

Trumpet Weekly

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Iranian women hold leaflets of Hassan Zamani, a candidate for the upcoming parliamentary elections, during a campaign meeting in Tehran on February 23.



Iranian Elections: A Litmus Test for the Nuclear Deal

Brent Nagtegaal | February 25

ON FRIDAY, IRANIANS HEAD TO THE POLLS FOR THE FIRST TIME since the country's nuclear deal with world powers took effect. The vote will provide the first clue as to whether key Western peddlers of the deal will receive what they hoped for: a more moderate, open Iran.

According to Prof. Rabi Uzi, director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, the chance of such a positive change is "wishful thinking."

Speaking to about a dozen of us at a media gathering in Jerusalem on Wednesday, Uzi stated that "those who orchestrated the deal did so on the assumption that with the passage of time the deal would recuperate Iran economically and turn them into a

player that would stabilize the region. ... I think that the results are going to tell us what is the future prospect of Iran after the deal. ... I think that the hard-liners are going to get the upper hand."

It seems that while Israelis can argue among themselves about most things, the one thing they can agree on is Iran.

According to Uzi, there is currently no indication that moderates will come out of the election cycle in a stronger position. Much to the contrary, the hard-liners in Iran have already ensured a positive result by disqualifying most of the moderates from being on the ballot. Of the 12,000 candidates who wanted to be part of the election, almost half were vetoed by the Guardian

Council, a 12-person body of Iranian clerics. A disproportionately high number of those banned were moderates.

Iranians will be voting on only those who remain in the field, vetted by the hard-liner Guardian Council.

The nuclear deal has reinforced the position of hard-liners such as Ayatollah Khamenei at the expense of the few, suppressed voices in Iran who are calling for change.

“Many fighters for liberation inside Iran are saying that the deal served only to strengthen the regime, and served as a hindrance to ... the Iranian Spring,” Uzi said.

In his discussion, the professor went on to describe with distressing clarity and zeal that Iran’s ambition since the shah’s ouster in 1979 has always been the same: to project its power across the Middle East as the regional hegemon.

“Iranian hard-liners and the regime take it as a mission to show the world that, in spite of the deal, it hasn’t changed,” Uzi said.

Except now, in the aftermath of the post-nuclear deal, Iran has the ability to implement that plan. Now that Iran is on the road to economic recovery, without being forced to change its ideology, the hard-liners in Iran can push forward with their regional ambitions.

If Friday’s election sees the odd reformer make it into parliament or even the Assembly of Experts, it will only be to give the impression of a functioning democracy. Iran’s hard line is now firmer than ever.

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MIDDLE EAST

TrumpetDaily

RADIO SHOW

THE DARK SIDE OF TECHNOLOGY | FEBRUARY 25

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THE DARK CITY ON A HILL; PLUS, PRESIDENT OBAMA DOESN'T BELIEVE IN A BALANCED BUDGET | FEBRUARY 23

BRITAIN'S DILEMMA: ABANDON HISTORICAL ROOTS OR ABANDON EUROPE | FEBRUARY 22

Iran: \$7,000 to Every Terror Family

Arutz Sheva | February 24

THE [ISRAELI] FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS DECLARED THAT “ISRAEL condemns the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon’s announcement that his country will financially support Palestinian terrorists and their families.”

The official statement explained, “This is additional proof of Iran’s deep involvement in supporting terror against Israel. After the agreement with the world powers, Iran is allowing itself to continue being a central player in international terror.”

The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon, Mohammad Fateh Ali, recently announced that his country would pay \$7,000 to the

family of any terrorist killed in the recent wave of terror, and an additional \$30,000 to any family whose house was destroyed in response. Fateh Ali made his statement during a press conference in Beirut and further called on Lebanon to join the fight against Israel, promising: “The martyrs’ blood will release the entire Palestine, from the river to the sea.”

Also today, Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon accused the Islamic Republic of embedding “sleeper cells” in the U.S. and Europe. He warned that these cells are gathering weapons and intelligence and recruiting new members to carry out terror attacks. ...

Saudis Pulling Money From Lebanon Is a Sign the Country Is Lost to Hezbollah

Jerusalem Post | February 25

WE TALKED ABOUT THIS



THE MOVES BY SAUDI ARABIA AND ITS GULF ALLIES ON TUESDAY TO warn their citizens against traveling to Lebanon and the Saudi decision last week to suspend \$3 billion in aid to the Lebanese military is a sign the country has fallen squarely into Iran’s orbit.

The Saudis became upset last month when the Lebanese government, represented by Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, refused to vote on a joint Arab statement condemning attacks by Iranians on Saudi missions in their country in reaction to the Saudi

execution of a prominent Shiite cleric. ...

“The overriding message in all of this is, we [the Saudis] are not going to pay for a state that is essentially run by Hezbollah and does what it wants,” Tony Badran, a Lebanon expert and research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told the *Jerusalem Post*. ...

The next thing to watch for, says Badran, is whether the Saudis will push for certain political steps from their allies. ...

There is talk the Saudis are threatening further financial

measures that would not only target Hezbollah-linked Shiite businessmen in the Gulf but also pro-Hezbollah Lebanese Christians, continued Badran.

“It is unclear if Saudi Arabia will take additional steps, but the message is clear, we are done underwriting a government that is subordinate to Iran and Hezbollah,” he said.

[Saudi-owned Al Arabiya News published an] article headlined “You Are Either With Us, or Against Us,” [which] stated that “there is a major confrontation between sectarian Iran and free peoples.”

Yemeni Rebels Pose a Rising Threat in Southern Saudi Arabia **Washington Post | February 24**

THOUSANDS OF SAUDI TROOPS HAVE BEEN DEPLOYED ALONG these desiccated hills, struggling to halt cross-border attacks by Yemeni rebels who fire rockets and carry out lethal ground incursions.

The Yemeni fighters have killed and captured hundreds of Saudi soldiers in a conflict that presents Saudi Arabia with the biggest challenge to its territory in years. ...

