mr. Trump has yet to sign any major legislation, or that his White House has been buffeted by legal and ethical questions surrounding the investigation into his campaign's possible links to Russia and his firing of the F.B.I. director who had been leading that inquiry.

The highly unusual spectacle before the cabinet meeting got down to business and the TV cameras were banished seemed designed to deflect attention from the president's faltering agenda and the accusations leveled against him last week by the fired F.B.I. director, James B. Comey, which are threatening to further overshadow his agenda and haunt his presidency.

Days before, Mr. Comey had charged that Mr. Trump had lied about his firing and inappropriately sought to influence the Russia investigation. On Monday, the president said the country was "seeing amazing results" from his leadership.

"I will say that never has there been a president, with few exceptions — in the case of F.D.R. he had a major Depression to handle — who's passed more legislation, who's done more things than what we've done," Mr. Trump said. "We've been about as active as you can possibly be, and at a just about record-setting pace."

The tableau in the Cabinet Room drew instant derision from critics. And within hours, Democrats had pounced.

In a video posted with the tweet, Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York and the minority leader, sat at a table with young staff members who, at his prompting, praised his performance

on Sunday talk shows and the appearance of his hair. One repeated Mr. Priebus's quotation word for word, prompting the senator and his aides to erupt into laughter.

Mr. Trump has been struggling with his legislative agenda. His effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act passed the House on a second try, but senators are toiling to put together their own version. And his administration is months away from unveiling either a major tax cut package or the sweeping infrastructure plan he has promised.

The endorsements from the administration's highest officials may have served as a comforting counterpoint to Mr. Trump's sinking poll numbers. Fifty-nine percent disapprove of the job he is doing as president, according to a June 11 Gallup tracking survey, with only 36 percent approving.

After his upbeat introductory remarks on Monday, the president went around the table asking for a statement from each cabinet member. One by one, they said their names and

— as if working to outdo one another — paid homage to Mr. Trump, describing how honored they were to serve in his administration.

"Thank you for the opportunity to serve at S.B.A.," said Linda McMahon, the administrator of the Small Business Administration, trumpeting "a new optimism" for small businesses.

Ben Carson, the housing secretary, called it "a great honor" to work for Mr. Trump, while Mr. Perdue offered congratulations for "the men and women you have gathered around this table."

Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary, told Mr. Trump, "It was a great honor traveling with you around the country for the last year, and an even greater honor to be here serving on your cabinet."

A few cabinet members diverged from the apparent script. Jim Mattis, the secretary of defense — whose reputation for independence has been a comfort to Mr. Trump's critics — refrained from personally praising the president, instead

aiming his comments at American troops fighting and dying for their country.

"Mr. President, it's an honor to represent the men and women of the Department of Defense, and we are grateful for the sacrifices our people are making in order to strengthen our military so our diplomats always negotiate from a position of strength," Mr. Mattis said as Mr. Trump sat, stern-faced.

But the meeting still struck White House officials of past administrations as odd.

"I ran 16 Cabinet meetings during Obama's 1st term," Chris Lu, former President Barack Obama's cabinet secretary, wrote on Twitter. "Our Cabinet was never told to sing Obama's praises. He wanted candid advice not adulation."

The show of support for the president was in keeping with an intense effort by the White House to boost Mr. Trump's mood and change the subject from Mr. Comey's damaging testimony last week.

In a television interview on Monday morning, the president's daughter Ivanka Trump said her father "felt vindicated" and was eager to move on and talk about the rest of his agenda. Appearing on "Fox & Friends," she said that "he feels incredibly optimistic."

Reporters who witnessed the cabinet meeting's prelude tried in vain to ask the president about his comments about Mr. Comey — specifically, whether he has tapes of their conversations, as he has hinted.

But Mr. Trump was in no mood to allow such questions to rain on his parade, and he dismissed the news media with a curt "thank you."

"Finally held our first full @Cabinet meeting today," he tweeted later, along with a video of the meeting-turned-pep-rally. "With this great team, we can restore American prosperity and bring real change to D.C."

POLITICO Trump and the Religious Right: A Match Made in Heaven

By Tim Alberta

Dismissed by the cultural elite. Disrespected by the mainstream media. Delegitimized by the American left. And desperate to stop the bleeding.

This is the story of Donald Trump, the perpetually insecure 45th president whose conquest of the White House was fueled by the contempt of a political class that never took him seriously. But it is equally the story of American evangelicalism, whose adherents feel marginalized in a culture that they believe no longer reflects its core values or tolerates its most polarizing principles.

Story Continued Below

Academics, intellectuals and journalists have devoted considerable time to the question of how Trump, a thrice-married casino owner who claimed never to have asked God for forgiveness, earned historic support from born-again Christians in the 2016 presidential election. Critics denounced this union as electoral opportunism devoid of any moral consistency; meanwhile, religious voters, facing a binary choice between Trump and Hillary Clinton, justified their support for the Republican nominee by pointing to the far-reaching political implications of Supreme Court appointments and policy changes on abortion and religious liberty.

But while this provides a more nuanced understanding of why Christians voted for Trump—81 percent of them, according to exit polling—it never illuminated why they felt a connection with him as a candidate, or why many feel an even stronger kinship with him as president today. One fascinating explanation, proffered repeatedly during conversations with evangelicals over the past year, is that they identify with Trump because both he and they have been systematically targeted in the public square—oftentimes by the same adversaries. This explains why Trump, speaking last week to the Faith and Freedom Coalition's annual gathering in Washington, offered an extraordinary sentiment in pledging to support the evangelical community.

"We're under siege. You understand that," the president said. "But we will come out bigger and better and stronger than ever."

It was a stroke of polysemantic genius from Trump and his speechwriters. As heads nodded in agreement across the hotel ballroom, media outlets seized—as the White House knew they would—on the phrase, "We're under siege." After all, at that very moment, just six miles from where Trump was speaking, former FBI Director James Comey was testifying under oath in front of the Senate Intelligence Committee about his

unseemly interactions with the commander in chief. These were the tensest hours of Trump's young presidency, and here he was, acknowledging a defensive posture. But he was also expressing solidarity with an audience that can relate to feeling victimized.

