

Quote of the week - “The *Lockheed-Martin F-22 jet fighter* was made by companies in 44 states; that’s 88 Senators.” - Robert Gates, a Republican scholar & university president, and long-term CIA employee who was named Defense Secretary by Bush 43 in 2006 to clean up the mess created by Donald Rumsfeld & kept in the job by President Obama (despite him being a stalwart Republican), and who remains a strong proponent of the use of “soft power” (i.e. diplomacy & foreign aid) & who once observed ‘the US Armed Forces have more musicians in military bands than the State Department has diplomats has in the Foreign Service’ - *This helps explain why lawmakers are always willing to open the taxpayers’ purse strings for the military.*

Quote of the week No. 2 - “Mainstream journalists who were covering this race (*the 2016 Presidential election*) ... really didn’t understand the anger, and ... how many people held that anger, toward the status quo - how widespread it was in the country. And it comes after we missed Brexit. It shows that the global media is having trouble keeping up with changes in the world.” - NYT media columnist Jim Ruterberg the day after the Trump win - *This is a modern day phenomenon : ‘experts’ spend most of their time talking to other ‘experts’ & ‘taking in each others’ washing’, rather than going through the hard work of, & the wearing out of shoe leather, ascertaining what is really happening at the grass roots.*

Criminalization of North American banking - The 2008 financial crisis was brought on by those at a few too-big-to-fail banks in the US self-servingly jettisoning their historic fiduciary responsibility to their clients in pursuit of the allmighty dollar (that they were allowed to get away by paying hundreds of billions of dollars of shareholder/taxpayer money in fines, rather than having to serve time in the ‘Big House’). Then came the Wells Fargo scandal when it was revealed that front line employees had been pressured by their superiors to open up millions of fake accounts & do other things that were not in the banks’ clients’ best interests. And now it is Canada’s turn; for after a CBC program reported the high pressure sales environment in the Toronto-Dominion Bank’s retail branch system, it was flooded with calls from ex-employees of all of Canada’s “Big Five” banks regaling it with stories of having been told by their superiors to lie & do what else necessary in ‘upselling’ customers on products they didn’t need or want, or that were even inappropriate for them, but that were good for the bank’s bottom line - *this is not news to those with any familiarity with how 21st century banking works in Canada, who will have heard stories that newcomers to their wealth management operations are explicitly told on Day One that “your priority is to make money for the bank, not for your clients.” - It is interesting in this context that last February 3rd President Trump signed an Executive Order instructing the Department of Labor to delay bringing in the Dodd-Frank “fiduciary rule” requiring financial advisers to act in their clients’ (rather than their own) best interests, while in Canada the industry has steadfastly maintained there is “no need” for such a rule here since the regulators have the situation ‘well in hand’.*

Dutch election - The media has gone gaga over Geert Wilders’ rabidly anti-immigrant PVV party having gained five seats to a total of 20 (in the 150-seat Lower House) & now being second in seat count only to Prime Minister Mark Rutte’s VVD Party’s 33. But in reality this is still down from its 24 seats before the 2012 election, from the 28 it would have been entitled to under a December 22nd poll (that would have made it the largest party since the VVD would have mustered only 27¹, that two other parties each will have 19 seats, both of them after having

¹ The VVD’s relatively strong finish was likely due, in part at least, to Rutte’s handling of the Erdogan attacks in, among others, the following exchange of views between him & Wilders on TV two days before the election : **Wilders** “We must directly expel the Turkish Ambassador and the rest of his staff from the country, otherwise we accept that we are being insulted”, to which Rutte responded “That’s the difference between Tweeting from your couch and governing the country. If you govern the country, you have to make sensible decisions, and that is not sensible.”

