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WASHINGTON POST

Kerry Harshly Condemns Israeli Settler Activity As An Obstacle To Peace

By Carol Morello And Ruth Eglash

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

Secretary of State John F. Kerry on Wednesday harshly criticized Israeli settlements in the West Bank, saying their growth threatens to destroy the viability of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that the United States was obliged to allow passage of a U.N. resolution condemning the activity in order to preserve the possibility of peace.

Kerry noted that the number of Israelis living in settlements has grown significantly and that their outposts are extending farther into the West Bank — “in the middle of what, by any reasonable definition, would be the future Palestinian state.”

“No one thinking seriously about peace can ignore the reality of what the settlements pose to that peace,” he said.

Kerry, in the hour-long speech delivered at the State Department, also condemned Palestinian incitement to violence as a barrier to direct negotiations. But his focus was on defending the Obama administration’s policies and highlighting Israel’s actions at a moment of high tension between the two governments, following the passage of the U.N. resolution.

“Regrettably, some seem to believe that the U.S. friendship means the U.S. must accept any policy, regardless of our own interests, our own positions, our own words, our own principles — even after urging again and again that the policy must change,” he said. “Friends need to tell each other the hard truths, and friendships require mutual respect.”

He said the vote at the United Nations was about “Israel’s future as a Jewish and democratic state, living side by side in peace and security with its neighbors. That’s what we are trying to preserve, for our sake and for theirs.”

Saying the two-state solution was in “serious jeopardy,” Kerry said Israel would never improve its relations with Arab countries if it precludes the possibility of a separate state for Palestinians.

“If the choice is one state, Israel can either be Jewish or Democratic,” he said. “It cannot be both.”

Some Israeli politicians applauded Kerry’s speech. Former prime minister Ehud Barak tweeted that it was a “Powerful, lucid speech. World & majority in Israel think the same.”

But most Israeli leaders and the political right immediately took umbrage, accusing Kerry of trying to dictate policy to an elected government.

-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the speech “a big disappointment.”

“He deals obsessively with the settlements, he fails to deal with the Palestinian failure to recognize a Jewish state,” Netanyahu said, adding, “If he put the same emphasis on Palestinian incitement and terror that he did on settlements then maybe we will be on the way to peace.”

Kerry acknowledged that his vision is not shared by President-elect Donald Trump.

“President Obama and I know that the incoming administration has signaled that they may take a different path, and even suggested breaking from the long-standing U.S. policies on settlements, Jerusalem — and possibly the two-state solution,” Kerry said. “That is for them to decide — that’s how we work. But we cannot, in good conscience, do nothing, and say nothing, when we see the hope of peace slipping away. This is a time to stand up for what is right.”

Trump has said that he will move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv, a move freighted with political significance in advance of any settlement, and his nominee to be ambassador to Israel, David M. Friedman, has said Jewish settlements in the West Bank are legal.

About two hours before Kerry started speaking, Trump tweeted his criticism of the Obama administration:

“We cannot continue to let Israel be treated with such total disdain and disrespect. They used to have a great friend in the U.S., but . . . not anymore. The beginning of the end was the horrible Iran deal, and now this (U.N.)! Stay strong Israel, January 20th is fast approaching!”

Netanyahu, in turn, promptly tweeted his gratitude: “President-elect Trump, thank you for your warm friendship and your clear-cut support for Israel!”

Although he did not mention Netanyahu by name, Kerry addressed head-on the Israeli leader’s assertions that the United States had “colluded” in and “orchestrated” last week’s U.N. resolution affirming that settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has “no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution.”

Kerry denied that the United States drafted or promoted the resolution. But he acknowledged that the United States took part in preliminary discussions, as is routine. Kerry said the diplomats told other Security Council members they would oppose a resolution that did not condemn Palestinian incitement to violence. They also said if the text were more “balanced,” it was “possible” the United States would not block it.

Kerry called the current Israeli governing coalition the most right-wing in country’s history and said it is driven by an extremist settler agenda inimical to a two-state agreement.

“The result is that policies of this government, which the prime minister himself just described as ‘more committed to settlements than any in Israel’s history,’ are leading in the opposite direction,” Kerry said. “They’re leading towards one state.”

“The vote in the United Nations was about preserving the two-state solution,” he added. “That’s what we were standing up for.”

Kerry offered six principles that he said would satisfy Israeli security needs and Palestinian aspirations for a homeland. Most have been proven sticking points in previous negotiations — among them, Jerusalem as a mutual capital for two states; normalized relations with Arab states in the region; and financial compensation for Palestinian refugees, along with acknowledgment of their suffering.

Kerry returned from vacation to give his speech, which was being worked on until a few minutes before he walked on stage in the Dean Acheson Auditorium. It was a sign that the administration was still struggling to deal with the political firestorm ignited by the resolution vote. The outrage in the Israeli government has been matched among some members of Congress.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called Kerry’s speech “at best a pointless tirade in the waning days of an outgoing administration.”

The U.S. abstention has been condemned by several Democrats as well, including

Sen. Charles E. Schumer (N.Y.), who is the party’s incoming leader.

But for Kerry it was a speech that captured the pent-up frustration that has grown in the two years since his nine-month effort to broker a peace agreement collapsed, and his attempts to tamp down Palestinian violence came to nothing.

And Kerry, famous for always sounding a hopeful note, was clearly pessimistic about whether his words would make any difference.

“We can only encourage them to take this path,” he said. “We cannot walk down it for them.”

Eglash reported from Jerusalem. Anne Gearan in Washington contributed to this report.

How The US Came To Abstain On A UN Resolution Condemning Israeli Settlements

By Karen DeYoung

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

On Dec. 21, amid his morning workout, an afternoon round of golf and a family dinner with friends, President Obama interrupted his Hawaii vacation to consult by phone with his top national security team in Washington. Egypt had introduced a resolution at the U.N. Security Council condemning Israeli settlements as illegal, and a vote was scheduled for the next day.

The idea had been circulating at the council for months, but the abrupt timing was a surprise. Obama was open to abstaining, he said on the call, provided the measure was “balanced” in its censure of terrorism and Palestinian violence and there were no last-minute changes in the text.

Skeptics, including Vice President Biden, warned of fierce backlash in Congress and in Israel itself. But most agreed that the time had come to take a stand. The rapid increase of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, despite escalating U.S. criticism, could very well close the door to any hope of negotiating side-by-side Israeli and Palestinian states. Pending Israeli legislation would retroactively legalize settlements already constructed on Palestinian land.

The resolution’s sponsors, four countries in addition to Egypt, were determined to call a vote before Obama left office. A U.S. veto would not only imply approval of Israeli actions but also likely take Israel off the hook for at least the next four years during President-elect Donald Trump’s administration.

“People debated whether the backlash to the vote, if we abstained, would do more harm than good, that it would reverberate into our politics, into Israeli politics, and would accelerate trends,” a senior administration official said. But “every potential argument about making things worse is already happening.”

Israel had been a third rail of U.S. political debate for decades, but Obama, aides noted, never had to run for office again. He had nothing to lose.

When the vote finally came two days later, all but one of the Security Council’s 15 members, including Russia, China and the United States’ closest European allies, approved it. U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power, who had just received the go-ahead from Obama, via a call from White House national security adviser Susan E. Rice, raised her hand high in abstention. The resolution was approved.

Reaction was as predicted. Members of Congress charged that Obama had undercut one of the United States’ closest allies. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the measure “absurd,” and his government said the United States had secretly “colluded” with the Palestinians on the resolution — a charge Obama aides heatedly denied.

Trump, who had publicly urged a veto, tweeted for Israel to “stay strong” until his inauguration. Trump clearly plans a sharp change of course in U.S. policy. Chief Trump strategist Stephen K. Bannon and others close to the president-elect have grown increasingly unhappy with administration comments in recent weeks, especially on Israel. Bannon and Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, are leading the president-elect’s efforts on the Israel debate during the transition, fielding calls from Israeli officials and allies, and arranging meetings, according to several people familiar with the internal setup.

Asked by reporters Wednesday whether he thinks the United States should leave the United Nations, Trump said that as long as the international body is “solving problems” rather than causing them, “if it lives up to its potential, it’s a great thing. If it doesn’t, it’s a waste of time.”

But for the moment, at least, according to senior Obama administration officials who discussed the road to the president’s decision on the condition of anonymity, the administration takes some satisfaction in that the issue of settlements and the perceived risk they pose to an eventual Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is back on the international agenda.

The first public hint of the move came in the heat of the U.S. presidential campaign in September, just after nominees Trump and Hillary Clinton held meetings with Netanyahu in New York. In an Israeli television interview, Dan Shapiro, U.S. ambassador to Israel, said Obama was “asking himself” about the best way to promote a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“This could be a statement we make or a resolution or an initiative at the U.N. . . . which contributes to an effort to be continued by the next administration,” he said.

Shapiro clearly anticipated a Clinton victory, reflecting thinking within the administration that if Obama took the heat for a critical statement or resolution, she would be in a better position to play the “good cop” and move Israel toward substantive negotiations. For her part, Clinton had expressed no interest in a resolution.

The United States had long declined to join much of the rest of the world in defining as “illegal” the building of Israeli housing in the West Bank and majority-Palestinian East Jerusalem. The final decision on who had the rights to what land was to be negotiated, according to decades of international agreements by Israelis and Palestinians.

During his eight years in office, Obama had tried to kick-start direct Israeli-Palestinian talks over a “final status” accord, including with nearly two years of intensive negotiations by Secretary of State John F. Kerry. Throughout that time, the administration had avoided Security Council action on the issue, persuading sponsors to withdraw potential resolutions before a vote.

The Palestinians were always lobbying for a vote, although the administration considered most of the proposed resolutions too one-sided. At the same time, the administration’s thinking was that there was no point in preempting talks if there were still a realistic chance of getting the parties back to the table.

But with settlements rapidly expanding, and senior officials in Netanyahu's right-wing coalition saying the two-state solution was effectively dead, other Security Council members were agitating for a new resolution, and the administration was listening.

So was Netanyahu's government, which picked up immediately on Shapiro's comments.

Trump's Nov. 8 victory increased Israeli concern of a preemptive move by Obama, along with determination by other U.N. members to table a resolution before the new U.S. administration took office.

The Palestinians and Egypt — which currently holds the rotating Arab seat on the Security Council — had been talking up a new resolution on settlements since the summer. At the same time, New Zealand, which had withheld a previous measure at the United States' request, had written a new draft.

Both versions began to circulate in early December. The United States, in discussions with New Zealand and indirectly with Egypt, insisted it would not even consider the matter unless the resolutions were more balanced to reflect criticism of Palestinian violence along with condemnation of Israeli settlements, according to U.S. officials.

The officials categorically denied Israeli allegations this week that the United States secretly pushed the resolutions. An Egyptian newspaper report alleging that Rice and Kerry met in early December with Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat and the head of Palestinian intelligence to plot the resolution was false, officials said. While Kerry and Rice met separately with Erekat during a visit here, they said, there was no intelligence official and no discussion of a resolution.

The officials also denied that Biden, in two mid-December calls to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, had urged a "yes" vote in the council. Biden, who handles the Ukraine account for the White House, calls Poroshenko several times a month, and those times were supporting the proposed nationalization of a corrupt bank.

The Egyptian draft, tweaked with help from Britain, was submitted to the council on Dec. 21. As often happens when competing and overlapping resolutions circulate, New Zealand and co-sponsors Malaysia, Senegal and Venezuela decided to drop their version and support the nearly identical Egyptian resolution in order to cut short prolonged negotiations and push for a vote.

"The United States did not draft or originate this resolution. Nor did we put it forward," Kerry said in a speech Wednesday. "It was drafted by Egypt . . . which is one of Israel's closest friends in the region, in coordination with the Palestinians and others."

The final text was carefully drawn to use identical, or near-identical, language to resolutions dating to the 1970s on Israel and the Palestinians that the United States had previously approved.

"We wanted to see Security Council action," said a diplomat from one of the sponsors. "We wanted the international community to reaffirm the two-state solution."

"We wanted to do it; it's a very important issue for us," said another diplomat, who said there had been "no conversation" with the United States about the subject. "I didn't see the U.S. play any role at all."

In the meantime, however, Egypt came under sharp pressure from Israel — which frequently supports U.S. military aid to Cairo — and from Trump, who called Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi. Arab foreign ministers convened a Thursday meeting in Cairo, and by midday, Egypt had withdrawn its resolution. A scheduled 3 p.m. vote was canceled.

Under Security Council rules, co-sponsors can still put the resolution forward, which is what New Zealand and the others did Friday, when the council reconvened for a vote.

At the time, according to several diplomats, few — if any — knew how the United States would vote.

Carol Morello and Robert Costa contributed to this report.

Donald Trump Tweets Support For Israel Ahead Of Kerry Speech On Middle East

By Ruth Eglash And Carol Morello

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

JERUSALEM — President-elect Donald Trump tweeted messages Wednesday showing his support for Israel and accusing President Obama of making inflammatory statements and damaging relations between Israel and the United States.

Trump tweeted that he could no longer allow Israel to be treated with disdain and urged Israel to "stay strong" until he takes office on Jan. 20.

In response Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted: "President-elect Trump, thank you for your warm friendship and your clear-cut support for Israel!" The tweet included Israeli and U.S. flags and tagged two of Trump's children, Ivanka Trump and Donald Trump Jr.

The messages came hours before Secretary of State John F. Kerry delivered a speech outlining the Obama administration's vision for resolving the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. On Friday, the United States, in a break with a long-standing policy, decided not to use its veto power to prevent the passage of a United Nations Security Council resolution criticizing Israeli settlements.

Speaking at the State Department, Kerry said the U.S. decision was aimed at “preserving the two-state solution,” which he called “the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.” If the United States allowed “a dangerous dynamic to take hold,” Kerry said, referring to increased Israeli settlement activity and implicit rejection of a Palestinian state, “we would be derelict in our own responsibilities.”

He denounced what he described as Israeli steps toward effective “annexation” of the West Bank in an effort to create one state, a “greater Israel,” instead of accepting an adjacent Palestinian state.

Kerry said: “Friends need to tell each other the hard truths. And friendships require mutual respect. . . . We cannot be true to our own values or even the stated democratic values of Israel . . . if we allow a viable two-state solution to be destroyed before our eyes.”

He enumerated a series of principles for a peace agreement, starting with secure borders for both states based on Israeli’s pre-1967 boundaries, with mutually agreed land swaps.

Netanyahu’s office promptly retorted by denouncing Kerry’s speech as “skewed” and saying it “obsessively” focused on settlements.

In subsequent televised remarks, Netanyahu said he had “iron-clad proof” that the United States organized the U.N. resolution, a charge that Kerry and other U.S. officials denied. The Israeli leader expressed “great disappointment” with Kerry’s speech, calling it “unbalanced” and saying it paid only “lip service” to combating Palestinian terrorism.

Netanyahu said he did not need to be “lectured about peace by foreign leaders,” and he blamed the continuing conflict not on Israeli settlements but on what he said was “the persistent Palestinian refusal” to recognize Israel’s right to exist.

Ahead of Kerry’s speech, senior Israeli minister Gilad Erdan said that if Kerry laid out principles for a peace deal at the last minute before leaving office, it would end up ensuring that the Palestinians never agree to negotiations with Israel. He called the U.S. position “pro-Palestinian,” “pathetic” and a sign that the Obama administration does not “understand what is happening in the Middle East.”

Since Friday’s resolution, Israel has accused Obama and his advisers of failing to protect Israel and of “colluding” with the Palestinians to draft the resolution and push it to a vote.

The resolution, which passed by 14 votes to 0, with the United States abstaining, declares that Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem have “no legal validity” and are a barrier to achieving peace with the Palestinians.

Following the vote, Netanyahu ordered diplomatic moves against countries that voted for the resolution. He summoned the envoys of the countries involved and recalled Israel’s ambassadors to New Zealand and Senegal, two of the four countries that submitted the resolution.

On Wednesday, however, Netanyahu seemed to tone down his actions, instructing the Jerusalem municipality to hold off on approving new housing units in a bid to avoid further strain in U.S.-Israeli relations, a local official said.

Jerusalem’s Municipal Planning and Construction Committee had been scheduled to finalize construction plans for some 492 new homes in Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, despite the resolution. It went ahead, however, with approval of plans for a new building in a Palestinian neighborhood in the city, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported.

Hanan Rubin, a member of Jerusalem’s city council, confirmed that the request to postpone construction plans came directly from the prime minister, who wanted to avoid deepening the rift. He said the zoning committee agreed to abide by it because they had no interest in “causing a political storm.”

“Our goal is to provide solutions to residents of Jerusalem. We have a problem building in central Jerusalem, and this is a natural expansion for the city,” he said. The 492 housing units are part of a wider plan to build in Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, an area the Palestinians would like to see as their capital of a future state.

On Tuesday, the Israeli government appeared to be stepping up its battle with the Obama administration, saying it had solid proof that the United States orchestrated the resolution.

On Wednesday, an Egyptian website, el-Youm el-Sabaa, said it had a copy of minutes from a meeting held 10 days before the vote and attended by Kerry, national security adviser Susan E. Rice, Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Saeb Erekat and Majid Faraj, commander of the Palestinian General Intelligence Service. The United States allegedly said it was willing to withhold its veto power if the resolution was balanced.

The State Department denied the account. And Erekat released a statement Wednesday saying that the leaked minutes of the meeting with Kerry were a fabrication.

Morello reported from Washington. William Branigin in Washington contributed to this report.

With Final Detainee Transfer, Obama's Guantanamo Policy Takes Its Last Breath

By Missy Ryan And Julie Tate

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

The Obama administration has informed Congress of its plans to resettle up to 19 detainees held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in a final sprint to pare down the inmate population at the military prison, U.S. officials said.

Even if the transfers occur before Jan. 20 as planned, about 40 inmates will remain at the facility, a lasting reminder of President Obama's failure to deliver on his Inauguration Day promise to close the prison and an illustration of the difficulty of following through on one of his central national security goals.

Obama's inability to close Guantanamo after eight years in office empowers President-elect Donald Trump to keep the prison operational. Trump has said he will make it part of his counterterrorism policy and "load it up with some bad dudes."

The end to Obama's Guantanamo plans also sets up a renewed debate over the proper handling of terrorism suspects and the legality of a system that was designed to interrogate and hold al-Qaeda suspects after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"The bottom line is that the continuing existence of Guantanamo is a legal and moral blight," said Hina Shamsi, director of the American Civil Liberty Union's National Security Project. "It is the embodiment of U.S. violations of the rule of law, unfair trials and unlawful and indefinite detentions without charge or trial."

The 11th-hour transfer plans, which would move a group of prisoners to the United Arab Emirates and additional inmates to Oman, Saudi Arabia and, possibly, Italy, culminates a flurry of resettlements that U.S. diplomats have negotiated in recent years. The planned transfers were first reported by the New York Times.

Since Obama took office, the United States has repatriated or resettled 179 prisoners, helping to winnow the detainee population from a peak under President George W. Bush of over 700 to 59 today.

Early in his administration, Obama attempted to bring suspects to the United States for trial in the federal courts, but he abandoned those efforts in the face of stiff political resistance. Over the years, Congress has enacted tight restrictions on how and where prisoners can be resettled.

Last winter, Obama made another appeal to Congress, asking them to set aside opposition and consider a plan for wrapping up a 15-year detention saga by bringing some inmates to the United States for imprisonment here.

But legal experts and detainee advocates fault Obama for not pushing harder for closure, saying he could have skirted congressional obstacles if he had been willing to weather the political fallout.