"The most politically incorrect thing to do these days is talk about Christianity," says Steve Scheffler, president of Faith and Freedom Coalition's Iowa chapter and a prominent grassroots player in Trump's victory there last fall. "Religion has been under siege for a long time. And I don't want to sound like an alarmist, but if Hillary Clinton had won, religious liberty in America would basically be finished because of her appointments to the courts."

Enter Trump.

Yes, evangelical leaders say, they were wary of the candidate's personal history and disgusted by what they heard on the "Access Hollywood" tape. And, no, they aren't under any illusion that this is a Bible-toting, Scripture-inspired president like many who have come before him. Yet for Christians who feel they are engaged in a great struggle for the identity of America—and fear that their side has been losing ground—the most important question is not whether Trump believes in their cause, but whether he can win their wars. "Jimmy Carter sat in the pew with

us. But he never fought for us," Ralph Reed, chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition, told me after the president's speech. "Donald Trump fights. And he fights for us."

This casting of Trump as a great champion of the faithful, engaging the forces of secularism on behalf of a beleaguered religious right, is essential to understanding his appeal among evangelicals. Of course, the core premise of their alliance—that America has turned menacingly against Christianity—is disputable. It remains far and away the largest religion in the country, though it has traded majority status for plurality status thanks to a growing number of theologically unaffiliated Americans. And the United States as a whole views evangelicals in a positive light, according to the Pew Research Center. Critics point to religious people occupying the highest public offices and governing by their faith, often to the detriment of non-believers; they see Christianity prevalent in every sphere of American society and wonder how this sense of martyrdom came to be so misplaced.

Evangelicals see it altogether differently. From their perspective, Christianity is under attack from the worldly influences of academia and entertainment and media, all of which have a vested interest in loosening religion's grip on society.

They see people and organizations of faith—florists, wedding cake bakers, Hobby Lobby, the Little Sisters of the Poor—persecuted for living their spiritual convictions. They shudder as pastors are subpoenaed for their sermons. And they fear, as same-sex marriage becomes culturally entrenched, a cascade of further defeats as the population, the electorate and ultimately the government becomes less pious and more accepting of ideologies that have no place in their vision of a Judeo-Christian nation.

“We are being discriminated against. There is an anti-Christian movement in the culture,” Fr. Paul Grant, a priest with the Catholic Information Center in Washington, told me after Vice President Mike Pence addressed the Faith and Freedom gathering on Saturday night. “The devil is using his tools to keep us out of the public square.”

Many Christians believe in the idea of “spiritual warfare,” the concept of God and Satan enlisting their armies of angels and demons to battle for the souls of people through everyday occurrences and experiences. Many also believe in what might be described as divine irony—that is, the notion that God

uses flawed, unlikely individuals to achieve his ends and advance his kingdom. (Jacob, Moses, David, et al.) Living within that worldview, it’s not irrational to see Trump as an imperfect vessel for the Almighty at a watershed moment in history, especially when other, more godly leaders have failed to stem the decline.

“George W. Bush was one of them, but he was a compassionate conservative. They want someone who’s a fighter, and they view Trump as a fighter,” says Travis Korson, the senior vice president of Madison Strategies, a consulting firm that does extensive work with conservatives and Christian groups. “It’s a lot of things: the policy battles, the way he ran his campaign, the way, frankly, that he’s handling the FBI investigation into Russia. Trump doesn’t back down. And that kind of leadership, evangelicals feel like they haven’t seen it from the White House.”

So far, Trump hasn’t just been fighting their battles—he’s been winning them. More than any other constituency, Christian conservatives have watched with delight as the president delivered on his core promises to them: nominating a conservative in Neil

Gorsuch to the Supreme Court; reinstating and strengthening the Mexico City policy, which eliminates U.S. funding for international nongovernmental organizations that perform abortions; signing the Congressional Review Act to route federal money away from Planned Parenthood; and issuing an executive order that begins to broaden religious liberty guidelines, with promises of more action to come.

Evangelical Christians are known to keep something of a cultural scorecard, tallying their victories and defeats to gauge which direction the winds of civilization are blowing. After generations of ceding ground to what they view as a militant, secular left—with *Roe v. Wade* cementing protections for abortion, *Engel v. Vitale* taking prayer out of public schools and *Obergefell v. Hodges* legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide, among other defeats—social conservatives are finally feeling momentum on their side. And it took a Trump presidency to swing it. “I believe we’re winning this battle,” James Dobson, the lionized Christian author and radio host, said to thunderous applause Saturday night during the Faith and Freedom Coalition’s closing dinner.

Whether Trump feels he’s winning is another story. His aforementioned successes aside, the president’s legislative agenda has been sabotaged by controversy and infighting, and the investigations into his campaign and administration continue to spawn damaging new narratives. With setbacks piling up and public opinion steadily turning against him, Trump is right to feel “under siege.” There is, however, a silver lining: By standing up and fighting on behalf of a community that has long felt the same way, Trump has earned their lasting loyalty. In months of discussions with evangelical Christians, none of the president’s self-inflicted wounds seem to register. Trump is one of their own now—his grievance is their grievance—and therefore, quite naturally, he finds himself in the lion’s den beside them.

The Rev. Richard Lee said as much in his benediction Saturday night. “Father, we pray for our president today. Thank you, Lord, that you’ve given us a man who will stand for right, a man who will stand for truth,” Lee said. “Father, he is under attack, which is to be expected.”



Sessions will testify in open hearing Tuesday before Senate Intelligence Committee (UNE)

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

Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s appearance Tuesday before the Senate Intelligence Committee will be a high-stakes test for a Trump official who has kept a low profile even as he has become a central figure in the scandal engulfing the White House over Russia and the firing of James B. Comey as FBI director.

Sessions, a former Republican senator from Alabama, will face tough questions from his former colleagues on a number of fronts that he has never had to publicly address in detail.

Democrats plan to ask about his contacts during the 2016 campaign with the Russian ambassador to the United States, Sergey Kislyak, which the attorney general failed to disclose fully during his confirmation hearing.

