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THE EPOCH TIMES

OUR NATION

US Responds With Sanctions, Peace Offer, to Latest Iranian Provocation

No US forces harmed in Iranian
missile attack on Iraqi base;
President Trump avoids escalation
of military conflict with Iran **8**

President Donald Trump speaks about the situation with Iran in the Grand Foyer of the White House on Jan. 8, 2020.



Watchdog Group Tells 5 States of Millions of Extra Voter Registrations

MATTHEW VADUM

At least 2.5 million extra voter registrations are on the voter rolls of 378 counties nationwide, according to the good-government group Judicial Watch.

Democrats have long denied that voter fraud affects electoral outcomes and claims that those on the right want to crack down on voter fraud solely as a means of preventing the poor and minorities from voting. But experts say fraudulent voter registrations open the door to fraudulent voting.

President Donald Trump and Republicans have long warned about the dangers of voter fraud. Significantly, four of the states with voter over-registrations—Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Virginia, and Colorado—are important battleground states that will figure prominently in the presidential election later this year. An unusually high voter registration rate suggests a jurisdiction may not be removing voters who have died or who have moved elsewhere, as required by federal law, according to Judicial Watch.

To reduce the likelihood of voter fraud in the 2020 elections, Judicial Watch has sent “notice of violation” letters to 19 large counties in five states, warning that the group intends to file suit against them unless they comply with federal law and remove ineligible voter registrations within 90 days.

Section 8 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), also known as the Motor-Voter law, requires that jurisdictions take reasonable efforts to remove ineligible registrations from their voter rolls. During the Obama administration, the Department of Justice was heavily criticized by Republicans and others for failing to enforce Section 8.

Judicial Watch discovered the over-registrations by analyzing data recently released

by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), an independent, bipartisan commission that was established by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). The EAC is responsible for developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration.

Dirty voting rolls can mean dirty elections, and Judicial Watch will insist, in court if necessary, that states follow federal law to clean up their voting rolls.

Tom Fitton, president, Judicial Watch

“Dirty voting rolls can mean dirty elections, and Judicial Watch will insist, in court if necessary, that states follow federal law to clean up their voting rolls,” said Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton in a statement.

The Washington-based nonprofit organization, well-known in political circles, describes itself as a “conservative, non-partisan educational foundation, [that] promotes transparency, accountability, and integrity in government, politics and the law.”

“Previous Judicial Watch lawsuits have already led to major cleanups in California, Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio—but more needs to be done,” said Fitton. “It is common sense that voters who die or move away be removed from the voting rolls.”

Nineteen counties in five states stood out for having more voter registrations than citizens residing there who are old enough to vote.

Those five states are: California (Imperial, Monterey, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, San



Voters cast their ballots in Los Angeles on June 5, 2018.

Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Stanislaus, and Yolo counties); Colorado (Jefferson County); North Carolina (Guilford and Mecklenburg counties); Pennsylvania (Allegheny, Bucks, Chester, and Delaware counties); and Virginia (Fairfax County).

The 2.5-million figure is still an improvement over a year ago, when Judicial Watch found there were 3.5 million more names on various county voter rolls than there were citizens of voting age.

Although San Diego County in California removed 500,000 inactive names from voter rolls following Judicial Watch’s legal settlement with Los Angeles County, San Diego continues to have a voter registration rate of 117 percent, which is one of the highest voter over-registration rates in the country. Judicial Watch says that by filing multi-

ple friend-of-the-court briefs, it helped clean up voter rolls in Ohio by pushing for a landmark Supreme Court ruling in 2018, in a landmark electoral integrity case called *Husted v. Philip Randolph Institute*.

The 6th Circuit Court of Appeals had ruled that Ohio’s process violated the NVRA, but the Supreme Court upheld an Ohio law that required the state to send address confirmation notices to all registered voters who hadn’t voted in the previous two years. The ruling had the effect of upholding a 2014 settlement agreement between Judicial Watch and Ohio, which required the state to use that same procedure as part of a regular supplemental mailing designed to identify whether registered Ohio voters had moved away—one of the steps mandated by the NVRA.

DHS Considering Protections to Prevent Violence Against Places of Worship

JANITA KAN

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is considering a list of recommendations focused on preventing violence against faith-based communities, after a spate of attacks at synagogues, churches, and other places of worship.

Acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf has asked agency heads, in a memorandum obtained by media outlets, to come up with a plan to bolster security at places of worship and protect faith-based groups from violent targeted attacks.

“Houses of worship and faith-based organizations dedicate resources to local communities and often serve as social and moral beacons people rely on in times of both joy and need. The right to practice religion free of interference or fear is one of our nation’s most fundamental and indelible rights,” Wolf wrote in his memo, sent on Jan. 2.

“As such, the targeting of houses of worship by violent extremists of any ideology is particularly abhorrent and must be prevented.”

The recommendations are part of a Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) report, which was attached to Wolf’s memo, which looks at DHS’s role in preventing and mitigating the attacks. In May 2019, then-acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan asked HSAC to set up a subcommittee to review the security of faith-based organizations across the country.

The subcommittee, co-chaired by John R. Allen, president of Brookings Institute, and Paul Goldenberg, president and CEO of Cardinal Point Strategies, was asked to review

the sharing of information between the DHS and faith-based organizations, evaluate protective efforts for faith-based communities, evaluate the role of faith-based communities in preventative efforts, and look at the impacts of violent extremists and domestic terrorists.

As part of their review, the subcommittee said they conducted seven site visits to places of worship across the nation, held in-person meetings and conference calls, and was also briefed by over 100 experts.

The report was finalized and submitted in December 2019, just days before a violent stabbing attack at a rabbi’s home in New York and a shooting at a Texas church.

The report outlines a range of findings and measures that could help improve the preparedness, communication, and funding of DHS and faith-based organizations in the event of an attack.

The recommendations in the 2019 report include designating a central point of contact within DHS for faith-based groups, creating a package approach to security for faith-based organizations, encourage faith-based organizations to work with law enforcement develop real-time information sharing systems, and seek additional funding from Congress to provide increased security grant money for faith-based organizations.

The report also references two similar reports made in 2012 and 2014 containing relevant recommendations that helped the subcommittee come to their conclusions in the new report. The subcommittee said although recommendations were made several years ago, “there is no evidence any of



Community members and congregants attend a candlelight vigil for the victim of the Chabad of Poway Synagogue shooting in Poway, Calif., on April 28, 2019.

the recommendations were acted upon.”

“With this the third report of this nature, and in view of the urgency of our moment, and the imprimatur of this Subcommittee, this report should be converted into an implementation plan at the earliest possible moment for the systematic adoption of the actionable recommendations,” the subcommittee advised the department.

Some law enforcement has also responded with its own measures following the church attack in Texas. Fort Worth police posted on Twitter that Chief Ed Kraus is encouraging officers to wear their uniforms when attend-

ing places of worship.

“In the wake of the local attack on the West Freeway Church of Christ last Sunday, as well as the attacks on Jewish communities and church services nationally, Chief Kraus is authorizing and encouraging our officers who attend worship services to do so in full police uniform,” the post said.

A man shot at congregants attending a service at West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, Texas, on Dec. 29, 2019, killing two people. The suspect, Keith Thomas Kinnunen, was shot and killed by a member of the church’s security team.

Cartels Continue to Build Cross Border Tunnels to Smuggle Drugs

CHARLOTTE CUTHBERTSON

Sharing a stormwater drainage system with Nogales, Mexico, means that Nogales, Arizona, is a popular spot for cartels to push their contraband across the U.S. border undetected. The southern Nogales has about six times the population of its U.S. namesake and the city pushes right up against the border fence.

Recently, two tunnels were discovered in Nogales, bringing the Tucson-sector tunnel count to 125 found since 1990. In early December, the first of the two tunnels was discovered when U.S. Border Patrol and Mexican Federal Police collaborated for a routine sweep of the stormwater system.

The tunnel’s entrance was concealed in the floor of an existing drainage system by a pile of dirt; it was capped with a Styrofoam and concrete mixture, according to Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

It extended 10 feet underground and 20 feet into the United States, CBP said. At its exit, the tunnel was approximately three feet wide and over four feet tall.

Days later, Border Patrol found another tunnel about 50 feet away and alerted the Mexican Federal Police to check the location of the entrance from the southern side.

Both tunnels have been remediated with concrete filler, according to CBP. Further west, in Yuma, Arizona, Border Patrol agent Jose Garibay recounted the story of a tunnel discovered in his sector in August 2018. The tunnel extended from San Luis, Mexico, to San Luis, Arizona. It was 600 feet long—the length of two football fields—and was shored up by vertical wood planks on the walls.

The tunnel popped up into an old KFC building in San Luis, and the exit point was about eight inches in diameter and just wide enough to bring up pounds of narcotics, said Garibay.

“A lot of them are hand-dug tunnels, which, regardless of how they’re dug, it takes a lot of precision to get them from the south side to the U.S. side and come up in the exact same spot that they want it to,” he said.

“Especially since they dug under a canal. So they had flowing water above them. It took a lot of engineering to be able to get it to work properly and not collapse.”

The tunnel was discovered through “human intelligence,” Garibay said, being careful not to reveal too many details. Federal and local law enforcement arrested a man who was transporting drugs out of the building.

When caught, the suspect was transporting more than three kilograms (more than six pounds) of fentanyl, six kilograms of cocaine, more than 20 kilograms of heroin, and 118 kilograms of methamphetamines, worth a combined \$1.2 million.

