

GLEANINGS II - 719
Thursday July 20th, 2017

All the President's dirty tricks - This is the heading of an article in The Atlantic by John Dickerson dated July 17th, 2017. It is worth reading, not so much because it notes "A month after Trump Jr's meeting, when CNN's Jake Tapper asked him if anyone in the Trump team had been in contact with the Russians, as the Clinton campaign had suggested, he reacted with outrage, saying "It's disgusting ... It's so phony" but because it lists occasions in the past when Presidential candidates (*incl. the politically nefarious LBJ*) chose to forego using 'dirt' they had on their opponents.

The August 21st Great American Total Solar Eclipse - On that day the moon will pass between the sun & Earth and cast a shadow on Earth that for a few minutes will totally block out the sun over a 90 mile-wide swath across the continental US from Oregon to South Carolina - *the best we can hope for in Canada is for only a partial (0.7) eclipse.*

NAFTA renegotiation - Wanting to start the process in mid-August (*to give voters the impression of progress on one of Trump's campaign promises?*) & by law required to inform Congress 30 days in advance of all trade negotiation objectives, the Administration made them public this week. With the overall objective being to cut the total US\$502BN US trade deficit¹, they fall into five broad categories : better access for agricultural products (*incl. dairy², grain & wine*), freer trade in communication services & online purchases (*get Canada to hike its tax-free limit on online purchases from \$20 to \$800*), new limits on "currency manipulation" (*whatever that means*), overhauling the dispute settlement system (*from which Canada benefitted in the softwood lumber dispute but the US on other occasions*) & freer US access to Canadian & Mexican government procurements (*while keeping the US' 'Buy American' rules in place for US junior governments!*) - *I have been biased on this issue from Day One. First since Brian Mulroney initially gave a mandate to former Deputy Finance Minister Simon Reisman, one of the most-hard-nosed sobs ever in Canada's public service & the father of the 'Auto Pact' precursor of the FTA (Free Trade Agreement), to investigate if there was a possible free trade agreement structure with the US that would be good for Canada, only to have him dump it back in his lap since he said there wasn't; Mulroney then gave the mandate to the then Finance Minister Mike Wilson (whom I had also worked with in the Department of Finance & knew to be a 'wuss'), who succeeded in a matter of weeks by the simple strategy of always giving in to the Americans on whatever they wanted. And secondly, because it never seem to make sense to get further in bed with a 250MM people economy in the same time zone and having the same language & a not dissimilar legal system, that was growing at 3% per annum & accounted for just 31% of global GDP (down from 45%% in 1945) that was already taking 80+% of our exports & it might*

¹ In which case Trump may be 'barking up the wrong tree since total US trade with Canada & Mexico was US\$545BN & US\$525BN respectively and its trade deficits with them were US\$11BB & US\$63BN respectively with the corresponding numbers being US\$579BN & US\$347BN, US\$196BN & US\$69BN, and US\$164BN & US\$65BN, with China, Japan & Germany respectively..

² This would be the deathknell for Canada's "supply management system (which I would welcome since it needlessly adds to the cost of Canadian dairy products (for the cost of "quota", i.e. the right to produce milk - in Alberta \$30,000+ per cow -is now a Canadian dairy farmer's expense item, more than the cow itself and the land & facilities needed to feed-, & house-, it). But it would also raise an interesting quality question; for in the US **bovine somatotropin**, a hormone that boosts a cow's milk production, is both legal & commonly used, whereas in Canada, as well as in Argentina, Australia, the EU, Israel, Japan, New Zealand it has been banned for well over a decade.

be more cost-effective to focus on gaining more trade access to the world's other markets that had 20x more people, were located in different time zones, spoke different languages & had different legal systems, if any, were growing at a rate twice that of the US, and had a thirst for North American goods & technology, especially if it didn't arrive with the "Ugly American"³ in tow, and where Canada still had potentially valuable Commonwealth links..