They also want him to explain his role in the firing of Comey, despite the attorney general’s recusal in March from the Russia investigation after revelations about his meetings with Kislyak.

“If, as the president said, I was fired because of the Russia investigation, why was the attorney general involved in that chain?” Comey said in testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee last week.

With Attorney General Jeff Sessions appearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee on June 13, there’s a lot lawmakers want to straighten out. Here are three of the major questions they’ll have. With Attorney General Jeff Sessions appearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee on June 13, there’s a lot lawmakers want to straighten out. (Video: Jenny Starrs/Photo: Melina Mara/The Washington Post/The Washington Post)

(Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

Sessions also is likely to face questions about Comey’s cryptic assertion that the FBI knew of a “problematic” reason that Sessions should not oversee the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Democratic lawmakers are skeptical that Sessions will divulge any explosive new details, especially since the attorney general could

assert executive privilege regarding any questions about conversations with President Trump.

But they hope the hearing offers a chance to at least get Sessions on the record as either answering or dodging questions about pivotal events related to Comey and the FBI’s investigation.

“There are many unanswered and troubling questions, so the attorney general needs to be forthcoming,” said Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.). “The Senate and the American people deserve to know exactly what involvement with the Russian investigation he had before his recusal, what safeguards are in place to prevent his meddling, and why he felt it was appropriate to recommend the firing of Director Comey when he was leading that investigation.”

For the embattled attorney general, the hearing will mark the first time he is questioned by senators since January, when he testified during his confirmation hearing that he did not communicate with Russian officials during the presidential campaign, when he acted as an adviser to Trump.

As the White House’s political crisis over the Russia investigation has grown, the attorney general has laid low. While Sessions used to frequently answer questions from reporters after public appearances discussing his criminal justice initiatives, he stopped in late April, just before Comey was dismissed.

Sessions was originally scheduled to testify Tuesday about the Justice Department budget before the Senate and House Appropriations subcommittees. On Saturday, he wrote the chairmen of both panels and said he was sending his deputy attorney general to testify in his place. He said that he would testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee instead, although it was unclear initially if the hearing would be open or closed to the public.

[Sessions says he will not testify at congressional budget hearings this week]

Late Monday morning, Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) and Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-Va.) announced that the hearing would be public.

“The Attorney General has requested that this hearing be public,” Justice Department spokeswoman Sarah Isgur Flores

said in a statement. "He believes it is important for the American people to hear the truth directly from him and looks forward to answering the committee's questions tomorrow."

No time has been scheduled for Sessions to testify separately in a closed hearing to discuss classified matters, according to Senate aides, who were not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

Comey's testimony last week revealed new avenues of inquiry that lawmakers are likely to pursue on Tuesday.

The former FBI director said he contacted Sessions after a meeting with Trump in the Oval Office at which Sessions and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, were asked to leave and Comey was alone with the president.

Comey said that during that meeting, Trump asked him to end an investigation into former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who had been forced to resign the day before after failing to disclose meetings with the Russian ambassador.

"I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go," Comey quoted Trump as saying. "He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go."

After the meeting, Comey told Sessions that he did not want to be alone anymore with Trump and that "it can't happen that you get kicked out of the room and the president talks to me."

Comey said Sessions responded with, essentially, a shrug.

"I have a recollection of him just kind of looking at me," Comey testified. "I kind of got — his body language gave me the sense like, 'What am I going to do?' ... He didn't say anything."

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

Ian Prior, a Justice Department spokesman, disputed that account and said that Sessions replied to Comey and said he "wanted to ensure that he and his FBI staff were following proper communications protocol with the White House." Trump's personal lawyer also challenged Comey's account, saying the president never asked for the investigation to be dropped.

Sessions had a remarkable path to the attorney general post. He was an early and vocal supporter of Trump during the campaign, when most Republican lawmakers dismissed the candidate. He arrived in the job in February eager to launch ambitious efforts to combat violent crime and deport undocumented immigrants.

But officials said Sessions's relationship with Trump has been strained since the attorney general recused himself from the Russia probe in March. The president has also criticized the Justice Department's failed efforts to defend his travel ban in federal court. Officials said that Sessions at one point offered to resign as his relationship with the president became increasingly tense.



Psaki : The questions that could determine Sessions' fate

By Jen Psaki

Jen Psaki, a CNN political commentator and spring fellow at the Georgetown University Institute of Politics and Public Service, was the White House communications director and State Department spokeswoman during the Obama administration. She also was a consultant for Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Follow her: @jrpsaki. The opinions expressed in this commentary are hers.

(CNN)The Comey hearing certainly lived up to the hype. And now there is buildup to the testimony of Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Tuesday afternoon.

The difference is Sessions still works for President Donald Trump, and he has a lot more to lose. In fact, his own survival as attorney general, which has recently been a subject of much debate, could hinge on his performance before the Senate Intelligence Committee.

One aspect of the Comey hearing that was overwhelmed by the newsworthiness of his comments was his refusal to speak to the nature of Sessions' recusal from the Russia investigation in an open hearing. This cast a new spotlight on Sessions and made him a character to watch in the Russia investigation.

The White House has already acknowledged that Sessions will not hesitate to invoke executive privilege, which may limit knowledge-sharing quite a bit.

Sessions will therefore have to walk a tightrope to both satisfy his boss,

Donald Trump, and remove the political target on his back.

Though we may not learn a lot about the Russia investigation, we will be able to better assess Sessions' survival by the end of the day.

There is no doubt senators on the committee have been preparing for his testimony, but here are the questions to Sessions that will be critical in determining his fate.

1. Can you commit to discuss with the committee in a closed session the reasons for your recusal from the Russia investigation?

If he says yes, it could be an indication there are additional reasons for his recusal, beyond a few meetings with the Russian ambassador, that are not known publicly. If he says no, he will set off alarm bells across the Capitol, because it will indicate he may have something to hide. And if he disagrees with Comey and explains in a public hearing the reasons for his recusal, it will likely lead to more questions about why he didn't also recuse himself from the firing of Comey.