During a traffic stop, a K-9 alerted officials to the drugs, which were in two toolboxes in the man’s pickup truck, said Scott Brown, Phoenix Homeland Security Investigations special agent in charge.

“Just the three kilograms of fentanyl translates to over 3 million dosage units,” Brown said at the time. “In a nation in the midst of an opioid crisis, obviously, this is a very significant seizure.”

The agent said the Mexico entrance of the tunnel was accessed via a trapdoor under a bed located in a residential compound.

Garibay said the tunnel



Border Patrol agents patrol the border in Nogales, Ariz., on July 29, 2019. The city of Nogales, Mexico, abuts the border fence to the right.

was built by the Sinaloa cartel. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, tunnels found along the border are generally associated with the Sinaloa cartel. Most tunnels are found in California and Arizona.

The tunnel was sealed at the border, then filled with concrete up to the exit point. Some previously discovered tunnels, mostly in the San Diego area, have had lighting, ventilation, and rail systems. One such unfinished tunnel that was discovered in San Diego in 2018 was 627 feet long and went to a depth of 31 feet. A rail system ran the entire length of the tunnel, CBP said.

Garibay said no technology exists yet that can detect small cross-border tunnels, which are generally three feet wide and five feet tall.

“There’s nothing as of now that would allow us to go operational with it and detect it with a high rate of accuracy,” he said. “We’ve sent guys to Israel because [Israel has] a big problem

with tunnels. So we were working with them. And they’re working on technology to try to detect tunnels more accurately.”

It’s impossible to tell how many pounds of drugs enter the United States through tunnels each year. Most of the drugs that CBP seizes along the border come through ports of entry in vehicles.

CBP officers and Border Patrol agents intercepted more than 82,100 pounds of drugs in November 2019—a 32 percent increase over October.

Tunnels found along the border are generally associated with the Sinaloa cartel, and most are built in California and Arizona.



Border Patrol agents discover a cross-border tunnel in Nogales, Ariz., on Dec. 8, 2019.

Iran Tension Unlikely to Cause Sustained Oil Price Spike

EMEL AKAN

WASHINGTON—Fears of a conflict escalation in the Middle East following the killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. airstrike may push oil prices higher in the short term, according to analysts.

A sustained surge in prices is unlikely, they said. Tensions between Washington and Tehran have escalated at a time when oil supplies have started to tighten.

Members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies agreed last month to reduce oil output by an additional 500,000 barrels per day starting this month. Expectations were also rising for oil demand, following the positive news about the “phase one” trade deal between the United States and China.

Oil prices spiked immediately after the news of the killing of Iran’s top military commander at Baghdad International Airport early on Jan. 3. The international benchmark Brent crude jumped more than 3 percent to \$68.67 per barrel that day. U.S. West Texas Intermediate also increased 3 percent to \$63.05.

The escalation of tensions could drive Brent prices above \$70 in short order, according to Citigroup.

“The factors in the market pushing oil prices higher are based on the view that Iranian authorities collectively, or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, independently, could potentially take retaliatory actions that increase the likelihood of supply disruption in the Middle East,” Edward Morse, the global head of commodities research at Citigroup, said in a report.

The scenarios of retaliation by Iran could include attacks on oil



Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on Jan. 3, 2020.

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Edward Morse, global head of commodities research at Citigroup

facilities in the Gulf area, in Iraq for example, where Western companies are investing in new oil production, Morse said.

Other potential retaliations could be “attacks on pipeline oil flows or shipping through either the Strait of Hormuz or the Red Sea.”

The Strait of Hormuz is the world’s most important oil transit chokepoint, as more than a fifth of the world’s oil supply flows through it. And any disruption, even a temporary one, can lead to substantial supply delays and an increase in energy prices, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

While Morse predicts that fears over Iranian retaliation will continue to put upward pressure on oil prices in the short-term, he says

it’s unlikely to cause a long-term concern.

“Despite clear short-term oil market concerns, there could be bearish factors at work later in 2020, with the possibility that Iran and the United States could find common purpose in working out a new agreement,” he wrote.

September Attacks

The killing of Soleimani follows the attacks in September 2019 on major Saudi Arabian oil facilities and a series of attacks targeting oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz earlier, which have raised geopolitical risks in the region. The United States blamed Iran for the attacks.

Analysts polled by S&P Global Platts say that the disruption in oil

markets will be short term, given a global oil supply glut and the lack of a sustained price spike following the September attacks.

On Sept. 14, 2019, Saudi Arabia’s key Abqaiq processing plant and the nearby oil field were attacked, knocking out more than half of the country’s oil output and nearly 5 percent of global supply.

Brent crude oil jumped almost 20 percent following the incident. However, it retreated to pre-attack levels in a few days, after the Saudis assured that production had been restored.

The September incident reveals that the oil market will accommodate a “very near-term geopolitical risk premium,” but won’t continue to do so for months, Katie Bays, co-founder of Washington-based Sandhill Strategy, told S&P Global Platts.

Iran promised vengeance after the U.S. airstrike that killed Soleimani, along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an Iraqi militia leader and one of Iran’s top lieutenants in Iraq. He has been blamed by the United States for last week’s assault on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

“We believe that an Iranian retaliation is almost certain,” Paul Sheldon, chief geopolitical risk analyst at S&P Global Platts, said in a note.

“The chances of a broader conflict remain below 50 percent, although risks are entering new territory. The initial market reaction indicates Brent is capped at \$70 per barrel, without another major incident. The Iranian retaliation could take the form of a quick response by proxies against U.S. allies and assets, but a larger response is likely to be more carefully calculated and indirect in an effort to avoid outright conflict,” he said.

Sen. Hawley Wants Deadline for Sending Impeachment Articles to Senate

MARK TAPSCOTT

WASHINGTON—Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) might have only one week left to withhold from the Senate the two articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, approved by House Democrats on Dec. 19, if the upper chamber approves a proposal for a 25-day deadline introduced Jan. 6 by Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.).

"If, following adoption of such articles, the House of Representatives does not so notify the Senate or otherwise provide for such articles to be exhibited to the Senate within 25 calendar days from the date of adoption of such articles, as recorded in the Journal of the House of Representatives, such articles shall be deemed exhibited before the Senate and it shall be in order for any Senator to offer a motion to dismiss such articles with prejudice for failure by the House of Representatives to prosecute such articles," the resolution reads. "Such motion shall be adopted by an affirmative vote of a majority of the Senators, duly chosen and sworn, without debate by the yeas and nays, which shall be entered on the record."

If Hawley's resolution is approved as is and made applicable to the Dec. 19 date, Pelosi would have to deliver the two approved articles of impeachment to the Senate no later than Jan. 13. She has withheld them while insisting the Senate adopt "fair" rules that allow testimony from witnesses who didn't appear during the House impeachment hearings. Once the articles of impeach-



Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 15, 2019.

ment are delivered to the Senate, its current rules stipulate that a trial then be held in which two-thirds of the 100 senators would have to vote in favor of convicting Trump on at least one of the two articles in order to remove him from the presidency.

In addition to Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.), co-sponsors of the resolution include Republican Sens. Mike Braun of Indiana, Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee, Ted Cruz of Texas, Steve Daines of Montana, John Barrasso of Wyoming, Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Joni Ernst of Iowa, David Perdue of Georgia, and Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma.

The presence among the initial co-sponsors of Barrasso, who is chairman of the Senate Republi-

can Conference, and Inhofe, who is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, could be a signal to House Democratic leaders that further delays in their impeachment drive against Trump could have significant consequences.

"Speaker Pelosi started this bogus impeachment by claiming President Trump was an urgent 'threat to democracy' who had to be removed now. But after a bipartisan vote against the articles in the House, and with the public opposed to the Democrats' partisan games, Pelosi has changed her tune," Hawley said in a statement announcing the resolution.

"Now she wants to prevent a Senate trial, perhaps indefinitely. But

the Constitution gives the Senate sole power to adjudicate articles of impeachment, not the House. If Speaker Pelosi is afraid to try her case, the articles should be dismissed for failure to prosecute, and Congress should get back to doing the people's business."

Scott said in the statement: "Nancy Pelosi and [Senate Minority Leader] Chuck Schumer [D-N.Y.] are making a mockery of our government. Democrats have wanted to impeach Donald Trump since he came down that escalator four years ago. They just hate Trump."

"But [House Select Committee on Intelligence] Chairman Adam Schiff [D-Calif.] did a great job showing the American people that the President did nothing wrong

and that this is just an effort to undo the 2016 election."

"If Nancy Pelosi doesn't want to send the articles to the Senate, we should dismiss the articles of impeachment and get back to work on all the things that aren't getting done, like securing the border, passing No Budget/No Pay, and lowering the cost of prescription drugs."

If Speaker Pelosi is afraid to try her case, the articles should be dismissed for failure to prosecute, and Congress should get back to doing the people's business.

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.)

He was referring to Trump's program to build a wall on the U.S. border with Mexico, legislation to deny paychecks to Congress when it doesn't adopt a budget on time, and legislation to reduce prescription drug prices.

Barrasso said in the statement: "Democrats have been obsessed with impeaching President Trump since day one. They know they don't have a credible case against the President."

"Speaker Pelosi cannot dictate how the Senate operates. If she refuses to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate, the Senate should be able to dismiss them."

Republicans control the Senate, with 53 members, compared to 45 Democrats and two independents.

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Comedian Ricky Gervais Criticizes Hollywood for Ethical Compromise, Political Lecturing, in Golden Globes Speech

PETR SVAB

British comedian Ricky Gervais chastised Hollywood's elites during his opening monologue at the Golden Globes award ceremony on Jan. 5 for compromising their professed beliefs by working for companies criticized for ethical issues.