Obamacare repeal now dead as a doornail? - The House version finally passed, despite misgivings by some GOP members, while the two Senate versions of Majority leader Mitch McConnell (R.-KY) have fallen by the wayside, first when four GOP Senators wouldn't buy into Plan A & then when three Senators (Maine's Susan Collins, West Virginia's Shelley Moore Capito & Alaska's Lisa Murkowski) wouldn't support Plan B (to repeal Obamacare in the expectation (*hope?*) that healthcare reform could be recovered from its ashes in time for the 2020 Presidential election. And while the latter three Senators' detractors said they had been piqued by there not being any women on the 13-member McConnell working group that developed Plan B, Sen. Capito issued a statement saying "I didn't come to Washington to hurt people ... I cannot vote to repeal Obamacare without a replacement plan that addresses my concerns and the needs of West Virginians."- *Two main hurdles to passage are the difficulty, if not impossibility, of reducing premiums (since US healthcare is expensive⁴ & the population aging), and the fact the far right insists on Medicaid being trashed. And a recent poll of registered voters found that only 30% support repealing Obamacare & starting all over again from scratch, while 58% want to keep the parts that work & have the rest fixed, and that 53% said they would be less likely to vote for their member(s) of Congress if he/she voted to repeal Obamacare.*

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HISPANIC RETAIL SALES STUMBLE AS IMMIGRANTS STAY HOME AND HOARD **(NBCNews, Ben Popken)**

- On July 18th Brian Cornell, CEO of Target told the Fortune Brainstorm Tech event in Aspen, Colorado that "They are staying at home. They are going out less often. Particularly around the border towns in the United States, you're seeing a change in behavior". And he quoted data from the Port Washington, NY-based market research firm NPD Group that YTD purchases at certain retailers had fallen 8%, most acutely so in apparel & accessories, with a dramatic "high teens" drop in sneaker sales (a market segment where in 2016 Hispanics had accounted for 23% of sales & most of the sales growth). Hispanics in 2015 accounted for US\$1.3TR in retail sales⁵, that will grow, according to Nielsen, to US\$1.7TR by 2020.
- Due to Trump's immigration crackdown Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrests are up 40% since he signed EOs to tighten border security & punish sanctuary cities and, while half the Hispanic population is documented, they all know, or are related to, people who aren't : according to Linda Lane Gonzalez, Chairman of the Association of

³ The title of a best-selling 1958 novel that was very critical of Americans' behaviour overseas.

⁴ While the cost of a knee transpalnt in New York City is in the US\$70,000 range, a few hundred miles to the North In Montreal, Canada a private medical clinic offers the same procedure for just C\$18,000 (i.e. US\$14,500).

⁵ I.e. 26.7% of total retail sales.

Hispanic Advertising Agencies “They may be holding back on spending to put something aside in case someone they know ... is in need.” (She also noted that “there has been a decline in Hispanic spending on financial services.”)

Since consumer spending at last report accounted for 68.96% of GDP (up from 58.22% fifty years ago), this may have a slightly dampening effect on US GDP growth & thus make it just a little more likely that Trump’s campaign promise to ramp it up to 3%, or more will not be realized.

REPUBLICANS LAMENT AN AGENDA ‘IN QUICKSAND’ (Politico, Burgees Everett)

- Since “We haven’t started the debt ceiling⁶ ... have to fund the government ... have to do the budget”, Sen. David Perdue (R.-GA) last week persuaded Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R.-KY) to scrap the least two weeks of the August recess. The GOP Obamacare project has now almost completely collapsed & it has made little progress on its priorities. The long-delayed budget is on the rocks in the House because of internal divisions that *also* threaten to derail tax reform & the House leaders have scaled back a big spending plan (*to pump-prime the economy & curry favor with GOP supporters*), infuriating the rank & file who wanted something positive to take home to their supporters. Meanwhile Trump is getting angry, berating the GOP senators for failing to repeal Obamacare and demanding they stay in session until they do so, while some lawmakers are starting to blame him for his handling of the Russian probe⁷, his Tweet feuds & his attacks on the media. According to Rep. Mike Simpson (R.-ID) “I don’t even pay attention what is taking place in the administration, because I don’t care *any more*. They’re a distraction. The family is a distraction, the president is a distraction ... At first it was ‘Well yeah, this is the guy we elected. He’ll learn, he’ll learn! ‘And you just don’t see it happening.” Six months into the Trump presidency Republican control of government is a picture of complete disunity, with Orrin Hatch (R.-UT), the most senior GOP Senator, observing “We’ve got many rebellions in the party right now ... which is not unusual.”