The border assaults have come in response to a devastating air and ground war that a Saudi-led military coalition launched in Yemen last year. That conflict has in turn spilled across the border with devastating consequences, said Maj. Gen. Saad Olyan,

who commands more than 20,000 Saudi forces along the 1,100-mile southern border.

The Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen—which includes mostly fellow Sunni Muslim nations—has killed thousands of civilians and exacerbated a humanitarian crisis in the desperately poor country. Saudi Arabia intervened to stop assaults by the Houthis, followers of the Zaydi sect of Shiite Islam who toppled Yemen’s Saudi-backed government last year. Saudi officials accuse the Houthis of acting as proxies of Iran, a Shiite-led powerhouse and the kingdom’s foremost regional competitor. ...

Hezbollah Founder: Neither Russia Nor Iran Serves Interests of Lebanese Shiites **TheTower.org | February 21**

ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF HEZBOLLAH HAS STRONGLY CRITICIZED the Iran-backed Lebanese terror organization for its participation in the Syrian civil war, saying that doing so was serving the interests of Tehran and “the Russian conqueror” rather than the Lebanese people.

Subhi al-Tufayli, Hezbollah’s first secretary-general, made his remarks to the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Mustaqbal* Sunday. He expressed fears that Hezbollah’s involvement in the war to support Syrian dictator Bashar Assad will cause a backlash that will lead to many deaths in both Syria and Lebanon. He also said

that Hezbollah should withdraw from Syria, but, he lamented, any decision to do so would be made by Iran, which doesn’t have the best interests of Lebanon’s Shiite population at heart. ...

Tufayli’s criticism of his organization comes amid widespread protests against Hezbollah in Lebanon. The protests were prompted after Saudi Arabia announced that it would stop its billion-dollar aid package to the Lebanese army. The threatened halt to aid is widely seen as a means of pressuring the central Lebanese government and military to cut its ties with Hezbollah. ...

EU Police Chief Warns That 5,000 Jihadists Returned From Middle East—And New Attack Is Likely **National Post | February 22**

UP TO 5,000 JIHADISTS TRAINED IN THE MIDDLE EAST COULD BE at large in Europe, the EU’s police chief has warned.

“Europe is currently facing the highest terror threat in more than 10 years,” said Rob Wainwright, the British head of Europol, the EU’s police agency.

Thousands of EU citizens have returned to their home countries after being trained by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Wainwright said.

“We can expect ISIL or other religious terror groups to stage an attack somewhere in Europe with the aim of achieving mass casualties among the civilian population,” he told Germany’s *Neue Osnabrucker Zeitung* newspaper. ...

The growing number “presents EU member states with

completely new challenges.” ...

His comments come after new information emerged about two suspects being held in Austria in connection with the Paris attacks.

Prosecutors in Salzburg for the first time confirmed reports the two men, a 28-year-old Algerian and a 34-year-old Pakistani who have not been named, entered Europe posing as refugees.

The two suspects, who were arrested at a refugee shelter on Dec. 10, 2015, have admitted they arrived in Greece with some of the Paris attackers, prosecutors said in a statement. ...

It has also emerged that a 25-year-old Moroccan and a 40-year-old Algerian arrested on December 18 are being held by the Austrian authorities because they were in close contact with the first two suspects, prosecutors said.

Textiles Dating to David and Solomon Found at Timna Valley Dig Ministry of Foreign Affairs | February 24

A TIMNA EXCAVATION TEAM FROM TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY HAS uncovered an extensive fabric collection. This is the first discovery of textiles dating from the era of David and Solomon and sheds new light on the historical fashions of the Holy Land.

The ancient copper mines in Timna are located deep in Israel's Arava Valley and are believed by some to be the site of King Solomon's mines. The arid conditions of the mines have seen the remarkable preservation of 3,000-year-old organic materials, including seeds, leather and fabric, and other extremely rare artifacts that provide a unique window into the culture and practices of this period.

A Timna excavation team from Tel Aviv University led by Dr. Erez Ben-Yosef has uncovered an extensive fabric collection of

diverse color, design and origin. ... The textiles also offer insight into the complex society of the early Edomites, the semi-nomadic people believed to have operated the mines at Timna. ...

As the only fabrics from that period discovered throughout the southern Levant, they are the closest examples we have of how people dressed in the time of David and Solomon. ...

Copper was used to produce tools and weapons and was the most valuable resource in ancient societies. Its production required many levels of expertise. Miners in ancient Timna may have been slaves or prisoners ... [T]he act of smelting, of turning stone into metal, required an enormous amount of skill and organization. The smelter had to manage some 30 to 40 variables in order to produce the coveted copper ingots. ...

EUROPE

Trumpet Hour

PUTIN'S MEDIA WAR WITH THE EU, THE POPE VS. TRUMP, JAPAN SNUBS OBAMA, PENSION CUTS, AND MORE | FEBRUARY 26

THE POPE AND RUSSIA, AN ATTACK ON THE CONSTITUTION, WHY OBESITY AND MORE | FEBRUARY 24



Why Is the Pope Pro-Putin?

Richard Palmer | February 22

POPE FRANCIS MET WITH PATRIARCH KIRILL, THE HEAD OF THE Russian Orthodox Church, on February 12. It's the first time the leaders of the two churches have met since the Great Schism almost 1,000 years ago.

There is much more to this meeting than a push for unity from two church leaders. The Russian Orthodox Church is an essential [tool for the Russian government](#). Kirill is allegedly a former KGB agent.

The patriarch's meeting with the pope, then, happened because the Russian government wanted it to. But why?

The Ukrainian crisis gives one clue.

Did Putin convince the pope to stay out of the Ukraine conflict? He certainly respects the Vatican's power. "The Kremlin sees the Vatican as a multidimensional power—bigger, in some ways, than what Russia considers 'the West,'" wrote Anna Nemtsova in the Daily Beast this month. "That is one reason why Putin has twice met with Pope Francis in the recent years to discuss the importance of changing the political climate."