He also called on the movie industry award winners to avoid political pontification in their acceptance speeches.

"You say you're woke, but the companies you work for, I mean, unbelievable—Apple, Amazon, Disney. If ISIS started a streaming service, you'd call your agent, wouldn't you?" he said, referring to the terrorist group.

He praised Apple's contribution to the TV show production "The Morning Show," but slammed the company.

"A superb drama about the importance of dignity and doing the right thing made by a company that runs sweatshops in China," he said.

Gervais then made a recommendation: "If you do win an award tonight, don't use it as a platform to make a political speech, right? You're in no position to lecture the public about anything. You know nothing about the real world."

If ISIS started a streaming service, you'd call your agent, wouldn't you?

Ricky Gervais, British comedian

"Most of you spent less time in school than Greta Thunberg," he said, referring to the Swedish teenage activist who spent much of last year traveling the world to talk about her concerns about the effects of humans on the world's climate.

Some of the speakers and award recipients, including actors and actresses Russell Crowe, Patricia Arquette, and Michelle Williams, chose not to heed Gervais's advice,



Ricky Gervais speaks onstage during the 77th Annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif., on Jan. 5, 2020.

and used their time to air political messages.

Williams voiced support for abortion rights; Crowe, who is in Australia and was represented by actress Jennifer Aniston, blamed the Australia wildfires on man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and argued for moving "our global workforce to renewable energy"; Arquette said the United States was "on the brink of war" with Iran and urged the audience to "vote in 2020." She didn't endorse a particular candidate.

Hollywood celebrities have previously faced criticism for giving speeches about social, political, and environmental issues, despite having limited expertise on the subjects and sometimes displaying behavior that runs counter to their stated ideals.

Actor Leonardo DiCaprio, who scored one nomination but didn't win the award, has been known to call for limiting emissions of carbon dioxide, even as he travels via private jet, which, according to some estimates, boost a person's carbon footprint by up to 10 times as much as conventional passenger aircraft.

Epstein Comments

In his speech, Gervais also made reference to skepticism about the death of Jeffrey Epstein, a well-connected financier arrested in July 2019 for allegedly running a child prostitution ring.

"Spoiler alert," Gervais said about his character in the "After Life" TV show. "Season two is on the way, so in the end, he obviously didn't kill himself—just like Jeffrey Epstein." Epstein was found dead in his New York jail cell in August 2019. The death was ruled a suicide, but has been broadly questioned by the public because of some unusual circumstances surrounding his death, along with suspicion that he possessed compromising information about his many powerful friends and acquaintances.

"Shut up. I know he's your friend, but I don't care," Gervais responded to a loud "oh" from the audience.

"You liked to make your own way in your own plane, didn't you?" he added, referring to many prominent figures who took flights

in Epstein's private jet dubbed the "Lolita Express."

Gervais's speech made waves online, with more than 750,000 tweets mentioning his name by noon of Jan. 6.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, based on the video of the speech having some 89,000 "thumbs up" versus about 1,100 "thumbs down" on YouTube by noon on Jan. 6.

But some in the entertainment industry milieu have criticized Gervais.

"The mood was already sober thanks to an impeachment [proceeding against President Donald Trump], the threat of war with Iran and devastating bush fires in Australia" and Gervais should have been "brave enough to drop the tired agitator shtick and, for once, read the room," wrote Lorraine Ali, television critic for the Los Angeles Times.

"No, he really shouldn't have," retorted Washington Examiner foreign policy commentator Tom Rogan, in an op-ed.

DOJ Recommends Up to 6-Month Sentence for Michael Flynn

IVAN PENTCHOUKOV

The Department of Justice recommended that the judge in the case against retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn issue a sentence of up to six months in prison, according to a sentencing memorandum filed on Jan. 7.

The prosecutors opted for a harsher recommendation than one they proposed in December 2018, alleging that Flynn, a former national security adviser, has since failed to accept responsibility and at times sought to impede the government's efforts in other cases, specifically the prosecution of his former business partner, Bijan Rafiekian.

"Given the serious nature of the defendant's offense, his apparent failure to accept responsibility, his failure to complete his cooperation in—and his affirmative efforts to undermine—the prosecution of Bijan Rafiekian, and the need to promote respect for the law and adequately deter such criminal conduct, the government recommends that the court sentence the defendant within the applicable Guidelines range of 0 to 6 months of incarceration," the prosecutors wrote in a 33-page brief for the judge.

Judge Emmet Sullivan is scheduled to sentence Flynn on Jan. 28.

The Department of Justice recommended a tougher sentence after Flynn's defense team turned the tables on the prosecution in late 2019 by accusing the government attorney of withholding exculpatory evidence and suggesting they be removed from the case. The judge rejected both requests in a ruling on Dec. 16, 2019.

On Dec. 18, 2018, the prosecutors had recommended a downward departure from the sentencing guidelines for Flynn, telling the court he had provided substantial cooperation to the government and accepted responsibility. The prosecutors have now withdrawn both requests, informing the court that Flynn's actions since Dec. 18 "negate the benefits of much of the defendant's earlier cooperation" and suggest he no longer accepts responsibility.

"Indeed, the government has reason to believe, through representations by the de-

fendant's counsel, that the defendant has retreated from his acceptance of responsibility in this case regarding his lies to the FBI," the prosecutors wrote.

"For that reason, the government asks this Court to inquire of the defendant as to whether he maintains those apparent statements of innocence or whether he disavows them and fully accepts responsibility for his criminal conduct."

The indictment of Flynn was the first filed by special counsel Robert Mueller as part of the investigation of alleged collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia to interfere in the 2016 election. Flynn pleaded guilty in December 2017

of lying to the FBI. The sentencing has been repeatedly delayed since, to allow Flynn to cooperate with authorities on other cases and to resolve the defense's late-breaking request to disclose alleged exculpatory evidence.

Mueller closed the Russia investigation in 2019, finding no evidence to suggest that then-candidate Donald Trump or anyone on his campaign, including Flynn, colluded with Russia to interfere in the 2016 election.

"The government seeks to punish General Flynn for refusing to lie for the prosecution in the Rafiekian case. Their position is outrageous and appalling," Flynn's attorney, Sidney Powell, said in a statement emailed

to The Epoch Times.

Flynn made the false statements he was charged with during an interview with two FBI agents, Joe Pientka and Peter Strzok, on Jan. 24, 2017, two days after he was sworn in as President Donald Trump's national security adviser.

Strzok is known for biased text messages he exchanged with Lisa Page, an FBI attorney. Strzok and Page discussed stopping Trump from becoming president, mentioned an "insurance policy" in case Trump was elected, and mulled impeachment around the time they joined the Mueller team.

Petr Svab contributed to this report.



Former national security adviser Michael Flynn leaves the E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse in Washington on June 24, 2019.

US Trade Deficit Hits 3-Year Low: 'Trump's China Hard Line Is Working,' Expert Says

TOM OZIMEK

The United States' November 2019 trade deficit fell to its lowest point in more than three years, suggesting the Trump administration's agenda to recalibrate international flows of goods and services is having an impact.

The trade deficit fell 8.2 percent to \$43.1 billion, the lowest since October 2016, the Commerce Department said on Jan. 7.

"As of this morning's figures, the total U.S. trade deficit is heading for its first year-over-year decline since 2013, when U.S. growth was a good deal lower than what's likely for this year," trade expert Alan Tonelson told The Epoch Times.

The goods trade deficit with China, the focus of the White House's "America First" agenda, decreased 15.7 percent to \$26.4 billion, with imports decreasing 9.2 percent and exports increasing by 13.7 percent.

Tonelson argued that the trade figures, which pertain to November flows of goods and services, "show that Trump's China hard line is working." He urged the administration to maintain its pressure in the trade dispute and take further steps to decouple the two countries'

economies.

"Decoupling the U.S. economy from China's is crucial for U.S. prosperity because the pre-Trump policy of expanding trade and commerce with the People's Republic has been such a net loser for the American economy," Tonelson said. "And it's crucial for U.S.

national security because the pre-Trump policies recklessly transferred so much in the way of resources and defense-related technology to an increasingly hostile and aggressive China."

The Commerce Department figures also show that the goods trade gap with the European Union fell 20.2 percent to \$13.1 billion.

Though Washington and Beijing in December hammered out a "phase one" trade deal, uncertainty remains about the details of the agreement. Trump wrote on Twitter on Dec. 31, 2019, that the partial deal would be signed on Jan. 15 at the White House.

While the 18-month-long U.S.-China trade war is widely reported as having dampened business investment, the new Commerce Department figures show a slight rise in capital expenditures.

"Thanks to the new November final numbers, U.S. core capex turned positive again year-over-year," Tonelson said. "The increase is just 0.4 percent, but the monthly improvement was the second straight and the eighth this year, despite all the trade war uncertainty caterwauling."

U.S. financial markets were little moved by the decline in the trade deficit,

which was flagged in an advance report published on Dec. 30, 2019.

Trump has made reducing the trade deficit a major priority of his administration.

Economists expect trade will add at least 1.5 percentage points to GDP growth in the fourth quarter after being a drag for two straight quarters.

The Atlanta Federal Reserve is forecasting GDP increasing at a 2.3 percent annualized rate in the fourth quarter. The economy grew at a 2.1 percent pace in the third quarter.

Reuters contributed to this report.