Meanwhile, Trump created more “distraction” when he said on July 19th he would never have chosen Jeff Sessions, then the Junior Senator from Alabama & one of his earliest supporters, to be his Attorney-General, if he had know he would recuse himself from the Russian investigation, a move he described as “very unfair to the President.” (the reaction to which of one nameless Republican Senator was that “the President doesn’t understand that the Attorney-General is not his personal lawyer, but a servant of the American people”) - Trump seems to be wholly unable, or worse still unwilling, to understand the role of the President in the US system. .

GOP LAWMAKER RAISES ‘SERIOUS QUESTIONS’ ABOUT KUSHNER FAMILY CONFLICTS (CNMoney, Jill Disis)

- On May 18th Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC) wrote the Office of Government Ethics as to whether the pitch by the Kushner family business to Chinese investors the month before had violated ethics rules. This was prompted by Jared’s sister, Nicole Kushner Meyer,

⁶ That needs to be raised by the end of September at the very latest to avoid a federal default.

⁷ The more he fights, demeans & threatens it, the more suspicions he engenders among the Joe & Jill Average Americans that he has something to hide that he doesn’t want to become public.

mentioning her brother's role in the *Trump* administration in a pitch in China seeking EB-5 financing⁸ for a real estate development in New Jersey [for which she later apologized, saying her comments weren't intended to "lure investors"⁹]. Later an attorney told CNNMoney that Jared had divested his interest in the project she had touted & had stepped away from the family business when he took his White House job (& would recuse himself from "particular matters concerning the EB-5 program")¹⁰.

- There has been tension between the White House & the Office over the release of ethics waivers granted, as of May 31st, to 14 Executive Office staffers, incl. four to ex-lobbyists who, contrary to Trump's campaign 'drain the swamp' undertaking, are working in their lobbying field (two of them being Kellyanne Conway & VP Pence's Chief of Staff Joshua Pitcock). In his June 20th response to Jones, Walter Schaub, the Ethics Office Director, said the ethics law doesn't prohibit family members of executive branch employees from participating in "non-governmental activities" but did concede "it would be disappointing for the family members of any government official to seek to profit from their relationships with that official and it might be expected that high level officials would take reasonable measures to discourage relatives from profiting from family ties to the government."

Schaub (age 46) is a lawyer who has, for all but two years, spent his legal career in the public service & has been in his current post since January 9th, 2013. He was outspoken in his criticism of Trump during the transition period¹¹ about his plan to move his assets into a trust managed by his sons, calling this "clearly ineffective", & got the media's attention by a series of tweets using the Office's Twitter account, one of which, mimicking the Trump style, congratulated him for his announcement he would divest himself of his business assets. On April 28th he issued a data request for the ethics waivers granted the ex-lobbyists in the Executive Branch &, when that was refused by OMB Director Mick Mulvaney, responded on May 22nd by sending Mulvaney, every federal ethics officer, all inspector-generals & the six members of Congress responsible for government oversight a ten-page memo asserting his legal authority to see those ethics waivers. On July 6th he handed in his resignation effective July 19th, saying "the rules need to be tougher" & the United States and the Trump administration "are pretty close to a laughingstock at this point."

ISRAEL'S WAR AGAINST GEORGE SOROS (NYT, Mairav Zonszein)

- As a Holocaust survivor, successful financier embracing free market capitalism & philanthropist championing liberal democracy, he ought to be the darling of the current Israeli government. But he has failed its litmus test of unconditional support for it & its policies of occupation, discrimination & disregard for human & civil rights.
- After *long* avoiding Israel-related philanthropies Soros became involved in 2008 with J Street, the moderate, *liberal*, pro-Israel *Washington-based* lobby group *that wants the*

⁸ EB-5 visas offer a '*fast train*' path to green cards for investors who put US\$500,000, or more, into a project that creates jobs in the US.

⁹ Although prospective Chinese investors have told CNNMoney that they considered the Kushner project safer than others because of the family's connections to Trump.

¹⁰ Which was entirely beside the issue.

¹¹ Prompting a Reuters headline "Official US ethics office gets snarky with Donald Trump on Twitter."