made bigger gains (6 & 7 seats respectively) & that a third party, Groen-Links (Green-Left) almost tripled its seat tally from 4 to 14 and, last but not least, that all the other major parties had pledged during the campaign not to join any coalition that included the PVV . Be that as it may, Prime Minister Rutte faces challenges; for not only did his own party seat count decline from 41 to 33, but his pre-election PVDA coalition partner (the post WW II socialist party) got its head handed to it, losing 29 of its 38 seats; so any new coalition will need to have at least three other parties in it to be viable - *and this election ought to be an eye opener for those misguided souls in Canada who are pushing for a shift from our traditional 'first-past-the-post' -, to a PR (Proportional Representation)-, system; for if in a small, compact country like Holland PR can result in 26 parties being on the ballot & half of them getting seats, in a country like Canada, spread over five time zones, 'the sky would be the limit' in its party count.*

US Foreign aid put in perspective - A 1970 UN General Assembly resolution called on the rich nations to earmark 0.7% of their GNIs (Gross National Incomes)² to ODA (Official Development Assistance) to poor countries, a target since incorporated in the 2005 UN Millennium Development Goals Project. While polls show that the US popular perception is that Washington spends 25% of its Budget on foreign aid, in reality in FY 2014 it did so spent 1.2% thereof (roughly equivalent to 0.24% of US GDP); moreover, one quarter of US “foreign aid” consists of “loans & credits for military purposes” that tend to be of greater economic benefit to the ‘US military-industrial complex’ & to US workers than to the recipient countries. Furthermore, US\$3+BN (30%) of the US military “aid” budget goes to Israel [that, according to the IMF, with a 2016 per capita GDP of US\$36,557 was in 26th place in the global GDP per capita ‘league table’, sandwiched between Japan (US\$37,304) & Italy (US\$30,294)³], *i.e. it is anything but a ‘poor’ country in need of-, or deserving, foreign aid.* Last but not least, according to USAID (United States Agency for International Development) in 2015 Net ODA (i.e. ex. loans & credits for military purposes) for the top 10 OECD nations was US - US\$30.675BN, Germany - US\$21.044BN, Britain - US\$19.754BN, France - US\$10.698BN, Japan - US\$10.287, Sweden - US\$8.523, Netherlands - US\$6,829, Norway - US\$5.528, Canada - US\$35.524BN & Italy - US\$4.766. But this ranking changes when population sizes are taken into account, for the per capita ranking is as follows : Norway - US\$1,105, Sweden - US\$852, Netherlands - US\$401, Britain - US\$313, France - US\$164, Canada - US\$137, Germany - US\$128, US - \$92, Japan - \$81 & Italy - US\$79. And perhaps a still more meaningful way to rate individual countries’ foreign aid effort is by their 2015 per capita foreign aid-, to GDP-, ratios : Norway - 2.54%, Sweden - 1.70%, Netherlands - 0.92%, UK - 0.71%, France - 0.43%, Canada - 0.32%, Germany - 0.31%, Italy - 0.26%, Japan - 0.25% & US 0.16%⁴.

Indian local elections - In recent weeks, elections were held in five of its 29 states (Goa, Manipur, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh & Uttarakhand). After the votes were counted on March 11th, Prime Minister Modi’s BJP Party had “sailed to a comfortable majority” in Uttar Pradesh (India’s

² A first cousin of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) concept, with the main difference between the two being that the GNI supposed to more closely tracks money flows between countries.

³ And therefore hardly qualifies as a poor nation in need of ODA; in fact, the US’ military aid to Israel funds 3+% of the Israeli government’s budget and indirectly gives it the spending room to fund the building of more settlements-, & subsidize the lifestyle of the settlers-, in the West Bank.

⁴ So, while Trump may grumble about US NATO partners’ not carrying their fair share of NATO’s ‘hard power’ budget, they would be equally justified in faulting Washington for failing to pull its weight in the ‘soft power foreign aid field that’s equally important for global-, & US-, security.

most populous state with a population of 204MM) where it had faced three regional parties, & in head-to head contests with the Congress Party had also won handily in Uttarakhand (10MM), run second in Manipur (27MM) & Goa (2MM), and lost in Punjab (30MM). Since then, however, it has formed the government in all but Punjab, further fueling unrest in the Congress Party with the leadership of Rahul Gandhi, the more so since these elections had been marketed as a vote of confidence, or lack thereof, in the government in the wake of the Prime Minister's surprise announcement last November that his government was withdrawing all existing 500 & 1,100 rupee bank notes from circulation, which, since they accounted for 86% of all currency in circulation in what is a largely cash economy, had caused such short-term economic chaos that it was expected to hurt the BJP at the polls.