2. How many meetings did you have with the Russian ambassador or any other Russian officials in 2016? What were the topics discussed? And why did you fail to provide information about the meetings you had with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak on your security clearance form?

These are the most obvious questions -- and frankly the reason Sessions finds himself in hot water.

This is the first time he will be speaking under oath about the nature of his discussions with Russian officials, and if he answers honestly, he may be able to at least end the speculation about the number and details of his meetings.

3. What was your involvement in the decision to fire James Comey? Did you ask your deputy attorney general to write a memo recommending the firing of Comey? And if so, did he know it would become public?

It has never been clear how Sessions could have recused himself from the Russia investigation, but still involved himself in the decision to fire the FBI director, given that the decision to fire Comey was directly linked to the Russia investigation. In addition, even Rod Rosenstein, his deputy, was not clear in his hearing whether he knew what his memo would be used for and who asked him to write it.

4. Were you aware of Jared Kushner's contacts with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak and were you aware of his interest in setting up a back channel during the transition? In general, do you think outreach to foreign governments should be coordinated with the outgoing administration during a transition?

Sessions was nominated to be attorney general in the middle of November, before Kushner reportedly attempted to set up a back channel with Russian officials. He was a foreign policy adviser during the campaign and in the

running to be vice president. The Kushner meetings would likely have been discussed within Trump's inner circle. If Sessions has any information or even a view on this, it will be newsworthy. It is also the question his boss will be watching closely.

5. At any point during the campaign did Trump ask you or anyone on the campaign to contact a Russian government official? Is there any request from the President or any other official in the White House that has made you uncomfortable since you were sworn in as attorney general?

There is a great deal we don't know about the potential Trump campaign contacts with Russian officials, such as who may have directed them and who, if anyone, knew of Putin's intentions to interfere with the electoral outcome. And Sessions has sat through enough hearings to know his answers will come back to bite him if there is even an element of untruth.

If he says he has no concerns, which we should fully expect, his answer will be replayed if and when more information comes out about who on the campaign knew what. And if he acknowledges he had some concerns, he will open up a new line of questioning about the conduct of President Trump and his advisers.

Trump Team Proposes Broad Rethink of Financial Rulebook (UNE)

Ryan Tracy and
Kate Davidson

WASHINGTON—The Trump administration proposed a wide-ranging rethink of the rules governing the U.S. financial sector in a report that makes scores of recommendations that have been on the banking industry's wish list for years.

The Treasury Department report, released Monday, gives the most detailed road map yet for President Donald Trump's promise to revisit a wave of regulations put in place after the financial crisis. The proposals would affect activities ranging from mortgage lending to Wall Street trading.

If Mr. Trump's regulatory appointees eventually implement them, the recommendations would pare back restrictions advanced by former President Barack Obama's administration, which argued they were necessary to guard against excessive risk-taking and a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis.

Mr. Trump's team said those rules, many of which were part of the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial law, have become overly restrictive, unnecessarily preventing banks from activities that help the economy function and grow.

"We tried to have the right balance between eliminating undue, burdensome regulations while not putting taxpayers at risk," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said.

The report drew praise from the financial industry and Republicans and sparked criticism from consumer groups and many Democrats.

The report is an "important step towards modernizing America's financial regulatory system so both economic growth and consumer protection are advanced," Tim Pawlenty, chief executive of the Financial

Services Roundtable trade group, said in a statement.

Marcus Stanley, policy director for the advocacy group Americans for Financial Reform, which represents unions and consumer groups, said "every recommendation" in the report "weakens systemic or consumer protections."

"This would take things that have already been weakened by industry lobbying and dilute them away to nothing," he said.

The report responds to a Feb. 3 executive order from Mr. Trump, and a senior official said the GOP president signed a copy of it on Monday in the Oval Office.

It focuses on lending, and is expected to be followed by further reports covering other topics, such as the money-management and insurance industries. To prepare it, the administration met with dozens of industry representatives in recent weeks, as well as consumer advocates, financial regulators and other groups.

Administration officials said their focus was on helping small and midsize lenders, as opposed to larger ones that might be considered "too big to fail" without a taxpayer bailout. But the report's recommendations include issues affecting firms of all sizes.

Regulators would re-examine a litany of capital and liquidity rules affecting banks. Those rules limit lenders' risk-taking. Officials would re-examine lending standards for so-called leverage loans to already-indebted companies, a big business for large banks.

Small banks would have more flexibility in making mortgage loans. Officials would open certain regulatory exams, such as "stress tests" and "living wills," to a formal notice-and-comment process—a change that officials in Mr. Obama's Democratic administration resisted

because they thought it would limit regulators' flexibility.

Fewer banks would take those exams, and less often.

Regulators also wouldn't adopt new rules unless they meet a stricter cost-benefit analysis than some bank overseers currently use.

Among the most controversial recommendations are at least a dozen changes at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, a central part of Dodd-Frank. The report proposes the bureau lose its authority to examine financial firms on a continuing basis and not be able to set its own budget.

In other areas, the report avoids weighing in on controversial debates. It hedges on whether the consumer bureau should continue to be led by a single director, as opposed to a multimember board, though it says the former would be "the most straightforward" approach. It recommends the \$50 billion asset threshold at which big banks face stricter rules under Dodd-Frank be raised, but it doesn't say by how much.

It endorses some changes approved by House Republicans in legislation last week, such as giving regulatory relief to well-capitalized banks. But it also takes a different approach in some areas, for instance by endorsing the principles behind the so-called Volcker rule, named after former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, limiting certain types of bank trading. The House Republicans' bill would throw out that rule.

Mr. Mnuchin said the administration is "very supportive" of the Republican bill and it was focused on what the administration could do without congressional approval.

"We are fine if the House and the Senate want to repeal the Volcker rule...We're more focused on what

are the changes we can make to fix it," Mr. Mnuchin said.

In one surprising development, the report recommends that a multi-regulator council created as part of Dodd-Frank be expanded, saying Congress should give the Financial Stability Oversight Council of senior regulators the authority to "appoint a lead regulator on any issue on which multiple agencies may have conflicting and overlapping regulatory jurisdiction."

