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Angola's new start

Financial inclusion: a special report

Disarmageddon

North Korea, Iran and the real nuclear threat



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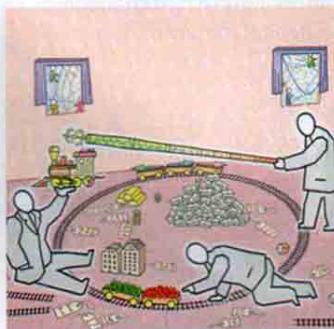


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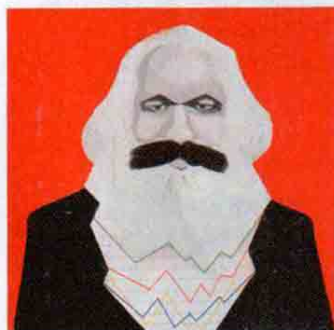


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Financial inclusion Nearly a quarter of the world's population remains unbanked. But thanks to mobile phones, financial inclusion is making great strides. See our special report after page 40

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Politics



South Korea said that American troops would remain in the country even if it does reach a deal with **North Korea** to end the Korean war formally. The statement came a few days after a much-trumpeted meeting between Moon Jae-in, the South's president, and Kim Jong Un, the North's dictator, in the demilitarised buffer between the countries. Mr Kim made lots of non-specific pledges about working towards a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. He is expected to meet Donald Trump soon.

India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, and **China's** president, Xi Jinping, held an informal summit in the central Chinese city of Wuhan. The meeting was aimed at defusing tensions between the two countries, which rose last year during a border dispute. After the summit, Chinese media said the two countries' armies had agreed to set up a hotline between their headquarters.

The **Dominican Republic** cut its long-standing ties with **Taiwan** and established diplomatic relations with China. The switch deepens Taiwan's diplomatic isolation: only 19 countries now recognise it.

In **Afghanistan**, at least 29 people, including nine journalists, were killed and dozens wounded in suicide-bombings in the capital, Kabul. Islamic State claimed responsibility.

The president of **France**, Emmanuel Macron, visited **Australia**, where he said the rise of China was "good news". But he also called for

"balance" in the region, and said it was important to preserve "rule-based development" there.

Let us in
Around 150 people in a caravan of migrants from **Central America** that has been making its way through Mexico arrived at the border with the United States and attempted to claim asylum. Immigration agents initially claimed the checkpoint was at full capacity but later started slowly processing their applications. Donald Trump accused the migrants of "openly defying our border".

Tens of thousands of people continued to throng **Nicaragua's** streets in peaceful demonstrations for and against the authoritarian socialist government of Daniel Ortega. The Catholic church and students groups tried to open talks with the regime. Activists demanded an investigation of the at least 63 deaths in recent riots, during which Mr Ortega's men used live bullets.

Prosecutors in **Brazil** filed new corruption charges against Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a former president who was recently jailed, and other leaders of the Workers' Party for allegedly accepting bribes from Odebrecht, a construction firm.



A tower block caught fire and collapsed in **São Paulo**. The abandoned building had been illegally occupied by some 150 families. Dozens of residents were missing.

A straight Rod
Rod Rosenstein, America's deputy attorney-general, defended Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian links

with aides to Donald Trump, and said that the Department of Justice "is not going to be extorted" by threats from congressional **Republicans**. Agitated congressmen have drafted articles of impeachment against Mr Rosenstein, who a year ago appointed Mr Mueller as the special counsel leading the inquiry.

Relations between the White House and the Mueller investigation could be about to get tetchier, with news that Ty Cobb is to be replaced as the head of Mr Trump's **legal team** by Emmet Flood, who represented Bill Clinton during his impeachment hearings.

Bibi's big show
Binyamin Netanyahu, **Israel's** prime minister, produced documents suggesting that **Iran** lied when it said it had never tried to develop a nuclear bomb. The world's intelligence agencies had long assumed as much, and little of the evidence was new. Mr Netanyahu did not offer evidence that Iran continued bomb-building after signing an agreement with America in 2015 intended to stop it from doing so. A barrage of missiles, suspected to have been fired by Israel, struck Iranian bases in **Syria**.

Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the **Palestinian Authority**, said that Jews had suffered persecution in Europe because of their involvement in money-lending and banking. A rash of attacks on Jews in Germany has prompted the country's new commissioner for fighting anti-Semitism to call for better information about the perpetrators.

Scores of people were killed in suicide-bomb attacks on a mosque and market in north-east **Nigeria**. The attacks were blamed on Boko Haram, a jihadist group, and came a day after Donald Trump promised more help for Nigeria in its fight against the terrorists.

The government of **Burundi** campaigned to pass a referendum that would change the

constitution and allow President Pierre Nkurunziza to stay in power for another 16 years. A former rebel leader, Mr Nkurunziza has been in charge since 2005 and believes that God wants him to keep ruling.

Cleaning up a Ruddy mess



Amber Rudd resigned as **Britain's** home secretary, as the Windrush scandal unfolded. Her position became untenable when targets for enforcing the return of people to Jamaica and other former Commonwealth countries were leaked. Ms Rudd had denied that such targets existed when giving evidence to a parliamentary select committee. She was seen by many as a shield for Theresa May, the prime minister, who ran the Home Office when the "hostile environment" policy for immigrants was introduced. Sajid Javid, whose parents were Pakistani immigrants, was appointed as the new home secretary.