Turkey Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 'hissy fit' - He is playing one of the oldest ploys in the political 'play book' : when in trouble at home, divert the locals' attention by creating an external enemy. He must be afeared of losing the April 16th referendum to move Turkey from a 'parliamentary'-, to an "executive presidency", system in which he would be the absolute ruler, if he is sending out his minions to proselytize his cause⁵ with Turks in the diaspora⁶ (*NOTE : his party failed to get a majority in the June 2015 election & needed another one, five months later, to stay in power - While the media have been mesmerized by the ultra right, Islamophobic Geert Wilders, it has all but ignored the fact the Mayor of Rotterdam, the city where most Turkish anti-government agitation took place, is a Morocco-born Muslim, Ahmed Aboutaleb, who in the aftermath of the Charley Hebdo shooting in Paris in January 2015 noted "If you don't like it here because the humorists who make a newspaper ... get lost!", a month later told CNN "Europe has no place for extremists who are not willing to live within the bounds of its norms" & once observed "I spent my youth in Morocco on one meal a day ... without shoes ... and came to Holland without a coat to protect myself ... I don't accept that poverty leads to terrorism."*

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Thursday March 16th, 2017

TRUMP INVITES PRESIDENT ABBAS TO WHITE HOUSE (Jerusalem Post)

- In early February the PA (Palestine Authority) General Intelligence Chief, Majid Faraj⁷ met with US National Security officials in Washington. One week later, the day before

⁵ Prime Minister Mark Rutte must have further infuriated Erdogan in the subsequent tit for tat exchange of views when he responded to his statement that Turkish nationals in Holland should vote "in Turkey's interest" by saying he expected them to vote "in the interest of the Netherlands".

⁶ While this contravened a Turkish law forbidding political campaigning abroad the two ministers involved sought to get around that by claiming they were going to attend Turkish 'cultural events'.

⁷ One of two leading potential successors to Abbas (the other being the PA's Chief Negotiator Saeb Erkatt) & usually loath to deal with the media, he created controversy at home when on Jan 16th in a 3000 word interview with Barbara Opall-Rome of the New York-based Defense News website entitled Keeping ISIS out of Palestine he was quoted as claiming his group had prevented 200 attacks on Israelis & in doing so had arrested 100 (*young?*) Palestinians, for which he was criticized by, among others, Hamas & Islamic Jihad (with the former going as far as pushing to have him tried on "grand treason" charges, and also by some Fatah leaders, although Ahmed Yousef, a political adviser to former Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh (*who recently was 'bumped upstairs to become Hamas' Leader based in Lebanon*), coming to his defense by saying he had done so to 'demonstrate that the PA was carrying out its obligations under the Oslo Accord while Israel wasn't', with Abbas also coming to his support and the Palestinian doctors' praising him for "saving the lives of 200 *young* Palestinians".

Netanyahu visited Washington, CIA Director Mike Pompeo & Abbas met in Ramallah. And *three weeks later*, on March 10th, one week before Jason Greenblatt, Trump's advisor for international negotiations, was to visit the Middle East⁸, President Trump during a 10 minute "cordial" phone call invited Abbas to "soon" visit him at the White House, stressing his commitment to a process that would lead to "real peace between the Palestinians and Israelis", after which Nabil Abu Rudeinah, Abbas' spokesman in a WAFA (*PA's News Agency*) press release noted Abbas had *also* always stressed his firm belief in "peace as a strategic choice to establish a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel" (carefully avoiding any reference to a 'two-state solution' after, at his joint press conference with Netanyahu, Trump had cast doubt on the US' historic commitment to it when he said "I'm looking at two state and one state , and I like the one both parties like ... I can live with either one").