The report marks the beginning of what will likely be a yearslong review of financial rules.

Some recommendations, including exempting small banks from the Volcker rule, limiting the consumer bureau's authority, or expanding FSOC authority, would require congressional action—a potentially high bar amid deep partisan tensions on Capitol Hill.

Other changes would need regulatory approval from officials who might not be in place for months. Many bank rules must be approved by the boards of the Fed and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., but the leaders of those agencies have terms that haven't expired yet. Mr. Trump also hasn't nominated anyone to a number of significant regulatory roles, including the top bank oversight post at the Fed.

A senior Treasury official said most of the report's recommendations could be carried out by regulators without help from Congress. The only current bank regulator appointed by the new administration, acting Comptroller of the Currency Keith Noreika, said Monday the report will inform his agency's work aimed at reducing regulatory burdens at the federally chartered banks it oversees.

Editorial : Trump's New Sugar High

The Trump Administration last week announced a new agreement with Mexico to guarantee that sugar prices in both countries will remain well above the world market price. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross framed the deal as a big win—and it is, for the few sugar producers on both sides of the border. The losers are millions of consumers.

No industry has enjoyed as much protection under the North

American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) as sugar producers and refiners. Mexico raised its sugar import tariffs from third countries in 1994 to match U.S. protection levels and thereby form a customs union. While most of the U.S. economy had to adapt to competition from Canada and Mexico starting in 1994, the U.S. market remained heavily protected from Mexican sugar until 2008.

Even when the market opened, U.S. sugar interests refused to adapt and

filed antidumping and countervailing duty suits against Mexican exports. In 2014 the Commerce Department ruled in their favor. Mexico could have fought that ruling at a Nafta arbitration panel but its sugar lobby also likes high prices. So instead it agreed to comply with a U.S.-stipulated minimum price and quota, and to restrict the amount of refined sugar it ships. In other words, both sides conspired to run a sugar cartel.

Enter President Trump, who the sugar titans saw as a vehicle for even more protection. In March Mexico voluntarily suspended permits for exporting sugar to the U.S. as a precaution against the possibility that the U.S. would cancel the 2014 agreement and impose tariffs. Last week's deal is an attempt to avoid those new duties in exchange for further limits on Mexican sugar exports to the U.S.

The new minimum price for raw sugar will be 23 cents per pound, up from 22.5 cents. The world market price is about 14 cents. Refined sugar will now be set at 28 cents per pound, up from 26 cents. Mexico sugar exports to the U.S.

will now be 70% raw and 30% refined, up from 53% raw and 47% refined.

Yet the American Sugar Alliance still doesn't support the deal because of what it calls a "loophole" that could allow refined Mexican

sugar into the U.S. in case of shortages under the Soviet-style quota system that predicts U.S. supply every year.

If this is a glimpse into Team Trump's trade policy, it isn't pretty. The deal suggests the strategy is to

use government power to enforce cartels that protect politically powerful producers, and Mexico's decision to roll over may encourage White House protectionists to ask for more. So much for the little guy.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Victor Davis Hanson : Trump Ironies: Wrecking Ball Is Long Overdue & May Benefit Country

1) For the Left (both Political and Media)

The Left was mostly untroubled for eight years about the often unconstitutional abuses of Barack Obama — given that they saw their shared noble aims as justifying almost any means necessary to achieve them.

There was the not uncommon Rice-Gruber-Rhodes-Holder sort of deception (on Benghazi, on the conduct of Bowe Bergdahl, on the Affordable Care Act, the Iran deal, on Fast and Furious, etc.) — a required tactic because so much of the Obama agenda was antithetical to the wishes and preferences of the American electorate and thus had to be disguised and camouflaged to become enacted.

There was the pen-and-phone mockery of established federal law (the suspension of the ACA employer mandate, the Chrysler creditor reversal, the non-enforcement of federal immigration law, the institutionalization of sanctuary-city nullification). There was the constant mythmaking (from faux red lines, deadlines, and step-over lines to the fatuity of the Cairo Speech and Iran-deal harangues).

There were the abuses of presidential power (the surveillance of journalists, the selective release of the bin Laden trove to pet journalists, the likely surveilling, unmasking, and leaking through reversed targeting of political enemies).

No one worried much when Obama promised on a hot mic to Medvedev that he would be more flexible with the Russians after his reelection, as if they were to conform to a desired sort of behavior in service to Obama that would earn them dividends from him later on — the kind of unapologetic partisan "collusion" that would have earned Trump a Comey-induced indictment. No one cared that Obama pulled all peacekeepers out of Iraq and thereby ruined what the surge had saved.

Nor did anyone fret much about the serial scandals at the GSA, the VA, the IRS, and the Secret Service, or his disastrous reset policy with

Russia and the implosion of the Middle East or the strange spectacles of Obama's interview with GloZell or polarizing Oval Office guests, such as the rapper whose album cover portrayed celebrations over a dead white judge.

True, none of these were impeachable or even major offenses. But all of them recalibrated the bar of presidential behavior.

So along came the next Republican president, empowered by Obama's exemptions to do almost anything he wished, albeit without the thin exculpatory veneer of Ivy League pretension, multicultural indemnity, and studied smoothness.

In biblical "there is a season" fashion, for every sermon about not building your business, making too much money, or profiting at the wrong time, there was a Trump retort to profit as never before.

For every too-frequent gala golf outing of a metrosexual Obama decked out in spiffy attire, there is a plumper Trump swinging away, oblivious to the angry pack of reporters that Obama once so carefully courted.

For every rapper with an ankle bracelet that went off in the White House, there is now a White House photo-op with Ted Nugent.

For every executive-order suspension of federal immigration enforcement, there is an executive-order corrective.

For every lecture on the crusades, sermons on Western genocidal history, apology tour, or Islamic mythmaking, there is an American Greatness pride in everything.

The progressive ironies continued.