As he prepares to leave office, Obama leaves behind a military trial system so slow that five 9/11 suspects, including self-proclaimed mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, are not expected to be tried until 2020. Guantanamo also holds a group of "forever prisoners," whom officials say they cannot release because of security risks but who also cannot be tried because of a lack of appropriate evidence.

"History is going to judge him badly for his failure to close Guantanamo and particularly for his failure to do everything he has legal authority to do," said J. Wells Dixon, a senior staff attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights, which represents Guantanamo prisoners.

Emily Horne, a White House spokeswoman, said the administration has continued to take "all possible steps" to move detainees out of Guantanamo and close the prison.

"The continued operation of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility weakens our national security by draining resources, damaging our relationships with key allies and partners and emboldening violent extremists," she said.

Some lawmakers continue to object even to transfers that are vetted by a panel of law enforcement, military and intelligence officials. Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Tex.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, warned against additional transfers in a letter earlier this month to Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter, who signs off on each resettlement.

"I am concerned that there has been insufficient due diligence prior to transfer, and that recipient nations have lacked the capability to enforce proper security measures to mitigate the risk of re-engagement," Thornberry wrote in the letter, a copy of which was seen by The Washington Post.

While a small minority of released detainees have been found to have returned to militant activity, officials say the risks have been overblown.

Although there are 23 prisoners approved for resettlement overseas, U.S. officials say they have no plans to transfer anyone beyond the 19 whose transfer has already been announced to Congress.

Republicans have also found fault with the administration's practice of keeping secret details of security arrangements for resettled detainees and information about U.S. financial support received by released prisoners.

Articulating the new optimism felt by critics of Obama's approach, Rep. Edward R. Royce (R-Calif.), who chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote this week that "on Jan. 20, we have an opportunity to chart a better way."

While Trump has not spoken extensively about Guantanamo, he has criticized prisoner releases and identified the military prison as a “very safe place” to house suspected militants.

“I want to make sure, 100 percent sure, that if we’re going to release people, number 1, they’re going to be people that can be released, and it’s going to be safe to release them,” Trump said in an interview with the Miami Herald.

He also suggested that he would put new prisoners in Guantanamo, possibly even trying U.S. citizens there, a move prohibited by current U.S. law. The last time the United States added to the prisoner population at Guantanamo was in 2008, before Obama took office.

A spokesman for the Trump transition team did not respond to a request for comment.

Legal experts suggest that the continued detention of prisoners, without parallel efforts to resettle them, or efforts to bring new detainees to Guantanamo could be met with fresh legal challenges.

Laura Pitter, senior national security counsel at Human Rights Watch, said that Trump’s apparent plans for the prison would feed into militant propaganda and weaken the United States’ ability to speak up for human rights worldwide.

“A statement like that just shows . . . a lack of understanding of what Guantanamo means and the danger that keeping it open poses to U.S. national security,” she said.

Trump On Alleged Election Interference By Russia: “Get On With Our Lives”

By John Wagner

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

President-elect Donald Trump distanced himself Wednesday night from the Obama administration’s plans to punish Russia for its alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election, telling reporters that “I think we ought to get on with our lives.”

Trump, appearing at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Fla., was asked what he thought about the Obama administration’s plans to sanction Russia for what U.S. intelligence officials say was state-sanctioned hacking of Democratic organizations, the targeting of state election systems and meddling in the U.S. presidential election.

“I think we ought to get on with our lives,” Trump said. “I think that computers have complicated lives very greatly. The whole age of the computer has made it where nobody knows exactly what’s going on. We have speed, we have a lot of other things, but I’m not sure we have the kind of security we need.”

Asked in particular about comments Wednesday by Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) that sanctions should hit Russian leader Vladimir Putin “as an individual,” Trump demurred.

“I don’t know what he’s doing,” Trump said of Graham. “I haven’t spoken to him. As you know, he ran against me.”

Trump, whom critics have accused of being too cozy with Putin, was referring to Graham’s failed 2016 bid for the Republican presidential nomination.

Trump made his comments outside an event at his estate that was attended by boxing promoter Don King, who stood by the president-elect’s side as he fielded questions.

Trump also played down questions that have swirled around him about how he will extract himself from his global business interests upon taking office. The president-elect postponed a news conference on that subject this month, and said Wednesday that it will be held early next month.

“It’s a very routine thing,” Trump said. “It’s not a big deal. You people are making that a big deal, the business. . . . When I won, they all knew I had a big business all over the place. . . . It’s a much bigger business than anybody thought. It’s a great business, but I’m going to have nothing to do with it.”

Trump said he was prepared to act more boldly than required by law because “I want to focus on the country.”

“I think that’s going to work out very easily,” he said. “It’s actually a very simple situation. It’s not a big deal.”

During the election, several Democratic email accounts were hacked, including those of the Democratic National Committee and of John Podesta, the chairman of Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton’s campaign.

U.S. officials have pinned the blame on the Russian government — a finding that Trump has repeatedly said he views skeptically.

Administration officials are pushing Obama to respond before leaving office.

On The Front Lines Of The Fight For The Islamic State’s Capital Of Raqqa, Syria

By Liz Sly

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

TAL SAMAN, Syria — “Raqqa we are coming” say the words spray-painted in Kurdish at the entrance to this empty little town, which lies on the front line of a U.S.-backed advance toward the Islamic State’s capital.

The city of Raqqa is 17 miles away, a tantalizingly short hop to the place showcased in the militants' propaganda videos as an Islamist utopia, where the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels were planned and where, U.S. officials warn, new plots against the West are being forged.

But a full offensive to retake the city could still be months or more away, despite hopes in Washington that an operation to take the Islamic State's most symbolically significant stronghold would be well underway before President Obama left office.

A rare visit to the Raqqa front line illustrated how near and yet far off the defeat of the Islamic State may be. The battle for Mosul in neighboring Iraq has stalled, the attack in Berlin has brought home the continued threat of terrorism, and there is still no plan for an offensive on Raqqa, making the war one of the most immediate, and complicated, challenges the Trump administration will have to confront.

Meanwhile, a preliminary operation to isolate and besiege Raqqa is going well. Over the past month, a Kurdish-Arab alliance called the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) has been slicing briskly through Islamic State lines in the northern and western countryside of Raqqa province. The fighters have captured some 140 villages and nearly 800 square miles of mostly empty rural land on two fronts in a just over a month, encountering little resistance along the way.

This is not the battle for Mosul, where large armored formations are converging from different directions. There are more sheep than soldiers scattered across the empty fields. Flocks trot through the landscape herded by boys on donkeys as the lightly armored pickup trucks and SUVs used by the Kurdish and Arab militias weave among them.

Every now and then, American soldiers hurtle past, a reminder that the U.S. military is very much invested in the Raqqa front, however remote it may be. There are around 600 Special Operations troops embedded with the SDF in northeastern Syria, a number that could rise before the battle fully takes shape, U.S. officials say. One of those troops was killed on Nov. 24, the first U.S. casualty of the war in Syria.

He died in Tal Saman, a victim of one of the mines and booby traps that have become the Islamic State's hallmark defense against advancing foes in Iraq and Syria.

Otherwise, the militants have put up little resistance, firing mortars as the soldiers advance but retreating well before their enemies arrive.

Bigger obstacles loom, however, in the form of a geopolitical tangle that could prove more daunting than any defenses mounted by the Islamic State.

At the heart of the issue is the U.S. military's policy of sending arms to the area controlled by the main Syrian Kurdish militia, the People's Protection Units, widely known as the YPG.

The decision has paid off so far. The YPG — which constitutes the Kurdish component of the SDF — has proved to be the United States' most effective military ally in Syria, and it has retaken vast swaths of territory. It is also expanding deep into Arab areas as it presses forward against the militants, raising questions among observers about the long-term sustainability of the gains.

The cooperation has, moreover, provoked the ire of Turkey, because of the YPG's long-standing ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which is designated a terrorist organization by Ankara and Washington. Turkey is waging its own offensive against the Islamic State in nearby Aleppo province but has hinted it may soon turn on the SDF alliance and perhaps then make its own push for the Islamic State capital.

The Syrian government also opposes the Kurdish expansion and has repeatedly said it plans to retake Raqqa, which it lost control of in 2013. Syria is backed by Russia, which is forging a new alliance with Turkey over Syria, potentially setting the stage for a global clash over who wins the prize goal.

To ameliorate the concerns of NATO ally Turkey, the U.S. military says it is giving arms only to Arab fighters within the umbrella SDF, formed last year to serve as a vehicle for the delivery of military aid. There are 13,000 Arabs now serving with the SDF, alongside 45,000 Kurds with the YPG, according to a U.S. military spokesman, Col. John Dorrian.

But there seems to be little doubt that the YPG is leading the fight. Its flags flutter over the checkpoints along the newly liberated rural roads and at the military bases closest to the front lines. Its graffiti is scrawled over the walls of the captured towns and villages, as in Tal Saman, where the initials "YPG" were spray-painted alongside the pledge to take Raqqa.

The Kurdish-Arab alliance, with U.S. assistance, plans to recruit and train an additional 10,000 Arab fighters for an offensive on Raqqa, said Rojda Felat, one of the commanders of the offensive to encircle the city. But YPG participation will be essential "because we have proved that we are the most effective fighters," she said.

"We will even go past Raqqa," she added, to other areas farther south controlled by the Islamic State, which is also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh.

Whether it is wise to send an overwhelmingly Kurdish force to capture the overwhelmingly Arab city of Raqqa is in question, however. A Kurdish push on Raqqa risks alienating the local population, perhaps encouraging residents who otherwise

would not support the Islamic State to fight on its behalf, according to Abu Issa, a commander with the rebel Free Syrian Army's Liwa Thuwar al-Raqqa, or Raqqa Revolutionaries Brigade.

"We saw in Iraq and other places that if the local people are not involved in the liberation, there won't be any stability," he said in an interview at his headquarters, in a remote farmhouse in the countryside of Raqqa province. He and his group are from Raqqa, and though they are loosely allied with the SDF, they fly the flag of the Free Syrian Army.

"All the Arabs know that the SDF are YPG, and if things continue as they are, there will be big problems in the future, sectarian clashes and conflict," Abu Issa said. "People don't understand why the YPG are going to Raqqa. It's an entirely Arab area, and the Arabs feel marginalized."

Arab residents of the areas recently freed from Islamic State control seem mostly just relieved to be rid of the extremists — and to have survived yet another battle, one that has so far proved mercifully brief. The fight has been so easy that there have been few casualties and relatively little damage to the isolated villages dotting the desert landscape.

The YPG fighters conduct what appear to be well-organized evacuations of the villages that lie in the path of the offensive. As people from areas close to the front lines leave, those from villages that have been cleared are allowed to return.

On one recent day, hundreds of people streamed into the destroyed Arab town of Ain Issa from villages well behind Islamic State lines, in trucks piled high with children, mattresses and sheep. They had responded, they said, to messages sent by the Kurds to vacate their homes before the battles arrived. They said they were glad to seize the chance to escape the seemingly collapsing rule of the Islamic State fighters fleeing in the other direction.

"They used to take people with them to use as human shields, but now they are not even doing this," said Saleh Hassan, one of the men who said he had escaped his home through minefields to reach the Kurdish lines. "People were with them before, but now even their fighters are trying to defect."

Ahmed Naim, 23, said he had covertly sold cigarettes and had many run-ins with the militants, who banned smoking. "Their days are numbered," he said. "Daesh is finished, and the majority of the people are happy."

It is hard to tell how happy people really are when armed guards are standing nearby. As the villagers who escaped areas behind the Islamic State lines arrived in Ain Issa, others were returning to their homes in the village of Hisha, which was freed last month after a brief battle.

At the local barbershop, a line of long-haired customers waited on wobbly plastic chairs for haircuts that were forbidden under Islamic State rule. "Nobody wants ISIS," Mouay ad Khalaf said as he snipped the curly locks of a teenage boy.

But some men, when stopped in the street and asked what they thought of the change of authority, seemed less thrilled.

"They haven't caused us any problems," one man said vaguely. He didn't want to be named.

"It's okay," said another who didn't seem sure. "We're cooperating with them."

U.S. officials acknowledge the concerns about sending Kurds into battle in Raqqa but say that at the moment there is no alternative. "The only force that is capable on any near-term timeline is the Syrian Democratic Forces, of which the YPG are a significant portion," Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend told reporters last month.

Turkey has, meanwhile, been waging a rival offensive against the Islamic State farther west, in the province of Aleppo, where Turkish troops are backing Syrian Arab rebels with the Free Syrian Army, with the support of the United States. Though the focus of the fighting is on the Islamic State, Turkey has threatened to attack the SDF, potentially drawing troops and resources away from the Raqqa battle.

So complicated are the politics that there is still no plan for a Raqqa offensive, said Nasir Haj Mansour, a veteran Kurdish fighter who is now an adviser to the SDF. "Unfortunately, yes," he said when asked whether he thought the Islamic State would still be in control of Raqqa in six months' time.

And in a year?

"Probably, yes."

Donald Trump Is Fighting For His Trademark In China, Home Of Trump Toilets And Trump Condoms

By Simon Denyer

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

BEIJING — Thirty-six-year-old Mao Yongjin says he has worshiped Donald Trump since he first watched "The Apprentice" in graduate school. So when it came time to set up his own company selling skin-care products, there was only one name he wanted for the men's line.

At the beginning of this year, he filed a trademark application.

"I really hoped there could be Trump beauty cream, Trump moisturizing lotion, Trump anti-aging and brightening serum, and Trump balm," he said. "But his winning the election isn't necessarily good news for me. I guess my trademark application won't pass now."

Mao is one of dozens of Chinese people who have tried to trademark the Trump name in China over the years, some in direct reference to the American property-mogul-turned-politician, others just because they like the sound of the name.

Many have been successful. Today, there are trademarks registered for Trump condoms, Trump toilets, Trump pesticide and Trump paint, none bearing any direct business relation to the next U.S. president.

But Donald Trump is fighting back, and he appears to be intensifying a long struggle to protect his brand name here. As he becomes a household name in China, he seems to be having more success.

Over the past 10 years, he has lodged 126 trademark applications in China for the TRUMP name, on everything from pet care products to computer software to lingerie to golf clubs, according to records at the Trademark Office of the State Administration for Industry and Commerce.

This year alone, 34 applications have been filed.

In September, he won a decade-long battle to wrest the "TRUMP" trademark from a Chinese citizen for the provision of "commercial, residential hotels and immovable property," the latter a term referring to real estate.

His initial application was rejected by the trademark bureau in 2006 because a man named Dong Wei had already secured the trademark for a similar purpose, his Chinese attorneys said.

Trump's application went to appeal, then to Beijing's No. 1 Intermediate People's Court and finally to Beijing's Supreme People's Court. He lost every time.

Then, in September 2016, the trademark bureau finally relented, declaring Dong Wei's trademark invalid. On Nov. 13, just days after Trump's election win, his application was finally accepted, and it will be formally registered in February — unless further objections are received. (The Trump Organization declined to comment.)

Trump's newfound fame in China played an indirect role in his trademark victory, said Zhou Dandan of Unitalen Attorneys at Law in Beijing, who acted on his behalf.

"Because of the election, Trump is widely known to the Chinese people," she said. "This meets the requirement of the law: that the duplicated name of a public figure as a trademark is not allowed, as it will create confusion to the public and be negative to the figure."

So why is the Trump name so popular here?

Mao's skin-care products don't give your face an orangy tan, and his plans for Trump shampoo and conditioner were not an homage to the politician's carefully crafted thatch but a tribute to his hero's personality and character.

"I really like his macho and decisive manner. He is brave in saying what he thinks. He is a role model for men," Mao said. "I agree with most of his policies and beliefs, especially on Muslim people. There is too much terrorism in the world, and it is very clear who is behind it."

But other people, including Wu Yue, manager of an investment consulting company in Shanghai, said they had applied to use the Trump name because they thought it had an auspicious ring to it.

"I wasn't thinking about Donald Trump," Wu said. "I just thought that 'trump' — as in playing cards — would bring good luck."

Wu's application — for a financial consulting service — was rejected last month on the grounds that it was an ambiguous and empty term and would be like taking out a trademark for the brand name "Good."

"You can't call yourself 'good' when other people don't know if you are good or not," he said the trademark bureau told him. "You can't use 'trump' when other people don't know if you truly possess the quality of 'trump.'"

But the Shenzhen Trump Industrial Co. has had a happier experience with the brand name. It has been selling Trump toilets and urinals since 2002, before it even knew there was a person called Donald Trump, and the company now has 2,000 employees, said its founder, Zhong Jiye.

If Trump ever sues, Zhong has told reporters, the company is prepared to defend its rights to the Trump name.

Customers in China include airports, hospitals and spas — as well as Zhongnanhai, the high-security government headquarters in the heart of Beijing where President Xi Jinping is believed to live.

The company also exports to the Middle East and Europe, said Zhong, adding that sales have risen sharply in the past few months.

"It is just a psychological effect," he said. "People think our brand's name sounds similar to Donald Trump, and they are interested, because they want to sit on a toilet or use a urinal that has the name of the U.S. president."

Congcong Zhang in Beijing and Jonathan O'Connell in Washington contributed to this report.

Duterte Threatens To Throw Corrupt Officials Out Of A Helicopter — And Says He's Done It Before

By Kristine Guerra

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

In his latest controversial statement, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, known for his bloody anti-drug war that has killed thousands, threatened to throw corrupt officials out of a helicopter, saying he has done it before — and won't hesitate to do it again.

"I will pick you up in a helicopter to Manila, and I will throw you out on the way," Duterte said in Tagalog in front of a crowd in the Camarines Sur province on Tuesday, according to GMA News. "I've done it before. Why would I not do it again?"

The Filipino president was visiting areas of the province in the northern island of Luzon that were affected by the deadly Typhoon Nock-Ten, locally known as Nina. The storm, one of the strongest since Typhoon Haiyan ravaged the Philippines's Visayas region in 2014, has killed at least six people and displaced hundreds of thousands, according to the Philippine Star.

In his speech, Duterte announced that he was going to give up to 100 million pesos in financial assistance, in addition to 1 billion pesos that was set aside for calamities, the Philippine Star reported.

After that announcement, he went on to talk about his campaign against drugs and corruption.

The former mayor and prosecutor, who rose to power on a promise to uproot his country's drug problem, has become famous for his brash talks and public outbursts.

He made headlines last April, when he was campaigning for the presidency, for making a joke about an Australian minister who was gang-raped and killed in 1989 in a Davao prison. At that time, Duterte was mayor of the southern city of Davao.

In August, he warned terrorists that he can be "10 times" more brutal than the Islamic State.

Most recently, Duterte admitted that he had personally killed people. He told a local radio station last month that he killed several criminals during his time as mayor. He specifically talked about killing three men who kidnapped and raped a Chinese girl in 1988, when he was only a few months into his term. He said that during the encounter, the men were holding carbines and didn't raise their hands when they were told, so he shot them.

Vitaliano Aguirre II, Duterte's justice secretary, cautioned that the president is prone to hyperbole and exaggeration, according to ABS-CBN News.

Following Duterte's claims, the United Nations human rights chief, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, urged the Philippines's judicial branch to launch a murder investigation.

"It should be unthinkable for any functioning judicial system not to launch investigative and judicial proceedings when someone has openly admitted being a killer," Zeid said in a statement. "The killings described by President Duterte also violate international law, including the right to life, freedom from violence and force, due process and fair trial, equal protection before the law, and innocence until proven guilty."

Zeid also addressed Duterte's anti-drug war, saying it has emboldened law enforcement to commit violence without accountability and is a "direct violation of all democratic safeguards that have been established to uphold justice and the rule of law."