Israeli-Palestinian conflict ended diplomatically & peacefully. And he started contributing to B'Tselem (in the image of God), a Jerusalem-based non-profit that seeks to document human rights violations in the 'occupied territories', combat the official denials thereof & create a human rights culture in Israel, and the anti-occupation group Breaking the Silence, both of which have been subject to a growing delegitimization campaign by the government.

- Prime Minister Netanyahu raised the stakes in the week of July 10th when his Foreign Minister issued a statement backing the Hungarian government governing party's propaganda effort against Soros, by accusing him of "continually undermining Israel's democratically-elected government by his funding of organizations that defame the Jewish state and seek to deny its right to defend itself". This was contrary to earlier comments by Yossi Amrani, Israel's ambassador in Budapest, who had expressed dismay at Hungary's ruling party's US\$21MM billboard campaign against Soros for supporting refugees & immigration that had attracted explicit anti-Semitic graffiti and that, according to the ambassador, evoked "sad memories ...referring to the fate of Jews in the Holocaust"

I too have been accused of ant-Semitism when not agreeing with Netanyahu government policies that I believe misguided & not in Israel's best long-term interests. Israel's current political pulse can be gauged from the headline, prior to last May 2's Independence Day celebration, in the supposedly left-leaning Haaretz that "U.S. Jews (& others in the diaspora) have no place in Israel's Independence Day celebrations ... for "they are left-leaning & vote Democratic ... (do) not multiply fast enough ... (are) not sufficiently Jewish, foresee no danger to their existence ... and live in 'tranquil prosperity.'" - the author is an Israel-based independent journalist that publishes in the Guardian & other prominent media outlets¹² as well as in the NYT & the +972 Magazine¹³ who wrote an article in the Washington Post last April entitled " Why I'd rather have my (three year-old) son didn't wave the Israeli flag in the (May 2nd) Independence Day Parade" (since "the normalization of occupation has become so well rooted in Israeli society that it's impossible to distinguish it from Israel's national symbols" & indoctrination by the military starts in play schools.

THE PRINCE AND THE COUP (NYT, Ben Hubbards et. al.)

- In the evening of June 21st, three days before the end of Ramadan, when Muslims tend to be pre-occupied with religious matters, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the Crown Prince, Interior Minister & 57 year-old nephew of King Salman was summoned to meet the King. Instead, as it turned out, he was subjected to a night-long session pressuring him to resign as Crown Prince in favour of the King' s favorite son, the 31 year old Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. After long resisting this he gave in by early morning, *no doubt in part due to the fact that, since it was still Ramadan he had not*

¹² +972 Magazine a bloggers' website founded in 2011 with a 'critical of government' bias that is "rejected by the Arabs & ignored by the Jews" (only one-fifth of its readership is Jewish) and targets a US audience because its Editor-in-Chief believes that, while there is still time for a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it would take "immense pressure from abroad to make it happen."

¹³ An online outlet "rejected by Arabs and ignored by Jews (*only 20% of its regular readers are Jewish*) that targets an English speaking audience because according to Noam Sheizaf, its then Editor-in-Chief, a few years ago, "I think there's still a chance to solve things (i.e. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) ... but it's not going to happen without dramatic pressure from abroad ...Left on their own, Israelis will continue the ... current policies forever."

eaten for twenty-four hours which, being diabetic, must have been problematic for him. After that the Allegiance Council (of 17 senior princes, created by the late King Abdullah to deal with succession issues) was alerted & told bin Nayev had a drug problem & was not fit to be King, upon which it approved the change (by a vote of 13-4). This was a 'palace coup', orchestrated by none other than the ambitious then Deputy Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