If the media were to be believed when they insisted that Obama was a "god," or that he was the smartest man ever to achieve the presidency, or that the first lady was Jackie Kennedy incarnate, or that Obama was capable of sending electrical shocks down a reporter's leg or was sure to be a brilliant president on the basis of his pants crease or because he talked in the manner of

Washington elites, then surely it could *not* be believed when Trump was smeared as a veritable dunce, crook, buffoon, and naïf worthy of impeachment or that his wife (fluent in several languages) was an airhead former escort girl.

By their former unhinged adoration and obsequiousness, progressives and the media undermined all future credibility in their unhinged venom and loathing of Donald Trump. Now they live with the reality that by elevating Obama into a deity, they unleashed their own worst nightmare and have reduced themselves to irrelevance.

In the end, no one believes the current venom of a CNN or a *New York Times* precisely because no one could have believed their prior slavish adulation.

Anderson Cooper has become Keith Olbermann, as Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer meld into Maxine Waters: now malevolent rather than previously sycophantic, but in their extremism still no more credible in 2017 than they were in 2009.

2) For the Orphaned Never Trump Right (as Overrepresented in the Punditocracy as Underrepresented in the Electorate)

Even the most die-hard Never Trump conservative has had to make some adjustments.

Despite assurances that Trump would not get the nomination, he did.

Despite assurances that he could never be elected, he was.

Despite prognostications that Trump was a liberal wolf hiding in conservative fleece, Trump's appointments, his executive orders, his legislation pending before the Congress, his abrupt withdrawal from the Paris global-warming accords, his fierce support for vouchers, his pro-life advocacy, and his immigration normality were so far orthodoxly conservative.

Most Never Trumpers now concede that something had gone terribly wrong with their top-down party, although they resent that it was

raucous billionaire Donald Trump who administered the diagnosis.

Despite suspicions that Trump's appeal to the working class was nursed on racism, fanatic nationalism, xenophobia, and nativism, the appeal instead grew from a shared disgust with blue-stocking Republicans who were perceived in word and deed as little different from coastal Democratic look-alikes. Most Never Trumpers now concede that something had gone terribly wrong with their top-down party, although they resent that it was raucous billionaire Donald Trump who administered the diagnosis.

Where Never Trump conservatives worried that Trump was too uninformed or too reckless (e.g., pulling out of an "obsolete" NATO, rejecting Article 5 of the NATO alliance, starting a trade war with China, or erecting tariffs in 1920s style), Trump was forced to separate his past rhetoric from present reality — confirming in a way his transparent art-of-the-deal negotiating style of asking for twice what he could acceptably settle for, or acting unhinged to unsettle negotiators, enemies, and rivals.

Given these surprises, the Never Trump position has now receded to a simpler proposition: The uncouth character of Donald J. Trump is not worth the conservative agenda that he may well enact, as we all will eventually and inevitably learn. Or how can conservative moralists stomach such a supposedly immoral incarnation of their own views?

Such a paradox hinges on four corollaries, many of them dubious.

One: The ideological trajectory of a probable 16 years of Obama–Hillary Clinton progressive transformation of the country was never as dangerous as turning over executive power to someone as purportedly uncouth and unpredictable as Trump.

Two: Trump's character defects were like none other in a previous American president (which would include John Kennedy's pathological and dangerous

womanizing, Lyndon Johnson's in-office profiteering and crudity, Richard Nixon's disrespect for truth and the law, Bill Clinton's demonstrable White House sex escapades and lying under oath) and thus would cancel out the entire gamut of renewed energy production, deregulation, tax reform, deterrent foreign policy, Obamacare reform, and the sort of Cabinet appointment that will prune back the deep state.

Three: Ideas matter more than politics and governance. Being 51 (or far more) percent preferable is still either not being preferable at all or at least not enough to warrant pragmatic assent.

Four: Even snarky and "see, how I was right" attacks on Trump from the right keep conservatism honest, rather than implode it in the manner that the Left most assiduously avoids. (Was there ever a "Never Hillary" movement after the Democratic convention to protest her pollution of the Democratic National Committee?)

For now, the fallback position of "I told you so" hinges on Trump's proving, in a downward spiral, far more recklessly obstreperous in the future than he has been so far, and on his agenda's either fossilizing or reverting to his own 1980s liberal outlook.

3) Always Trump

There are few ironies for Always Trumpers who supported Trump from well before the primaries.

They wished an iron wrecking ball to be thrown into the deep-state glass, and they certainly got what they wished for.

The uncouthness of Trump is not vulgarity for them. It's the necessary tough antidote to what they see as the polished crudity of the elite class, who are quite indecent in their sanctimonious lectures on amnesties or globalized free but unfair trade — while having the personal means of navigating around the deleterious consequences of their own advocacy.

Trump's nihilistic and self-destructive tweets are yet again, for the Always Trumpers, the Semtex that helps blow up the entire spectacle of the feeding frenzy Washington press conference, the

embarrassment of the White House Correspondents Dinner, the soft-ball televised interview, and the moral preening of television's talking heads.

Dr. Sawbones Trump smelled a festering wound, ripped off the scab, and proclaimed that the exposure would aerate and cure the gangrenous mass below.

For the Always Trumpers, without the Trump shock, we would never have fully appreciated just how politically crude a Stephen Colbert really was, or just how obscene was a Tom Perez or a Senator Gillibrand, or how rankly partisan was a Chuck Schumer or how incapacitated a Nancy Pelosi. Dr. Sawbones Trump smelled a festering wound, ripped off the scab, and proclaimed that the exposure would aerate and cure the gangrenous mass below — however crudely administered the remedy without analgesics.

In this view, Trump's ostensibly counterproductive outbursts and Twitter rants are the unpleasent castor oil that was long ago needed to break up and pass on a constipated, corrupt, and incestuous elite.

4) Trump, Better Far Than the Alternative

Lastly, there are the conservatives and Republicans (well over 90 percent) who voted for Trump on the grounds that, while he may not have been preferable to most of the alternatives in the primary, he most certainly was in the general election. For these pragmatists, there are both pleasant and occasionally worrisome ironies.

On the upside, it seems clear that Trump is not just conservative to his word, but, in the first 100 days, conservative in terms of policy to a degree unlike any other Republican president or presidential nominee since Ronald Reagan. Mitt Romney would not have yanked the U.S. out of the jerry-rigged Paris climate accord.