More than 6,000 have been killed since Duterte took office on June 30. Some were killed during encounters with police who were acting under the government's orders, while others were killed by unknown vigilantes.

Duterte defended his anti-drug campaign in an October interview with Al Jazeera.

Killing criminals, he said, is not a crime.

"It could not be negligence because you have to save your life. It could not be recklessness because you have to defend yourself," he said.

His goal, he said, is to eradicate his country's massive drug problems "to preserve the interest of the next generation."

"If you destroy my country, I'll kill you. That's a legitimate thing," Duterte said. "If you destroy our young children, I will kill you. That is a very correct statement."

More Migrants Are Leaving Germany On Their Own Before The Country Can Deport Them

By Rick Noack

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

If 2015 was the year in which Germany opened its doors to refugees, 2016 was when the country pondered how to close them. Although the influx of refugees peaked more than a year ago, attacks like the one in Berlin on Dec. 19 have led to demands that Germany refuse entry to individuals without passports and step up deportations of criminals and terrorism suspects.

Authorities hope that another trend will have a bigger effect in the short run: migrants deciding to go back because they are fed up with Germany or fear deportation. More than twice as many migrants departed the country voluntarily this year than were deported.

Out of the 55,000 migrants who left voluntarily, 15,000 were Albanians. About 5,000 each from Serbia, Iraq and Kosovo returned home. The numbers were first reported by Germany's Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper. A spokesman for the migration ministry confirmed the numbers on Wednesday.

Germany offers individuals or families willing to return to their countries of origin financial benefits that can amount to several thousands of euros, including travel costs and start-up grants. Promoted as an alternative to conventional development aid, such payments are supposed to help vitalize local economies and to prevent returnees and others from again fleeing to European Union nations.

The German government will spend more than \$155 million on additional development aid projects over the next three years in countries that are home to many of the migrants who head to Germany. Among the nations included are Morocco and Tunisia, as well as Kosovo, Serbia and Albania, all countries generally considered "safe" by German authorities.

Voluntary departures are unlikely to make up for Germany's lagging efforts to deport more migrants, however. Out of the almost 900,000 people who entered last year alone, many remain in the country despite being refused asylum.

German authorities say deportations are expensive and difficult to organize. Migrants are often arrested at night and later put on planes to their home countries.

Pressure to change that process is increasing as more details are emerging about efforts to deport Anis Amri, the man suspected in the Dec. 19 Berlin market attack, which killed 12 people. The fugitive was fatally shot by a police officer in Italy.

Despite the 24-year-old's criminal past, he could not be deported to his home country of Tunisia for months because he lacked documents, which the North African nation had failed to provide, according to German media reports.

WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL

Memo To Trump: There Can Be Only One President At A Time

By Ruth Marcus

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

One of the hallmarks of our democratic system is its commitment to the peaceful transition of power. This practice comes with two important, linked corollaries that fall under the umbrella that there can be only one president at a time. The first is that the incoming president, especially in the arena of foreign policy, takes care not to trespass on the prerogatives of the incumbent. The second is that the outgoing president, once departed, remains largely mute, giving his successor space to operate unimpeded by post-presidential back seat carping.

President-elect Donald Trump must have missed this memo. Not bothering to wait for the constitutionally mandated handover, Trump has inserted himself into policy-making, from bullying U.S. manufacturers to barging into foreign affairs, including shaking up U.S.-China policy and intruding into the Obama administration's dealings with Israel at the United Nations.

This public tussling is as disturbing as it is unprecedented.

President Richard Nixon, at a news conference a week after being sworn in, was asked whether he would stick with judicial nominations submitted by his predecessor, Lyndon Johnson. Nixon noted that, in conversations as president-elect with Johnson administration officials, he had "scrupulously followed the line that we have one president at a time, and that he must continue to be president until he leaves office on January 20."

Bill Clinton book-ended his presidency with this same point. "During the transition that is now beginning," he said the day after his election in 1992, "I urge America's friends and foes alike to recognize, as I do, that America has only one president at a time."

Eight years later, asked about his future plans as he prepared to leave office, Clinton invoked the one-president theme again, saying that he wanted to "find a way to be a useful citizen . . . but to do it in a way that does not get in the way of my successor."

As president-elect, Barack Obama employed the one-president-at-a-time mantra so frequently — 10 times, by my count — that my colleague Dana Milbank was moved to poke fun at it. In the midst of a financial meltdown, Obama was assertively involved in lobbying for the auto bailout and in shaping the contours of a stimulus package that would be enacted on his watch.

But Obama — who had been criticized during the 2008 campaign for some of his dealings with foreign leaders — steered decidedly clear of weighing in on issues like the escalating crisis in the Gaza Strip. "We can't have two administrations running foreign policy at the same time," he said on Jan. 7. "We simply can't do it."

Except Trump can. "At the end of the day, he's not someone that's going to sit back and wait," Sean Spicer, the incoming White House press secretary, told CNN, defending Trump's involvement with the United Nations vote.

Obama and his aides have, rather gently, made the one-president point. After Trump took a phone call with the president of Taiwan, Obama observed: "Since there's only one president at a time, my advice to him has been that before he starts having a lot of interactions with foreign governments other than the usual courtesy calls, that he should want to have his full team in place."

Not only did the president-elect fail to heed the message — he bristled at it. With typical Trumpian gall, he managed to take umbrage at Obama's conduct during the transition. "Doing my best to disregard the many inflammatory President O statements and roadblocks," Trump tweeted Wednesday morning. "Thought it was going to be a smooth transition — NOT!"

Trump's definition of a smooth transition: one that goes entirely his way. So what were these "inflammatory" statements that set Trump off? Just about anything can trigger his wrath. Perhaps it was Obama, at Pearl Harbor with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, exhorting Americans to "resist the urge to turn inward" or "to demonize those who are different." Perhaps it was Obama boasting he would have beaten Trump if allowed to run.

Well, that's certainly inflammatory. How dare Obama?

Maybe Trump's disrespectful conduct toward Obama shouldn't be so surprising. After all, long before the election, Senate Republicans acted as if the Obama presidency had already ended, refusing even to consider his Supreme Court nominee.

In that sense, Trump is merely following an especially ugly, anti-constitutional party line. Imagine how President Trump, in office, would respond to such incursions on his authority — and how President Trump, on his way out, would deal with a successor behaving this churlishly.

I Watched A Populist Leader Rise In My Country. That's Why I'm Genuinely Worried For America.

By Miklos Haraszti

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

Miklos Haraszti is a Hungarian author and director of research on human rights at the Center for European Neighborhood Studies of Central European University.

Hungary, my country, has in the past half-decade morphed from an exemplary post-Cold War democracy into a populist autocracy. Here are a few eerie parallels that have made it easy for Hungarians to put Donald Trump on their political map: Prime Minister Viktor Orban has depicted migrants as rapists, job-stealers, terrorists and "poison" for the nation, and built a vast fence along Hungary's southern border. The popularity of his nativist agitation has allowed him to easily debunk as unpatriotic or partisan any resistance to his self-styled "illiberal democracy," which he said he modeled after "successful states" such as Russia and Turkey.

No wonder Orban feted Trump's victory as ending the era of "liberal non-democracy," "the dictatorship of political correctness" and "democracy export." The two consummated their political kinship in a recent phone conversation; Orban is invited to Washington, where, they agreed, both had been treated as "black sheep."

When friends encouraged me to share my views on the U.S. election, they may have looked for heartening insights from a member of the European generation that managed a successful transition from Communist autocracy to liberal constitutionalism. Alas, right now I find it hard to squeeze hope from our past experiences, because halting elected post-truthers in countries split by partisan fighting is much more difficult than achieving freedom where it is desired by virtually everyone.

But based on our current humiliating condition, I may observe what governing style to expect from the incoming populist-in-chief and what fallacies should be avoided in countering his ravages.

A first vital lesson from my Hungarian experience: Do not be distracted by a delusion of impending normalization. Do not ascribe a rectifying force to statutes, logic, necessities or fiascoes. Remember the frequently reset and always failed illusions attached to an eventual normalization of Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Orban.

Call me a typical Hungarian pessimist, but I think hope can be damaging when dealing with populists. For instance, hoping that unprincipled populism is unable to govern. Hoping that Trumpism is self-deceiving, or self-revealing, or self-defeating. Hoping to find out if the president-elect will have a line or a core, or if he is driven by beliefs or by interests. Or there's the Kremlinology-type hope that Trump's party, swept to out-and-out power by his charms, could turn against him. Or hope extracted, oddly, from the very fact that he often disavows his previous commitments.

Populists govern by swapping issues, as opposed to resolving them. Purposeful randomness, constant ambush, relentless slaloming and red herrings dropped all around are the new normal. Their favorite means of communication is provoking conflict. They do not mind being hated. Their two basic postures of "defending" and "triumphing" are impossible to perform without picking enemies.

I was terrified to learn that pundits in the United States have started to elaborate on possible benefits of Trump's stances toward Russia and China. Few developments are more frightening than the populist edition of George Orwell's dystopia. The world is now dominated by three gigantic dominions, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, a.k.a. the United States, Russia and China, and all three are governed by promises of making their realms "great again."

Please do not forget that populists can turn into peaceniks or imperialists at any moment, depending on what they think could yield good spin that boosts their support. Remember how Putin and Erdogan had switched, within months this year, from warring to fraternity. Or how Orban in opposition had blasted any compromises with Russia, only to become Putin's best friend upon his election.

I have plenty of gloomy don't-dos, but few proven trump cards. There is perhaps one mighty exception, the issue of corruption, which the polite American media like to describe as "conflicts of interest."

It is the public's moral indignation over nepotism that has proved to be the nemesis of illiberal regimes. Personal and family greed, cronyism, thievery combined with hypocrisy are in the genes of illiberal autocracy; and in many countries betrayed expectations of a selfless strongman have led to a civic awakening.

It probably helps to be as watchful as possible on corruption, to assist investigative journalism at any price, and to defend the institutions that enforce transparency and justice. And it also helps to have leaders in the opposition who are not only impeccably clean in pecuniary matters, but also impress as such.

The world is looking at the United States now in a way that we never thought would be possible: fretting that the "deals" of its new president will make the world's first democracy more similar to that of the others. I wish we onlookers could help the Americans in making the most out of their hard-to-change Constitution. We still are thankful for what they gave to the world, and we will be a bit envious if they can stop the fast-spreading plague of national populism.

Trump Wants New "Extreme Vetting" For Immigrants. That Might Be A Waste Of Time.

[Washington Post](#), December 28, 2016

NO ONE is certain how President-elect Donald Trump intends to stiffen restrictions on immigrants and visitors to the United States, or what he means by "extreme vetting," though there is little doubt he will try to tighten screening for many applying from Muslim countries.

What is clear is that beefed-up federal laws, rules, systems, programs and technology have added substantial layers of scrutiny for virtually every foreigner who has entered the country in recent years. Americans deserve to know that those entering the country have been screened carefully, but it will be difficult for Mr. Trump to fashion an even more muscular inspection and monitoring regimen without subjecting visitors and immigrants to outright religious profiling.

The advances in federal capabilities were highlighted last week when the Obama administration officially dismantled one post-Sept. 11 screening program, which seemed tough when it was enacted, because it had become obsolete. The program, known as the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, was in use for nine years before being suspended in 2011, largely because other, newer systems had proved more effective at tracking and monitoring foreign travelers before and after they entered the country.

While it was in use, NSEERS entailed registering some 180,000 teenage boys and men from 25 countries, most of them Muslim — subjecting them to fingerprinting, interrogations and, in some cases, periodic visits from federal agents. At least 13,000 of them were placed into deportation proceedings after overstaying their visas or otherwise failing to comply with rules.

The program applied for the most part to law-abiding visitors and residents, and as far as is known, never produced any terrorist prosecutions. In 2012, the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general, noting it had done little to enhance public safety while draining government resources, recommended that it be permanently dismantled. Now it has been, meaning the Trump administration would have to jump through additional hoops to resurrect it, or something like it.

Doing so may be a waste of effort. Since NSEERS was established, and even more since its demise, other programs have leapfrogged it. Automated systems now collect and store biographic and biometric data including digitized fingerprints, iris scans and facial data for most foreigners entering the country, including students. Foreign nationals from or those who have visited high-risk countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen are ineligible for participation in the U.S. visa waiver program, meaning they are subject to extra scrutiny when applying to come to the United States. Government databases are increasingly searchable and better at helping officials spot those who may pose threats to national security.

Those systems and programs, detailed by Homeland Security in explanation of NSEERS's obsolescence, provide federal authorities with a range of tools to verify foreigners' identities and monitor their movements. They apply broadly to visitors, travelers and immigrants. They also comport with constitutional standards and American values.

By contrast, a registry that singles out travelers from Muslim countries falls afoul of those standards — and may do little to enhance national security. While some prominent recent terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe were carried out by immigrants, the perpetrators of others, including the bloody assaults in Paris and Orlando, were by homegrown terrorists.

NEW YORK TIMES

Kerry Rebukes Israel, Calling Settlements A Threat To Peace

By David E. Sanger

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State John Kerry accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel on Wednesday of thwarting peace in the Middle East, speaking with a clarity and harshness almost never heard from American diplomats when discussing one of their closest and strongest allies.

With only 23 days left in his four-year turn as secretary of state, during which he made the search for peace in the Middle East one of his driving missions, Mr. Kerry said the Israeli government was undermining any hope of a two-state solution to its decades-long conflict with the Palestinians.

The American vote last week in the United Nations allowing the condemnation of Israel for settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, he added, was driven by a desire to save Israel from “the most extreme elements” in its own government.

“The status quo is leading toward one state and perpetual occupation,” Mr. Kerry said, his voice animated.

His speech was a powerful admonition after years of tension and frustration, with the Obama administration giving public voice to its long-held concern that Israel was headed off a cliff toward international isolation and was condemning itself to a future of low-level, perpetual warfare with the Palestinians.

Reaction was immediate and harsh, not only from Mr. Netanyahu, but also from Senators John McCain, Republican of Arizona, and Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York. President-elect Donald J. Trump did not even wait for Mr. Kerry to speak before condemning the secretary of state.

The United States and Israel are in the middle of a breach rarely seen since President Harry S. Truman recognized the fragile Israeli state in May 1948. In a direct response to Mr. Netanyahu’s barb over the weekend that “friends don’t take friends to the Security Council” — a reference to the Obama administration’s decision to abstain from the resolution condemning the building of new settlements in disputed territory — Mr. Kerry said the United States acted out of a deeper understanding of the meaning of its alliance.

“Some seem to believe that the U.S. friendship means the U.S. must accept any policy, regardless of our own interests, our own positions, our own words, our own principles — even after urging again and again that the policy must change,” he said. “Friends need to tell each other the hard truths, and friendships require mutual respect.”

Toward the end of his 70-minute speech in the State Department’s auditorium, Mr. Kerry acknowledged that Mr. Trump may well abandon the major principles that the United States has used for decades of Middle East negotiations, including the two-state solution that both Republicans and Democrats support. Mr. Trump is nominating a new American ambassador, David M. Friedman, who has broken with even the pretense of supporting a two-state negotiated agreement and has helped fund some of the settlements Mr. Kerry denounced.

On vacation in Palm Beach, Fla., Mr. Trump posted two Twitter messages rejecting the speech before it was delivered. “We cannot continue to let Israel be treated with such total disdain and disrespect,” he wrote on Wednesday morning. After assailing the nuclear deal in Iran and last week’s vote at the Security Council, he said, “Stay strong Israel, January 20th is fast approaching!”

He was soon praised — also on Twitter — by Mr. Netanyahu, who later released a video statement that was unsparingly direct and dismissive of Mr. Kerry.

“The entire Middle East is going up in flames, entire countries are toppling, terrorism is raging and for an entire hour the secretary of state attacks the only democracy in the Middle East,” Mr. Netanyahu said. “Maybe Kerry did not notice that Israel is the only place in the Middle East where Christmas can be celebrated in peace and security. Sadly, none of this interests the secretary of state.”

Mr. Kerry’s speech was criticized at home as well.

Mr. McCain called it a “pointless tirade,” while Mr. Schumer, the incoming Senate Democratic leader, said he feared that Mr. Kerry had “emboldened extremists on both sides.”

Mr. Kerry did make note of the Palestinian violence, the “extremist agenda” of Hamas, and the Palestinian unwillingness to recognize Israel. All, he said, were at the heart of the conflict. But Mr. Netanyahu’s continued support of settlements, “strategically placed in locations that make two states impossible,” he said, is driving a solution further and further away.

Mr. Kerry argued that Israel, with a growing Arab population, could not survive as both a Jewish state and a democratic state unless it embraced the two-state approach that a succession of American presidents have endorsed.

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, responded to Mr. Kerry’s speech by calling on Israel to freeze housing construction in order to restart negotiations. “The minute the Israeli government agrees to cease all settlement activities, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem, and agree to implement the signed agreements on the basis of mutual reciprocity, the Palestinian leadership stands ready to resume permanent status negotiations,” he said.

Mr. Netanyahu has said he is willing to meet Mr. Abbas anytime for talks as long as there are no preconditions.

It was notable that it was Mr. Kerry who delivered the speech rather than President Obama, who has long kept a distance from Middle East peace negotiations, a pursuit he has always doubted would succeed. After talks at Camp David collapsed in 2000, it was President Bill Clinton himself who gave a speech laying out the parameters of an ultimate deal, about 10 days before leaving office in 2001.

At the time, Mr. Clinton also censured Israel for its settlements, but in far more measured terms. Mr. Kerry called them a violation of international law, a position he said the State Department had taken since 1978.

“The Israeli prime minister publicly supports a two-state solution, but his current coalition is the most right-wing in Israeli history, with an agenda driven by its most extreme elements,” he said. “The result is that policies of this government — which the prime minister himself just described as ‘more committed to settlements than any in Israel’s history’ — are leading in the opposite direction, towards one state.”

Seldom in modern American diplomacy has an American administration so directly confronted — and disavowed — a close ally’s actions as Mr. Kerry did on Wednesday, dropping most of the restraint he had shown in public over the past four years. One of the last times was during the Eisenhower administration, when the United States broke with Britain, France and Israel over the 1956 invasion of the Egyptian Sinai. Eisenhower had warned against the invasion and threatened to harm Britain’s financial system in retaliation.

When Mr. Kerry got to the principles for a future settlement, they were unsurprising. Many date to the 1990s or earlier, and many to past United Nations resolutions.

The principles he described started with a “secure and recognized border between Israel and a viable and contiguous Palestine,” based on Israel’s withdrawal from territory occupied since the 1967 war and land swaps to “reflect practical realities on the ground.”

A second principle was the creation of a state for the Palestinian people, and a third was a “fair and realistic solution to the Palestinian refugee issue,” including compensation. There was no mention of a “right of return” for refugees and their descendants forced to leave Israel and the Palestinian territories, back to 1948.

The fourth principle called for Jerusalem to be the recognized capital of both states, which Mr. Kerry said was “the most sensitive issue for both sides.” The fifth was an agreement to satisfy Israel’s security needs while ending its military occupation of Palestinian territories.

Mr. Kerry, who has cast himself as one of Israel’s greatest friends, said in recent months it became clear he had to “save the two-state solution while there was still time.”

“We did not take this decision lightly,” he said of the vote in the United Nations Security Council, where the American abstention allowed a 14-to-0 condemnation of Israel go forward. “Israelis are fully justified in decrying attempts to delegitimize their state and question the right of a Jewish state to exist. But this vote was not about that. It was about actions that Israelis and Palestinians are taking that are increasingly rendering a two-state solution impossible.”