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Alan Tonelson, trade expert



Shipping containers from China and other Asian countries are unloaded at the Port of Los Angeles in Long Beach, Calif., on Sept. 14, 2019.

New York Jewish Community Defiant, Fearful Amid Ongoing Anti-Semitic Attacks

BOWEN XIAO

CROWN HEIGHTS, N.Y.—The mood in Crown Heights was a surreal mix of fear, angst, and indifference. Police officers and emergency vehicles lined the main street in the Brooklyn, New York, neighborhood as Jewish school buses carrying children drove in and out.

Scores of Hasidic Jews walked past each other along the street, barely glancing up at the ramped-up security around them, which is now a recurring presence in their life. Scattered groups spoke among themselves, some in hushed, muted tones.

Members of the Jewish community are becoming frustrated and inflamed over the uptick in anti-Semitism, which has become increasingly violent in nature.

But soon another picture emerged, one not only of fear but also of defiance, as dozens of violent anti-Semitic attacks have taken place in recent months across the wider New York metropolitan area, including Crown Heights.

About 25 percent of the population in Crown Heights are Hasidic Jews. The neighborhood is also home to Caribbean immigrants from Jamaica and the West Indies, in addition to some African Americans.

Members of the Jewish community, including local store owners and longtime residents, told The Epoch Times in interviews that for the first time in recent memory, they are becoming frustrated and inflamed over the uptick in anti-Semitism, which has become increasingly violent in nature.

They said members are increasingly talking about starting grassroots movements to defend the community and for Jewish residents to be armed, through concealed carry and other means, in response to perceived inaction by the government. At the same time, many in the Jewish community remain fearful, some having become too afraid to be out often in public.

This rising defiance is part of new rhetoric that's spreading within the community, one with more focus on personal action. Some described the new security added across Jewish communities in New York as akin to "putting a band-aid over a gaping wound"—a short-term solution that plays no part in solving the root of the issue.

Jewish residents, some of whom only provided their first names for fear of retaliation, also blamed new bail-reform laws—which let offenders out of prison without paying bail—as being too lenient, saying it encourages attackers to re-offend. In December alone, there were at least 13 anti-Semitic incidents.

Some said a handful of other factors have contributed to the rise in anti-Semitic attacks, including general ignorance, divisiveness between the different communities, and socio-economic issues within the neighborhood.

"It's unbelievable. This is Brooklyn, this is New York in 2020 and we're literally defending ourselves," 24-year-old Esther Gopin, who was born and raised in Crown Heights, told The Epoch Times. "I think this is the first period that I can remember where the Jewish people here are actually really getting fed up."



(Top) Bardy's in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, on Jan. 7, 2020.

(Above) Bardy's store owner Jose Bard-Wigdor at his store in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, on Jan. 7, 2020.

"They want to take a stand for themselves and are starting these grassroots movements to defend the community, protect the community."

Her father, Abraham Gopin, was attacked and beaten with a rock in August while jogging.

In one recent case, Tiffany Harris, a woman accused of slapping three people in an apparent anti-Semitic attack in Crown Heights, was charged with attempted assault as a hate crime. A day after being freed without bail, Harris was arrested again for a second alleged assault.

Concealed Carry

Anti-Semitic incidents in New York have continued into the new year. Jose Bard-Wigdor, the owner of Bardy's, a local jewelry and accessories store in the neighborhood, told The Epoch Times that Jews have to "learn from history."

"The first things that the Nazis did in Germany were to remove the weapons of the general population, especially the Jewish people," Bard-Wigdor said. "I think the Jewish people should increasingly buy weapons and carry-ons."

The 64-year-old said that he doesn't believe members in their community should be vigilantes, but that everyone has the right to defend themselves. Some of the more violent incidents in recent weeks involve a 37-year-old suspect accused of stabbing five people celebrating Hanukkah at a rabbi's home, and a shooting at a kosher supermarket in New Jersey that left two Hasidic Jews dead.

Jewish people should conceal carry even without a permit, Bard-Wigdor says, "because if the government doesn't do the job, we have to do our job."

Residents in New York state who want to conceal carry must pass basic requirements and approval from local law enforcement, which "has discretion in determining whether or not to issue a concealed weapons permit

but indicated that he's had enough. "I ignored them. Most of the time, I ignored them," he said. "I don't know if I'm going to ignore them anymore."

On Jan. 5, thousands of people marched across the Brooklyn Bridge as part of a "No Hate, No Fear" rally in support of the Jewish community. During that march, Cuomo said he wants to pass a law labeling hate crimes as domestic terrorism; he's also released \$45 million in funding allocations to protect at-risk institutions. The grant is made available on a statewide basis, through the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services.

Meanwhile, four Orthodox Jewish lawmakers are urging Cuomo to declare a state of emergency over the recent spate of anti-Semitic crimes and to deploy the National Guard to patrol Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods.

In another example of Jewish residents taking a more proactive approach, Gopin said a large amount of pepper spray has been distributed for free to the community. She said somebody else has taken over the initiative and that a few thousand dollars have been raised to distribute the products across the state.

Bail Reform

A new bail law that's been criticized by some Jewish leaders officially went into effect on Jan. 1. New York passed bail reform legislation in April 2019 that was estimated to cause at least a "40 percent reduction overall in the state's pretrial jail population," according to the Vera Institute of Justice.

Under the new laws, some suspects in the recent anti-Semitic attacks have been quickly released without bail. Judges can no longer set bail for many misdemeanors, including assaults without serious injury, and other non-violent felonies.

Mendy, who works at a local Jewish store in the neighborhood and declined to give his last name, said the new legislation is one of the factors contributing to the increase in anti-Semitic attacks.

"I think a lot of it could be bail reform. There are no consequences for what these people are doing," he said. Mendy has been working at the store for almost a year and a half.

Jewish leaders have told The Epoch Times that the law needs to be revamped to ensure there are no loopholes. They said they don't believe the purpose of the legislation was to help criminals.

It doesn't mean eliminating the new bail reform legislation entirely, said Mendy, who suggested that it just needs some adjustments.

"I think a re-examination [is needed]. At least for people who do things multiple times," he said, citing the case involving Harris. "They shouldn't be able to just do something, get out of jail, and do something again."

Prosecutors under the new bail reform laws are now also required to hand defense attorneys pretrial access to a list of personal information, according to the New York Post, "including potentially the names and contact details of witnesses in their cases."

"In a situation like this, you'd imagine that the community leaders and the politicians would be taking a stand against this and enacting legislation that would stop, prevent, or penalize such behavior," Gopin said. "Instead, they're literally doing the opposite."

Gopin referred to the case with her father, who was in the hospital

with permanent physical damage and trauma after being attacked with a rock.

"I can't imagine that my father would have wanted to file a report had this law been enacted so that his attacker could find out all his information," she said. "It's literally a danger to the victims, after everything they go through."

"It's not only adding insult to injury, but adding injury to more injury."

The suspect in her father's case is facing charges of assault as a hate crime and criminal possession of a weapon. The man allegedly had yelled anti-Semitic slurs at the father as well.

Esther Gopin said she was "enraged, frustrated, and furious" over the new legislation. She said her father was able to fight off his attacker, although had it been someone weaker who was attacked, they might have died.

"I lose hope from things like this. It's literally not just counterproductive, it almost rewards this negative behavior," she said. "It's almost like insurance that it's going to continue."

The suspect wasn't caught until a few weeks after the attack, and he was back on the streets "within days," according to Gopin.

"How do you think that makes me feel? I don't feel safe here, and that was before the bail reform. So imagine now after the bail reform when it's physically impossible to keep people in [prison]."

Other Jewish residents, such as Gopin and Berg, all called for the state to enact stricter legislation, specifically for hate crimes.

Ignorance, Respect

The president's daughter, Ivanka Trump, noted on Twitter in December that "attacks on Jewish New Yorkers were reported almost every single day this past week."

There are multiple factors that contribute to anti-Semitism, with ignorance and a lack of respect being mentioned often by members of the Jewish community.

Gopin said that the socio-economic issues within the neighborhood and a general "lack of education" have also led to a "lot of juvenile delinquents on the street."

"There is a small number of ignorant youth who are getting their information from people who are trying to incite them into doing bad things," Berg said.

Bard-Wigdor, meanwhile, said that young people, who are often the perpetrators in anti-Semitic attacks, have to be educated "not only in anti-Semitism, but also in general respect for society."

"They have to learn to respect Jewish people," he said. "Without respecting one another, society goes downhill. Respect is very important in order to survive in any society, in any country, and in any town."

One Jewish resident, who goes by Menachem and declined to give his last name for security reasons, said the community must deal with the increase in anti-Semitic attacks "by standing strong and not being afraid."

The best way to combat hate crimes, according to Gopin, is to address it as firmly as possible.

"If we don't stand up for ourselves and make a fuss and demand better, we won't get it. I think that responsibility falls on the Jewish community and Jewish community leaders," she said. "It falls on everybody in New York because it's not just affecting the people who are directly being attacked, it affects everybody."

"It affects the whole fabric of our society and it starts with us," she said, "but it ends with everybody else."

GOP Leaders Call on Trump to Revoke Iran's Nuke Waivers, Reimpose International Sanctions

MARK TAPSCOTT

WASHINGTON—Republican Sens. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Ted Cruz of Texas joined with Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) in calling for President Donald Trump to drop waivers on domestic Iranian power projects under the U.S. nuclear deal with Iran and to reimpose tough international sanctions against Tehran.