Bin Nayev was in business before he became a government official two decades ago. He studied in the US without ever graduating, attended several FBI security-focused courses & befriended several Western leaders. Even before being named Crown Prince (& Interior Minister) in April 2015 [after Prince Muqrin, now age 72, the youngest of King Saud's 45 sons & hence a (half) brother to King Salman, the Crown Prince for the three months since King Abdullah's death, had been pressured to resign¹⁴], he had been major force in Saudi Arabia's anti-terrorism efforts, no doubt driven in part by the fact that in 2009 he had survived a targeted suicide bomber attack. If he had become king, he would have been the first of his generation to occupy the throne. Bin Salman is a different kettle of fish, and not just because he is a member of the generation after bin Nayef's. He has a law degree from Saudi Arabia's King Saud University. Most of his work experience has been as his father's special assistant. He hasn't had much exposure to the outside world, at least not before becoming Deputy Crown Prince (after which he has traveled extensively 'to mark his territory'). He was not just Deputy Crown Prince but also Minister of Defense (& hence responsible for the conduct of the Yemen War, which now is described as a "quackmire with no end in sight"), de facto Foreign Minister & Chairman of the Council for Economic & Development Affairs¹⁵ (as part of which he is promoting Vision 2030, a plan to diversify the Saudi economy¹⁶). The King is 81 & not in the best of health & there have been persistent, but never confirmed, rumours he has pre-dementia (these events suggest that there may well be more than an element of truth to that). And the odds of Prince bin Salman's ambitions becoming reality may be much longer than currently perceived; for his position may be weaker than generally perceived. If he were to become King, his would bypass a whole generation. The 13-4 Allegiance Council vote suggests the presence of unrest at his climbing the ladder so quickly. To his credit he has some "modern ideas, incl. on the treatment & status of women in Saudi society (which may not sit well with the clerical establishment). As noted before, the Yemen War is a running sore for him personally & for the country, and financially for the Saudi treasury. He is believed to have been the instigator behind the Qatar affair (where a high profile Saudi climb-down may now be in the making, in part because Qatar is fiscally & financially in much better shape than Saudi Arabia. The Vision 2030 initiative seems to be going nowhere in a hurry. He is the driving force behind the Aramco IPO which a) is not all that popular at home & b) may not turn out to be such a roaring success as he seems to expect. And the Saudi treasury's foreign asset 'kitty' is bleeding cash at a US\$8.5BN monthly rate¹⁷ (while the oil price recovery is not living up to earlier expectations because the production cut deal has not lived up to expectations & the rate of compliance appears to deteriorating).

¹⁴ While never in the modern history of the Kingdom a Crown Prince has ever been fired, King Salman has now done so twice in 26 months.

¹⁵ As a result of which he is sometimes *derogatorily* referred to as "Mr. Everything".

¹⁶ Just ask Alberta, which has been talking for 30 years about that, how difficult it is to put that idea into practice.

¹⁷ At the end of May it stood at US\$493 BN, for the first in six years below US\$500 (& was down one-third from US \$740BN three years ago).

SAUDI ARABIA BOOSTING EXTREMISM IN EUROPE (The Guardian, Patrick Wintour)

- Sir William Patey was the UK ambassador to Riyadh from 2006 to 2010 &, prior to that, Head of the Foreign Office's Middle East Desk. One day after the government had made public a severely abbreviated version of a Home Office-commissioned report on the funding of extremism in the UK (the report itself remains classified for security reasons), he told a roundtable discussion in London sponsored by the Conservative Middle East Council that Saudi Arabia has been (*indirectly?*) funding mosques throughout Europe that have become hotbeds of extremism (*by using the World Association of Muslim Youth & the Muslim World League, both of them based in Saudi Arabia, in Riyadh & Makkah*¹⁸ *respectively, as its funding vehicles*). As to the Qatar boycott he said that it "has all the hallmarks of a policy that has not been thought through. They thought that, with Trump behind them, Qatar would back down *quickly* & ... were surprised when it didn't and that, instead, a cult had developed around the now popular emir". And speaking at the same conference Michael Stephens, Head of the Royal United Services Institute's Qatar desk, said that the row may become an intractable dispute that could prompt foreign investors to think seriously about disinvesting in the Middle East, saying we are now five weeks into a conflict most people thought would last 72 hours.

Worse still, it may interfere with the implementation of the young Saudi Deputy Crown Prince's "ambitious but achievable" Vision 2030 blue print (to diversify the Saudi economy) ... , the first pillar of which is our status as the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds."

PAKISTAN'S SUPREME COURT STARTS HEARINGS TO DECIDE PRIME MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF'S FUTURE (Reuters, Drazen Jorgic)

- Age 67, he narrowly escaped disqualification last April when, in the wake of the Panama Papers leak of *illicit* offshore wealth, the country's Supreme Court ruled 3-2 there was insufficient evidence to remove him but ordered a Joint Investigative Team (JIT) *to look into his family's wealth*. And on Monday July 17th, after the panel had issued a scathing 254-page report alleging his family's vast wealth was well beyond his means & accused his children of signing forged documents to obscure ownership of posh London apartments, it started hearings as to whether to put him on trial for corruption or *just* dismiss him.