The first of those visits came in late 2013. Ukraine was on course to shift to a pro-Western and pro-European direction. That came to an abrupt halt in November. In the midst of this, Russian President Vladimir Putin had his first ever meeting with Pope Francis. The events of November 2013 triggered the Ukraine

crisis. Russia responded by invading Ukraine. Yet the Vatican had almost nothing to say about it.

The pope remained silent as Catholics claimed that Russian security services were driving them out of Crimea.

For local Catholics, it was very different. Religious authorities in Ukraine who are in communion with Rome are robust critics of Russia. But the pope told them to be quiet.

In February 2015, Ukraine's bishops had already been scheduled to travel to Rome to meet the pope. The pope told the Ukrainian bishops to stay out of politics.

Also in February 2015, Patriarch Kirill publicly thanked the Vatican for its stance on Ukraine.

"I would like to note with satisfaction that the Holy See itself has always pursued a balanced stance toward the situation in Ukraine and has avoided any lopsided assessments, but has called for peace talks and an end to armed clashes," he added.

The Vatican's nuncio in Ukraine—essentially a papal ambassador—Archbishop Thomas Gullickson compared the persecution of Catholics in Crimea and the Donbass with the persecution Ukrainian Catholics suffered under Joseph Stalin.

"The reports that the nuncio is sending to Rome are detailed and alarming," wrote Sandro Magister for the Italian *L'Espresso* magazine. "And Ukrainian Catholics have been furious to see how none

of this has appeared in the words of Pope Francis. It is their conviction that in the Roman curia, as well as in Ukraine, the pro-Russian party has free rein and is influencing the pope."

The Vatican continued to ignore Gullickson's reports, until September 2015 when they moved the troublesome nuncio to Switzerland. *Foreign Affairs* magazine noted that the move was "allegedly because Moscow complained that he [Gullickson] was biased against Russia."

Ukrainian Catholics were [very disappointed at last week's meeting](#) with the Russian patriarch. While [Archbishop Sviatoslav] Shevchuk [major archbishop of Kiev] was careful not to criticize the pope directly, he condemned the Joint Declaration signed by the two church leaders.

"It is hard to imagine a weaker team than the one that drafted this text," he said. The document once again takes Russia's stance that this is a civil war rather than a Russian invasion. Shevchuk went on to say: "Undoubtedly, this text has caused deep disappointment among many faithful of our church and among conscientious citizens of Ukraine. Today, many contacted me about this and said that they feel betrayed by the Vatican, disappointed by the half-truth nature of this document, and even see it as indirect support by the Apostolic See for Russian aggression against Ukraine. I can certainly understand those feelings."

The church's stance on Ukraine is part of a strong trend. "Francis has always done all he could not to annoy the patriarchate of Moscow and the imperial politics of Vladimir Putin, even at the cost of sowing the strongest disappointment among the bishops, clergy and faithful of the Catholic Church in the region," wrote Magister.

"One relationship Francis has patiently cultivated is with Putin," *Foreign Affairs* wrote. Why bend over backward for Putin like this? The *Trumpet* has long speculated that Germany and Russia would come to some kind of agreement as both powers become more assertive.

Could the Vatican play a role in forging a deal between Russia and Europe? The way they're behaving over Ukraine makes it appear that way.

The pope appears to have allowed Russia to do whatever it wants in Ukraine without opposition. If he can convince Germany and the rest of Europe to do likewise—and so far they've put up very little resistance—how much more will Putin do? And what will be the quid pro quo? What will Russia allow Europe to get away with?

That is why the pope's silence on Ukraine is so concerning. For more on where the ambitions of Germany and Russia will take the world, read Mr. Flurry's article "[Russia's Attack Signals Dangerous New Era](#)."

 Follow [Richard Palmer](#)

Rope-a-Pope

Stephen Prothero, *Politico* | February 19

WE TALKED ABOUT THIS



JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT AMERICAN POLITICS COULDN'T GET ANY weirder, [the pope] and "The Donald" exchanged pile drivers on Thursday in the professional wrestling match that our presidential politics has become. It started a week ago, when [Donald] Trump characterized Francis as a "very political person" who had become a pawn of the Mexican government, and Thursday the pope jumped into the ring: "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian," he told reporters while flying back to the Vatican. Trump hit back hard, calling the pope "disgraceful" for questioning his faith, and responding that the pope should be praying for a Trump presidency in order to prevent ISIS from attacking the Vatican.

It's easy to read this spectacle simply as Trump being Trump: Happily playing the heel who thrives on heckling, he shamelessly skirts the rules even as he blames his opponents for foul play.

But the pope-Trump feud has deeper implications, with troubling threads that run through American history. As crass as Trump's attacks may seem, it was the pope who violated an unspoken gentleman's agreement in American politics—one that has been in place since the election of John F. Kennedy.

In his controversial plane interview, Pope Francis fessed up to being a "political animal," but in this case, he badly misjudged the American political scene. In Francis's native Argentina, the Catholic Church enjoys the moral authority to speak out on plainly

political matters. And it regularly employs that authority. ...

But politics is different in the U.S. Yes, religion plays a huge role in our political life ... but the papacy has long been, in some respects, a special case. In the colonies and early republic, Protestants predominated, and they understood "popery" to be an affront to not only true Christianity but also American democracy—a return to the monarchical authority of one.

In misreading the American political scene, Francis risks a renewal of the Protestant-Catholic culture wars that have plagued the nation for much of its history. ...

The more telling irony on this strange day was delivered by Jerry Falwell Jr. After testifying to Trump's "faith in Jesus Christ," Falwell said, "I think John F. Kennedy would be rolling over in his grave right now if he could hear what the pope was saying, because that's a man who fought to be president against lots of prejudice, because many Protestants in this country did not want to elect a Catholic president, and he broke down those barriers." ...