"On Sunday, Iran backed out of catastrophic Obama-Iran nuclear deal, which they've long exploited to build up their nuclear facilities," the lawmakers said in a joint statement released Jan. 6.

"There are no more pretenses. Iran has made it very clear that they are just trying to wait out the Trump administration and among other things secure an end to the arms embargo, which is set to expire in October 2020. The United States gains nothing by pretending otherwise," they said in the statement.

Cruz and Graham are members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, while Cheney is a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

Referring to the deal negotiated by former President Barack Obama and then-Secretary of State John Kerry, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the legislators pointed to two actions they believe Trump should take as soon as possible:

"First, President Trump should immediately end all civil-nuclear waivers. Second, he should order our diplomats to invoke the United Nations



An Iranian technician works at the Uranium Conversion Facilities in Isfahan, Iran, in this file photo.

snapback to restore international sanctions and restrictions on Iran."

The "snapback" sanctions are those that were in place through the United Nations when the JCPOA was signed in 2015. They were aimed at Iran's nuclear research and development efforts.

The JCPOA included a provision that would renew the sanctions in the event that Iran violated the agreement and at least one of the other nations that entered the deal objected. Besides the United States, the signers included Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China.

The project waivers are crucial to Iran's ability to continue development on three projects.

The Fordow Project is an underground enrichment facility that's clearly intended for use as a nuclear weapons resource, in violation of the JCPOA, according to the three legislators.

Under the JCPOA, Iran negotiators agreed that the project would be converted to a research center, for which its centrifuges used in uranium enrichment would no longer be useful.

"Iran skated on the obligation to fully convert the facility and earlier this month injected uranium into centrifuges there," the three said in a Nov. 18, 2019, statement.

The Arak Reactor is a heavy-water reactor capable of making

enough plutonium to complete at least one nuclear weapon annually. Under the JCPOA, Iran said it would redesign the reactor to reduce its capabilities.

"However, Iran's nuclear chief bragged the project can be easily reversed because Iran secretly imported illicit parts, allowing them to quickly reverse all the changes," the legislators said last year.

The Tehran Research Reactor is allowed under the JCPOA to use imported highly enriched uranium in activities devoted solely to civil nuclear power technology development, as defined under the international Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

But the three legislators pointed out in their November 2019 statement that the Trump administration confirmed to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in May 2018 that "Iran's standing as a non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the NPT cannot be described as 'good.'"

Iran has made it very clear that they are just trying to wait out the Trump administration and among other things secure an end to the arms embargo.

Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), Ted Cruz (R-Texas), and Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.)

Both the Obama and Trump administrations issued waivers covering the three projects following the adoption of the JCPOA. Trump didn't remove the waivers, however, after announcing in 2018 that the U.S. no longer recognizes the JCPOA.

Cruz, Graham, and Cheney introduced anti-waiver bills in November 2019.

"The U.S. must revoke waivers for 'civil nuclear' projects established by President Obama's nuclear deal. These waivers legitimize Iran's illicit nuclear infrastructure—even as the regime continues on a path of nuclear escalation at sites like the Fordow bunker, where Iran recently resumed uranium enrichment," Cheney said in November.

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USMCA Advances to Full Senate After Committee Approval

MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES

ZACHARY STIEBER

The Senate Finance Committee approved sending the U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade agreement to the full Senate in a 25-3 vote on Jan. 7.

Sens. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), and Bill Cassidy (R-La.) voted against advancing the bill.

Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), during the hearing on the trade deal, called it "one of the most important pieces of legislation we can do this year."

"USMCA will bring much-needed certainty and real benefits to America's farmers, workers, and businesses. Farmers are getting better and more reliable market access, which farmers badly need. Workers will see thousands of new jobs, particularly in high-wage manufacturing industries. Businesses will have an agreement that reflects the realities of modern commerce, including for the \$1.3 trillion U.S. digital economy," Grassley said.

"There are some aspects of this bill that I don't particularly like, but as I reflect on how we got here, I'm proud of the hard work of many individuals that made it possible to achieve a strong agreement and a bill that could garner broad support."

USMCA will bring much-needed certainty and real benefits to America's farmers, workers, and businesses. Farmers are getting better and more reliable market access, which farmers badly need.

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa)

Senate Finance Committee ranking member Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) said the Trump administration's initial USMCA bill "looked like more of the status quo" regarding enforcement. Still, he and Sen.



Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) (L) talks with Senate Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) during a hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington on Oct. 24, 2019.

Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) pushed the House to include putting regulators on the ground to help identify when factories in Mexico violate labor rules.

"The enforcement process will take a fraction of the time it has in the past. No more forcing American businesses and workers to wait around for what seems like eons, while trade cheats rip them off," Wyden said.

Toomey said the North American Free Trade Agreement was only renegotiated because the Trump administration wanted to fix a trade deficit with Mexico.

While he supported modernizing trade with Canada and Mexico, Toomey said that some of the changes "are meant to diminish trade and investment. And this, my colleagues, is what I think is wrong with this

agreement." "It's the first time we are ever going to go backwards on a trade agreement. The country's specific rules of origins are completely antithetical to a continental free trade agreement and designed to raise the cost to American consumers of buying Mexican cars," he said.

The Democratic-controlled House passed USMCA on Dec. 19, 2019, in a 385-41 bipartisan vote, one day after impeaching President Donald Trump in a sharply partisan vote. Democrats said they made substantial changes to the deal, including strengthening enforcement.

While Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said, he expected to put USMCA on the back burner as the Senate im-

peachment trial takes place. The trial hasn't started because House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) hasn't yet sent the impeachment articles to the Senate.

Grassley, on Jan. 7, thanked his colleagues, stating: "This is a big bipartisan vote. A reminder that when Congress works together in a bipartisan way, the American people greatly benefit. I want to thank my colleagues again for working with the Trump administration and me and Senator Wyden. I want to thank members of my finance committee trade staff for their very, very hard work."

"I look forward to a vote on the Senate floor, hopefully soon, for final passage," he said. Trump is expected to sign the bill if the Senate passes it.

-AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ Iraqi Kurds inspect a crater reportedly caused by an Iranian missile initially fired at Iraqi bases housing U.S. and U.S.-led coalition troops, in the Kurdish town of Bardarash, Iraq, on Jan. 8, 2020.

Trump Opts for Sanctions, Offers Peace After No US Casualties in Iran Missile Strikes

IVAN PENTCHOUKOV

President Donald Trump ordered the imposition of additional sanctions on Iran on Jan. 8 in response to missile strikes a day earlier, which targeted but didn't harm any U.S. forces in Iraq.

"The United States will immediately impose additional punishing economic sanctions on the Iranian regime. These powerful sanctions will remain until Iran changes its behavior," Trump, flanked by military officials, told reporters gathered at the White House.

Iran fired missiles at two Iraqi military bases that host American forces on Jan. 8 in response to the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Quds Force. Trump said he authorized the attack on the general, whom he called a "ruthless terrorist," because Soleimani was plotting an imminent attack on American citizens.

As Iran vowed to avenge Soleimani's killing, Trump warned the Islamic regime that the United States would respond swiftly. With no Americans harmed, Trump opted for sanctions and said he was ready for peace.

"To the people and leaders of Iran: We want you to have a future and a great future—one that you deserve, one of prosperity at home, and harmony with the nations of the world. The United States is ready to embrace peace with all who seek it," Trump said.

Trump didn't offer details on the sanctions. The Treasury Department didn't respond to a request by The Epoch Times for details.

According to the president, Iran's attacks didn't harm any Americans because of "precautions taken, the dispersal of forces, and an early warning system that worked very well."

Trump's choice of sanctions over an armed response isn't the first time that he's exercised restraint in handling Iranian provocations. Iran has downed two U.S. drones, attacked and seized oil tankers in international waters, and fired missiles at Saudi oil facilities.

Iran appeared to have crossed an unspoken line when one of its proxy terrorist groups in Iraq killed an American contractor. After U.S. forces responded with airstrikes against the terrorists, the group's supporters stormed the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. Shortly after, a U.S. drone strike killed Soleimani, along with the leader of the umbrella group of Iran's proxies in Iraq.

These powerful sanctions will remain until Iran changes its behavior.

President Donald Trump

Trump said he will be asking NATO to get more involved with the Middle East.

What appears to be new damage at Al Asad air base in Iraq is seen in a satellite photo taken on Jan. 8, 2020.

A satellite image shows damage at Al Asad air base in Iraq on Jan. 8, 2020.

"The Trump administration has finally drawn some very proper and legal and strategically smart red lines that, if crossed by Iran, will result in serious damage to the Iranian terrorist machine," said Peter Huessy, the president of defense consulting firm GeoStrategic Analysis.

"It is also long since past the time when our NATO and all our Middle East allies took more seriously the threat from Iran—and took the necessary action to deter and defeat Iranian action, and work toward the day when the Iranian people take action to ensure the mullah regime is no more." Trump said that Iran appears to be standing down from further attacks. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on Twitter that the country had "concluded proportionate measures in self-defense."

Emma Ashford, a research fellow at the Cato Institute, welcomed the de-escalation.

"Trump may have been in many ways responsible for the ongoing tensions with Iran, but, much as he did with North Korea, he has chosen at the last minute to seek a more conciliatory approach," Ashford said in a comment to The Epoch Times via email.

"By choosing not to respond to Iranian strikes with further military action, thankfully, the president has given the United States a window to reflect and try to figure out how to avoid further conflict."

Trump said he will ask NATO to get more involved with the Middle East. The president also underlined the size and strength of the U.S. military, but emphasized that the power is best used as a deterrent.