This seems to confirm Trump sees an Israeli-Palestinian deal as potentially "the deal of the century", & a potential feather in his legacy 'cap'. But in trying to orchestrate it he may find himself between a rock & a hard place, between the PA's insistence, with much global support, on a purely Arab state with sovereign powers & the 1967 borders, and the Israeli government's belief that there is a much better deal to be had.

JEFF SESSIONS ASKS 46 OBAMA-APPOINTED US DISTRICT ATTORNEYS TO RESIGN (LAT, Del Quentin Wilber)

- On March 10th, in order "to ensure a uniform transition", the Attorney-General asked them to resign (there are a total of 93 of them, one per district, with Guam & the Marianas sharing one, & the other 47 had already resigned out of their own volition). While the same procedure had been followed, in the face of conservative opposition, in 1993 when Bill Clinton became President, in the Clinton-to-Bush 43-, & Bush 43-to-Obama-, transitions their departures had been staggered over a period of months.

One of them, 48 year-old Preet Bhahara, the incumbent in the Southern District of New York, wouldn't resign & in his words "was fired" (allegedly by phone by a secretary on Trump's staff⁹).

ZEAL TO REPEAL OBAMACARE REFLECTS A NEW POLITICAL REALITY (G&M, David Shribman)

⁸ While he is slated to visit Jerusalem for discuss settlement construction, it is unclear if he will meet with PA officials in Ramallah.

⁹ A sikh-Hindu hybrid, he was born in India & as a two year-old, came with his parents to the US in 1970. He graduated from Harvard 'summa cum laude', & from Columbia Law in 1993. He became quickly known as a "crusader prosecutor" for declaring war on public corruption & Wall Street crime. He prosecuted Sheldon Silver, the (Democratic) Speaker of the New York State Assembly, & Dean Skelos, the (Republican) Majority Leader in the Ste Senate (both of whom are currently c'cooling their heels in jail), and even started an investigation of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo. He prosecuted nearly 100 Wall Streeters for insider trading and, in "historic settlements", extracted hundreds of billions of dollars in fines from banks, incl. the country's largest four, for their malfeasances during the years leading up to the US 2008 financial crisis, and successfully prosecuted members of the Gambino & Colombo-, and Asian-, gangs in New York City, at one point having 85 convictions in a row. In 2013 he was refused admission to Russia when he wanted to travel there in the context of his investigation of financial crimes that might have been committed in New York City by Russian-, and other foreign- banks & individuals. All in all, regardless of tradition, he sound like a fish worth keeping, rather than tossing back in the pond (unless, of course, he had caught some Trump crony in his net.

- The rush to kill Obamacare & the debate over the future of US healthcare reflect the changed circumstances in Washington in the wake of a formidable set of events : the emergence (*or, rather, the 'sudden move into a position of greater influence' ?*) of a hard right faction of Tea Party GOP lawmakers, the astonishing triumph of Trump in November, the ascendancy of (*older?*) working class voters as the coveted prize of US politics & the engine of Trump's political coalition, the eclipse of the GOP establishment, & the emerging style of the Trump administration. The haste to ram the Obamacare repeal through the House Energy & Commerce-, and Ways & Means-, committees that are known for their fondness for comprehensive hearings & deliberations, has swept away the formalities that for decades have governed Capitol Hill & constitutes a major departure from a long-held tradition in US political life (that actually was first broken by the Democrats during the Obama years). For until Obamacare every major expansion of social policy since the 1930's, incl. the creation of Medicare in 1965¹⁰, always had bipartisan support, making them American-, rather than partisan-, achievements. By contrast not a single Republican voted for Obamacare & not a single Democrat in either house will vote to end it; in other words, the nearly one century-old bipartisan consensus on social policy has gone by the boards.

The "scribes" may be making too much of this; Trump's success in the 2016 election may prove to have been the beginning of the end, rather than end of the beginning, of the Trump phenomenon, if he proves to be a 'giant with feet of clay' (Daniel 2 : 31-33).