It was also about Mr. Kerry’s own personal disappointment. As soon as he took over from Hillary Clinton as secretary of state in 2013, Mr. Kerry plunged into the tar pit of Middle East peace negotiations with an enthusiasm neither Mrs. Clinton nor Mr. Obama shared. The goal was a nine-month negotiation leading to a “final status” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the summer of 2014.

It never got that far. Despite scores of meetings between Mr. Kerry and his two main interlocutors, Mr. Abbas, the Palestinian president, and Mr. Netanyahu, Mr. Kerry and his lead mediators, Martin S. Indyk and Frank Lowenstein, could not make progress. They blamed both sides for taking actions that undermined the process, but the continued expansion of the settlements was one of their leading complaints — an effort, in the American and European view, to establish “facts on the ground” so that territory could not be traded away.

Mr. Netanyahu has accused the United States of “orchestrating” the vote, and his aides have said that Mr. Kerry and Mr. Obama effectively stabbed Israel in the back. Israeli officials have said they have evidence that the United States organized the resolution. Mr. Kerry pushed back at that narrative on Wednesday.

Mr. Netanyahu, for his part, is biding his time and waiting for Mr. Kerry and Mr. Obama to move on. Israeli leaders postponed plans on Wednesday to move ahead with new housing in East Jerusalem, just hours before the speech.

Expiration Date For Israeli-Palestinian 2-State Solution May Be Jan. 20

By Peter Baker

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

JERUSALEM — Even before Secretary of State John Kerry issued his scathing critique of Israeli policies on Wednesday, President-elect Donald J. Trump essentially told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to ignore it.

“Stay strong Israel,” Mr. Trump wrote on Twitter. “January 20th is fast approaching!”

Mr. Netanyahu responded warmly. “President-elect Trump, thank you for your warm friendship and your clear-cut support for Israel!” he wrote, adding Israeli and American flag emojis.

Mr. Kerry’s much-anticipated Middle East speech brought together four giant personalities representing two radically divergent worldviews in one momentous clash.

On one side was Mr. Kerry, venting years of frustration on behalf of President Obama and himself at what they consider Israeli intransigence.

On the other were Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Trump, firing back at what they deemed a hypocritical betrayal of America’s closest friend in the Middle East.

If Mr. Obama and Mr. Kerry were playing for history, Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Trump were playing for time.

The departing administration intended for the speech to lay out a path to peace that they had tried to take, hoping to salvage some scrap of a legacy on the issue. The incoming administration and its Israeli ally were busy counting the days until the old team will be swept from the stage and a new Israeli-American alignment redefines the politics of the region.

Mr. Obama and Mr. Kerry have painted Israel into a corner, providing ammunition to its critics and effectively isolating it on the world stage after a United Nations Security Council resolution last week criticizing Israeli settlements and the secretary’s sharp assessment on Wednesday. But in three weeks, Mr. Netanyahu expects unstinting support from Mr. Trump, who so far appears to be promising it.

Amid the harsh exchanges was the increasing sense that the two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict favored by much of the world no longer seems plausible, at least for now. When Mr. Kerry outlined six principles for a final land-for-peace agreement, he largely tracked longstanding American orthodoxy. But unlike when President Bill Clinton did something similar 16 years ago, it sounded more like a requiem than a plan.

“The positions he lays out are well known to all of us,” said Michael Herzog, a member of the Israeli negotiating team during the latest round of failed talks, led by Mr. Kerry in 2014. “There were no major surprises. The question is, does it really matter?”

Indeed, among the blaring, polarized responses to Mr. Kerry’s speech, the one conclusion that drew agreement across political lines was that the two-state solution may be all but buried.

“This will go down in history as an eloquently delivered eulogy to the two-state formula, which is in itself a recipe for disaster,” said Oded Revivi, the chief foreign envoy of the Yesha Council, which represents Israeli settlers.

“John Kerry just gave an eloquent eulogy for the two-state solution,” said Ali Abunimah, a Palestinian-American activist who helped found the Electronic Intifada, a website focused on the Palestinian side of the conflict.

While Mr. Netanyahu still formally supports a two-state solution, few believe his heart is in it, and voices on the far sides of the conflict are increasingly talking about a one-state solution, albeit one conceived in starkly different ways.

From his right flank, Mr. Netanyahu faces calls within his coalition to give up the two-state formula and instead annex parts of the West Bank. From the other side, some Palestinians now advocate a single state from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River in which everyone has an equal vote, knowing that Palestinians would ultimately outnumber Jewish citizens in such a country.

The rift between Mr. Obama and Mr. Trump may further polarize a debate that has divided the world for decades. With such a harsh assessment by the departing Obama administration, Israel has for the moment lost its staunchest defender in the international arena, and its critics may feel emboldened to press for more action against it in the form of sanctions, boycotts or legal cases.

Conversely, the impending arrival of Mr. Trump and his unqualified support for Israel have already inspired the Israeli right to press for more aggressive policies that would move the country even further from compromise. After nearly eight years with Mr. Obama, Mr. Netanyahu for the first time may feel little or no American pressure to make concessions.

The status quo in the meantime is an uneasy coexistence with no obvious resolution in the near term.

Palestinians live under military occupation surrounded by miles of walls and fences. Israelis build more homes for themselves while their forces raid communities, control movement through checkpoints and respond to provocations with decisive force.

Israelis live under the constant threat of terrorism, enduring sometimes daily assaults by attackers wielding knives or driving cars into crowds. The Palestinian authorities venerate such “martyrs” and compensate their families financially.

It is against that backdrop that the struggle of the four major figures in the twilight of an expiring presidency has played out in recent days and weeks. Underlying it was a deep divide over who was to blame for the long impasse in this part of the world.

Mr. Obama and Mr. Kerry, while careful to call on the Palestinians to curb terrorism and incitement, seem to save most of their emotional energy for denouncing Mr. Netanyahu, who has come to grate on both of them. To the extent that the United States has presented itself as an honest broker in the conflict over the years, Mr. Obama and Mr. Kerry are viewed by many in Jerusalem as tilted to the Palestinian cause, despite the \$38 billion they pledged to Israel’s defense over the next 10 years.

Mr. Netanyahu has reacted to the United Nations resolution and Mr. Kerry’s speech as if they were “a declaration of war,” a phrase he reportedly used before the Security Council vote last week in trying to persuade New Zealand to drop the measure. Mr. Trump, after initially saying he wanted to be a neutral figure in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has thrown in his lot with Mr. Netanyahu, especially since the election, perhaps encouraging the prime minister to castigate the departing president and secretary.

“Israelis do not need to be lectured about the importance of peace by foreign leaders,” Mr. Netanyahu said after Mr. Kerry’s speech.

Still, some of Mr. Netanyahu’s domestic critics said he had brought this on himself. Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak wrote on Twitter that most of the world and Israel agreed with Mr. Kerry.

“Bibi, on verge of messianic abyss, determined to go forward,” he added, using Mr. Netanyahu’s nickname.

Reactions to Mr. Kerry divided along similar lines, only in reverse. Miri Regev, a hard-line minister in Mr. Netanyahu’s cabinet, told an Israeli news outlet that Mr. Kerry’s speech “gives hope to the terror organizations to eliminate Israel step by step.” She also challenged the secretary to propose “having Washington divided” as he proposes to divide Jerusalem.

The final break between Mr. Kerry and Mr. Netanyahu — and their patrons, Mr. Obama and Mr. Trump — came after years of conversations that never led to the accord the secretary sought.

Mr. Kerry made a point of talking with Mr. Netanyahu often, more than was publicly known, hoping to build a relationship that would enable them to bridge their ideological differences. But Mr. Netanyahu never viewed it as in his interest, or in Israel’s, to go along with the American interloper.

After all the stormy exchanges and recriminations, the remaining question is where Mr. Trump’s alliance with Mr. Netanyahu will lead. Mr. Trump fashions himself a deal maker, and this would be the ultimate deal.

Having embraced one side of the conflict so avowedly, could he craft a mutually acceptable bargain where Mr. Obama and Mr. Kerry failed? Would he deem it in his interest to try? And would Mr. Netanyahu want him to?

As Mr. Trump put it, Jan. 20 is fast approaching.

Kerry’s Blunt Words For Israel Denounced By Lawmakers In Both Parties

By Jonathan Martin

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

Secretary of State John Kerry’s rebuke of the Israeli government on Wednesday set off a wave of criticism from lawmakers in both parties, with Republicans denouncing what they said was the Obama administration’s harsh treatment of a steadfast ally and Democrats signaling that they were uneasy with Mr. Kerry’s pressure on Israel, even as they praised the effort to promote Middle East peace.

In Europe, however, Mr. Kerry’s speech was greeted warmly, with officials calling it a courageous and thoughtful effort to salvage the idea of a two-state solution for the Israelis and Palestinians. Still, across the Arab world, his harsh words for Israel were met with a collective shrug, coming at the end of eight years of Obama administration policies that left many in the Middle East frustrated.

On Capitol Hill, hours after Mr. Kerry used what may be his last major address to bluntly inform the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, that “friends need to tell each other the hard truths,” he received a reminder of the deep support Israel enjoys in an otherwise sharply divided Congress.

“While he may not have intended it, I fear Secretary Kerry, in his speech and action at the U.N., has emboldened extremists on both sides,” said Senator Chuck Schumer, the incoming Senate Democratic leader.

A bipartisan chorus of lawmakers, upset with President Obama’s decision last week to allow the passage of a United Nations resolution condemning Israel’s construction of settlements in disputed territory, made clear that they were looking past the departing administration.

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin of Maryland, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, said he shared Mr. Kerry’s concerns “with the lack of forward progress on a two-state solution.” But Mr. Cardin also said he was unhappy that Mr. Obama had not vetoed the United Nations resolution, instead abstaining from the vote. He pledged to “explore congressional action that can mitigate the negative implications” of it.

The most ardent supporters of Israel in Congress seemed just as liberated as Mr. Kerry was to let loose.

“Secretary Kerry’s speech today was at best a pointless tirade in the waning days of an outgoing administration,” said Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona. “At worst, it was another dangerous outburst that will further Israel’s diplomatic isolation and embolden its enemies.”

Representative Eliot L. Engel of New York, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, called Mr. Kerry’s speech “gratuitous” and “wrong.” “There doesn’t seem any purpose to this other than to embarrass Israel,” Mr. Engel said. “It just pained me to watch it.”

Democratic members of Congress who are closer to Mr. Kerry, a former senator, and the Obama administration were more measured. Many had been angered by Mr. Netanyahu’s decision last year to accept an invitation from the Republican-led House to deliver a speech in the Capitol, where he confronted the president over the Iran nuclear accord.

Yet even these Democrats — eyeing the arrival of a Republican administration-in-waiting that has vowed strong support for Israel — left little doubt that they were parting ways with Mr. Obama on the substance of the United Nations resolution.

Senator Bill Nelson of Florida, who is facing re-election in 2018, said he knew why Mr. Kerry was frustrated over the settlements, which he called an “impediment toward a negotiated two-state solution.” But he was quick to note that he was among the 88 senators who signed a letter months ago opposing the sort of United Nations resolution on Israel that the Security Council approved last week.

In France, Britain and Germany, Mr. Kerry’s speech was greeted with more full-throated support. Senator Nathalie Goulet, vice president of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the French Senate, said Mr. Kerry “is right, he is absolutely right.”

“The more there are settlements,” she said, “the less it is likely there will be a two-state solution. But nobody ever dares condemn Israel. There is a double standard that nourishes the propaganda of the terrorists.”

In a statement, the German foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, praised Mr. Kerry’s speech as a “passionate and deeply convincing” defense of “the only credible way” to solve the issue: a two-state solution.

British officials said they regarded Mr. Kerry’s speech as a thoughtful summary of longstanding British and European concerns about the direction of Israeli politics. Britain and France, both members of the Security Council, voted for the resolution on settlements, and France has been extremely active in pressing for a kind of peace conference, to which the Israelis have objected.

In the Arab world, analysts said the Obama administration should have spoken out sooner.

“At the last five minutes of the hour, apparently Kerry and Obama are showing some courage to stand up to Israel, but it is coming too late in the game,” said Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a professor of political science in the United Arab Emirates. “It is after the fact. They should have shown this amount of political courage four years ago, if not eight years ago.”

But the Palestinian issue today is not as central as it once was in the wider Arab consciousness. “Arab countries have sociopolitical problems that trump the Palestinian cause,” said Ziad A. Akl, a senior researcher at the Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo.

Israel Postpones Vote On New Housing Ahead Of Speech By John Kerry

By Peter Baker

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

JERUSALEM — Israeli leaders temporarily postponed plans on Wednesday to move ahead with new housing in East Jerusalem, just hours before Secretary of State John Kerry was scheduled to deliver a much-anticipated speech outlining an American vision for peace with the Palestinians.

The planning committee of the Jerusalem city government canceled at the last moment a scheduled vote on permits for 618 new housing units in the predominantly Palestinian eastern section of town. Army Radio reported that the delay came at the request of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The decision came after days of furious protests by Mr. Netanyahu and other Israeli officials against the United Nations Security Council, which passed a resolution condemning Israeli settlements as a flagrant violation of international law. The measure passed 14 to 0, with the United States abstaining rather than vetoing it, as it has on other occasions.

Mr. Netanyahu has accused President Obama and Mr. Kerry of secretly orchestrating the “shameful” resolution. His aides say they have “ironclad information” proving it, and that they plan to turn it over to the administration of President-elect Donald J. Trump.

Obama administration officials have strongly denied the accusation. Palestinian officials said on Wednesday a supposed Egyptian memo reporting a collaboration with Mr. Kerry before the vote was a fake.

Mr. Netanyahu was so angry about the resolution that he summoned the United States ambassador to castigate the Obama administration and retaliate against other members of the Security Council by canceling diplomatic visits, recalling envoys and cutting back financial aid.

In the hours before the vote, he told the foreign minister of New Zealand, one of the sponsors of the resolution, that its passage would be “a declaration of war” against Israel, according to Israeli daily Haaretz.

The units scheduled for Wednesday’s vote had been on the agenda since before the resolution, and for their part, Jerusalem officials had vowed to proceed with the new homes as a show of defiance. The deputy mayor, who leads the planning committee, has said they would be the first installment on 5,600 additional homes in East Jerusalem and he promised not to be deterred by the United Nations.

Mr. Netanyahu’s office did not immediately comment on the postponement, but at least one member of his cabinet suggested that some people in the prime minister’s party were worried about going too far in attacking the United States, which under Mr. Obama just agreed to a record \$38 billion, 10-year security aid package.

Yisrael Katz, who is both the transportation minister and the intelligence minister, echoed Mr. Netanyahu’s criticism of what he called “an extreme step” by the Security Council but added that Israel needs the United States and must treat it with respect.

“Without the United States, we have no status in the international organizations,” he told Israeli news outlet.

But other allies of the government lashed out at Mr. Kerry for presuming to offer a peace plan over Israeli objections.

“John Kerry is a stain on American foreign policy that is ignorant of the issues,” Oded Revivi, the chief foreign envoy of the Yesha Council, which represents Israeli settlers in the West Bank, said in a statement. “He has chosen to eternalize his legacy as the worst secretary of state in history that chose to stab his closest ally in the back while rivers of blood flowed like water across the Middle East.”

Mr. Kerry, who remains frustrated by a failed peacemaking effort in 2014, will use the speech on Wednesday to describe what he considers a way forward in finally resolving the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, according to his team.

He will also respond to what he considers misleading criticism from the Israelis, and argue that neither the resolution nor the abstention was unprecedented.

Tunisian Detained As Possible Accomplice In Berlin Attack

By Alison Smale

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

BERLIN — A 40-year-old Tunisian man has been detained as a possible accomplice of Anis Amri, the man identified as the terrorist who carried out the truck attack on a Berlin Christmas market that killed 12 people, German officials said on Wednesday.

The Tunisian was held in Berlin, news agencies reported, after a search of a home and offices associated with the man, whose name was not released. Information about him was found in the cellphone of Mr. Amri, a 24-year-old Tunisian, who was killed on Friday during a shootout with police officers outside Milan.

The development on Wednesday was announced by the office of Peter Frank, the public prosecutor general, which is based in Karlsruhe.

“The investigations indicate that he could have been involved in the attack,” Mr. Frank’s office said in a statement, adding that officials expected to know by late Thursday if there were enough grounds to press criminal charges. “To what extent suspicions about the arrested person will be firmed up remains to be seen, after further investigation.”

The truck attack, on Dec. 19, was Germany’s deadliest terrorist attack in decades. The Islamic State claimed responsibility and released a video that Mr. Amri had recorded, in which he pledged his allegiance to the group’s supreme leader.

But it is not known if Mr. Amri had accomplices. Nor is it clear precisely how Mr. Amri made his way back to Italy, where he was from 2011 to 2015, when he moved to Germany.

Italian and French officials have said that Mr. Amri most likely traveled by train on the evening of Dec. 22 from Lyon, France, transferring trains at the town of Chambéry, near the border with Italy, before making his way to Turin and then Milan. From Central Station in Milan, he went to the northern suburb of Sesto San Giovanni, where two police officers on a routine patrol stopped him early Friday morning and asked for identification; Mr. Amri opened fire and was fatally shot.

How Mr. Amri reached Lyon from Berlin remains unclear, but Agence France-Presse, citing unidentified Dutch officials, reported on Wednesday that he took a bus from Amsterdam or the Dutch city of Nijmegen, near the Netherlands-Germany border, to Lyon on Dec. 21, two days after the attack. (There is no direct bus service to Lyon from Amsterdam or Nijmegen; travelers have to change buses in Brussels; Düsseldorf, Germany; Frankfurt; or Paris.)

"The suspect in the Berlin attack was very likely at the Nijmegen station two days after the attack," Wim de Bruin, a spokesman for the Dutch national prosecutor's office, said in a statement on Wednesday. In a phone interview, he said that officials believed that Mr. Amri obtained in Nijmegen a free cellphone SIM card that the Italian police found on his body after he was killed.

Mr. de Bruin said that the police were following up on reports from people who thought they might have seen Mr. Amri. "We have to investigate the reports because we would like to reconstruct the route he took in the Netherlands to get from Germany to France," he said in the interview.

He added that investigators were working closely with their counterparts in Germany, France and Italy.

Mr. Amri is said to have careened into a Christmas market at the symbolic Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin just after 8 p.m. on Dec. 19. The police initially detained a Pakistani man who was found to have no connection to the truck and thus the assault. The error ended up giving the suspect a head start of almost 20 hours to flee, before investigators scouring the cab found a migration document that led to Mr. Amri.

Mr. Amri, who had a history of petty crime and used several aliases in his odyssey around Europe, applied for asylum in Germany in April. His application was rejected in June, and he was ordered deported, but he managed to slip through the cracks.

He may have benefited from Germany's decentralized political system. Power is spread over 16 states, and police, judicial and migration officials have distinct spheres of authority.

For example, Mr. Amri was detained for two days in the southern German town of Friedrichshafen on July 30, after trying to take a bus to Zurich, when the police noticed he was under deportation order. But an office for registering foreigners in Kleve, in the far northwest of Germany, which was responsible for the order, said it did not have the papers from Tunisia necessary to carry out the deportation, so Mr. Amri was ordered released.

Adding to the confusion, on leaving jail in the south, he gave an address in Karlsruhe, in the southwest — hundreds of miles from Kleve.

This jumbled state of affairs — a reaction to the abuses of centralized power under fascist and communist governments — has frequently been criticized, and with the new focus on terrorism, both politicians and ordinary Germans are again clamoring for change.