John McCain would not have appointed a Neal Gorsuch or proposed to radically recalibrate the tax code.

Neither of the two Bushes would have felt politically secure enough

to shut down the border to illegal immigration; neither would have pressed to finished the border wall.

None since Reagan would have made the sort of conservative appointments at the cabinet and bureaucratic level as has Trump. If Trump were really a namby-pamby conservative, the sheer hatred of Trump the person by the progressive Left has had the predictable effect of making him against everything his loudest enemies are for.

For the realist Trump supporters, Trump's tweets or outbursts are often regrettable and occasionally bothersome, but not so much because they demonstrate an unprecedented level of presidential indecency. (Cynical realists with knowledge of history accept what FDR or JFK was capable of, and thus what they said in private conversations, and occasionally out loud.) Trump's sin, then, is that he more often says out loud what prior presidents kept to their inner circle.

Rather, their worry is more tactical and strategic: Trump, the bull-in-the-china-shop messenger, breaks up too much of the vital message of Trump. In public, they may cringe at Trump's excesses (though enjoying in private how he forces sanctimonious progressives to melt down), but their worry over Trump's overkill is mostly from the fear that no mortal 70-year-old male, without a traditionally loyal support staff, but with unhealthy sleep and diet habits, and under the stress of historic vituperation, could see through such an ambitious conservative agenda.

They are worried, then, that the 24/7 and extraneous fights that Trump picks will eventually undo him, and with his demise will go his entire conservative resurgence for a generation. They admire enormously Mike Pence but concede that he would have been neither nominated nor elected. And should Trump fall, Pence would be unable amid the nuclear fallout to press the conservative agenda further.

And yet there is some doubt even here as well. Trump's tweets can be as prescient as they are reckless. Take the infamous "Just found out that Obama had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower just before the victory" and substitute "Obama

administration" for Obama, and "surveil" for "wires tapped," and Trump's tweet about the former president's intelligence agencies improperly monitoring him may yet prove in a broad sense correct. In other words, cringe-worthy Trump behavior so often is the lubricant that oils his success against cringe-worthy opponents, turning upside down the Heraclitean axiom that character is destiny, or rather redefining it, because Trump's targets so often were hubristic and deserved the nemesis sent their way.

It may not be that Trump earns hatred for unnecessary provocation and vitriol, but instead that he or any other Republican would have earned such venom anyway.

The large minority of conservative Trump supporters who did not join him in the primary are thus confused now. Traditional wisdom declares that Trump's personal behavior is counterproductive and unsustainable, but traditional wisdom has so far been wrong both during the campaign and in the first four months of the Trump's presidency. It may not be that Trump earns hatred for unnecessary provocation and vitriol, but instead that he or any other Republican would have earned such venom anyway; thus his own searing tactics and narcissistic belief in his own destiny are predicated on the assumption that his unhinged enemies will vaporize first. And he may be right. James Comey has underestimated Donald Trump every bit as much as Marco Rubio or Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama did. In the end, the pragmatists apparently believe conservatives will hang together or hang separately.

Never have so many bright people proved so dense. Never have polls and politics proved so unreliable or partisan. Never have unintended consequences so replaced predictable results.

Yes, we are in chaos, but we sense also that the pandemonium is purgative of the worse that prompted it — and it is unpleasant mostly because it has so long been overdue.

came from the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, in San Francisco.

The two courts employed different reasoning to arrive at the same

**The
New York
Times**

Trump Loses Travel Ban Ruling in Appeals Court

Adam Liptak

WASHINGTON — A second federal appeals court has ruled against President Trump's revised travel ban, delivering on Monday the latest

in a string of defeats for the administration's efforts to limit travel from several predominantly Muslim countries.

The administration has already sought a Supreme Court review of a similar decision issued last month by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, in Richmond, Va. Monday's decision

basic conclusion. The Fourth Circuit said the revised executive order violated the First Amendment's prohibition of government establishment of religion.

The Ninth Circuit, by contrast, rested its conclusions on statutory grounds. It said Mr. Trump had exceeded the authority Congress granted him in making national security judgments in the realm of immigration without adequate justification.

"The order does not offer a sufficient justification to suspend the entry of more than 180 million people on the basis of nationality," the Ninth Circuit's opinion said. "National security is not a 'talismanic incantation' that, once invoked, can support any and all exercise of executive power."

The decision, from a three-judge panel, was unanimous. It was issued jointly by Judges Michael Daly Hawkins, Ronald M. Gould and Richard A. Paez. All three were appointed by President Bill Clinton.

The ruling affirmed most of a March decision from Judge Derrick K. Watson, of the Federal District Court in Hawaii. But the appeals court narrowed the injunction issued by Judge Watson in a significant way.

The appeals court said Judge Watson had erred in barring the administration from conducting internal reviews of its vetting procedures while the case moved forward.

That may turn out to be important as the Supreme Court considers how to address the two cases.

The key part of the executive order suspended travel from six predominantly Muslim countries for 90 days to give the administration time to conduct a review of its vetting procedures. If that review

can soon be completed, the justices may decide that the case will soon be moot.

In briefs filed Monday in the Supreme Court, lawyers challenging the revised executive order urged the court not to hear the Trump administration's appeal of the Fourth Circuit's decision or to stay the injunctions entered in the two cases.

They said the cases might be moot as soon as Wednesday, as the 90-day suspension of entry contemplated by the revised executive order was, counting from its effective date, set to expire then.

The administration has argued that Judge Watson's ruling stopped the 90-day clock. It asked the justices to agree to hear an appeal of the Fourth Circuit decision before they leave for their summer break and to schedule arguments in the fall.

By lifting the part of Judge Watson's injunction that barred review of internal vetting procedures in the meantime, the Ninth Circuit may have ensured that the case will be moot by the time it is argued, no matter how the 90 days are calculated.

"It would be unnecessary and wasteful for the court to grant review of an issue that is essentially moot," lawyers for the State of Hawaii wrote.