WHAT STEVE BANNON AND AL-QAEDA HAVE IN COMMON (New Statesman, Milo Comerford)

- A recent headline in al-Qaeda's Arab Peninsula newspaper al-Masra read Steve Bannon, White House Chief Strategist : "Our war is with Islam as a religion. It is necessary to fight against it and against Muslim communities in Europe". So he needs the jihadis as much as they need him; for his pre-occupation with the inevitability of an "existential war" with those seeking to establish an Islamist state in the US is the mirror image of theirs with a Zionist-Crusader-Iranian alliance seeking to destroy *Sunni* Islam.

But 'hard power' has its limitations in a 'war for the hearts & minds'; thus one observer recently noted "ISIS fears nothing more than an educated woman"; all the current, undue focus on hard power on both sides is really an extreme case of 'alpha male pecker-stretching'.

WHO WILL DOMINATE IRAQ AND SYRIA AFTER ISIS (JP, Jonathan Spyer)

- ISIS will soon cease to exist as a territory-based entity; having lost tens of thousands of fighters & inflows of new recruits, it cannot reverse the trend. And in Western Syria the rebellion is in retreat & its eclipse appears near as the regime and its Iranian, Russian & Hezbollah allies are reducing the rebel enclaves. So total victory by an Iran-led Shiite alliance in both Iraq & Syria appears more & more likely, forcing Israel & the US to start thinking about ways to prevent this or, at the very least, reduce its impact.
- But, while the pro-Iranian, 100,000-strong Iraqi PMU (Popular Mobilization Units) Shiite militias will become a permanent part of Iraq's security forces, *further region-wide*

¹⁰ That became law with support of 70 Republicans in the House, as well as *an outright majority* 237 Democrats and of 13 Republicans, as well as 57 Democrats in the Senate.

progress by the Iranian side is possible only with Russian air power, & Moscow has more limited objectives than Tehran (whereas the latter wants to reunify Syria under Assad & have the Shiite militias control Iraq *thereby solidifying its sphere of influence more securely as far West as the Israeli border*, Moscow just wants Assad to stay in power, secure its naval base on Syria's Mediterranean coast & become **the** regional power broker (*in competition with Iran?*) Widening the resultant gap between them should be the priority for American & Israeli policy-makers who must make Russia understand that achieving their agenda in Syria without threatening Russian interests will be at risk if Iran is allowed to achieve its ambitious agenda. The key force now fighting ISIS in Syria is the US-aligned SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), a *motley*, multi-ethnic & multi-religion alliance of Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Turkmen, Circassians & Chechens¹¹ supported by elements of the US' 75th Ranger Regiment & 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit; for ownership by the US & its allies of Eastern Syria in the post-ISIS period will be the best way to stop Iran's objective while presenting Russia with a *fait accompli*.

The end of ISIS as a quasi state will, in & by itself, solve little & may well create more domestic security problems for the US if ISIS were to "go the mattresses" & start using its considerable social media skills to carry the fight to its US arch enemy's home grounds. And on the ground in Syria & Iraq, the dozen or so groups that have been sort of united in fighting ISIS each have their own-, & typically conflicting-, agendas and, once the ISIS problem has been 'solved' they're likely to start fighting among themselves over the spoils (as happened in Libya, except that in Syria & Iraq the scope for a truly catastrophic debacle is far greater - the author is a fellow at the Philadelphia, PA-based Middle East Forum, a 'think tank' founded in 1990 by the aggressively pro-Israel Daniel Pipes to "combat lawful Islamism and protect the freedom of speech of anti-Muslim authors" (to the point where its Legal Project to support those being prosecuted for their anti-Islam views backed Holland's Geert Wilders in 2009 when he faced a criminal indictment for his anti-Islam views..