One of the abiding fears of anti-Catholic culture warriors from the early republic into the early 20th century had been that the pope had designs on ruling America. This fear set a Catholic convent on fire in Boston in 1834 and killed dozens 10 years later as Philadelphians rioted over which Bible children would read in public schools. And it was stoked by John Hughes, the

controversial Catholic bishop of New York, who told his parishioners in an 1850 homily delivered at Manhattan's St. Patrick's Cathedral that the paranoia of anti-Catholic ranters and ravers wasn't paranoia at all. There was a Catholic plot to take over America, he insisted: "Everybody should know that we have for our mission to convert the world, including the inhabitants of the United States, the people of the cities, and the people of the country, the officers of the Navy and the marines, commanders of the Army, the legislatures, the Senate, the cabinet, the president, and all!"

But Hughes was called "Dagger John" for a reason. Most of his fellow Catholics were far less keen for a fight. ...

On Sept. 12, 1960, in an extraordinary address to a group of Protestant ministers in Houston, Kennedy famously pledged his

allegiance to a secular nation. ...

And so the compact was sealed. Thereafter, Roman Catholics here pledged to be American Catholics. In turn, Protestants agreed to reimagine their country as a Christian nation in which Protestants and Catholics were partners. ...

For Catholics, coverage under this sacred canopy came with a cost: A tacit requirement to keep their faith out of politics. ...

This is the deal that Pope Francis broke this week. My agreements with the Falwells come around about as often as a February 29, but Jerry Jr. has a point—it's hard to imagine JFK would have been comfortable with Pope Francis's breaking the implicit compact that has kept relations among Protestants, Catholics and Jews relatively placid here for more than half a century. ...

Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg: Will He Return to Power?

Merkur.de (Trumpet translation) | February 24

MUNICH—KARL-THEODOR ZU GUTTENBERG IS BACK. BEHIND the scenes he is once again approaching the CSU [Christian Socialist Union]. Does he want to return to power? The time of decision is approaching. ...

Two weeks ago Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg dared to leap into ice water at a weeklong expedition to Antarctica with a fellow Google manager. It's a test of courage, a ritual for travelers in this region. ... We know this because Guttenberg came from Antarctica via New York to Munich to hold a few meetings close to the security conference. He described the icy experience behind closed doors.

Guttenberg is currently something like the Loch Ness monster in Bavarian politics. Credible people regularly say they have spotted him. But he has not made a real appearance. The new Guttenberg is the opposite of the old: Earlier he never avoided a camera and hardly missed a TV show. Today he doesn't even answer interview requests. If he makes an appearance, it is under the condition that no journalists are present. Once, a reporter of a tabloid tried to creep in—but she was discovered and stopped. Nevertheless, many have taken notice lately. Not least because Horst Seehofer is regularly bringing him back into play. ...

What drives Guttenberg? Is he planning a comeback? People who know him well say he is torn. On the one side are the wounds of his departure for a cheated doctorate; on the other are the political gene that one apparently never escapes. He wanted to keep both options open, they say. ...

Today, the off-duty defense minister likes to bring a little self-irony into his appearances, according to conservatives who have

experienced it a few times. For example, the jokes during his lectures sometimes mention the term "footnotes"—"you know, I have to be careful with those," he says. ...

Yet one man talks about him: Seehofer. For months, he has never missed an opportunity to bring the ex-minister into play. Three weeks ago in Moscow, the [Bavarian] governor said that he would take Guttenberg with him on his second visit to Russia in the fall. Even before the controversial state visit took place, he discussed foreign policy with Guttenberg in a foreign-policy club of the CSU. No press was allowed to be present besides the *Bayernkurier*. "Maintain the transatlantic alliance and at the same time make a fresh start in relations with Russia," was the advice of the Americanized 44-year-old with an open shirt and three-day beard.

We don't have many like him in our party, the CSU leader likes to say. Those close to him say telephone contacts are regular but not very frequent. Starting next week, Guttenberg—unlike Markus Söder or Ilse Aigner—has been asked to participate at the strategy committee that prepares the forthcoming election campaigns.

Guttenberg also still keeps contact with the politicians of the younger generation of the CSU. On the edge of the security conference, he again joined with Manfred Weber's Network "Neufahrner Circle" in a castle hotel in Lower Bavaria....

By the way, at one of the meetings he received a DVD box of AC/DC inter alia with the video of the performance in Circus Krone 2003. Guttenberg thanked the gift bearer with beaming eyes. Along with it was the hit: "It's a Long Way to the Top." This also applies to returners.

Lunch With the FT: Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg

Gideon Rachman, Financial Times | February 26

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN KARL-THEODOR ZU GUTTENBERG WAS widely tipped to succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor of Germany. Good-looking, aristocratic, married to a descendant of Bismarck, and beloved by the popular press, zu Guttenberg had cut a dash, first as a decisive economics minister, and then as Germany's youngest defense minister And then, in two disastrous

weeks in early 2011, his gilded career fell apart, after it was revealed that he had plagiarized large parts of his doctoral thesis. Within two weeks, zu Guttenberg had resigned from the German government. Shortly afterward, he left for a career in business in the U.S.

Ever since zu Guttenberg stepped down, there has been

speculation about his return to German politics. Now, with Chancellor Merkel in deep political trouble over Germany's refugee crisis, might this be a time for him to resurrect his political career? As political pundits run through the rather thin list of possible leaders in a post-Merkel era, some eyes have begun to stray over the Atlantic—to the baron across the water. ...

How often does he go back to Germany? "At the moment, I'd say probably about once a month, but mainly for a board meeting or an investment. Or I might give a speech, to test an idea. ...It's about learning, learning, learning." ...

I ask him if he thought Merkel had been taken by surprise by the arrival of more than a million refugees in Germany in 2015. His reply is more critical than I expect: "I think she was surprised by the outcome of her decision, and I see with some interest that she's now step-by-step moving toward the positions of her harshest critics within her own party and obviously within the CSU [Christian Social Union]." ...

"I don't see the situation improving dramatically," he continues. "The unfortunate thing about European politics at the moment is it's just about survival until the next stage—until the next disaster happens. ... I don't see Germany and Europe regaining stable ground in the months to come. We still haven't seen, out of sheer luck sometimes, a *Charlie Hebdo*-style terrorist attack in Germany." ...