"The fact that we have this great military and equipment, however, does not mean we have to use it. We do not want to use it," Trump said. "American strength, both military and economic, is the best deterrent."

During the speech at the White House, the president referred to Soleimani as "the world's top terrorist." The Quds Force, which Soleimani led, is part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which the United States designated as a terrorist group in 2019.

Trump accused Soleimani of orchestrating the recent attacks on Americans in Iraq and the assault on the U.S. Embassy.

"He trained terrorist armies, including Hezbollah, launching terrorist strikes against civilian targets. He fueled bloody civil wars all across the region. He viciously wounded and murdered thousands of U.S. troops, including the planting of roadside bombs that maim and dismember their victims," Trump said.

Tensions with Iran began to escalate after Trump exited the multinational nuclear deal secured by the Obama administration. Trump reimposed tough sanctions on the Islamic regime, crippling its economy and contributing to widespread protests. The president had long criticized the 2015 Iran nuclear deal as a failure. He said during his speech on Jan. 8 that the money Iran received as part of the agreement was used to build the missiles that were fired at U.S. forces on Jan. 7.

Trump made the statement as Democrats in Congress pushed for details on the intelligence that led to the decision to kill Soleimani. Following Trump's speech, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) condemned the attacks but noted that the United States doesn't seek war.

"I condemn the attack by the Iranian government and remain concerned about the risk of a further escalation of hostilities in the Middle East," Schumer said on the floor of the Senate. "The American people do not want a war with Iran and the president does not have the authority to wage one."

Republicans are backing the president's decision to impose sanctions.

"The United States does not seek conflict but is prepared to protect American lives and interests. Iran should not question our collective will by launching further attacks," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky). "Peace through strength"—That was the Reagan doctrine, and that is the measured approach we are seeing from the Trump administration today," House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif) wrote on Twitter.

"Thank you to our President and to our courageous troops for returning America to a position of respect and admiration around the world."

Rent-a-Mobs Will Not Ease Khamenei's Grim Future

MICHAEL LEDEEN



Commentary

There are demonstrations all over Iran for a big goodbye to Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

But the bulk of the demonstrators are there, not because they wish to pay tribute to the fallen martyr, but because they have to be. They have been commanded to be present, and, in addition to their fees, they are getting food and transportation to the various mob sites.

So it's a very big rent-a-mob. But don't for a minute fall for the propaganda. Of the 80 million inhabitants of Iran, probably 70 million are pleased that Soleimani is dead.

The killing of Soleimani has changed the world, as the world always changes when the United States moves decisively. For 40 years, no U.S. president dared strike at the heart of the Islamic Republic. It didn't much matter if the president was a lefty or a righty, a Democrat or a Republican, the basic war game was always the same: We invaded Iran, and lost. If we played the war game today, chances are good that 80 million Iranian people would fight on our side, and the leaders of the regime would be given a choice of lamp posts.

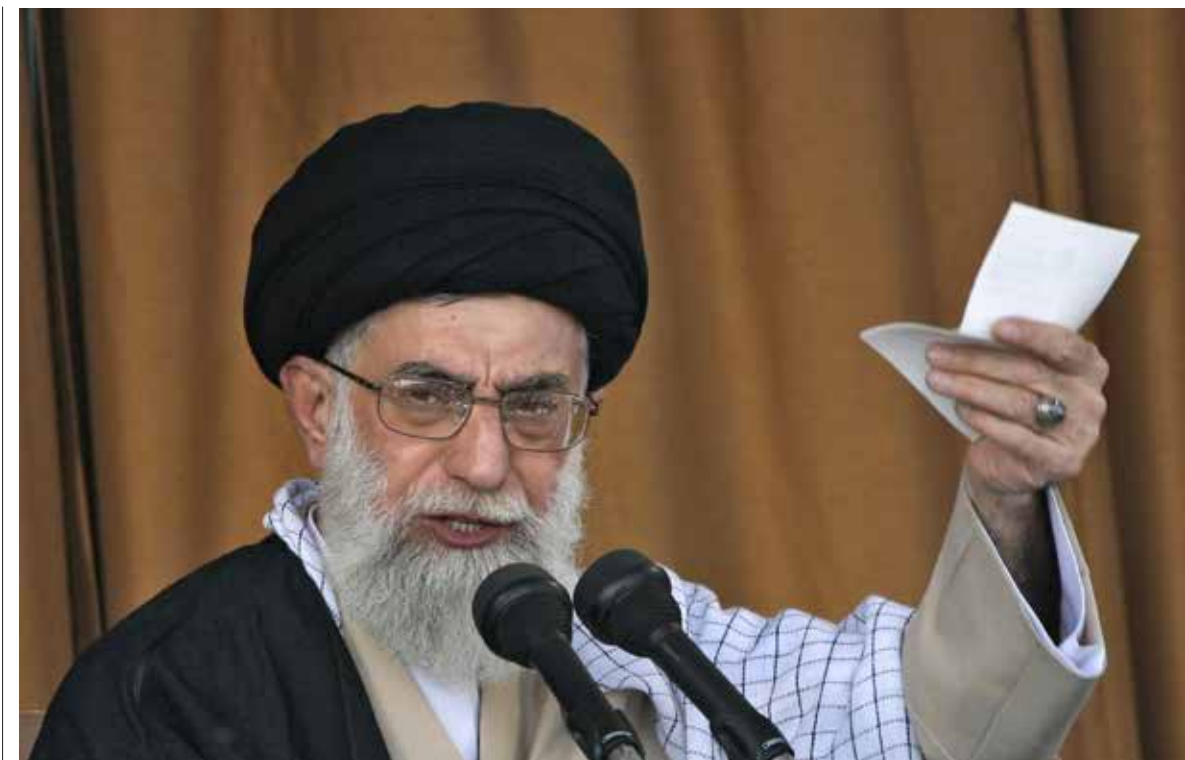
Note that Iran's key allies, Russia and China, aren't adding their voices to the calls for revenge against the Trump administration. China gave the United States the keys to a Chinese app that the Iranians had been using for their secure communications. Accounts differ as to whether the transfer took place before or after the most recent round of violence in Iran, culminating in the elimination of Soleimani, but it certainly wasn't the sort of help that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was hoping for.

And as for Russia, just before the New Year's celebrations, this took place, as reported by Radio Free Europe:

"Russian authorities say that they have taken into custody two suspects in connection with a purported plot to carry out terrorist attacks in St. Petersburg on New Year's Eve that was foiled, in part, based on an intelligence tip from the United States.

"The Federal Security Service (FSB) announced last weekend that the men were detained on December 27, based on information from their American partners."

Trump wants a working partnership with the Russians, as he does with the Chinese, and as he wanted with



-AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES
Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Semnan, Iran, on Nov. 8, 2006.

The killing of Soleimani has changed the world, as the world always changes when the United States moves decisively.

the Iranian dictators. But the Persian tyrants know that they have tens of millions of opponents, and relentlessly crack down on them. Khamenei recently told a would-be intermediary from Oman that he didn't want an Omani middleman to mediate the many conflicts between Tehran and Washington.

While Moscow and Beijing see the wisdom of cooperating with Trump, Tehran is banking on his defeat in November. It would be fascinating to study the exchange of documents with Trump's U.S. opponents, to see what plans the Iranians made to drag out the process of negotiation.

In any case, those plans have now been knocked into a cocked hat. With the death of Soleimani, many of Iran's schemes perished. Iran is scrambling to save face, as in Iraq, where the United States is reinforcing its troop commitment, and Lebanon and Syria, where Soleimani was a principal architect of Iran's domination. Iran will go all-out to achieve a U.S. withdrawal, but its chances are poor. Trump didn't order the killing of Soleimani in order to withdraw from the battlefield; if anything, he will intensify U.S. efforts.

The killing of Soleimani was only one in a series of planned U.S. responses to Iranian aggression, and in the days since the strike, there have been many arrests and there will be more. Tehran will keep ordering its proxies to hit Americans and U.S. bases, but such efforts will only lead to more Iranian deaths and arrests. The Iranian strategy of fighting to the last Arab

won't work.

Indeed, Khamenei faces a grim future. Not only does he face an incipient uprising in his own country once the Soleimani circus is over, but he must deal with open rebellion against Iranian influence in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and the lesser powers. It won't be easy for him.

Moscow and Beijing see the wisdom of cooperating with Trump, but Tehran is banking on his defeat in November.

As we can read at the Belmont Club blog, "There may have been enough resources to launch covert ops against America, but there is way too little to confront it openly."

Michael Ledeen is a freedom scholar at Foundation for Defense of Democracies. He has served as a consultant to the National Security Council and the departments of State and Defense, and as a special adviser to the secretary of state. He is the author of 35 books, most recently "Field of Fight: How to Win the War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies," co-authored with retired Lt. Gen. Michael T. Flynn.

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

SABAH ARAR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Crowds surround a vehicle during the funeral procession for Iranian military commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi paramilitary chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Baghdad on Jan. 4, 2020.

Blame for FBI's FISA Abuse Should Be Put Where It Belongs

MARC RUSKIN



Commentary
Last month, the Department of Justice released a report on an internal investigation by its inspector general (IG) exposing how spying occurred on a campaign aide of President Donald Trump.

The report could culminate in a series of prosecutions overseen by Attorney General William Barr, who appointed the unflappable John Durham, a veteran U.S. attorney of impeccable integrity, to further investigate the matters being examined by the inspector general.

The FBI rank-and-file always understood that they weren't the object of the president's ire. They know it was the bureau's leadership that was being called into question.