WHAT KING SALMAN SEEKS IN ASIA (al-Jazeera, Ankit Panda)

- In late February Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud set out, along with 1,500 companions, a couple of dozen planes, two 'stretch' Mercedes Benzes & 500 tons of luggage, on a month-long foreign tour with stops in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, the Maldives Islands, China & Japan and, on the way back home, Jordan. Its purpose is two-fold. In China & Japan he is looking for financial support in the form of direct investment for the ambitious plan of his favorite son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to diversify the Saudi economy away from its utter dependence on oil, to touch base with two important customers for Saudi oil & to try & weaken their relationship with his Kingdom's arch enemy, Iran (*something Beijing will be loath to do*). And in the Muslim nations he is seeking to muster support for another of his son's projects, one to promote Muslim countries' cooperation in fighting jihadism (*which is ironic since it has long floated on a sea of private Saudi 'Wahabbi' funding*)¹².

¹¹ None of whom are Shiite Muslims.

¹² The somewhat surprising inclusion of the Maldives, a 295 sq. km/115 sq. mi. 350,000 inhabitant nation Southwest of the Southern tip of the Indian sub-continent where Islam is the state religion & non-Muslims cannot be citizens, that has questionable distinction of having produced, albeit on a per capita basis, more ISIS fighters than any other nation.

At the time of writing the lion's share of his travel was behind him : he had 'done' Malaysia, Indonesia & Brunei & taken an eight-day breather on Bali, before making his way to Japan on March 10th & to Beijing on the 15th, before heading home via the Maldives & Jordan. And to many it is a sign of the times, & of a changing global balance of power, that he went to Asia, rather than to the Atlantic region (as he would have been have done one or two decades ago).

TRUMP MEETS SAUDI PRINCE AS THE UNITED STATES AND KINGDOM SEEK WARMER RELATIONS (NYT, Julie Hirschfeld)

- On March 14th he met with Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the White House. The prince was in Washington to try & improve relations between the two countries (*that had first suffered when the Kingdom lost confidence in the Obama Administration during the 'Arab Spring', got worse when it began to fuss over human rights, & finally really 'went South' after the nuclear deal with Iran*). Originally planned as a brief 'meet & greet' event¹³, it turned into a formal lunch attended on the US side by VP Pence, National Security Adviser Gen. McMaster, Chief of Staff Priebus, Chief White House Strategist Bannon & son-in-law Jared Kushner¹⁴ (the Prince is expected to meet with Defense Secretary Gen. Mattis later in the week). They talked about the war in Yemen where a Saudi-led coalition of mostly Sunni Arab nations (that the Deputy Crown Prince as Defense Minister is in charge of) has been fighting Iran-aligned Houthi rebels while the President sought Saudi support for the Washington idea of establishing "safe zones" for the locals in Syria (that is deemed preferable over having to cope with hundreds of thousands of refugees¹⁵). According to Simon Henderson, the Director of the Gulf and Energy Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the President & his closest aides "see Saudi Arabia as a crucial part of the Middle East and as an important country to have a positive relationship with ... This is at odds with the Obama Administration, so they want that clear distinction", & to Bruce Riedel, a Senior Fellow at Brookings, "Trump ... made it clear ... he is not worried about supporting human rights ... that Sisi is going to be his best friend in Egypt ... *and* that all those difficult questions about gender equality and the like are going to be off the table for the next four years."

Subsequent to the lunch a White House Press release noted that "the President had expressed his strong desire to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" while Prince Mohammed was quoted as saying that the President is "a true friend of Muslims who doesn't target Islam"¹⁶ and has a "great understanding of the importance

¹³ Because he had set Tuesday lunch aside for Chancellor Merkel who, however, postponed her visit until later in the week because of the Snow storm Stella's impact on aircraft traffic in the Northeastern US; obviously the Prince is made of sterner stuff for he managed to be on a plane that landed in Washington during the late afternoon/early evening hours on March 13th.

¹⁴ Whole Trump has tasked with responsibility for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process (there has been rumours that foner ExxonMobil CEO & now Secretary of Dstate Rex Tillerson (who is currently in the Far East is more than a little miffed by the fact that Kushner, and not he, appears to have become the President's prime adviser on foreign policy matters.

¹⁵ There seem to be two possible problems with this, one endo-, & the other exo-, genous : they may be difficult-, if not impossible-, to fund if Trump insists on stripping the foreign aid budget, & it would not fit with Putin's agenda of restoring Assad to full control over all of Syria.