Like the Fourth Circuit, Judge Watson blocked major parts of the revised order on the ground that they violated the Constitution's ban on a government establishment of religion. Judge Watson wrote that the statements of Mr. Trump and his advisers made clear that his executive order amounted to an attempt to disfavor Muslims.

Judge Watson should not have reached the constitutional issue and

should have ruled on statutory grounds, the Ninth Circuit said.

"We need not, and do not, reach the Establishment Clause claim to resolve this appeal," the appeals court's opinion said.

Judge Watson's injunction was broader than the one affirmed by the Fourth Circuit. In addition to halting the limits on travel from the six countries, Judge Watson blocked a 120-day suspension of the nation's refugee program and a 50,000-person cap on refugee admissions in 2017, down from 110,000. The Ninth Circuit affirmed those parts of Judge Watson's decision.

The Ninth Circuit said it had a role to play in testing Mr. Trump's actions.

"Whatever deference we accord to the president's immigration and national security policy judgments does not preclude us from reviewing the policy at all," the appeals court's opinion said. "We do not abdicate the judicial role, and we affirm our obligation 'to say what the law is' in this case," it added, quoting *Marbury v. Madison*, the foundational 1803 Supreme Court decision.

A federal law gives the president the power to exclude foreigners if he finds that letting them enter the country "would be detrimental to the interests of the United States."

The appeals court said Mr. Trump had exceeded that authority, in large part because he had failed to offer adequate justifications for his order.

"In suspending the entry of more than 180 million nationals from six countries, suspending the entry of all refugees, and reducing the cap on the admission of refugees from 110,000 to 50,000 for the 2017 fiscal year," the court said, "the

president did not meet the essential precondition to exercising his delegated authority: The president must make a sufficient finding that the entry of these classes of people would be 'detrimental to the interests of the United States.'"

The court said Mr. Trump's justifications for the executive order were inadequate.

"The order does not tie these nationals in any way to terrorist organizations within the six designated countries," the opinion said. "It does not identify these nationals as contributors to active conflict or as those responsible for insecure country conditions. It does not provide any link between an individual's nationality and their propensity to commit terrorism or their inherent dangerousness."

"In short," the opinion concluded, "the order does not provide a rationale explaining why permitting entry of nationals from the six designated countries under current protocols would be detrimental to the interests of the United States."

The appeals court also ruled that the administration had run afoul of another provision of the immigration laws, one that forbids discrimination "because of the person's race, sex, nationality, place of birth or place of residence," but only "in the issuance of an immigrant visa." The Trump administration argued that the power to bar entry, the subject of a different provision, was broader than the limits on issuing visas.

The appeals court said the two provisions must be read together.

"We cannot blind ourselves to the fact that, for nationals of the six designated countries," the opinion said, the revised order "is effectively a ban on the issuance of immigrant visas."

**The
New York
Times**

The Senate Hides Its Trumpcare Bill Behind Closed Doors

A coterie of Republicans is planning to have the Senate vote before July 4 on a bill that could take health insurance away from up to 23 million people and make changes to the coverage of millions of others. And they are coming up with the legislation behind closed doors without holding hearings, without consulting lawmakers who disagree with them and without engaging in any meaningful public debate.

There is no mystery why the Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, is trying to push this bill through quickly. The legislation would repeal

major provisions of the Affordable Care Act. Opening it to scrutiny before a vote would be the congressional equivalent of exposing a vampire to sunlight.

That is one mistake Mr. McConnell, a master of the Senate's dark arts, is not about to make. As one Republican aide put it to Axios on Monday, "We aren't stupid." Better to pass a terrible bill in the cover of darkness just as the House did with its version, the American Health Care Act, in the hopes that critics do not have much time to raise a stink. And then there is President Trump, who is standing ready to applaud whatever turkey the Senate

produces as long as it gives him a chance to claim a win.

Mr. McConnell's strategy belies the disingenuous Republican complaint that Democrats jammed the A.C.A., or Obamacare, into law in 2010 without sufficient analysis or discussion. The Republican effort to undo the A.C.A. bears no resemblance whatsoever to that much more thorough exercise. Congress and the Obama administration spent a year on health care reform from March 2009 to March 2010. The House and Senate came up with several competing bills, held dozens of hearings, accepted Republican

amendments and spent countless hours soliciting feedback from public interests groups and the health care industry. The Congressional Budget Office produced several reports to analyze the various proposals and the legislation that ultimately became law.

By contrast, instead of public drafts and hearings, we now have to settle for a series of leaks from Capitol Hill about what is or isn't in the bill. On one day, news organizations might be told that Mr. McConnell's health care working group (which happens to be composed entirely of men) has found ways to win over more

moderate senators like Rob Portman of Ohio by agreeing to phase out the expansion of Medicaid more slowly than the House bill would. Such a policy would mean that millions would still lose coverage but not as quickly as in the House version.

But on another day, the public might learn that conservatives like Rand Paul of Kentucky are furious because the draft does not do enough to turn the American health care system into a facsimile of "The Hunger Games."

In other words, the country is getting only glimpses of half-formed policies and mere hints of the back-room deals offered to win support for them. The Washington Post recently reported, for instance, that Mr. McConnell might cobble together a slim majority for his bill by offering senators from Appalachian states a fund for the opioid epidemic. He might also have to come up with something to accommodate Lisa Murkowski of Alaska because her state has high health care costs and stands to lose

a lot if Congress reduces spending on health care by \$1.1 trillion over 10 years to give the wealthiest American families a fat tax cut.

It would be tempting to find all this negotiating a purposeless charade if it didn't have the potential to hurt millions of people and wasn't already taking a toll. In recent weeks, health insurers have ended coverage in some parts of the country for next year and proposed raising premiums substantially elsewhere. The companies say they are trying to protect themselves

from the uncertainty around the A.C.A. Blame for that rests with Congress and Mr. Trump, who has threatened to destroy Obamacare through administrative changes.

Republican leaders seem to think they will gain a tactical legislative advantage if they can negotiate a deal behind the scenes and then suddenly spring it on the full Senate. Those gains will quickly evaporate when voters learn what they have done.