J. Edgar Hoover would be turning in his grave upon hearing these findings.

Only a few short years ago, Trump was attacked by the media and politicians for criticizing the FBI and the nation's intelligence services. The implication was that the FBI's rank-and-file were being critiqued, and therefore, their morale was sinking, impairing their ability to protect us. This was the opinion from those who have, historically, hardly been supportive of FBI agents and CIA case officers.

But the rank-and-file of the FBI always understood that they weren't the object of the president's ire.

Quite the opposite, they know it was the bureau's upper management—the leadership—that was being called into question. Historically, the FBI's field agent culture has been at odds with upper management, viewing it as an impediment to the pursuit of significant investigations. Now, the rank-and-file are for the most part appalled to learn from the inspector general's report about the deception and abuses, the outright fraud perpetrated by the bureau's upper ranks on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) Court.

These were acts and omissions emanating from and conducted within the concrete walls of JEH—The Hoover Building housing the FBI's upper management.

The FISA abuses described in the IG report were neither created nor executed by FBI field agents in their field offices. This distinction

is critical, both because of its effects on the public's perception of our national police (the FBI), and its implications for restorative and punitive action.

If FBI special agents are to maintain their special position as the world's elite law enforcers, the blame for these recent bad acts must be clearly and publicly placed at the feet of the culpable parties. Nothing short of criminal prosecutions will serve this necessary step for the restoration of the bureau's credibility and its reputation for impeccable integrity.

A careful analysis of IG Michael Horowitz's report and relevant congressional testimony reveals that the FBI's upper management bypassed the field so as to commit the fraud upon the FISA Court. FISA applications are, as a matter of course and common practice, reviewed by primary legal advisers (PLAs), the FBI agent-attorneys in field offices, before being submitted up the chain of command.

The reviews, called Woods reviews, are conducted with painstaking detail and are frequently kicked back to the requesting case agents for revision and further evidentiary support.

Congressional testimony concerning the review of Trump presidential campaign volunteer Carter Page (in connection with Page's possible ties to Russian intelligence officers) FISA warrant applications made no reference to the field PLA review; the only logical inference is that such reviews were never conducted.

This would have been a virtual impossibility unless the field offices were bypassed and the plot was the brainchild of FBI headquarters desk jockeys, rather than "real" agents.

This conclusion is further supported and essentially confirmed by the title given to the entire investigation. Major FBI investigations are characteristically endowed with a title. Notable examples are ABSCAM (a federal corruption investigation in the late 1970s and early 1980s that led to the convictions of a senator and six congressmen, in addition to other officials) and MIBURN (Mississippi Burning—the FBI's investigation into the murder of three civil rights workers by the Ku Klux Klan, memorialized in the film starring Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe).

The laughably cinematic and hyper-dramatic title given to the Carter Page investigation, "Crossfire Hurricane," would never have been selected nor accepted by grizzled street agents.

Former FBI Director James Comey's testimony and statements, from 2016 onward, have done much to harm the FBI, causing



CHP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES



CHARLOTTE CUTHBERTSON/THE EPOCH TIMES

(Top) Former FBI Director James Comey makes his way to a closed hearing on Capitol Hill on June 8, 2017.

(Above) Department of Justice Inspector General Michael Horowitz testifies in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington on Dec. 11, 2019.

(Bottom) FBI headquarters in Washington on Jan. 2, 2020.

internal morale to diminish, and externally degrading the bureau's reputation for integrity. The hubris that seems to be a fundamental aspect of Comey's character is truly astounding.

His performance when interviewed by Chris Wallace on Dec. 15, 2019, was primarily characterized by his sheer chutzpah on display. Confronted with the many repeated, outrageous acts executed on his watch, he declared his relief that the bureau had been vindicated by the IG report.

When Comey said he was unaware of the details of an investigation affecting Trump while a presidential candidate, there is little doubt that the statement was false, particularly in view of former Attorney General Loretta Lynch's statement to Horowitz that in March 2016 she was informed in person by Comey and then-FBI Deputy Andrew McCabe—that Page was being investigated in connection with possible ties to Russian intelligence officers.

At that time, apparently, Comey was fully conversant with the minor details, the minutiae, of the case. Comey's veracity is further called into question by his statements to the IG, in which he stated that he didn't recall the conversation with Lynch. He said he didn't merely fail to recall the details, but that he failed to recall the very occurrence of the conversation.

This denial defies credulity: The conversation wasn't one pertaining to a relatively insignificant investigation. Rather, the matter was one of clearly historic importance, involving as it did the first-ever investigation of a presidential campaign, an investigation with potential international implications, involving possible meddling by Russia, a historically malevolent and aggressive antagonist to the United States.

The IG's investigators were unable to question Comey about his frequent lapses of memory—particularly regarding topics that reflected negatively on his exercise of authority and judgment in all Crossfire Hurricane-related matters. Relying on legal technicalities, Comey circumvented the questioning by declining to have his security clearance reinstated.

But he had no such concerns for the niceties of security classification laws when, in May 2017, he disseminated—that is, leaked—classified memos to the press. Still, Comey's declination is unlikely to impede the questioning likely to occur in the course of U.S. Attorney Durham's investigation. Durham has been tasked by Attorney General Barr to thoroughly

investigate all aspects of Spycate and to follow all the evidentiary threads to their logical conclusions—to wherever they may lead.

Critics of the president have pointed to the IG's assertion that there were no documented findings of political motivation for the bad acts at FBI headquarters. But it wasn't the IG's job to make conclusions as to motives, nor to speculate as to whether the motivations were political or otherwise. His error was to even allude to motivation. His job, which he completed successfully, was to ascertain whether there had been behavior, acts, or omissions that violated either criminal law or Department of Justice regulations.

IG Report and Impeachment

The IG report was issued on Dec. 9, 2019. Just nine days later, on Dec. 18, the House of Representatives voted to issue articles of impeachment that accused the president of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. As neither of the articles alleges any violation of statutes enumerated in the Federal Penal Code, the impeachment is historically unique, the first of its kind.

The tortuous route that the impeachment process has followed is ultimately rooted in the election of a president whose assumption of power has been anathema to those who opposed him most vehemently.

The hubris that seems to be a fundamental aspect of Comey's character is truly astounding.

Just as with impeachment, the series of events leading to the IG report and the Barr-Dunham probe are rooted in the very same series of events: the campaign, the election, and the assumption of executive authority by Trump, which have been anathema to establishment mandarins—the highly placed "deep state" actors in the FBI and the DOJ.

Now, we see the genius of the framers in forming a tripartite system of power. They understood that one or more of the three branches would always tend to exceed its powers. In the past, it has, at times, been the executive. Today, it is the legislative branch and certain highly placed executives in the permanent federal civil service who have exceeded the limits of their defined authority. And the public has come to recognize the fact.

Ultimately, it's the third branch of government—the judiciary—that will have the task of restoring balance and functionality to the polity.

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Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.



The Supreme Court of the United States in Washington on Dec. 4, 2018.

Supreme Court to Hear Religious Freedom Case on School Choice

ROB NATELSON



Commentary
On Jan. 22, the Supreme Court will hear a religious freedom case. The outcome will determine

whether states may manage their educational systems to discriminate against religion or favor some religions over others.

The case is *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*. The plaintiffs are religious families with children. The defendant is a state agency that claims the Montana constitution requires it to deny educational choice to those families.

The U.S. Supreme Court interprets the Constitution's First Amendment to impose several rules governing how states treat religion. Two rules are central to the *Espinoza* case.

Rule No. 1 is that government may not discriminate against religion or religious people generally. The courts sometimes allow officials to bend this rule to avoid state "entanglement" with religion or religious institutions. For example, a state granting educational scholarships to students in most courses of study may deny support for purely devotional theology (such as for ministry courses), if the denial applies to all religions equally.

Rule No. 2 is much stricter: The government must treat all religions equally. A state may not prohibit aid to students studying for the Jewish rabbinate if it grants aid to students studying for the Christian ministry. The courts almost never allow government officials to play favorites among religions.

In light of these rules, it's surprising to learn that most state constitutions have provisions designed to favor some religions over others. They are anti-sectarian clauses, and they require or permit the state to support "non-sectarian" schools, but prohibit support for "sectarian" schools.

But what does "sectarian" mean? Today, many people use the word as a synonym for "religious." If we adopt that meaning, then state constitutions with anti-sectarian

One wonders how protecting a state school monopoly can justify violating religious freedom.

clauses potentially violate Rule No. 1 by supporting secular schools but not religious ones. In defense, states argue this discrimination is permissible to avoid state "entanglement" with religion.

The *Espinoza* case serves as an example. The Montana legislature passed a law allowing taxpayers to take income tax credits of up to \$150 if they donated to foundations granting K-12 scholarships. The Montana Supreme Court voided the law, claiming it breached the state constitution's anti-sectarian clause because the law permitted scholarships for students in religions as well as in secular schools. For justification, the court cited the need to support government schools and avoid state entanglement with religion.

One wonders how protecting a state school monopoly can justify violating religious freedom. Also, the U.S. Supreme Court has held that a single buffer between the state and a religious school—student choice—is sufficient to avoid "entanglement." The Montana law actually created a triple buffer: the choice of the donor, the choice of the scholarship foundation, and the choice of the student or his or her family.

So in all probability, if we interpret the word "sectarian" to mean "religious," then Montana has discriminated against religion generally, thereby violating Rule No. 1.