In France, which has a fairly strong central government but is also struggling with terrorism, a 29-year-old man was arrested Tuesday morning in a police raid at his home in Cugnaux, near Toulouse in the country's southwest, on suspicion that he had been planning an imminent terrorist attack, officials said on Wednesday. His name was not disclosed.

Jean-Marc Falcone, the head of the national police, told the French newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche* that France remains under "high" threat of another attack, and that the Berlin attack "confirms that a heavy set of security measures, both active and passive, has to be put into place around mass gatherings."

Tillerson Led Exxon's Shift On Climate Change; Some Say "It Was All P.R."

By John Schwartz

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

In January 2009, Rex W. Tillerson, the chief executive of Exxon Mobil, gave a speech in Washington that might have seemed impossible even a few years before. He announced that his company supported a carbon tax to help fight climate change.

Carbon taxes are a fee on fuel use, based on how much carbon dioxide that fuel puts into the atmosphere. "As a businessman, it is hard to speak favorably about any new tax," Mr. Tillerson told reporters in his speech at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. But, he said, it was "a more direct, a more transparent and a more effective approach" than an

alternative gaining support in Congress known as cap and trade, which would set an upper limit on carbon dioxide emissions and then rely on a permit-trading system to meet the target.

Mr. Tillerson's speech was years in the making — part of a turnaround after decades of public denial that the planet was warming, even as Exxon's own research suggested that it was. It had paid outside organizations to spread doubts about the science. But pressure on the company was building, and the newly elected President Obama had pledged to fight climate change and had singled out Exxon as an example of corporate greed.

Mr. Tillerson — President-elect Donald J. Trump's nominee to be secretary of state — presided over the company's shift, which appears to have begun with public statements delivered without fanfare by the company in 2006. In 2007, he personally acknowledged that climate change was happening and that human activity was a contributing factor. Now, at the Wilson Center, he was taking it further, saying that Exxon was willing to accept action from Congress on the problem.

Was this a sincere change of heart, or merely a cynical shift in corporate messaging? Environmental activists are skeptical.

"They deliberately changed their stripes on climate, but it was all P.R.," said Kert Davies, who has spent years investigating the company's internal documents and practices at Greenpeace and who founded the Climate Investigations Center, an environmental research and advocacy organization.

The history of Exxon's shift suggests that however earnest Exxon Mobil might sound in its pronouncements on policy, it has done little or nothing to help put carbon taxes into effect.

Both carbon taxes and cap and trade put a price on carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas that makes a major contribution to climate change. Both can reduce emissions, and policy experts endlessly debate which would be more effective. But in January 2009, one difference was clear: A cap and trade plan sponsored in the House of Representatives by Henry A. Waxman of California and Edward J. Markey of Massachusetts, both Democrats, was gaining bipartisan support. A more straightforward carbon tax was going nowhere.

Mr. Tillerson faces potential confirmation difficulties because of his business activities around the globe and his close dealings with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. But his acceptance of the reality of climate change and his ostensible support for a carbon tax and the Paris climate agreement have weighed in his favor, and stand in contrast with the positions of other cabinet nominees who share Mr. Trump's view that climate change is a hoax.

The process leading up to Exxon's new public stance was as deliberate as the turning of a supertanker. "They don't just sort of throw these ideas against the wall and see what sticks," said Bennett Freeman, a consultant and former official at the State Department who took part in meetings with Exxon officials in the years leading up to Mr. Tillerson's speech.

Activists have compared Exxon's tactics of funding climate-change denialists to disinformation campaigns about smoking led by the tobacco industry, which spent billions of dollars in a settlement with state attorneys general and was found guilty in a federal civil fraud and racketeering case.

In a recent interview, Alan T. Jeffers, an Exxon spokesman, denied that the company's shifting statements on climate change were a response to tobacco's liability issues. "It was not a liability-based decision," he said. "It was a science-based decision."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or I.P.C.C., had by then said that the science was "unequivocal" in showing that the earth's temperature was rising and that human activity was almost surely a factor. "As the science firmed up on that, our understanding and the rest of the world's did, too," Mr. Jeffers said. He described the company's change as an "evolution," not an abrupt shift.

For more than 10 years, the company held a series of retreats with environmental experts like Mr. Freeman and other activists to discuss issues like human rights and climate change, according to the book "Private Empire: Exxon Mobil and American Power," by Steve Coll. Those meetings, which began around 2003, were "part private retreat, part focus group and part lobbying briefing" for leaders in the areas of human rights, environmental activism and more, Mr. Coll writes.

By 2006, the year that Mr. Tillerson became chief executive, attention to climate change was growing. The documentary "An Inconvenient Truth," featuring former Vice President Al Gore, came out that year. In the midterm elections, Democrats made significant gains, retaking control of the House of Representatives.

Participants in a conference in late 2006 criticized the company's funding for climate-change deniers, according to Mr. Coll's account. Ken Cohen, then the company's vice president for public and government affairs, told participants that the company was dropping funding for some of the groups as part of a broader review; their fiery approach was becoming, he said, a "distraction" from the issues. After that meeting, participants received a letter from Exxon saying its position on climate change was "misunderstood." The letter did not acknowledge that the company was changing its position, nor that it had done anything wrong in the past.

At a retreat in October 2008, Mr. Freeman spoke with executives about human rights and climate change. With the election close at hand, he recommended the company support cap and trade.

In an interview, Mr. Freeman said he shared a limousine to La Guardia Airport after the conference with Mr. Cohen. He recalled telling Mr. Cohen that Mr. Tillerson needed to give a major speech in Washington shortly before Mr. Obama's inauguration that would lay out a strategy in line with political reality.

Mr. Cohen, he said, told him that the company would support action, but that it would back a carbon tax, not cap and trade.

Mr. Freeman said he pressed the point: "You guys don't have the credibility to put forward a carbon tax when that's not on the table. You're going to have to embrace cap and trade if you're going to be seen as credible." But Mr. Cohen, he recalled, told him that cap and trade, by creating marketplaces for fuel producers, utilities and other large businesses for exchanging carbon credits, would create a windfall for emissions traders.

Mr. Cohen declined to comment.

In January 2009, Mr. Tillerson gave his speech at the Wilson Center. He warned that any system based on trading credits would lead to speculation and a "new Wall Street of emissions brokers."

Ultimately, the cap-and-trade bill was unsuccessful, passing the House in 2009, but failing to reach the Senate floor. The bill died for many reasons, including a struggling economy. But intense lobbying against the bill by energy companies, including Exxon, had an effect.

In the years since the Waxman-Markey bill failed, the company has not thrown its potent lobbying influence behind any specific carbon tax proposal. Still, the company's website says, "A properly designed carbon tax can be predictable, transparent and comparatively simple to understand and implement."

While Mr. Tillerson's Exxon has stopped funding several groups that loudly denied climate science, it still funds organizations that pursue a broader agenda of fighting measures to address climate change, including carbon taxes.

Naomi Oreskes, a Harvard historian, said the positions held by the company and Mr. Tillerson still constitute climate denial, but in a "clever and sophisticated" form. "It is, in my view, what makes it more concerning," she said, "because many people don't scratch the surface to see what lies beneath."

Peter C. Frumhoff, the director of science and policy at the Union of Concerned Scientists, characterized Exxon's stance as, "We agree with the I.P.C.C. on climate science — except where it's inconvenient." The Senate hearings on Mr. Tillerson, he said, should be a public trial on Exxon's history of studying climate science while spreading doubt about the underlying science and the company's actions.

Some hard-line deniers of the overwhelming scientific evidence for climate change have said they, too, were uncomfortable with Mr. Tillerson's stands on climate change, fearing he may be too soft.

Marc Morano, publisher of the site Climate Depot, said that at first he had reservations, but that he was now confident Mr. Tillerson would act in accord with Mr. Trump's stated views on climate change.

"A deeper examination of Tillerson," he said, "reveals a man who is not going to be a friend of the climate-change movement."

Chinese Prosecutors Ask Court For More Time In Detained Tibetan's Case

By Edward Wong

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

The case of a Tibetan entrepreneur who was detained after being featured in an article and video by The New York Times has taken an unusual turn, with Chinese prosecutors asking a court for more time to investigate as the judges were weighing a trial.

The prosecutors had sent the case against Tashi Wangchuk, 31, who is accused of inciting separatism, to the Yushu Intermediate Court in Qinghai Province in September. But this month, they asked the court to send the case back to them for further investigation, according to a judge and a defense lawyer.

The move is "very rare," the lawyer, Lin Qilei, said in an interview. Prosecutors expect the additional investigation, which is likely to be carried out by the police, to be finished by Jan. 4, Mr. Lin said.

It is unclear what the development may signal about whether the court will accept the case against Mr. Tashi, a businessman who has advocated Tibetan language education on a personal blog and in interviews with The Times. If the court accepts the case for trial, Mr. Tashi, who has said he is not a separatist, will almost certainly be convicted.

Mr. Tashi has been detained for almost a year, in a case that has attracted intense international attention. On Dec. 10, Human Rights Day, the American ambassador to China, Max Baucus, released a long statement in which he mentioned a

number of people being held by China, including Mr. Tashi, who he said was “in jail for his peaceful advocacy of Tibetan language education.”

Other organizations that have raised his case include Amnesty International and PEN America, which noted Mr. Tashi’s detention in a 76-page report in September on China’s attempts to censor foreign reporting.

The international advocacy on behalf of Mr. Tashi may have contributed to the fact that the court has yet to accept the case. The Chinese legal system operates with little transparency and under political imperatives, often from senior Communist Party officials, so it is difficult to discern how decisions are made.

The police from Mr. Tashi’s hometown, Yushu, on the Tibetan Plateau, detained him in January, two months after he was quoted in a Times article on the Tibetan language and was featured in a Times documentary video on the same subject. Mr. Tashi was also quoted in a December 2015 story on a Yushu horse festival.

Mr. Tashi was held in secret for weeks. His relatives were not notified of his detention until March 24, in an apparent violation of Chinese law, which requires that a detainee’s family be told within 24 hours of the start of captivity. The police eventually gave the family a written statement saying Mr. Tashi was being charged with inciting separatism, which can result in a 15-year prison sentence.

Prosecutors, known in China as the procuratorate, then asked the police twice to conduct further investigation. A judge with the Yushu Intermediate Court, who gave only his surname, Cui, said that the prosecutors had asked the court this month to send the case back to them for still more investigation and that the court had done so.

Another lawyer for Mr. Tashi, Liang Xiaojun, said in August that case files showed that the police had investigated Mr. Tashi because of his interviews with The Times. The police were focusing on the Times video documentary that featured him, he said.

In the 2015 interviews, Mr. Tashi said that he did not support Tibetan independence. He said he simply wanted to promote greater Tibetan language education and use of the language in public life, a right that is guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution, which provides a framework for autonomy in ethnic regions of China.

Mr. Tashi also praised President Xi Jinping of China for having “promoted a democratic and law-abiding country these last few years.”

Mr. Tashi traveled to Beijing early last year to try to file a lawsuit against Yushu officials, accusing them of suppressing Tibetan language education. He tried to persuade Chinese state news organizations to report on those efforts.

He also came into contact with Times journalists in Beijing in May, and he met with them when they later traveled to Yushu. He repeatedly insisted that all his interviews be on the record and said he understood that they could potentially lead to his imprisonment.

Privately, Tibetans living under Chinese rule often express great concern about language policies that prevent younger Tibetans from becoming fluent in their language. Tibetan teachers and students have held protests over the issue in recent years in Qinghai Province, which has a substantial Tibetan population.

Mr. Tashi ran a shop in central Yushu from which he sold local products both in person and online. In 2014, Alibaba, China’s biggest e-commerce company, chose Mr. Tashi to be featured in a video for the company’s investor roadshow before a high-profile initial public offering.

As China’s Largest Freshwater Lake Shrinks, Solution Faces Criticism

By Mike Ives

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

HONG KONG — Long celebrated as China’s largest freshwater lake, Poyang reaches more than three times the expanse of Los Angeles in the summer wet season. It is home to the rare Yangtze finless porpoise, and its mud flats are the primary winter feeding grounds for thousands of birds that fly south each autumn to escape Siberia’s chill, including the critically endangered Siberian crane.

Now it is Poyang itself that is at risk.

In recent years, the average expanse of the lake, in the southeastern province of Jiangxi, has been shrinking, and winter water levels have declined sharply.

The local government has a proposed solution, but it faces a chorus of opposition from scientists and environmental groups in China and beyond who argue that it could have disastrous effects on the lake’s fragile ecosystem and drive the Siberian crane and other migratory birds further toward extinction.

Water levels in the lake have always fluctuated radically between the summer rains and winter dryness, but there is now concern that the levels are off balance. Culprits include the Three Gorges Dam, which stores water upstream on the Yangtze for

winter electricity generation, lowering a nearby river channel and sucking water from the lake. Dredging to collect sand for construction projects has also lowered the lake's bed and caused more runoff. This year, drought turned much of the lake into grassy plains.

The local government has proposed building a sluice gate to keep more water inside the lake in the winter, but critics say the gate would essentially be a dam, and it could cause bigger problems.

"I think you're proposing a solution without understanding the causes of the problem," said David Shankman, a professor emeritus of geography at the University of Alabama who has studied the lake's hydrology.

"The whole idea of the dam is that there would be some economic benefit, but there may be potential long-term ecological problems," he added.

The primary feature of the \$1.9 billion Poyang Lake Water Conservancy Project would be a 10,000-foot sluice gate across a natural channel that connects the lake's northern edge to the Yangtze, according to a November report by the Jiangxi provincial government.

Among other benefits, the report said, the sluice gate would help to stabilize the drinking water supply and promote shipping on the lake. The report described the project as an ideal way to create "first-class water quality, first-class air, first-class ecology and a first-class environmental standard for residents."

The National Development and Reform Commission, the government agency that helps oversee economic planning, has been reviewing the proposal since 2009, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection began its environmental impact assessment in November. The proposal could still be derailed if senior officials turn against it.

Scientists said in interviews that the project could irreparably alter the lake's seasonal flood pulse, which causes water to rise and fall by up to 30 feet between the wet and dry seasons and has carried sediment into Poyang from as far away as the Tibetan plateau.

The project would also allow water to rush in from the Yangtze during the winter dry season, the scientists said, drowning vegetation that grows in Poyang's mud flats and provides a crucial food source for hundreds of species of migratory birds.

"Whatever's built is going to be able to drown that entire system during the winter," said James Burnham, a doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who has researched how changes in China's wetlands affect endangered water birds.

The Siberian crane, whose estimated 4,000 remaining individuals winter almost exclusively at Poyang because it is the closest lake to Siberia that does not freeze, is among Jiangxi's best-known birds. But more than a dozen other threatened or endangered bird species depend on Poyang as a wintering site and would be threatened by the project, Mr. Burnham said.

Several prominent environmental groups have also criticized the project.

WWF, which has been working to protect the endangered Yangtze finless porpoises that live in Poyang, has said that the project would "irreversibly and unpredictably" affect water quality and species diversity.

Zhang Yunbo, who heads Let Birds Fly, an environmental group based in Beijing, said that he was not categorically opposed to reasonable engineering solutions at Poyang, but that the complexity of the hydrological problems there made him wary of a large-scale engineering solution.

"Just because the water level is going down doesn't mean we have to engineer the water levels," Mr. Zhang said.

Some experts say that an alternative would be to stop the sand mining that appears to be lowering the lake bed and causing more water to escape from the water channels that appear in Poyang's mud flats during the winter. Much of the sand is used for construction in Shanghai, about 400 miles east, and other Chinese cities along the lower Yangtze River basin.

Officials at the Jiangxi Provincial Water Bureau declined a request for an interview and referred inquiries to the government's report on the project.

Separately, local officials released some details in November from its environmental impact assessment of the project. But critics, including Greenpeace, the international environmental organization, said that the details did not allow for a full assessment by outsiders of the project's likely ecological consequences.

A 2014 study in the journal *Scientific Reports* found that reservoirs covering a total area equivalent to the size of Vermont had been constructed across China over the previous six decades, and that most of China's large freshwater lakes — not including Poyang and Dongting, another freshwater lake in the Yangtze River basin — were regulated for irrigation, flood protection and other uses.

Lu Xixi, one of the study's authors and a geography professor at the National University of Singapore, said the Chinese government's approach to hydrological challenges was often driven by an "engineering mentality." As a result, he said, the consequences of engineering projects — such as erosion — were often addressed with further engineering, even when less-intensive solutions might be more effective or less harmful to the watershed.

"We think the mentality must be changed," Mr. Lu said in an interview.

Mr. Burnham said that stabilizing Poyang's flood pulse would make its seasonal variations more predictable, potentially allowing for economic activities in places near the lake that were once at risk of flooding during the summer.

But he said it was unlikely that the migratory birds that feed at the lake during the winter dry season would see any benefits from the proposed sluice gate.

One of Mr. Burnham's latest studies shows that when Poyang's water levels were high during an unusually wet winter in 2011, Siberian cranes fled to nearby grasslands but did not absorb as many calories there as they normally do from vegetation in the lake's mud flats. The study also says that grassland feeding could potentially slow the birds' reproduction over the long term.

"There aren't many other places for these birds to go: Poyang is the last, best place around," Mr. Burnham said. "And if that's no longer available, or if it gets altered to the point where it can't be used anymore, you're going to see a collapse of these species in the wild."

Israeli Mystery Of Lost Babies Gets New Chapter: 200,000 Secret Records

By Isabel Kershner

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

JERUSALEM — Some Israeli families received army call-up papers and voter registration notices for children who had been declared dead as babies. Many others were never given an official cause of death by health officials, never saw the bodies of their infants and were never able to locate their graves.

For decades, about 1,000 families have lived with their doubts and a deep distrust of the authorities, suspecting a systematic scheme to abduct babies from families who immigrated to the newly established state of Israel from Yemen and other countries in the 1950s and give them up for adoption by childless couples from the Ashkenazi elite.

Many of the missing children had been admitted to clinics or hospitals after falling ill — often a result of poor sanitary conditions in the intake camps where their often-large families were initially housed — or were being looked after in day care centers. The overburdened immigrants and their offspring recall the authorities treating them with a highhanded disdain.

On Wednesday, the Israeli government made available online 200,000 previously classified documents from the state archives pertaining to the missing children. The hope was to shed light on a painful episode in the young country's history and to try to help families answer lingering questions that three official commissions of inquiry since the 1960s had not resolved. The commissions concluded that there was no systematic abduction of children for adoption, and that most of them had simply died, but the families did not believe them.

While the opening of the archives was not expected to provide a conclusive end to the chapter for many of the families, given the partial and sometimes contradictory information in the files, the government hoped to at least dispel the notion that it was hiding information, and to perhaps bring some relief.

"Today we are correcting an historic injustice of disregard or discrimination or concealing — we don't know which — the fate of what have been dubbed as the 'Yemenite children,'" Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at a ceremony activating the website of the documents. "As harsh as the reality is, we are not prepared to allow that to continue."

The issue recently re-emerged with a new generation demanding transparency, including many siblings of the missing children who have grown up in Israel and are better educated than their immigrant parents. The call for a more thorough accounting comes against the background of a cultural reawakening, or revolt, by Israel's Mizrahi Jews, who hail from North African and Middle Eastern countries, against the old cultural hegemony of the Ashkenazim, of European origin. The Mizrahim make up about half the population of Israeli Jews.

The growing calls for the state to reveal all it knew came from ordinary people, like Avner Tzuri, 52, an insurance agent in Jerusalem, whose sister Malka was admitted to a hospital in Haifa one day in July 1953 and was declared dead and said to have been buried by the next morning. The calls also came from members of Parliament with family connections to the missing children, and celebrities like Boaz Sharabi, 69, a popular singer who appeared on television weeping as he spoke of his missing twin sister, Ada.