Given all these uncertainties, I ask, "Are you getting calls from Germany saying come on back, things are" He interrupts me,

before I complete the sentence—"Yes, more in the last couple of months."

What kind of people?

"It differs. Sometimes it's just people on the street who recognize me, with the beard and everything. Also the party."

So what do you say?

"I have a responsibility over here. The company." He adds that his business, which invests in technology companies, has done "extremely well. A bit surprisingly well." ...

This denial of political ambition sounds almost convincing. But when I suggest that his activities in New York, which involve the U.S. tech sector and high finance, might excite some suspicion among German voters—who are not noted for their fondness for either Wall Street or Silicon Valley—he is strikingly quick to put me right. "No, I'm not doing anything suspicious. ... I'm investing in companies. I'm helping companies to grow If I was in an investment bank and at Goldman, I think the Germans would utterly dislike me, and there are good reasons for that." ...

Malcontents within Merkel's own CDU-CSU grouping see [a UN secretary-general appointment for Merkel] as a graceful way to ease the chancellor out—with the obvious replacement being Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany's finance minister. But Schäuble is 73 years old and not in perfect health. He would probably just be an interim appointment, which might just open the door for a younger man, somebody who might return to German politics in the federal elections, due in 2017. ...

The Stoiber Plot Against Merkel **Bild (Trumpet translation) | February 10**

ANOTHER IS BACKSTAGE PULLING THE STRINGS: BAVARIA'S FORMER governor Edmund Stoiber

Most recently, he arranged the visit between [Christian Socialist Union leader Horst] Seehofer and [Russian] President Vladimir Putin. He has good connections in Berlin. According to participants, he often speaks to the CSU committee more than the party leader—and more and more sharply against Merkel.

The chancellor believes that Stoiber is more dangerous than Seehofer, whose comings and goings are already known.

Stoiber is different: If he has something on his mind, he forgets about his friends. This is now the case. Stoiber sees Bavaria and Germany in great danger because too many refugees are arriving.

The goal: The chancellor needs to change course immediately, even before the state elections (March 13) and reject refugees at the border. Or else she "needs to go," Stoiber supposedly said—he did not deny this quote recently attributed to him by *Spiegel*.

The plan: After a likely unsuccessful [European Union] summit on February 17 and 18, the Christian Democratic Union campaigner Julia Klöckner of Rheinland-Pfalz and Guido Wolf from Baden-Württemberg should switch on to the CSU course.

If Merkel nevertheless refuses to change her course, the CSU will tighten its hold [aka become more vehement]. Bavaria will submit a constitutional challenge against the federal government in February according to *Bild* information. ...

French Special Forces Waging 'Secret War' in Libya: Report **Reuters | February 24**

FRENCH SPECIAL FORCES AND INTELLIGENCE COMMANDOS ARE engaged in covert operations against Islamic State militants in Libya in conjunction with the United States and Britain, the French newspaper *Le Monde* reported on Wednesday.

It said President François Hollande had authorized "unofficial military action" by both an elite armed forces unit and the covert action service of the DGSE [Directorate-General for External Security] intelligence agency in the conflict-ridden North African state, which has two rival governments and largely ungoverned desert spaces.

What *Le Monde* called "France's secret war in Libya" involved occasional targeted strikes against leaders of the ultra-radical Islamist group, prepared by discreet action on the ground, to try to slow its growth in Libya. ...

The ministry has previously confirmed that ... France has set up an advance military base in northern Niger on the border with Libya.

U.S. warplanes struck an Islamic State training camp in Libya last Friday in attacks that killed nearly 50 people including two Serbian embassy employees abducted last November, according to Serbia's prime minister. ...

Crackdowns on Free Speech Rise Across a Europe Wary of Terror

Raphael Minder, *New York Times* | February 24

A PUPPET SHOW AT AN OPEN SQUARE IN MADRID DURING CARNIVAL festivities this month featured a policeman who tried to entrap a witch. The puppet officer held up a little sign to falsely accuse her, using a play on words that combined al Qaeda and ETA, the Basque separatist group.

Angry parents complained, and the real police stepped in. They arrested two puppeteers, who could now face as much as seven years in prison on charges of glorifying terrorism and promoting hatred. ...

Far from an isolated episode, the arrests on February 5 are part of a lengthening string of prosecutions, including two against a rap musician and a poet, that have fueled a debate over whether freedom of protest and speech are under threat in Spain and elsewhere in Europe because of fears of terrorism.

Some European countries, with painful historical chapters of fascism and leftist extremism, have long placed stricter limits on political and hate speech than has the United States. For instance, denying the Holocaust can be prosecuted in Germany as well as France.

But some civil liberties groups and legal experts are growing increasingly alarmed at the broad ways such laws are being adapted as the specter of Islamic extremism becomes Europe's new preoccupation.

Once such prohibitions become law, even if in response to real security concerns, there is no telling how the statutes could be

applied in the future, they say. ...

Those steps coincided with the [Mariano] Rajoy government's introduction of what has become known as a "gag law," harshly penalizing unauthorized public demonstrations, which has drawn strong criticism at home and abroad.

"This is the latest very serious attack on freedom of expression," said Joaquim Bosch, a spokesman for Judges for Democracy, an association of about 600 judges that focuses on human rights. "During the Franco dictatorship, troublesome artists went to prison, but not in democratic Spain."

Even at the height of ETA's violent campaign, Mr. Bosch noted, the law forbidding the glorification of terrorism was used "about two or three times a year." ...

Last year, however, judges from Spain's national court ruled on 25 such cases, absolving the defendants in only six of them. "The politicization of terrorism has been used as a smoke screen to divert attention from social and corruption problems," Mr. Bosch said.

The widening application of anti-terrorism laws related to speech extends beyond Spain, however, as countries across Europe struggle to balance civil liberties and security in the aftermath of two major terrorist attacks in Paris last year.

Even before those attacks, in November 2014, France reinforced a law similar to that in Spain, which punishes statements praising or inciting terrorism, as worries increased about homegrown radicalization and the influence of extremist groups online. ...