In fact, however, Montana also has violated Rule No. 2—the requirement that the state treat religions equally. This is because the history of anti-sectarian clauses shows that "sectarian" isn't a synonym for "religious" and anti-sectarian clauses weren't designed merely to discriminate against religion. Instead, they were designed to discriminate in favor of some religions and against others.

Here is the background: During the 19th and early 20th centuries, public schools usually were controlled by mainline Protestants, and school authorities promoted mainline Protestant theology. For example, teachers and textbooks often taught from the King James Version of the Bible—a version accepted by most Protestants, but

rejected by Catholics and Jews. The Protestant public school establishment wanted to protect its privileged access to state funds. So it convinced state constitution-writers to ban public aid to "sectarian" competitors.

"Sectarian" was a very convenient word for the Protestant public school establishment. Nineteenth- and early 20th-century dictionaries, newspapers, and other sources show that it encompassed all religions except mainline Protestantism. In the rhetoric of the time, Catholics were "sectarian." So were Jews, Mormons, Muslims—and even those Protestant evangelicals the mainliners thought over-enthusiastic. The one group never called sectarian were mainline Protestants.

Anti-sectarian clauses were designed to permit public money to flow to Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian schools while denying it to Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, and Catholic schools.

Constitutional commentators often call anti-sectarian clauses "Blaine Amendments," after the 19th-century statesman James G. Blaine. Supposedly they originated with a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution that Blaine sponsored in 1875 while a member of Congress. Allegedly Blaine did so in the cause of anti-Catholic bigotry.

But that story is both inaccurate and unfair to Blaine. Anti-sectarian clauses were inserted in some state constitutions well before Blaine's 1875 proposal. Moreover, Blaine's amendment, while of questionable wisdom, didn't use the word "sectarian" and didn't overtly discriminate among religions. Nor was Blaine anti-Catholic: He was devoted to his Catholic mother, he may well have been baptized in that faith, and throughout his political career, he stoutly resisted the anti-Catholic rhetoric then favored by other Republican politicians. As U.S. secretary of state, Blaine opened our historic Pan-American outreach to (Catholic) Latin America.

Anti-sectarian clauses were—and are—far worse than anything Blaine promoted. A state convention inserted one such clause into Montana's first constitution at the

height of the anti-Catholic furor. (By contrast, the word "nonsectarian" was used favorably on the convention floor.)

In 1972, Montana discarded its first constitution for a replacement. But the convention drafting the new document preserved the anti-sectarian clause. It did so even after the delegates were warned about the sordid history of such provisions. Moreover, supporters of the new constitution affirmed repeatedly—both during the convention and during the subsequent ratification campaign—that the new clause had the same meaning as the old. And they were right about that: Dictionaries circulating in 1972 confirm the insulting definition of "sectarian."

There are several reasons to hope the plaintiffs win the *Espinoza* case. First, the Montana Supreme Court overreached when it struck down the entire scholarship credit law, because only a narrower issue was before the court. The Montana justices have a history of overreach of which the U.S. Supreme Court is well aware, having reversed them several times recently.

Second, the U.S. Supreme Court already has served notice that anti-sectarian clauses are constitutionally suspect.

Third, the disgraceful history of anti-sectarian clauses is so evident that it's hard to ignore.

Finally, almost everyone recognizes that monopoly isn't a good thing, particularly when it's propped up by the state. The problems afflicting public schools—high cost, impaired effectiveness, and political interference—are classic symptoms of government monopolies. Surely U.S. Supreme Court justices recognize that as well.

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SAMIRA BOUADOU/THE EPOCH TIMES



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) presides over the House of Representatives as they vote on the second article of impeachment of President Donald Trump in the House Chamber at the Capitol on Dec. 18, 2019.

Phony Impeachment Becoming Democratic Debacle

CONRAD BLACK



Commentary

After a two-week holiday, the American public seems to have forgotten that its president is supposedly fighting to hang onto his job until Election Day and avoid being the first person ever legally evicted from the U.S. presidency in mid-term. This indicates what a total failure this phony impeachment has been.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) doesn't want to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate, ostensibly because she requires the Senate to call witnesses the House declined to try to subpoena. She knows that if the Senate calls witnesses, the well-prompted whistleblower by hearsay, guided by the office of House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), will appear and lay bare the fraudulent beginnings of the whole odious process, (or go down for 10 years for perjury). That disaster would be bigger than would just letting the Senate vote it down overwhelmingly.

Since Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) won't accommodate Pelosi's absurd demands, this will come to one of two outcomes. Either Pelosi will abandon the demand for Senate witnesses and the Democrats will have the fallback position that it was a rigged and vitiated trial by partisan Republicans to save their president (whom most of them secretly would like to remove, according to the Democrats and their media house organs); or McConnell will tire of waiting and pass a resolution deferring any action until after the election, at which time the House will have to start all over again.

McConnell must be close to being able to pass such a vote now, and there is no evidence that any significant backlash would result. Under either scenario, the Democrats get, as they deserve, an embarrassing fiasco that should discourage frivolous future impeachment efforts.

A Perfect Storm

Within a few weeks, the Democrats

The way the impeachment farce is rolling out is just one victory after another for the president.

will face a perfect storm: an impeachment debacle, a manifestly inept and unfeasible group of candidates, which will likely present the alternative of reaching for an aged New York billionaire, with a larger fortune and ego than the incumbent, but with practically no natural constituency to put up against the Trump army, which is itching for vengeance on those who have tormented their leader; or locking arms behind an innocuous also-ran such as Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.).

At least she would spare the Democrats the horrible defeat that awaits former Vice President Joe Biden, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), or South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg. No serious American could vote for any of them for president. A majority would probably affirm, if polled, that they are, respectively, an ancient weather-vane with a hot air balloon for a brain, a raving Menshevik, a pseudo-American Indian who wants to spend \$52 trillion on compulsory universal health care, and a glib, undistinguished mayor of a small city masquerading as a combat veteran crusading for gay rights.

Klobuchar would maintain the party elders in their seats of power, from which they cheated Hillary Clinton in 2008 and Sanders in 2016, and they may have to lock arms again to sand-bag Bloomberg, though his campaign to date has not caused a ripple anywhere, despite his deep open pockets.

All the while, ticking like the fuse in the Little Boy in the bomb bay of the B-29 Enola Gay over Hiroshima in August 1945 are the conclusions of the special counsel, which, if the report of the inspector general of the Justice Department is any guide, are going to incinerate the respectability of many veterans of the Obama justice and intelligence apparatus and the Hillary Clinton campaign. Its effects will not be diluted in the slightest by the sleazy current attempt to portray the attorney general (William Barr) and the special counsel (John Durham) as partisan agents for the administration.

Displacement

As the Democratic myth-makers

regroup after the impeachment fizzle, contemplating how to rescue the House speaker out in the middle of the minefield she sowed, the new line is that the president is lashing out at Iran with no policy or justification and because he is so distracted by the impeachment threat. It is one of the many psychiatric mysteries of the Trump-hatred syndrome that its expositors—despite developing the shakes, glottal stops, and an almost complete arrest of the capacity for rational thought when his name is mentioned—claim a perfect talent at mind-reading the president.

A.B. Stoddard, one of the relatively presentable and coherent Trump-haters, knowingly advised her RealClearPolitics readers on Jan. 3 that cold terror over impeachment (he's "consumed and distracted") caused Trump's action in killing the Iranian terrorist general, Qassem Soleimani.

It is like the Dudley Moore film in which, when the aged house-keeper flatulates, Moore screams at the (unoffending) dog. It is all a displacement: In the skilled analysis of his enemies, Trump ordered the killing of the world's leading terrorist who had severely provoked the United States, because he was worried about the absurd impeachment articles that allege no illegalities.

In fact, all indications are that the president is enjoying the spectacle of his enemies wallowing in their quavering self-righteousness. They can't win the issue with McConnell, and they have passed the off-ramp for any symbolic half-measure such as an unctuous vote of censure; no one can take righteousness from this Democratic claque of liars seriously.

Their most hilarious pretense to outrage this week is that Trump should have consulted the Democratic congressional leadership, a sieve to the media now preoccupied with the spurious attempt to remove him from office, before killing Soleimani.

Riveting Entertainment

The way the impeachment farce is rolling out is just one victory after another for the president. Al Green, the egregious pony-tailed Democratic congressman from Texas, who moved the first impeachment motion, which had significant Democratic support,

told the country last week that he came to this idea when Trump announced he was a candidate.

The constitutional criteria for removal from office of a U.S. president have been reduced in Rep. Green's mind to the high crime and misdemeanor of having the effrontery to declare oneself to have the ambition to seek the office: preemptive impeachment and removal from an office long before the offender is even nominated by any organization as a candidate for the office. He and his Democratic House supporters make the Red Queen look like a hemophiliac bleeding heart procedural reformer and civil rights activist.

Not to be left out of this comical merry-go-round is Maxine "Impeach 45!" Waters, a Democratic congresswoman from Los Angeles, who was completely taken in last week by pranksters claiming to be Russians with information about Trump's collusion with Russia.

Trump couldn't write such an entertaining script himself; no one could. Impeachment may be distracting him, but not in a way that causes him to respond decisively to the systematic murder of Americans by Islamist terrorists. More likely, he is splitting his sides laughing as the Democratic members of the Congress wallow around in their "solemn, sad" duty (Pelosi), of such urgency that it had to be rushed through the House before Christmas, but must now await completely unconstitutional concessions demanded by the speaker from the Senate. Donald Trump pulled 25 million television viewers every week for 14 years; he knows riveting entertainment when he sees it.

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