Describing the episode as "an ever-bleeding wound," Mr. Sharabi said the pain had never left his parents. He was speaking of a generation that is now dying out.

The past commissions of inquiry gathered documents that pertained to 1,060 children and included burial certificates for 923 of them. In the cases of 69 children whose parents had contacted the official panels, no records were found and their status was defined as unknown.

The documents made public on Wednesday include personal files of the children, arranged by alphabetical order, containing hospital records, burial certificates, police reports and protocols of the official commissions of inquiry, as well as

testimony given by the parents. The only details not made public were those involving children who were officially placed in adoptive homes and other cases in which privacy might be compromised.

Many of the documents were originally meant to remain classified until 2031. This summer, Mr. Netanyahu appointed a government minister, Tzachi Hanegbi, to examine the documents and decide if there was any justification for keeping them secret. Mr. Hanegbi found none.

"I'm not sure this is going to heal the wounds," Mr. Hanegbi told reporters on Wednesday. But, he said, it may reduce the suspicions and distrust of the establishment. "No more hiding. All the details are out there."

The next step, Mr. Hanegbi said, is to build a DNA bank where people who suspect they were unofficially adopted as children can search for matches with the missing children's families.

Much of the confusion may have stemmed from the chaotic bureaucracy of Israel's early years. Records were badly kept; similar-sounding names were mixed up. Immigrants, often illiterate, arrived with large numbers of children and lived in crowded transit camps.

But for some, instead of clarity, the opening of the archives on Wednesday only created more anguish and turmoil.

That was the case for Mr. Tzuri, the insurance agent, the youngest of six remaining siblings. One is named Malka, for the older sister who went missing. Their parents, Michael and Kochava Tzuri, came to Israel from Iran, via Iraq, in the early 1950s and lived in temporary housing in a transit camp near Hadera, south of the port city of Haifa.

On July 19, 1953, Ms. Tzuri found Malka, 14 months old, lying unconscious, apparently after accidentally ingesting oil, according to the child's file and the mother's testimony, given to the Cohen-Kedmi commission in 1997.

The child was taken to a local clinic, and then went with her mother in an ambulance to Rambam Hospital in Haifa. The doctors told Ms. Tzuri that she could not stay overnight, but that she should come back the next morning. When she returned the next day, she was told that the child was dead, but she was not shown the body. Ms. Tzuri testified that she had been told the hospital would arrange the burial, and that she believed the documents concerning Malka were fake.

The version that the siblings say they grew up with was that Malka had been buried by the time Ms. Tzuri arrived. The family later obtained a certificate from the burial society in Haifa, but when they found the numbered plot, they said, there was no sign of a grave.

Mr. Tzuri had been hoping that the newly released protocols of the Cohen-Kedmi commission would put to rest the questions he has been chasing for years.

Instead, he said in an interview after examining the online files at work on Wednesday, "it became more complicated than before, because we discovered something new."

According to the records, the commission had located the hospital's surgery registry, which showed that an autopsy had been performed on Malka on July 20, and the registry from the cemetery showed that she had been buried three days later, on July 23.

"If that was the case, why didn't they let my parents see her body?" asked Mr. Tzuri, whose parents are dead. "This only sets off more red lights. It is all lies."

NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL

Is Israel Abandoning A Two-State Solution?

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

Over the past week, differences between Israel and the United States have boiled over into a scalding diplomatic confrontation between these closest of allies. The dispute reflects not any change in American policy, but a dangerous evolution in Israeli policy, under the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, away from an acceptance of a negotiated two-state resolution to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. The dispute also arises from Mr. Netanyahu's lamentable practice of making his government a more nakedly partisan player in American politics than any foreign government in memory, save Russia.

It is hard to see how either move by this Israeli government serves Israel's long-term interest.

The spark for this confrontation was a United Nations Security Council resolution, adopted on Friday, that condemned Israeli settlement-building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Obama administration chose to abstain from the vote rather than exercise its veto to block it. The United Nations is shamefully biased against Israel, and President Obama has used the American veto and its diplomatic muscle more assiduously than any previous American president to shield Israel from unwarranted criticism. But nowhere is it written that an American president is obliged to shelter Israel from international criticism that is consistent with decades-old American policy and with American interests.

The American abstention has triggered more than the usual amount of outrage, name-calling and threats from Mr. Netanyahu and his allies. Personalizing the dispute to an astonishing degree, they have accused Mr. Obama of betraying Israel.

They're wrong. Many of Mr. Netanyahu's accusations and those of his supporters misrepresent the history of Israeli-American relations, malign Mr. Obama and his secretary of state, John Kerry, and confuse what should be a serious debate over the future of a negotiated peace between Israelis and Palestinians, which seems further away every day. With less than three weeks before Mr. Obama leaves office, Mr. Kerry on Wednesday finally gave the speech he wanted to give two years ago — a passionate, blunt and detailed warning about why the two-state solution is in jeopardy and how it might yet be salvaged before incalculable damage is done to Israel and the region.

Inconveniently for Mr. Netanyahu's claim that the Security Council resolution was the result of perfidy by Mr. Obama, the measure was adopted 14 to 0, with support from Russia, China and Egypt, among others. It declared that the settlements, in territory that Israel captured from Jordan during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, have no legal validity; affirming longstanding United Nations and American policy, it cited the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which prohibits any occupying power from transferring its own people to conquered territory.

The most politically volatile feature of the new resolution was that it explicitly condemned Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. Mr. Netanyahu has emphasized that the language did not distinguish between Jerusalem and the West Bank and hence treated the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City and the Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray, as occupied territory.

Under any negotiated solution to the conflict, Israelis expect their capital to be Jerusalem. But Palestinians also expect to have areas of Jerusalem as their capital, and to have access to Muslim holy sites there. That is why this resolution did not represent a change in the position of the United Nations, which has referred to Jerusalem in many such statements backed by past American administrations. Under Mr. Obama, the United States continues to subscribe to the position enshrined in the 1993 Oslo accords that the future of Jerusalem, like that of the West Bank, should be decided through negotiation — not by diktat by either side.

Settlements represent such a diktat.

Anyone who doesn't think so hasn't looked at the map or studied the history of the settlement movement. Right-wing Israeli settlers have been quite open for decades about their patient approach to claiming Jerusalem and the West Bank by strategically placing settlements to prevent the creation of a viable Palestinian state. Since 2009, when Mr. Obama took office, the number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank has grown to around 400,000, a gain of more than 100,000, and the number of settlers in East Jerusalem has grown to roughly 208,000, from 193,000, according to Americans for Peace Now. During the same period, construction has begun on over 12,700 settlement units on the West Bank.

Supporters of Mr. Netanyahu argue that Mr. Obama has now only inflamed the Israeli right and encouraged more settlement-building, as if this Israeli government would otherwise show restraint. This is the cynical logic of the settlement movement: When the world is silent, Israel can build settlements; when the world objects, Israel must build settlements. Under any scenario, settlements will grow, and the possibility of a two-state solution will recede.

Settlements are certainly not the only impediment, or even the principal one, to negotiations today. The Palestinians remain divided and their leadership malicious or hapless, with Hamas, which advocates terrorism, reigning in the Gaza Strip, while the Palestinian Authority, rife with corruption, governs ineptly in the West Bank. But the settlements are an obstacle to any eventual deal, and they are Israel's responsibility.

For a long time, Mr. Netanyahu gave lip service to a Palestinian state. But there is no longer any room for illusion. Mr. Netanyahu recently described his government as "more committed to settlements than any in Israel's history," and Naftali Bennett, one of his coalition partners, declared that "the era of the two-state solution is over." Mr. Netanyahu's own United Nations ambassador, as Mr. Kerry noted on Wednesday, rejects that solution, too.

What could be the endgame, if it does not include a Palestinian state? Mr. Kerry warned that without a two-state solution, Israel faces a choice between being a Jewish state and a democracy. If Israel annexes the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, this logic goes, Palestinians, many of whom are Muslims, would become the majority in the resulting state of Israel. At that point, Israelis could give these Palestinians full rights as citizens, thus diluting the Jewish character of their nation, or deny them rights and forsake democracy.

But the Israeli far right has long imagined a different scenario: Egypt would be somehow induced to take control of the Gaza Strip, while Israel would hold most of the West Bank and somehow offload the bulk of its Palestinian residents into Jordan. Jerusalem, presumably, would be entirely under Israeli control.

This one-state solution may remain a fantasy, but it's gathering adherents. In an opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal* on Monday, John Bolton, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a former American ambassador to the United Nations,

advanced just this scenario. Mr. Bolton is said to be on President-elect Donald Trump's list as a possible deputy secretary of state.

Mr. Obama has stayed true to the values and policy aims that American administrations have held across the decades for the Middle East, but Mr. Trump has signaled that a major change is coming. He has already appointed to the post of ambassador to Israel a settlement advocate who is, if anything, to Mr. Netanyahu's right.

If Mr. Trump envisions working with Israel's extreme right to foreclose the dream of a Palestinian state, he envisions a tragic future indeed, one in which Israel is likely to never have the peace and security that it deserves.

Bibi Netanyahu Makes Trump His Chump

By Thomas L. Friedman

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

For those of you confused over the latest fight between President Obama and Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu of Israel, let me make it simple: Barack Obama and John Kerry admire and want to preserve Israel as a Jewish and democratic state in the Land of Israel. I have covered this issue my entire adult life and have never met two U.S. leaders more committed to Israel as a Jewish democracy.

But they are convinced — rightly — that Netanyahu is a leader who is forever dog paddling in the middle of the Rubicon, never ready to cross it. He is unwilling to make any big, hard decision to advance or preserve a two-state solution if that decision in any way risks his leadership of Israel's right-wing coalition or forces him to confront the Jewish settlers, who relentlessly push Israel deeper and deeper into the West Bank.

That is what precipitated this fight over Obama's decision not to block a U.N. resolution last week criticizing Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The settlers' goal is very clear, as Kerry put it on Wednesday: to strategically place settlements "in locations that make two states impossible," so that Israel will eventually annex all of the West Bank. Netanyahu knows this will bring huge problems, but his heart is with the settlers, and his passion is with holding power — at any cost. So in any crunch, he sides with the settlers, and they keep pushing.

Obama ordered the U.S. to abstain on the U.N. resolution condemning the settlements (three months after Obama forged a 10-year, \$38 billion military aid package for Israel — the largest for any U.S. ally ever) in hopes of sparking a debate inside Israel and to prevent it from closing off any chance of a two-state solution.

Friends don't let friends drive drunk, and right now Obama and Kerry rightly believe that Israel is driving drunk toward annexing the West Bank and becoming either a bi-national Arab-Jewish state or some Middle Eastern version of 1960s South Africa, where Israel has to systematically deprive large elements of its population of democratic rights to preserve the state's Jewish character.

Israel is clearly now on a path toward absorbing the West Bank's 2.8 million Palestinians. There are already 1.7 million Arabs living in Israel, so putting these two Arab populations together would constitute a significant minority with a higher birthrate than that of Israeli Jews — who number 6.3 million — posing a demographic and democratic challenge.

I greatly sympathize with Israel's security problems. If I were Israel, I would not relinquish control of the West Bank borders — for now. The Arab world is far too unstable, and Hamas, which controls another 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza, would likely take over the West Bank.

My criticism of Netanyahu is not that he won't simply quit all the West Bank; it is that he refuses to show any imagination or desire to build workable alternatives that would create greater separation and win Israel global support, such as radical political and economic autonomy for Palestinians in the majority of the West Bank, free of settlements, while Israel still controls the borders and the settlements close to it.

Bibi never lays down a credible peace plan that truly puts the ball in the Palestinians' court. And when someone like Obama exposes that — and Bibi comes under intense criticism from the liberal half of Israel, which sees the country getting more and more isolated and less and less democratic — Bibi just calls Obama an enemy of Israel and caves to the settlers. U.S. Jewish "leaders" then parrot whatever Bibi says. Sad.

More worrisome is the fact that President-elect Donald Trump — who could be a fresh change agent — is letting himself get totally manipulated by right-wing extremists, and I mean extreme. His ambassador-designate to Israel, David Friedman, has compared Jews who favor a two-state solution to Jews who collaborated with the Nazis. I've never heard such a vile slur from one Jew to another.

Trump also has no idea how much he is being manipulated into helping Iran and ISIS. What is Iran's top goal when it comes to Israel? That Israel never leaves the West Bank and that it implants Jewish settlers everywhere there.

That would keep Israel in permanent conflict with Palestinians and the Muslim world, as well as many Western democracies and their college campuses. It would draw all attention away from Iran's own human rights abuses and enable Iran and ISIS to present themselves as the leading Muslim protectors of Jerusalem — and to present America's Sunni Arab allies as lackeys of an extremist Israel. This would create all kinds of problems for these Arab regimes. A West Bank on fire would become a recruitment tool for ISIS and Iran.

One day Trump will wake up and discover that he was manipulated into becoming the co-father, with Netanyahu, of an Israel that is either no longer Jewish or no longer democratic. He will discover that he was Bibi's chump.

What a true friend of Israel and foe of Iran would do today is just what Obama and Kerry tried — assure Israel long-term military superiority to the tune of \$38 billion, but, unlike Trump, who is just passing Israel another bottle of wine, tell our dear ally that it's driving drunk, needs to stop the settlements and apply that amazing Israeli imagination to preserving Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

A Flashback To My Soviet Childhood

By Lev Golinkin

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

The gas masks given to me and other Soviet first graders in 1987 were hand-me-downs from World War II, made of stiff rubber and too big for our faces. They trapped moisture and reduced the world to two blurry circles bouncing in front of my face. Our teacher didn't tell us about the gas mask drill ahead of time — she simply handed out the masks, and we blindly paraded around the school before going back to our lessons. None of us bothered to ask why we were training. There was no need.

By the time my classmates and I entered first grade, we already knew that the United States and its Western allies were planning to harm us, the children of School No. 3 in Kharkiv, Ukraine. The only thing left to do was to put on the gas masks.

The impending Capitalist attack was just one of countless threats a Soviet child had to be prepared for, even in the waning years of the Soviet Union. There were the standard rules for surviving a dictatorship: Don't trust anyone but family, never attract the attention of the police, always be patriotic. There were rules that applied only to Jews: Don't utter words like "synagogue" in public, don't share family stories with non-Jewish neighbors. Anti-Semitism waxed in accord with overall social anxiety; by 1989, it led my family and thousands of others to flee.

Myriad don'ts permeated Soviet life. There was little difference between dangers visible and invisible, real and superstitious. Play with a knife and you'll get cut; hand a friend a knife instead of placing it down on the table for him to pick up, and your friendship will wither. You were exposed and vulnerable in public, in your apartment, in your head. The evils, the omens, the Americans working on secret weapons and the K.G.B. looking for traitors were all part of the same malevolent atmosphere.

The only relief came in the form of scathing, cynical satire called anekdoty, or anecdotes — anonymous jokes that arose with baffling speed, often in response to current events, much like memes today. What's the difference between an optimist and a pessimist? A pessimist believes life will get worse; an optimist knows it will. "Obe khuzhe" (both are worse) was a typical reply when asked to choose between two things; the answer could be sincere or sarcastic, or both. It was a dark coping mechanism, but it helped.

I've always found this fatalism hard to explain to Americans, at least until 2016.

Twenty-five years ago this month, the Soviet Union, where unquestioning first graders dutifully ran in gas masks and censors scrambled to protect citizens from themselves, collapsed. Scholars are still debating the precise cause of death, but surely unsustainable communal anxiety played a role.

Today, I'm stunned to see signs of similar neuroses tainting the United States, the country to which my family fled. It's not in the legitimate discussion over real national security threats, but in the relentless onslaught of helplessness being blared across the news and social media. I see it in groups calling for sanctions on vaguely defined pro-Russian media and peddling apps that block websites that allegedly benefit the Kremlin, like 21-century talismans to protect American minds from infection. I read it in columns that warn of Moscow's unstoppable information war, the unraveling of democracy and the demise of truth. I see it in the constant assurance that we're losing. Just as in the Soviet Union, it doesn't matter how we're losing or why, or to whom.

It is particularly jarring to witness this defeatism in America, a country whose optimism reaches across continents. My family came here with many stereotypical visions of America. Most turned out to be wrong, but the one about the United States being built on optimism was true. Perhaps it takes an outsider to notice, but when you're in the land of solutions, reading column after column offering nothing but paranoia leaves a disturbing un-American vacuum.

"Hope is necessary — it is a necessary concept," Michelle Obama reflected in a postelection interview. "What do you give your kids if you can't give them hope?"

The first lady knows her country well. Certain cultures rely on hope more than others. The Russian people's greatest advantage is their ability to endure today despite the deep-seated, often prescient suspicion that tomorrow life will be worse.

But American society draws its power from the ability to envision a better tomorrow, no matter what horrors are rising today: better than a nation monitoring its movements and mouths, better than brainwashed children in gas masks.

A Zika Vaccine, But For Whom?

By Patrick Adams And Cameron Nutt

[New York Times](#), December 28, 2016

The race for a Zika vaccine, one of the most pressing priorities in global health, is at full throttle. More than a dozen companies and government institutions are working to unlock the secrets of the virus, and a vaccine could be available as early as 2018.

But available to whom? If history is any guide, impoverished communities in Africa are likely to be the last in line. And this despite a mounting body of evidence that, contrary to the prevailing wisdom, poor families in Africa might bear the greatest burden of the disease.

Indeed, much of what we have taken for granted about Zika — that it is a threat unique to the Western Hemisphere; that it may only recently have evolved the ability to cause microcephaly and brain damage in babies; and that it hasn't hurt women and children in Africa — is now in serious doubt.

We know that Zika was first identified in Uganda, in 1947, and that the first documented urban outbreak of the virus occurred in Libreville, the capital of Gabon, in 2007. We know that African strains of Zika — which can probably be transmitted sexually and from mother to child — are present in at least 25 countries across the continent. And we know that Guinea-Bissau, the only mainland African nation to send Zika testing results to the World Health Organization in 2016, has reported three microcephalic babies with clinical data suggesting Zika exposure.

Most worrisome, though, is what we've learned from laboratory investigations over the past year. So far, at least 16 studies published in scientific journals have demonstrated that African strains of Zika can cause the same kinds of cellular damage we've seen in the Americas. According to one study by French virologists, a strain of Zika isolated in the Central African Republic was twice as deadly to brain stem cells as the variant circulating in Brazil.

Brazilian geneticists reported that the mutations that have taken place between different strains of Zika do not seem to have altered the virus's ability to cause microcephaly, which they believe may be a universal "feature of Zika itself." Researchers at Harvard found that when they infected human brain cells with either the original Zika strain isolated in Uganda in 1947 or the strain now circulating in Puerto Rico, the effects were "surprisingly comparable." And neuroscientists in Florida have demonstrated that infection with the Ugandan Zika strain can cause microcephaly in mice.

Given that the disease is asymptomatic in up to 80 percent of those infected, that only a small fraction of infections during pregnancy result in microcephaly, and that other infections known to cause microcephaly are also widespread (and undiagnosed) across the region, it's easy to see how an African epidemic of Zika-induced microcephaly could have gone unnoticed, possibly for decades.

Such an oversight would hardly be without precedent. Consider H.I.V., which had been circulating in Africa since at least the 1920s, and not exactly silently; cases of aggressive Kaposi's sarcoma, the classic AIDS-defining illness rarely found in people without H.I.V., were documented in Uganda as far back as the 1960s. By the time the AIDS epidemic was "discovered" in California in 1981, it was estimated that more than 100,000 people across Africa had already been infected.