TW IN BRIEF

Germans cheer fire: Onlookers celebrated as a suspected arson fire damaged a former hotel that was being converted into a refugee home in eastern Germany, police said on Sunday. No one was injured, but a group of people gathered outside, some of them "cheering" and "jeering" at the fire. Police ordered three

people to leave the fire scene because they were hampering firefighters' work. Investigators found traces of a fire accelerant at the scene and believe the fire was caused by arson. Last year, Germany saw a surge in violence against such lodgings.

ASIA

Russia's Hybrid War

Maxim Trudolyubov, *New York Times* | February 24

WE TALKED ABOUT THIS



ALMOST ANYTHING VLADIMIR PUTIN TOUCHES THESE DAYS IS perceived by the West as a weapon, and almost everything he does is seen as an attack, very often a successful one. The Kremlin can change facts on the ground, stage quasi ceasefires and create zones of influence to exert pressure on other nations. It has done so in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, and the pattern is now being repeated in Syria. ...

It is not by crude force alone that Russia twists events to its advantage. By using its total control over the Russian news media

to sow confusion in the West, Mr. Putin has managed, in the words of the journalists Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, to "weaponize" information. In a report published in late 2014 by the New York-based Institute of Modern Russia, they outlined how the Kremlin manipulates the media, ethnic tensions and trade and financial transactions abroad to further its own ends. ...

Moscow is also widely seen to have "weaponized" the migrant crisis. Many analysts and government officials—the Turkish security services among them—agree that Moscow not only thwarts

U.S. policies in the Middle East but is targeting Russia's perceived enemies by purposely creating additional flows of migrants moving through Turkey and, ultimately, on to the European Union. Mr. Putin's strategy, Sen. John McCain said recently, is "to exacerbate the refugee crisis and use it as a weapon to divide the transatlantic alliance and undermine the European project." ...

Mr. Putin's talent for disruption amounts to a kind of "Midas touch." It has made him a formidable adversary in Russia's hybrid war of force and manipulation, where anything can be a target and everything can be a weapon. It has also given him what he has long coveted: Western acknowledgment that Russia is a force to be reckoned with.

"It is much safer to be feared than to be loved," Machiavelli wrote, an observation that the Russian leader and generations of his predecessors have taken to heart. As one high-ranking

Russian official told me: "We are not known for being particularly nice or elegant. But that is fine with us as long as our interests are taken seriously." ...

Historically, the Kremlin's rulers have always considered their country's first line of defense against what they perceive as Western mischief to lie well beyond Russia's borders. But Moscow has made people in the West think that its policies are motivated by aggressive revisionism, not defense. Their success is full of ironies. ...

"Domestically, Putin has transformed the Russian media into a propaganda machine. He has severely curbed the power of democracy and emasculated Russia's parliament."

Gerald Flurry, "Is Vladimir Putin the Prophesied Prince of Rosh?" *Trumpet*, February 2014

Vladimir Putin Readies Tactical Nuclear Weapons Against Turkey **Precious Silva, Morning News USA | February 24**

IT APPEARS TENSIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND TURKEY ARE ESCALATING to incremental levels as a source recently revealed that President Vladimir Putin has threatened Turkey with nuclear weapons. ...

A source reportedly told award-winning Iran-Contra journalist Robert Parry that Putin has threatened to launch tactical nukes should Turkey remain at odds with Moscow's interests. "A source close to Russian President Vladimir Putin told me that the Russians have warned Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that Moscow is prepared to use tactical nuclear weapons if necessary to save their troops in the face of a Turkish-Saudi onslaught," he added. "If Turkey (with hundreds of thousands of troops massed near the Syrian border) and Saudi Arabia (with its sophisticated air force) follow through on threats and intervene militarily to

save their rebel clients, who include al Qaeda's Nusra Front, from a powerful Russian-backed Syrian government offensive, then Russia will have to decide what to do to protect its 20,000 or so military personnel inside Syria," Parry wrote more. ...

"Neither Turkey nor Russia want a war that spreads beyond Syria. Both countries have similar sized economies, they are important trade partners, they have modern militaries—and they wield nuclear deterrents. Despite the angry and hostile rhetoric, geopolitical realities suggest a compromise will be reached. Some of the latest posturing is about increasing leverage for a future deal."

"Will Turkey Fight Russia in Syria?" *Trumpet*, Dec. 22, 2015

Xi Jinping's News Alert: Chinese Media Must Serve the Party **Edward Wong, New York Times | February 22**

THE CHINESE NEWS MEDIA COVERED PRESIDENT XI JINPING'S MOST recent public appearances with adulation befitting a demigod.

Front-page headlines across the nation trumpeted Mr. Xi's visits to the headquarters of the three main Communist Party and state news organizations on [February 19]. Photographs showed fawning journalists crowding around Mr. Xi, who sat at an anchor's desk at the state television network. One media official wrote the president an adoring poem.

The blanket coverage reflected the brazen and far-reaching media policy announced by Mr. Xi on his choreographed tour: The Chinese news media exists to serve as a propaganda tool for the Communist Party, and it must pledge its fealty to Mr. Xi.

Though the party has been tightening its control over the media since Mr. Xi became the top leader in late 2012, the new policy removes any doubt that in the view of the president and party chief, the media should be first and foremost a party mouthpiece. Mr. Xi wants to push the party's message domestically—and

internationally—across all media platforms, including advertising and entertainment, scholars say. That is a shift from his predecessor, Hu Jintao, who stressed the need for the state-run media to become more responsive to the modern digital environment and shape or channel public opinion. ...

"All news media run by the party must work to speak for the party's will and its propositions, and protect the party's authority and unity," Mr. Xi told the gathered media officials on Friday, according to Xinhua, the state news agency.

Mr. Xi also wants to curb the presence of foreign media companies. Last week, government agencies announced a regulation that would prevent foreign companies from publishing and distributing content online in China. That could affect Microsoft, Apple and Amazon, among others.