*While as far back as 20 years ago his family has been accused of "wealth accumulation beyond their means", Sharif claims this is an army cum judiciary conspiracy to oust him (two members of the JIT were from the army), and that his removal would destabilize the country & risk the economic gains made since he was voted back into office in 2013*¹⁹. He was Prime Minister twice in the 1990s, the second time until removed in a coup by the army in 1999, after which he & 17 family members were exiled to Saudi Arabia. In 2005 the Daily Pakistan said he was the fourth wealthiest man in Pakistan, with an estimated US\$1.4BN Net Worth. His nemesis in this

¹⁸ Both promote the Saudi arch-conservative Wahhabi ideology & are part of a network of hundreds of largely Saudi-funded groups that promote Islamic teachings & encourage Muslims to be more religiously observant, and provide non-Muslims & recent converts with information about Islam.

¹⁹ Pakistan's GDP growth has average 4,12% in the past four years vs. 2.60% in the previous four.

is the Pashtun Leader of the Opposition in Parliament²⁰, Oxford-educated Imran Khan (now aged 64) who for two decades was a member of Pakistan's National Cricket Team & for almost as long its most famous player, and who retired from the game in 1992, after he had captained it to victory, for its one & only time ever, in the finals of the 1992 World Cup of Cricket whereafter he went into politics & in 2006 founded the centrist Pakistan Movement for Justice Party, an anti-status quo group that advocates an egalitarian Islamic democratic system of government.

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TRUMP'S GIFT TO PUTIN IN THE MIDDLE EAST (NYT, Vali R. Nasr)

- In the past two months, while American-trained forces were driving IS insurgents out of the Mosul, next door in Syria the situation developed more favourably to Putin's ambitions for Russia to regain a broader influence in the Middle East. First, because Trump encouraged Saudi Arabia to split a Sunni alliance and drive Qatar & Turkey, both essential to America's military presence in the region, closer together and to Iran & Russia [thereby alarming the leaders of a third group in the region (Kuwait, Oman & Iraq) with ties to the West]. And then, in his tete a tete with Putin in Germany *during the G-20 Summit*, he virtually handed him the keys to the Middle East by agreeing to a ceasefire that assured a lasting Russian presence there. With his inner circle *often* at odds with each other, & Trump himself going on his unpredictable way, Putin hasn't missed an opportunity to expand Russia's presence in the region, thereby helping to blur the long-standing Sunni-Shiite sectarian division & complicating America's strategic position. And despatching Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to sort out the resultant mess hasn't worked since for the monarchs in the region an underling's voice means far less than his master's tweets & actions].

There are two things at stake for Putin in the Middle East : its oil competes with the Russian product in European markets & he wants to boost Russia's share of the Mideast arms market (that to date has been almost exclusively the purview of the West) - The author is a 56 year-old Iranian-born US citizen who, after a series of meritorious teaching positions & becoming a specialist on the Middle East & the Islamic World, since 2012 has been Dean of Johns Hopkins' Paul H. Nitze²¹ School of Advanced International Studies & for some time has been a member of the State Department's Foreign Affairs Policy Board.

DONALD JR's STUPIDITY RUINED TRUMP'S RUSSIA DEFENSE (NP, Charles Krauthammer)

- For six months the White House claimed this scandal was nothing but innuendo; yes, there had been meetings with Russian officials, some only belatedly disclosed. But that was just circumstantial evidence at best. Meetings tell you nothing unless you know what happened in them. Thus the famous July 2016 *Ambassador Kislyak- then Sen. Sessions*

²⁰ Sharif is of Kashmiri-Punjabi extraction.

²¹ Born in 1907, he witnessed in Germany the outbreak of WW I. Later, having inherited money & a career on Wall Street, he joined the public service in WW II and after it, for four decades under Presidents Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford & Reagan, became one of the chief architects of US policy vis a vis the Soviet Union.

meeting during the GOP convention had been nothing but an exchange of pleasantries. Big deal!