¹⁶ Which is utter rubbish, given that a couple days later two US District Judges, one in Hawaii & the other in Maryland, voided his revised travel ban on people from six predominantly Muslim countries on the

of (good) relations between their two countries ... and a clear sight of the problems in the region.” - The 31 year-old Prince Mohammed is the 81 year-old King Salman’s favorite of his 12 sons. And since long before he became King in January 2015, his father had been carefully grooming him for high office. So now he is not only the Deputy Crown Prince (to the King’s nephew, 58 year-old Prince Muhammad bin Nayef), but also Defense Minister, the youngest in the world &, as such, responsible for the conduct of the Yemen War, Chairman of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs, and as such behind the visionary ‘Vision 2030’ NTP (National Transformation Plan) that aims at diversifying the Saudi economy from its excessive dependence on oil, and in his spare time Chair of Aramco’s 10-member “Supreme Council where he supposedly has been the driving force behind the idea of having the company come to market with an IPO [& was instrumental in having the 20-year veteran Oil Minister, Ali al-Naimi replaced with (a more amenable?) Khalid al-Talih?]. So it’s not surprising that, despite his tender age, he is increasingly, & not always approvingly, deemed “the power behind the throne”.

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GLAXONSMITHKLINE TO PAY FIRST FEMALE CHIEF EXECUTIVE LESS THAN PREDECESSOR (BB, Marthe Fourcade)

- Emma Walmsley, age 47¹⁷, after only six years with this 100,000 employee company, was selected by a firm of headhunters to become its first-ever female CEO. But her annual base salary will only be £1MM, down from her predecessor’s £1.15MM, and her targeted bonus won’t exceed her salary while that of her predecessor could go as high as 125% thereof.

This is a non-issue for anyone but a zealot. For a decade earlier her predecessor too had a lower starting salary than his predecessor (and for the same reason, ‘less experience’) & executive pay has been in the public spotlight in Britain

Nice payday? - Emmanuel Momoh is a church minister in Eastern Sierra Leone’s Kono diamond mining district, who supplements his meagre stipend by engaging in ‘artisanal’ (*i.e. small scale, pick & shovel*) diamond mining. Earlier this week he struck it rich when he dug up a 709-karat rough diamond, supposedly the 13th largest ever found anywhere. After doing so, he ‘turned it over’ to the authorities & was praised for doing so (rather than “smuggling it out of the country”) by none other than Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma who also announced it would be “auctioned off in a transparent manner”, with Mr. Momoh getting a reward – *not long ago, a somewhat bigger (800+ karat) stone brought 51MM pound sterling at auction in London..*

WOW! - One hundred and fifty years ago this spring, the then 52 year-old Prime Minister of Canada, John A. Macdonald, was in London to finalize the negotiations for Canada’s independence. But in his ‘off-hours’, he found time to court & marry Susan Agnes Bernard (whom he had pursued when she lived in Canada in the face of her brothers’ opposition because of his boozy reputation & because Ottawa was not a “fit place to live”, subsequently to which he married his cousin Isabella, who had died a decade earlier). In 1886, she made history

grounds of “significant and un rebutted evidence of religious acumen” as evidenced in then candidate Trump’s December 2015 statement that had called for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States.”

¹⁷ A daughter of a Royal Navy Vice-Admiral, a graduate in Classics & Modern Languages from Christ Church College, Oxford, and a mother of four (three sons & one daughter)

when, during a transcontinental train trip with her husband from Ottawa to Vancouver, she decided on a whim to forego traveling for the last 600 miles with her husband in the Royal Coach for the locomotive's 'cow catcher' (a platform attached to its front to push objects, often wildlife, off the tracks to reduce the risk of derailing the train), first uphill to the height of land & then down often scarily steep slopes to the ocean front - *Imagine doing that, especially so in front of a coal smoke & ash-spewing steam locomotive & in the voluminous apparel of 50 year-old ladies of the day!*