Mr. Xi's appearances on Friday were another major effort in his campaign to build a personality cult that equates him with the well being of the party and the nation. The act of *biao tai*, or pledging

loyalty, by newsroom leaders was one that Mr. Xi has demanded of military leaders and other important figures in the last year. ...

Some political analysts note that Mr. Xi's attempts to impose total control over the media say as much about his personal insecurities as they do about any Marxist-Leninist ideological vision that he holds.

"The most important thing is for him to announce his absolute authority," said Zhang Lifan, a historian. ...

Abe Snubs Obama Over Russia Visit

Japan Times | February 24

PRIME MINISTER SHINZO ABE HAS SNUBBED AN APPEAL BY U.S. President Barack Obama, who asked that he not visit Russia in May, sources close to Japan-Russia relations said Tuesday.

Obama made the appeal by phone on February 9, but Abe rejected it and will press ahead as planned with a visit to the Russian city of Sochi for talks with President Vladimir Putin, likely in early May, the sources said.

Obama delivered the appeal in a conversation primarily about cooperation between Tokyo and Washington over North Korea's launch of a rocket two days earlier. The Foreign Ministry has not publicly revealed what the two leaders discussed regarding Abe's trip to Russia.

TW IN BRIEF

China warns U.S. after Trump wins Nevada caucus: China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman told reporters in Beijing on Wednesday that the United States should avoid punitive currency policies that could disrupt U.S.-China relations. Reporters had asked her about China's response to a possible Donald Trump presidency, and his announced plan to punish China for currency manipulation with a tariff on Chinese goods. The spokeswoman declined to comment on specific remarks by individual U.S. presidential candidates but stressed her position that the U.S. and China should shoulder major world responsibilities together in an attempt to safeguard peace, stability and security. Trump vowed last month to impose a 45 percent tariff on Chinese goods to offset China's devaluation of the yuan.

"In his first year in office, Chinese President Xi Jinping has amassed a level of individual power not seen among Chinese leaders in decades. He emerged from a recent key meeting of China's Communist Party with impressive new powers that enable him to sidestep traditional bureaucracy and force through his policies."

"Another King of the East," Trumpet, February 2014

The sources quoted Obama as urging Abe to postpone the trip, citing Russia's differences with the United States over its actions in Ukraine and Syria.

Abe is keen to settle a long-standing dispute over islands off Hokkaido seized by the Soviet Union after Japan's surrender in World War II. The matter has prevented Moscow and Tokyo from signing a peace treaty. ...

"Prime Minister Abe apparently wants to knit a Japan-Russia alliance before someone applies a little pressure on that U.S. blanket and fully exposes its tattered condition to the world."

"Don't Worry, Putin, Asia Has Your Back," Trumpet, March 13, 2014

U.S. military official says China is gearing up for East Asia dominance: A senior United States military official indicated on Tuesday that China is gearing up for East Asia dominance. China is "changing the operational landscape" in the South China Sea by deploying missiles and radar as part of an effort to militarily dominate East Asia, said Adm. Harry Harris. They are "clearly militarizing the South China [Sea]. You'd have to believe in a flat Earth to think otherwise." Soon after he spoke, U.S. government sources confirmed that China recently deployed fighter jets to Woody Island in the South China Sea's Paracel chain. Beijing has sent jets there before, but this time it has raised new questions about its intentions.

ANGLO-AMERICA



God's Greatest Reward

Gerald Flurry,

The Key of David | February 26

In the midst of the chaos and destruction foretold in Bible prophecies, God offers the greatest reward to those who obey Him in this end time.



Why Is Obama Visiting Cuba?

Globe and Mail | February 25

ONLY TWO MONTHS AGO, U.S. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA LAID out the conditions under which he would visit Cuba before he leaves office: "If, in fact, I with confidence can say that we're seeing some progress in the liberty and expression and possibilities of ordinary Cubans, I'd love to use a visit as a way of highlighting that progress." ...

The world has become accustomed to Mr. Obama's foreign-policy flip-flops (see his "red line" in Syria) and desire to do away with the image of the United States as a meddling and moralizing superpower. But even critics of the five-decade U.S. policy of isolating the Castro regime were taken aback by news that Mr. Obama will next month become the first sitting president to visit to Cuba in 88 years.

In no material sense has Cuban President Raúl Castro, who took over from his ailing brother Fidel in 2006, expanded the

freedoms of ordinary citizens. ...

There has been even less progress on human rights. Arbitrary arrests and detentions climbed steadily throughout 2015 and hit 1,474 people in January Political repression has not eased. ...

This has not stopped the Obama administration from unilaterally easing restrictions on Americans traveling to Cuba and sending remittances to relatives on the island. ...

Mr. Obama risks enhancing their legitimacy and strengthening their grip on the island's economy. ...

The Cuban military, also headed by Raúl Castro, controls most of the economy ... and stands to benefit the most from increased U.S. trade and investment. ...

RELATED: "CUBA: A THREAT TO AMERICA"

400,000 Americans in Jeopardy as Giant Pension Fund Plans 50 Percent Cuts

ZeroHedge | February 18

WE TALKED ABOUT THIS



DALE DORSEY ISN'T HAPPY. AFTER WORKING 33 YEARS, HE'S FACING a 55 percent cut to his pension benefits, a blow which he says will "cripple" his family and imperil the livelihood of his two children, one of whom is in the fourth grade and one of whom is just entering high school.

Dorsey attended a town hall meeting in Kansas City on Tuesday where retirees turned out for a discussion on "massive" pension cuts proposed by the Central States Pension Fund, which covers 400,000 participants, and which will almost certainly go broke within the next decade.

"A controversial 2014 law allowed the pension to propose [deep] cuts, many of them by half or more, as a way to perhaps save the fund," the *Kansas City Star* wrote "What's happening to us is a microcosm of what's going to happen to the rest of the pensions in the United States," said Jay Perry, a longtime Teamsters member.