- It was long a puzzle. For six months there was smoke but no fire. President Trump might act very defensively, as if he was hiding something. But there was no hard evidence. *But* now we have evidence, not hearsay, fake news or unsourced leaks, in the form of the email chain released by Jr. himself. *For* a British go-between sent him a message that there was a Russian government effort to help Trump Sr. win the election & in that context proposed a meeting with a “Russian government attorney” possessing damaging information on Hillary, indicating the Kremlin was willing to share troves of incriminating documents from the “Crown” (an error, should have been “State”) Prosecutor’s office. And Jr. emailed back “I love it”. And it doesn’t matter that the meeting was a bust, “just a wasted 20 minutes”; in fact this was a stroke of good luck; for if the lawyer had delivered, Jr. & others would have been in far deeper legal trouble. It’s pathetic to hear Trump apologists saying that’s no big deal because we too have interfered with other countries’ elections for two reasons : first since the Trumpites, after saying for six months no collusion ever happened, now say “Sure it happened, so what? Everyone does it.” And secondly because not everyone does it. And, while what Jr., Kushner & Manafort did may not be criminal, it was not just stupid but deeply wrong. And while the lawyers may adjudicate the legalities of unconsummated collusion, you don’t need to be a lawyer to know that the Trump defense, that the collusion charges are a desperate Democrat fiction to explain away a lost election, is now officially dead.

Krauthammer is an alum of McGill in Political Science, of Harvard with an MD, and is a certified psychiatrist & a widely-followed newspaper columnist, despite having a diving accident after his first year at Harvard that confines him to a wheel chair. But more importantly according to the NYT’s David Brooks & MSNBC’s Joe Scarborough²², both of them right wingers, “the most important conservative columnist” & “without a doubt the most powerful force in American conservatism” respectively. While he once called Trump “a man with many idiosyncracies’ and long, for the sake of the party, was not unduly critical of him; that no longer seems the case and, in that respect, likely reflects the growing sense of dismay & unrest in the conservative ranks that cannot help but bode ill for Trump and, more importantly, for the GOP in the 2018 mid-term elections.

RESTRICTING WOMEN’S CLOTHING - AND FREEDOM - IN BELGIUM **(Human Rights Watch, Hillary Margolis)**

- The European Council of Human Rights has struck another blow to women’s autonomy, ruling in favour of bans on full-faced veils in Belgium. Echoing a 2014 ruling in S.A.S. vs France the Court cited the vague idea of “living together” as justification. *But* nowhere does the European Convention on Human Rights state that “living together” can be adequate grounds for restricting rights. The Court accepted the Belgian government’s argument that wearing clothing that obstructs the face is “incompatible in Belgian society and, more generally, the establishment the establishment of human relations.” *So quite* perversely, this week’s ruling could hinder exactly this kind of social interaction by isolating women who elect to wear full-face veils. “Fostering human relations is a

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Who for six years starting in 1994 was a GOP member of the House for Florida’s First District (that had not elected a GOP representative since Reconstruction, i.e. for over a century, whose fiancé, & later he himself, recently were the target of some abusive Trump tweets.

laudable goal, but forcing women to choose between wearing what they want and being unable to appear in public isn't the way to do it."

*The most blinkered, ill-founded line of reasoning is the work of a so-called "researcher" at HRW who currently is focused on domestic violence. First of all, living in a society ipso facto necessitates some restriction of all individuals 'rights'. Secondly, with respect to human rights the world consists of some countries that do care-, & a lot of others that couldn't care less-, about them, and this nonsense cannot help but undermine support for HRW in the former. Thirdly, whereas I am an ignoramus where the Koran is concerned, people who aren't tell me that it just exhorts women to dress "modestly" but not necessarily to cover their faces; so the niqab is a cultural-, not a religious-, phenomenon. Last, but not least, as an immigrant myself, I put a lot of weight on my father's exhortation, six & a half decades ago on the eve of my departure to Canada, that "when in Rome do like the Romans do"; and more generally speaking, am perturbed by some people's politically-correct interpretation of democracy; for while in my Political Sciences studies in university I was taught that democracy is all about the will of the majority, but that this does not extend to running roughshot over minorities, some people today have extended their vision of democracy to an illogical extreme whereby the majority becomes the victim of a 'Tyranny of a Minority' in which any minority, no matter how small, takes it for granted that the majority **must** do its bidding.*