Or, for a more recent example, take the explosive spread of Ebola across West Africa starting in 2013. Throughout that epidemic, international health authorities maintained that the virus had never before been seen in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Yet six studies published by European scientists in the 1980s had documented that in all three countries, up to 14 percent of the populations studied had Ebola antibodies.

In these and other cases, the warning signs were there. But no one was paying attention.

Epidemiologists call this the "streetlight effect": the tendency to search for something only where it is easiest to see. When it comes to the study of infectious diseases, parts of sub-Saharan Africa are poorly illuminated: Doctors are scarce, disease surveillance is weak and laboratory capacity is severely limited.

Hence the finding, reported in 2010 by researchers in Cameroon, that "despite documented evidence for their presence in virtually all African countries," arboviruses (of which Zika is one, of the Flavivirus genus) "are almost never part of routine laboratory diagnoses and very often go unnoticed." Zika, the authors added, "which had not been previously reported in Cameroon, appears as the most important Flavivirus of humans," in the area studied, "accounting for more than 11 percent of

fevers of unknown origin.” (In May 2016, Belgian doctors reported a confirmed case of Zika in a patient recently returned from Cameroon.)

In September, Congress allocated \$1.1 billion to combat Zika in the United States. That’s compared with the \$2 million raised by the African Development Bank to support the World Health Organization’s Zika surveillance in parts of Africa. Moreover, to help pay for the American domestic response, Congress cut \$109.5 million previously dedicated to strengthening laboratory capacity in parts of West Africa devastated by Ebola — funding that might have helped to define and address the threat of Zika in Africa.

The paradox is that while the development of a Zika vaccine relies heavily on knowledge acquired from Africa, Zika vaccines are unlikely to be prioritized for use there — largely because we have been content to accept flimsy assumptions as scientific facts. Like other diseases before it, the data on Zika seems to matter only when it helps those of us in rich countries protect ourselves. Yet it’s this double standard that allows outbreaks to become pandemics, and that imperils public health — in Africa and everywhere.

WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.S. Escalates Tensions With Israel

Secretary of State John Kerry defends decision to allow U.N. resolution condemning Israeli settlements

By Felicia Schwartz And Rory Jones

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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Donald Trump Says Obama Administration Treating Israel With “Disdain”

President-elect urges the Jewish state to ‘stay strong’ until he is inaugurated

By Peter Nicholas

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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Inside The 37-Year Standoff Over Iran’s Frozen US Dollars

Iran sought the money from every administration since Carter’s; will Obama’s deal encourage more claims?

By Jay Solomon And Carol E. Lee

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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U.S. Poised To Act Over Alleged Election Hacking

Retaliation against Russia expected for cyberattacks on Democratic National Committee

By Carol E. Lee

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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Israel Grapples With Military’s Plan To Open Combat Roles To Women

Mixed-gender units have been in fire fights, but some object to a wider role for female soldiers

By Rory Jones

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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With Pearl Harbor Trip, Shinzo Abe Looks To Smooth Out Past As New Threats Arise

Visit to U.S. comes amid rising challenges from China, North Korea

By Alastair Gale

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Russia Seeks Backing For New Talks On Syria

Plan would give Moscow greater voice in efforts to broker an end to six-year conflict

By Nathan Hodge And Noam Raydan

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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France Poised For Pro-Russia Pivot

François Fillon and Marine Le Pen have spoken out against sanctions and argue for closer ties between Paris and Moscow

By Matthew Dalton

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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Tunisian Man Linked To Truck Attacker Arrested In Berlin

Man's contact details were discovered in Christmas market truck attacker Anis Amri's cellphone

By Zeke Turner

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Aluminum Billionaire Planning Escape From China: Lawyer

Giant aluminum stockpile in Mexico and Vietnam may represent an effort to get wealth out of China by Liu Zhongtian, chairman of China Zhongwang Holdings

By Scott Patterson

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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SEC Probes Banks' Sale Of Soured Mozambique Bonds

Mozambique again looks to restructure \$850 million debt, which was meant for tuna fishing but used to buy military equipment instead

By Matt Wirz And Julie Wernau

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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WALL STREET JOURNAL EDITORIAL

Kerry's Rage Against Israel

The Secretary doesn't understand why his peace talks failed.

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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The War On Israel Never Ends

Settlements aren't the issue. Many of the Jewish state's enemies don't even believe in its right to exist.

By Douglas J. Feith

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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North Korea's Defector Speaks

Pyongyang can't be bribed to give up its nuclear weapons.

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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Bring Back Pax Americana

After eight years of Obama's foreign policy, an isolationist mood is no surprise.

By Daniel Henninger

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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A Preview Of Obama's Post-Presidency

He's grumbling about Fox News and talk radio while feigning that he isn't partisan.

By Karl Rove

[Wall Street Journal](#), December 28, 2016

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WASHINGTON TIMES

Kerry, Netanyahu Clash Angriily About Peace

By Carlo Muñoz

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

Secretary of State John F. Kerry launched a rhetorical broadside against Israel Wednesday, saying Washington could not "protect or defend" the country should Tel Aviv continue to balk at two-state peace plans with Palestinians.

His comments drew swift and sharp rebuke from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who chided Mr. Kerry by saying Israelis did "not need to be lectured" about peace by the outgoing administration, while President-elect Donald Trump weighed in even before the speech was given with a strong support for Mr. Netanyahu and Israel, and vowing his incoming administration would take a sharply different approach.

It was an extraordinary and extraordinarily public division between two longtime allies, one that could have lasting and incalculable consequences for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Washington's traditional role as an honest broker and the main outside power in the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Kerry's 70-minute speech, much of it devoted to a critique of the Netanyahu government's policies, came a week after the Obama administration broke with longstanding U.S. practice and refused to veto a U.N. Security Council Resolution characterizing Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory as a "flagrant violation of international law."

"The vote in the United Nations was about preserving the two-state solution — that's what we were standing up for," Mr. Kerry told an audience at the State Department, asserting that the Israeli settlement activity has "steadily grown" in recent years, dangerously inflaming tensions with Palestinians and jeopardizing any realistic path toward peace.

Israel "can be Jewish or democratic, it cannot be both," he said, adding that without making some hard choices, Israel will never enjoy lasting peace.

In a press conference in Tel Aviv, Mr. Netanyahu expressed his "deep disappointment" over Mr. Kerry's "one-sided" remarks, which he said failed to take into account the security challenges Israel faced.

"Israelis do not need to be lectured about the importance of peace by foreign leaders. Israel's hand has been extended since Day One," he said. "It is a shame that Secretary Kerry does not see this simple truth."

Mr. Trump, in a barrage of tweets Wednesday morning, urged Israel to "stay strong" until he takes office next month, and accused the President Obama of erecting "roadblocks" to a smooth transition.

"We cannot continue to let Israel be treated with such total disdain and disrespect," Mr. Trump said on Twitter. "They used to have a great friend in the U.S., but not anymore."

Critics say the Obama administration's decision not to veto Friday's Security Council vote — which passed on a 14-0 vote — was equivalent to supporting the measure and marked a troubling departure from Washington's long history of defending Israel at the U.N.

Such criticism "failed to recognize that this friend, the United States of America, has done more to support Israel than any other country," Mr. Kerry said Wednesday. He argued the U.S. was essentially trying to save Israel from itself, and that the misguided settlement policy was isolating the Jewish state.

Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin, Maryland Democrat and Foreign Relations Committee ranking member, while backing a two-state solution, said he regretted the decision not to block the U.N. resolution. And Sen. Charles Schumer of New York, the incoming Democratic leader, said Israel's unhappy experience when it withdrew from the Gaza Strip — and Palestinians used the territory to launch missile strikes into Israel — undercut the Obama administration's arguments.

"While he may not have intended it, I fear Secretary Kerry, in his speech and action at the U.N., has emboldened extremists on both sides," Mr. Schumer said.

Mr. Netanyahu expressed concern that a summit being organized by France next month could produce an international framework that the U.N. Security Council might then codify with Mr. Obama's assent, boxing Israel in. Yet Mr. Kerry seemed to rule out the possibility the U.S. plans any new policy steps on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before Mr. Trump is sworn in.

Mr. Kerry's comments highlighted the longstanding rift in the diplomatic and personal relationship between Mr. Netanyahu and President Obama, which nearly froze after the administration's nuclear deal with Iran. Despite White House denials, Mr. Netanyahu's aides were saying Wednesday they had proof the Obama administration actively orchestrated the Security Council resolution and vote.

The timing of Mr. Kerry's comments, so soon after the U.N. vote on Jewish settlements, was yet another example of that animosity, says one regional analyst.

"President Obama and [Secretary] Kerry could have led with this several months ago and set the stage for a U.N. vote while giving Israel an opportunity to engage," said Jonathan Schanzer, vice president of research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

For his part, Mr. Netanyahu said he was already looking forward to the incoming Trump White House, hoping to work with the new administration to "mitigate the damage this [U.N.] resolution has done."

Israel Urges Obama To Stop Diplomatic 'Assault' Amid Fears Of More U.N. Action

Netanyahu's spokesman says there is evidence of White House collusion on U.N. anti-Israel resolution

By Valerie Richardson

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

An Israeli spokesman called Tuesday for President Obama to stop his diplomatic "assault" on the Middle East nation and warned that last week's anti-Israel U.N. resolution may be only the beginning.

David Keyes, spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said his government is concerned that the Obama administration is scrambling to put its stamp on Israeli foreign policy before President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The White House sparked a bipartisan outcry Friday by refusing to veto a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlements.

"We actually believe this may be the first of another series of pushes before the Obama administration leaves office," Mr. Keyes said on "The Kelly File" on Fox News.

Reports out of Israel say Mr. Netanyahu fears that Secretary of State John Kerry may seek a Security Council resolution to enshrine the administration's vision for an Israeli-Palestinian accord before Mr. Trump takes office.

Mr. Kerry is scheduled to make a policy speech Wednesday on the longstanding conflict, which could lay the groundwork for a Jan. 15 summit in France on Israeli-Palestinian relations.

"What I hope happens is the Obama administration ceases this assault on Israel, frankly using diplomatic forums, certainly biased forums like the Security Council, which has spent far too much time lambasting the Middle East's one liberal democracy and too little time shining a light on the mass murdering dictators like [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad," Mr. Keyes said.

Top Israeli officials, including Mr. Keyes, have for days accused the Obama administration of orchestrating the resolution behind the scenes, insisting the Israeli government has "ironclad" information to that effect, which the White House has denied.

Mr. Keyes doubled down Tuesday on the allegation even though White House spokesman Eric Schultz issued a statement the previous day saying that, "The US did not draft this resolution nor did the US introduce this resolution."

"The Egyptians, in partnership with the Palestinians, are the ones who began circulating an earlier draft of the resolution," Mr. Schultz said. "The Egyptians are the ones who moved it forward on Friday. And we took the position that we did when it was put to a vote."

Said Mr. Keyes: "I've seen information with my own eyes that contradicts that."

The Egyptian newspaper Al-Youm Al-Sabea published Tuesday what it claims are transcripts of meetings between U.S. and Palestinian officials collaborating on the resolution, according to the Times of Israel.

Mr. Keyes said the U.N. resolution's description of east Jerusalem — which includes the Western Wall, a holy Jewish site — as "occupied territory" would be comparable to describing Washington, D.C., as "occupied territory."

"The idea that the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem, the Western Wall, is occupied territory — what if somebody brought a Security Council resolution saying the heart of Washington was occupied territory, or London Bridge was occupied territory?" Mr. Keyes asked. "These are wild fantasies disconnected from reality which actually prejudice the outcome of negotiations."

The Obama administration has argued that the resolution, which was approved 14-0, is consistent with previous U.S. opposition to settlement construction, although the U.S. government has traditionally acted to block Israel's critics at the U.N.

"We know that there was deep collusion between the Obama administration and the Palestinians in order to push this United Nations Security Council resolution forward," Mr. Keyes said. "That is deeply, deeply disappointing because historically America has protected Israel at this very, very biased body."

Mr. Trump opposed the Obama administration's decision to withhold the veto, saying on Twitter that "things will be different" with regard to the U.N. after he takes office in January.

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John Kerry: Israel Can Be Jewish Or Democratic — Not Both

By Guy Taylor

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

Secretary of State John Kerry said Wednesday that if Israel rejects a two-state solution for peace with the Palestinian people, "it can be Jewish or it can be democratic."

Hours after President-elect Donald Trump issued a blistering attack on Twitter, Mr. Kerry defended President Obama's treatment of Israel, claiming "no American administration has done more for Israeli security than Barack Obama's."

Mr. Kerry, who's tenure at the State Department will end when Mr. Trump takes office in three weeks, stood by the administration's decision to allow the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution last week that called Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory a "flagrant violation of international law."

"The vote in the United Nations was about preserving the two-state solution that's what we were standing up for," he said, asserting that the Israeli settlement activity has "steadily grown" in recent years, dangerously inflaming tensions with Palestinians and jeopardizing any realistic path toward peace.

Critics say the Obama administration's decision to abstain from the Friday's Security Council vote — rather than block it from happening with a veto — was equivalent to supporting the measure and marked a troubling departure from Washington's long history of defending Israel at the U.N.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has gone so far in recent days as to accuse the Obama administration of having actually orchestrated the vote.

Mr. Kerry, who spoke before a large crowd at State Department headquarters Wednesday, dismissed the criticism.

The U.S., he said, "did in fact vote in accordance with our values." The secretary of state said critics "failed to recognize that this friend, the United States of America, has done more to support Israel than any other country."

"This friend that has blocked countless efforts to delegitimize Israel, cannot be true to our own values, or even the stated democratic values of Israel and we cannot properly protect and defend Israel if we allow a viable two-state solution to be destroyed before our own eyes," Mr. Kerry said.

Mr. Kerry also stressed that while the U.S. abstained from Friday's vote, the Security Council's 14 other member nations voted unanimously to approve the resolution.

His comments came after Mr. Trump had issued a barrage of tweets on Wednesday morning, urging Israel to "stay strong" until he takes office next month and accusing the President Obama of erecting "roadblocks" to a smooth transition.

"We cannot continue to let Israel be treated with such total disdain and disrespect," Mr. Trump said on Twitter. "They used to have a great friend in the U.S., but not anymore."

"Stay strong Israel, January 20th is fast approaching!" Mr. Trump said of his pending inauguration.

• The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Trump Urges Israel To 'Stay Strong,' Blasts Obama For U.N. Vote

By Dave Boyer

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

President-elect Donald Trump criticized President Obama's treatment of Israel Wednesday, urging Israel to "stay strong" until he takes office next month and accusing the president of erecting "roadblocks" to a smooth transition.

"We cannot continue to let Israel be treated with such total disdain and disrespect," Mr. Trump said on Twitter. "They used to have a great friend in the U.S., but not anymore."

His comments were prompted by the Obama administration's decision last week not to veto a U.N. resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The move angered the Israeli government, which accused the administration of orchestrating the vote.

"The beginning of the end was the horrible Iran deal, and now this (U.N.)! Stay strong Israel, January 20th is fast approaching!" Mr. Trump said of his pending inauguration.

Signaling that the president's professed cooperation with the incoming administration has hit a low point, Mr. Trump said he is "doing my best to disregard the many inflammatory President O statements and roadblocks."

"Thought it was going to be a smooth transition – NOT!" the president-elect said.

It was an astonishing public airing of the growing tensions between Mr. Trump and Mr. Obama, who has pledged to do everything possible to create a smooth and efficient transfer of power.

Mr. Trump's comments also came just hours ahead of a planned speech by Secretary of State John F. Kerry on the Obama administration's Mideast policy, a move that a senior member of the Israeli government called "pathetic."

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Lawmakers Urge Pentagon To Probe Huawei Deal

By Bill Gertz

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

Three Republican members of Congress are urging Defense Secretary Ash Carter to investigate the security risks to American facilities and military forces in South Korea posed by a Chinese telecommunications company's role in a new wireless network in the country.

"The United States cannot risk having its sensitive or classified information compromised by foreign Chinese spyware that could provide a means for Chinese authorities to access American data," Rep. Steve Chabot, Sen. Mark Kirk and Sen. John Cornyn stated in the Dec. 22 letter. Mr. Chabot chairs the House Small Business Committee. Mr. Kirk lost his re-election race in Illinois in November, but Mr. Cornyn of Texas is the Senate Republican whip.

The concerns are focused on Huawei Technologies, which has been linked to the Chinese military and intelligence services by the U.S. government.

According to the lawmakers, South Korea's government is in "active discussions" with Huawei for a contract to build a nationwide 5G — for fifth generation — wireless network.

"Huawei has been under intense scrutiny from the U.S. government given its close ties to the Chinese government," the lawmakers said, noting a 2012 House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence probe that concluded that "Huawei may have deliberately incorporated vulnerabilities in its equipment that could be exploited by the Chinese military and security services," according to the letter.

Additionally, the federal government's Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, which monitors foreign acquisitions of U.S. assets, was urged by the committee to ban Huawei from government contracts.

"The findings of this report have led to a de facto ban on Huawei's participation in major telecommunications projects in the United States and Australia," the members said.

Huawei's role in the South Korean network also raises cybersecurity concerns. The network will support "highly sensitive areas" such as U.S. military, intelligence and diplomatic facilities, including an advanced telecommunications network in Jeju-do, an island off the southernmost tip of the Korean peninsula, the congressmen said.

The lawmakers warned that allowing Huawei to take part in the network "presents potential security concerns about China's increasing network penetration across sensitive areas of the East China Sea."

The new 5G network also could give China access to thousands of internet-linked devices called the "Internet of Things" in the region. "As such U.S. military, intelligence, diplomatic or civilian personnel that connect to a Huawei-backed 5G network could have their data compromised," they stated.

The letter also quoted former National Security Agency Director Michael Hayden, who warned that Huawei in the past has "shared with the Chinese state intimate and extensive knowledge of foreign telecommunications systems it is involved with." The congressmen asked Mr. Carter to "investigate the cyber security implications of Huawei's potential participation in the South Korea's 5G network" and to raise the security concerns in discussions with South Korean leaders.

Huawei spokesman William Plummer said the company is a leading provider of telecommunications infrastructure equipment that is "world-proven and trusted." Huawei gear is used in over 170 markets, including Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin and North America, he said.

"These are demonstrable facts," he said. "These are not rumors, innuendo, hearsay, or any other type of groundless suggestions that cannot and have never been proven."

New counter-disinformation center

The fiscal 2017 defense authorization bill signed into law by President Obama last week contains a provision calling for a new U.S. government program to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation. The Global Engagement Center will be located in the State Department and must be established in the next six months.

"The purpose of the center shall be to lead, synchronize and coordinate efforts of the federal government to recognize, understand, expose and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interests," the law states. The center will seek to integrate efforts to track and evaluate disinformation, analyze foreign narratives, and disseminate "fact-based" narratives aimed at countering the lies and deception.

The center will have an operating budget of up to \$60 million for 2017.

The legislation also will allow the center to provide funds to civil society groups, media content providers, nongovernmental organizations, federally funded research and development centers, private companies, and academic institutions. The funds will be used to refute disinformation and media manipulation.

The center, however, will be temporary and close down on Dec. 23, 2024.

The center will replace some functions of the defunct U.S. Information Agency, which was shut down in 1999. Its functions were transferred to the State Department and critics say its effectiveness has been limited by diplomats more concerned with not upsetting U.S. foreign relations than countering foreign lies.