Jay is probably correct. Public sector pension funds are grossly underfunded in places like Chicago and Houston, while private sector funds are struggling to deal with rock bottom interest rates, which put pressure on expected returns and thus drive the present value of funds' liabilities higher.

Illinois's pension burden has brought the state to its knees financially speaking and in November, Springfield was forced to miss a \$560 million payment to its retirement fund. In the private

sector, GM said on Thursday that it will sell 20- and 30-year bonds in order to meet its pension obligations.

"At the end of last year, GM's U.S. hourly pension plan was underfunded by \$10.4 billion," the *New York Times* writes. ...

"You know anybody hiring a 73-year-old mechanic?" Rod Heelan asked [Kenneth] Feinberg [the man who oversaw the distribution of cash compensation to victims who were involved in accidents tied to faulty ignition switches]. "I'm available."

"I'll have to go find a job. I don't know. I'm 68," Gary Meyer of Concordia, Mo., said. "It would probably be a minimum-wage job."

To be sure, retirees' frustrations are justified. That said the fund is simply running out of money. "We simply can't stay afloat if we continue to pay out \$3.46 in pension benefits for every \$1 paid in from contributing employers," a letter to retirees reads.

The fund is projected to go broke by 2026. Without the proposed cuts, no benefits at all will be paid from that point forward.

According to letters shared with the *Star*, cuts range from around 40 percent to 61 percent. "[The] average pension loss was more than \$1,400 a month," the paper says. ...

As for what will become of those who depend upon their benefits to survive, the above quoted Gary Meyer summed it up best: "I guess food stamps. Hopefully not. It would be a last resort." ... Gary, you aren't alone.

One in Four Americans on Verge of Financial Ruin

MarketWatch | February 23

THE RICH KEEP GETTING RICHER. THE REST OF US AREN'T SO lucky.

According to a survey released Tuesday by Bankrate.com of more than 1,000 adults, nearly one in four Americans have

credit-card debt that exceeds their emergency fund or savings. And that's partially because many people, in addition to their debt, don't have a dime in their emergency fund at all: Another Bankrate survey released earlier this year found that 29 percent

of Americans have no emergency savings at all.

These numbers mean that many Americans are “teetering on the edge of financial disaster,” says Greg McBride, Bankrate.com’s chief financial analyst—thanks to the fact that they might be hard-pressed to pay for an emergency should one arise. “Not only do most of them not have enough savings, they’ve all used up some portion of their available credit—they are running out of options.”

That’s particularly problematic considering that emergencies happen more often than you might think. A 2014 survey by American Express found that half of all Americans had experienced an unforeseen expense in the past year—some of which could be considered an emergency. Indeed, 44 percent of those

who had an unforeseen expense(s) had one for health care and 46 percent for car trouble—two items that for many Americans are must-pay items, as you need a car to get to work and your health expenses are usually not optional.

Some groups—for example, the 30-to-49 age group—are in worse off than others when it comes to credit-card debt and savings. This group is in particularly rough shape, likely it faces child-related and mortgage expenses. ...

For consumers, the ideal situation is to have no credit-card debt and at least six months of savings in an emergency fund (more if you have dependents), experts say. But the reality is that most of us don’t have even close to that

TW IN BRIEF

PRESIDENT OBAMA SEEKS TO CLOSE GUANTANAMO BAY: President Barack Obama made a final attempt today to persuade Congress to close the United States military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Mr. Obama faces strong opposition from lawmakers who do not want detainees transferred to the United States. U.S. law bars transfers to the U.S., but the Pentagon-authored plan includes 13 potential sites on American soil where 30 to 60 detainees would be held in maximum-security prisons. Mr. Obama is considering taking unilateral executive action to close the facility if Congress does not vote to allow transfers to the U.S.

Eight Canadians wounded in school stabbing: Eight Canadians were injured February 23 after a female student at a high school went on a stabbing rampage. The attack occurred at Dunbarton High School east of Toronto. The victims included two staff members who were eventually able to neutralize the perpetrator. Four of the victims were hospitalized for their injuries. The day before the attack, the perpetrator announced on social media that she planned to “hurt and kill as many people” as possible. The school attack was Canada’s second in a month, with the previous one leaving four people dead.

Johnson backs Brexit: A June 23 date has finally been set for the momentous “in or out” British vote on whether to abandon the 28-nation European Union. British Prime Minister David Cameron warned Monday that a vote to leave the EU would be a “final decision” with unknown consequences, as uncertainty

over Britain’s future in the bloc sent the pound plunging on currency markets. “This is no time to divide the West,” Cameron told Parliament on Monday. Cameron told lawmakers in the House of Commons that the “challenges facing the West are genuinely threatening,” arguing that remaining in the EU better positioned the United Kingdom to defend itself. The “out” campaign received a major boost over the weekend. Justice Secretary Michael Gove on February 20 became the most prominent Cabinet figure to declare that he wanted Britain out of the EU. Then, on February 21, London Mayor Boris Johnson said he would also campaign to leave. Until now, the “out” campaign has suffered from a serious dearth of high-profile leaders.

China buying Chicago Stock Exchange: Forty-five members of Congress sent a letter to the U.S. Treasury Department on Tuesday demanding a full and rigorous investigation into the pending sale of the Chicago Stock Exchange to a Chinese-owned company. The lawmakers want the deal blocked if links are found to the Chinese government or Chinese military. Analysts say a link is highly likely. The letter also raised concerns over charges of computer hacking by the Chinese government. Another concern is over the kind of insider financial data that could be collected about U.S. corporations by the Chinese government. The Chinese firm said the deal will help it develop financial markets in China and allow Chinese firms to more easily attract U.S. investment. If allowed, the deal would mark the first time a Chinese owned firm would have direct access to America’s \$22 trillion equities market place.



Our Awesome Universe Potential

Stephen Flurry,

Trumpet Daily | February 26

The more we study and learn about our universe, the stronger the evidence becomes of an absolutely remarkable truth: There is an Author of the cosmos. And He intended for us to be able to study the stars to help us come to know more about Him—and His awesome purpose for mankind!

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