The new center was the result of efforts by Sen. Rob Portman, Ohio Republican and Sen. Chris Murphy, Connecticut Democrat.

"Our enemies are using foreign propaganda and disinformation against us and our allies, and so far the U.S. government has been asleep at the wheel," Mr. Portman said in a statement. "But today, the United States has taken a critical step towards confronting the extensive, and destabilizing, foreign propaganda and disinformation operations being waged against us by our enemies overseas."

The bill follows aggressive Russian influence activities that have included cyberattacks against U.S. political figures and what U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded was a covert program designed to affect the outcome of the presidential election.

Mr. Obama has ordered an intelligence review of the Russian influence operation. The Washington Post reported this week that the president may soon impose sanctions on Russia for the election interference.

Europe braced for returning terrorists

A State Department security report is warning that large numbers of Europeans who traveled to the Middle East to fight for the Islamic State terror group are set to return to their home countries, posing an increased terrorism threat.

"Over the past five years, an unprecedented number of Europeans have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight or train with terrorist groups operating in the conflict zone," the Dec. 22 report said. "However, since many remain in the theater their eventual return may prolong the heightened risk environment which has come to be known as Western Europe's 'new normal.'"

A total of 21 of the 50 Islamist attacks in Western Europe since 1994 involved Europeans who received terror training abroad.

"The 21 attacks include most of the high-profile, mass-casualty Islamist terrorist attacks that Western Europe has experienced since Islamist terrorism first emerged in the region approximately two decades ago, including the 2004 bombings in Madrid (191 killed); the 2005 bombings in London (52 killed); the 2015 attack against Charlie Hebdo in Paris (12 killed); the November 2015 attacks in Paris (132 killed); and the March 2016 attacks in Brussels (32 killed)."

The truck attack in Nice, France in July that killed 86 was carried out by an Islamist with no foreign training or fighting experience.

Foreign training "suggests that combat and military training received overseas may increase the lethality of perpetrators," the report by the Overseas Security Advisory Council said.

Syria and Iraq were the main foreign terrorist training grounds with up to 7,000 Europeans traveling there since 2014.

The report said European governments are concerned that progress in attacking the Islamic State in its Syrian and Iraqi bases will force more European terrorists back to the continent. Some 2,100 European fighters already have returned home, and to date three attacks were linked to these returning Islamic State terrorists.

European authorities have claimed that asylum seekers from the Middle East have not been used for infiltration by terrorists. But the State Department said "there is evidence that some have, including members of the cell behind the November 13 attacks in Paris."

Asylum seekers in Germany also conducted terrorist attacks, including a July 18 ax attack in Wurzburg, a July 24 suicide bombing in Ansbach, and the December 19 truck ramming of a Christmas market in the heart of Berlin.

The danger of attacks in Europe will require increased security vigilance “as the heightened ‘new normal’ risk is expected to persist for the time being,” the report concluded.

•Contact Bill Gertz on Twitter at @BillGertz.

Russia’s New Year’s Resolution For 2017: Launch 2 Nuclear Submarines

By Douglas Ernst

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s military aims to bring two new nuclear submarines online in 2017.

Moscow plans to reap the benefits of a \$41 billion defense budget in 2016 by launching its Project 955A Borei II-class and the nuclear-powered multipurpose attack submarine Project 855 Yasen-class.

The announcement was made by Russian Navy Deputy Commander-in-Chief Vice-Admiral Viktor Bursuk to the state-run TASS News Agency.

SEE ALSO: Russian submarine tests new missile designed to carry nuclear warheads

“In 2017, the first improved Project 955-A submarine and the Yasen-M will be floated out,” the officer said, The Diplomat reported Tuesday.

The news is likely to please Mr. Putin, whose nation already boasts the third-largest air force in the world and a new crop of intercontinental ballistic missiles engineered to counter U.S. missile defense systems.

“The Russian Navy expects delivery of the new subs ‘within the time limits stipulated by the contract.’ Russia plans to operate a total of eight Borei-class boomers — three Borei-class and five improved Borei II-class SSBNs — by the 2020s,” the magazine reported.

The Project 885-M Yasen M-class Kazan is reportedly one of the “quietest subs ever to be commissioned into the Russian Navy,” the Diplomat reported.

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OSCE, International Monitoring Group, Acknowledges ‘major Security Incident’

By Andrew Blake

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

The Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe, a group tasked with monitoring the pro-Russian uprising in eastern Ukraine, admitted Wednesday to being the victim of a recent “major security incident.”

“There was an attack. We found out about it at the beginning of November,” an OSCE spokeswoman told Reuters, confirming reports of a cyberattack that appeared earlier Wednesday in the French newspaper Le Monde.

The attack “compromis[ed] the confidentiality” of the OSCE’s computer network and put “its integrity at risk,” but failed to fully sideline the organization’s ability to operate, spokesperson Mersiha Causevic Podzic told Agence France-Presse.

“The systems are safe now. We were given entirely new security systems and passwords,” she added.

The OSCE said it was personally incapable of identifying any potential suspects. According to Le Monde, however, an unnamed Western intelligence source anonymously claimed that the attack was waged by a hacking group linked to several high-profile earlier attacks attributed to the Russian government.

The OSCE spokeswoman acknowledged the agency was aware of “speculation” concerning the potential culprit: a purported unit of the Russia’s main military intelligence service referred to various names including APT28, Pawn Storm and Fancy Bear.

Security researchers have previously blamed that same group with launching cyberattacks against the Democratic National Committee and the chairman of Hillary Clinton’s failed 2016 White House run, John Podesta, prior to last month’s presidential race.

In addition to purely American targets, however, researchers as recently as last week linked that same hacking group to a newly uncovered campaign launched against the Ukrainian military. CrowdStrike, a U.S. security firm hired to investigate the DNC breach, said last week that Pawn Storm exploited a vulnerability affecting Android smartphones in a bid to infiltrate the mobile devices of Ukrainian soldiers.

The OSCE currently has about 700 monitors deployed across eastern Ukraine in a effort to watch over the ongoing skirmish that erupted there after the country’s pro-Russian former President Viktor Yanukovich was driven from office in February 2014

All 57 of the organization's member states, including the U.S., Russia and Ukraine, were reportedly made aware of last month's security breach.

The Russian government has previously denied being responsible for cyberattacks attributed to the group known as Pawn Storm. Nonetheless, U.S. officials told CNN Wednesday that the Obama administration plans to announce a series of retaliatory measures including expanded sanctions against Moscow as early as Thursday.

Germany's Far-right Party Seizes On Berlin Truck Attack, Says Angela Merkel 'complicit'

By Austin Davis

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

BERLIN — Germany's surging far-right party has wasted no time seizing on the political impact of the country's latest terrorist assault, moving quickly to politicize the grief and outrage after a radicalized Tunisian asylum seeker hijacked a truck and drove it into a Berlin Christmas market.

Two days after the Dec. 19 attack that left 12 dead and more than 50 injured, members of the Alternative for Germany party marched on the Chancellery to honor the victims — and to protest Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision last year to permit roughly 1 million refugees to enter the country.

With Bach playing on loudspeakers, the demonstrators waved German flags and held up placards reading, "Merkel must go."

At the center of the protests was Alexander Gauland, 75, a founder of the AfD and now its national deputy chairman.

"She made a decision that was disastrous for Germany," said Mr. Gauland. "This is just one consequence of that. She is complicit."

The Christmas market attack could serve as fuel for the rise of the populist far-right party, in a country that has traditionally repressed political movements harking back to Germany's troubled past.

The AfD is the German iteration of the European populist revolt that has shaken the continent's political establishment in recent years, including gains of anti-immigrant parties in Western and Eastern Europe, the United Kingdom's Brexit vote to leave the European Union and the near victory of a far-right party candidate for Austria's presidency this year.

Mr. Gauland was born during World War II in Chemnitz, a city that would become Karl-Marx-Stadt under East German communist rule. He fled to West Germany in 1959, earned a doctorate in law and political science and rose quickly in Ms. Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union. Later, he had a successful career as a local newspaper publisher and historian.

The fiscal and social conservative's faith in the CDU was shaken in 2010, however, when Germany agreed to eurozone bailouts for Greece's failing economy.

Angered by the government's neglect of international agreements and what he viewed as a betrayal of Germany's interests, Mr. Gauland, along with politician and economist Bernd Lucke, cut ties with the Christian Democrats after 40 years of membership and in 2013 founded what would become the AfD.

"It had been determined that there wouldn't be any bailouts and that every country would adhere to paying their own debts," Mr. Gauland recalled during a conversation in his office in Potsdam, where he heads the party's caucus in the Brandenburg state legislature. "That was essentially the point when I told myself that this isn't the party for me."

Mr. Gauland and Mr. Lucke's brainchild began as a party opposed to the increasing concentration of power in Brussels, the capital of the European Union. But the group also has eagerly embraced policy stances that until recently were considered taboo here, including condemning immigration and labeling Islam as un-German.

"We are essentially the only party that concerns ourselves with issues that the other parties simply ignore," Mr. Gauland said.

The pushback has been sharp and hostile. The German mainstream media and the leading political forces have branded the party as xenophobic.

The AfD is "an organization which employs unrestrained demagoguery to abuse everything that is capable of being abused," Wolfgang Schäuble, Ms. Merkel's powerful finance minister, said in 2014.

Potent electoral formula

But "we are neither xenophobic nor hostile toward foreigners," Mr. Gauland insisted. "Rather, we simply provide those who don't want these changes with a way to express themselves."

The perspective has proved politically potent as the country struggles to absorb nearly 1 million refugees who flooded Germany after Ms. Merkel refused to close the country's borders in the wake of crises in Syria, Afghanistan and other global hot spots. The AfD now holds seats in 10 of Germany's 16 powerful state legislatures. Nationally, the party is polling at 15.5 percent,

according to an INSA survey — up 2.5 percentage points in the wake of the Christmas market truck attack and just 5 points behind the center-left Social Democrats, Ms. Merkel's ruling coalition junior partner.

If the party maintains its popularity ratings going into elections next year, the AfD would easily enter Germany's federal parliament as a powerful force opposing the government's agenda.

"Taking part in a coalition is completely out of the question," Mr. Gauland said. "We want to work as an oppositional force to change the agenda of other parties."

Mr. Gauland might be achieving his goals already.

Ms. Merkel and her Christian Democrats conspicuously shifted course at her party's convention this month, calling for increased deportations of violent and suspicious immigrants and for a ban on public displays of the burqa, a veil worn by conservative Muslim women.

"That's our success," said Mr. Gauland. "I'm confident that what played out at the CDU's party convention wasn't a coincidence. The CDU is afraid that it's losing voters and we'll continue to fuel this fear."

Parties across Europe and in the United States are fanning flames of discontent using similar tactics with increasing success.

France's National Front and the Netherlands' Party for Freedom are gearing up for their countries' elections next year using rhetoric largely condemning immigration and Islam.

Meanwhile, the Brexit referendum and the presidential election of Donald Trump in the U.S. have solidified the gains of conservative nationalist movements tapping into anger over the status quo.

While Mr. Gauland is skeptical of drawing too many similarities with Mr. Trump or with other right-wing parties on the continent, he welcomed the growing rejection of traditional elite politicking in favor of a more direct, even brazen political style, a rejection of political correctness and the fear of addressing real problems honestly.

"In Germany in recent years — especially regarding the election of Donald Trump or the Brexit referendum — we've seen that a political decision is condemned just because it seems politically incorrect," he said, adding that democracy is about giving voice to everyone's views. "But that doesn't have anything to do with politics."

As Germany's political season heats up, Mr. Gauland plans to continue emphasizing policy discrepancies and insecurities within Germany's conservative voter base, especially in the wake of another terrorist attack.

"If you don't want more refugees in this country, if you want these people to be deported, then you cannot vote CDU," Mr. Gauland said. "They're not reliable. You have to vote AfD."

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WASHINGTON TIMES EDITORIAL

Why Donald Trump Is Right About Nuclear Arms

By Peter Vincent Pry

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

The liberal mainstream media is all aghast that President-elect Trump is calling for "expanding and modernizing" the U.S. nuclear deterrent, and if necessary winning a new nuclear arms race with Russia.

Even the usually "fair and balanced" Fox News has for three days (and counting) reported uncritically the view of the Arms Control Association that Mr. Trump is "irresponsible" and "reckless" — as if the Arms Control Association is a left wing lobby dedicated to unilateral nuclear disarmament of the United States.

The public might get the false impression from Fox reporting that the Arms Control Association is part of the U.S. Government and a source of official information. In fact, the Arms Control Association is no more to be trusted on matters of national security than Greenpeace or Ploughshares, all of whom want to achieve President Obama's "a world without nuclear weapons" starting with the United States.

One example of the Arms Control Association disinformation reported as fact by Fox is that the nuclear balance between the United States and Russia is about equal and comprises many thousands of warheads — 7,100 U.S. versus 7,300 Russian nuclear weapons. The Arms Control Association, Greenpeace, and Ploughshares argue that 7,100 U.S. nuclear weapons is "overkill" so the U.S. can afford to take the lead in making deeper cuts.

But the Arms Control Association's alleged 7,100 U.S. nuclear weapons is counting weapons in the U.S. "stockpile" — which includes nuclear weapons retired, warehoused, and awaiting dismantlement. These weapons are not deployed in the operational force, would require months or years to refurbish and make deliverable, and are really no more part of the U.S. nuclear deterrent than obsolete bombers rusting away in the desert.

In fact, the real U.S. nuclear deterrent — comprising weapons that are deployed and operational, meaning they can be promptly used — is 1,550 strategic weapons (as permitted under the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) and 200 tactical weapons.

So the U.S. nuclear deterrent comprises altogether 1,750 weapons.

Russia has at least 4,750 nuclear weapons, and probably a lot more.

Russia has 1,750 strategic nuclear weapons — 200 more than permitted by New START, and they continue building. Russia also has at least 3,000 tactical nuclear weapons. Estimates of Russian tactical nuclear weapons range from 3,000-20,000.

Thus, Russia has achieved a dangerous preponderance in overall numbers of nuclear weapons — a margin of superiority it never had during the Cold War.

Russia also has a huge advantage in nuclear weapons modernity. Russia's nuclear weapons are mostly brand new. Indeed, Moscow has fielded "third generation" nuclear weapons, that have no counterpart in the U.S. deterrent. Russian third generation nuclear weapons are less for deterrence and more for war fighting, designed for specialized effects like electromagnetic pulse (EMP) for destroying electronics, "clean" warheads that make no radioactive fallout, neutron warheads for antiarmor and air defense, x-ray warheads for anti-satellite and missile defense.

U.S. nuclear weapons are decades old, designed and built long ago during the Cold War for a very different threat environment, when massive collateral damage from blast and radioactive fallout was considered desirable, to make nuclear war unthinkable. Today, these characteristics only make U.S. nuclear weapons unuseable, and therefore close to useless, even for deterring North Korea.

Moreover, the U.S. nuclear deterrent is so aged that its safety and reliability is questionable.

Every nuclear weapon in the U.S. inventory is now many years beyond its original design service life. We have literally been patching and repairing the nuclear deterrent, relying on computer models and the judgment of technicians (who have never actually built a nuclear weapon) to annually certify the safety and reliability of U.S. warheads.

Our best nuclear weapons experts, including John Foster and Lowell Wood — who designed the nuclear weapons in our current inventory — have challenged the efficacy of so-called "science-based stockpile stewardship" that began during the Clinton Administration. Indeed, during the Clinton years, the House Armed Services Committee warned that this policy was a ploy for eventual unilateral nuclear disarmament in the report Science-Based Stockpile Stewardship: Erosion By Design.

That is why Mr. Trump is not "reckless" or "irresponsible" to call for "expanding and modernizing" the U.S. nuclear deterrent. Expansion and modernization of the U.S. nuclear deterrent is necessary to restore parity to the nuclear balance with Russia — and to deter Moscow from thinking it can use its nuclear advantage for nuclear blackmail or aggression.

Even those who want "a world without nuclear weapons" should support expansion and modernization of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. Historically, nuclear arms control has worked only when the U.S. has had something to trade.

Russia, China, and North Korea will not trade something for nothing.

• Peter Vincent Pry is executive director of the Task Force on National and Homeland Security.

The End Of Liberal Internationalism

By Herbert London

[Washington Times](#), December 28, 2016

At the end of World War II, the United States established a liberal international order that included an institutional commitment to free trade and freedom of the seas. It also included unprecedented assistance to weak nations incapable of fending for themselves, through the Marshall Plan, NATO and other alliances. However one describes the U.S. rule, it did provide a period of equilibrium, notwithstanding challenges from the Soviet Union.

While the U.S. is not likely to be completely displaced from its dominant position in the 21st century, this order will undoubtedly be threatened by a diffusion of power and the complexity of world politics. The openness that enabled the U.S. to build networks, maintain institutions and alliances is under siege. Internally, the populist reaction to globalization and trade agreements illustrate antipathy to the post-war arrangements. Externally, a rising Chinese military presence in the South China Sea and Russian assertiveness in Syria and Crimea challenge assumptions of the past.

In Asia, Beijing seeks to draw American allies such as the Philippines and Thailand into its political orbit. In the Middle East, the U.S. has been unable to guide the region toward a more liberal and peaceful future in the wake of the Arab Spring and has proved to be powerless to halt the killing fields in Aleppo. Russia's geopolitical influence has reached heights unseen since the Cold War as Russian President Vladimir Putin attempts to roll back liberal advances on his geographic periphery.

For 50 years or more, the European Union seemed to represent the advance guard of a new liberalism in which nations “pool” sovereignty for continental cooperation. But today the EU is fractured. The departure of jobs to Asia and the arrival of migrants from Africa and the Middle East have resuscitated nationalistic impulses. Brexit was merely one manifestation of this trend. After that June vote, the only question that remains is which country is next to leave the EU and how much more contraction can the Union tolerate.

Even though Norbert Hofer of Austria’s Freedom party lost the election to a pro-EU party, his strong showing set off alarm bells throughout the EU. Earlier this year, Mr. Hofer said that Islam “has no place in Austria” without explaining what that means for Austria’s Muslims.

The Italian referendum also suggested a troubling trend line for the EU. Matteo Renzi’s proposal to extend his powers and ease further reforms was seen as a plebiscite on his premiership. It was soundly rejected and Renzi was obliged to resign. The “winner” of the referendum is Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement, a movement skeptical of the EU and global liberalism.

Over this past decade, buffeted by financial crises, populist insurgencies and the resurgence of authoritarian powers, the liberal international order has stumbled. In part this process of dissolution is related to the belief that the U.S., as the superpower maintaining global equilibrium, is no longer a fully engaged partner. Where the U.S. has lapsed, Russia has intervened — notwithstanding its own economic weakness.

What the world is experiencing is material reduction brought about through the demand for social services and equity without the ability to generate adequate revenue. Debt is the burden that overwhelms Europe. A cri de coeur heard throughout the continent is a plea for the delivery of returns to society superior to alternative financial arrangements. In the backdrop of unsustainable financing is a Russian system of centralized and opaque political leadership incompatible with Europe’s market and rules based system and a Chinese initiatives for global trade managed by a Communist party apparatus that will not tolerate opposition.

Russia and China represent a kind of Nietzschean “will to power” applied to a liberal international order weaker than it has been in three generations. Hence, autocratic governments will attempt to establish an alternative political order managed by might rather than rules. The best that can be hoped for, short of conflicts is an awkward coexistence between liberal and illiberal nations. But even this compromise, should it be accepted, is tacit belief the liberal internationalism that kept the world intact for 80 years is over.

• Herbert London is president of the London Center for Policy Research.

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