Mr Javid, meanwhile, reportedly threw his support behind the hard Brexiters on a cabinet committee that scuppered Mrs May's plan to sign off on a "**customs partnership**" with the EU when Britain leaves the union. The Brexiters back a "maximum facilitation" proposal on customs, based on futuristic and untested technology. The cabinet is still discussing the options.

Armenia's capital, Yerevan, was largely shut down as hundreds of thousands of people poured onto the streets, demanding that the liberal opposition leader, Nikol Pashinian, be made prime minister. The ruling party has so far rejected this.

Business

T-Mobile and **Sprint** decided to have another go at merging, announcing a deal that values the combined company at \$146bn, including debt. The pair toyed with the idea of hooking up in 2014. Antitrust regulators were not keen, as a merger would reduce the number of big wireless carriers in America from four to three. That issue will come to the fore again now. T-Mobile and Sprint argue that their new company would have the capacity to roll out a nationwide 5G network quickly.

Competition concerns were also raised in Britain after **Sainsbury's** said that it had reached an agreement to buy **Asda**, which is owned by Walmart. The melding of Britain's second- and third-biggest supermarket chains would create a colossus in the industry, though both brands would be retained—Asda pitches its appeal to more cost-conscious shoppers than Sainsbury's.

Steady on

At its latest meeting, the Federal Reserve left its benchmark **interest rate** unchanged at a range of between 1.5% and 1.75%. The central bank is expected to raise rates at its next meeting, in June. The Fed's decision came after data indicated that the **American economy** grew at an annualised rate of 2.3% in the first quarter, the slowest pace in a year.

In an abrupt move, **Argentina's** central bank raised its benchmark interest rate from 27.25% to 30.25% in an effort to shore up the peso, which has taken a battering in currency markets amid worries about stubbornly high inflation.

The Trump administration postponed implementing **tariffs** on steel and aluminium imports from countries in the European Union by a month, saying it wanted more time for negotiations. The Europeans, annoyed that they should be bracketed with countries like

China, want permanent exemptions from the tariffs, which Argentina, Australia and Brazil have attained.

In a \$36bn deal that creates America's biggest oil-refining company, **Marathon Petroleum** said it would buy **Andeavor**. Andeavor operates ten refineries in the western United States. Marathon owns six, but handles more oil.

Higher oil prices helped lift **BP's** headline profit in the first quarter by 71%, to \$2.6bn. The energy giant hinted that it would increase its dividend for the first time in four years if oil prices remain buoyant; its stock hit an eight-year high.

A working strategy

Apple reported a net profit of \$13.8bn for the first three months of the year. Although the rate of growth in iPhone sales has slowed over the years, revenue from its signature product rose by 14% compared with the same quarter last year, thanks in part to the more expensive iPhone X. With 1.3bn Apple devices in use around the world, its income from associated services, such as music, soared by a third. Swimming in cash, Apple launched another share buy-back plan, worth \$100bn.

Xiaomi, a Chinese smart-phone-maker, filed for an IPO in Hong Kong. The company is reportedly hoping to raise up to \$10bn, which would make it one of the biggest tech flotations to date.

Tesla Motors' latest earnings report raised more questions for investors about the rate at which it is burning through its cash reserves. Plagued by production problems for its Model 3 mass-market car, Tesla ended the first quarter with \$2.7bn in cash on hand, compared with \$3.4bn in December. It also reported another headline loss, of \$710m.

Cambridge Analytica folded.

The data-mining firm hit the headlines for obtaining information on Facebook users that was then deployed to help Donald Trump's presidential campaign. The firm blamed a media "siege" for its decision to shut up shop.

Ahead of a visit to Beijing by senior economic officials in the Trump administration, **China** relaxed the restrictions on foreign investors becoming controlling shareholders in joint-venture securities companies, raising the cap on foreign ownership from 49% to 51%. Only financial institutions

with a "good international reputation" need apply.

The mouse that roared

Box office opening weekend

Gross receipts, \$m, 2018 prices



Sources: Box Office Mojo; BLS

Marvel Entertainment, a subsidiary of Disney, broke box-office records with the release of "**Infinity War**", the latest of its Avengers movies, beating the global record for an opening weekend with a total of \$641m. "The Force Awakens", Disney's first Star Wars outing after acquiring the Lucasfilm franchise, still boasts the best opening weekend in America after adjusting for inflation. It is possible that this Avengers adventure may be the biggest yet and take \$2bn worldwide.

For other economic data and news see Indicators section



Disarmageddon

Even as America tries to strike a deal with North Korea, arms control elsewhere is unravelling



RARELY do optimism and North Korea belong in the same breath. However, the smiles and pageantry in April's encounter between Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae-in, leaders of the two Koreas, hinted at a deal in which the North would abandon nuclear weapons in exchange for a security guarantee from the world, and in particular America. Sadly, much as this newspaper wishes for a nuclear-free North Korea, a lasting deal remains as remote as the summit of Mount Paektu. The Kims are serial cheats and nuclear weapons are central to their grip on power (see Asia section). Moreover, even as optimists focus on Korea, nuclear restraints elsewhere are unravelling.

By May 12th President Donald Trump must decide the fate of the deal struck in 2015 to curb Iran's nuclear programme. This week Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, gave a presentation that seemed designed to get Mr Trump to pull America out. He may well oblige. Worse, within three years current agreed limits on the nuclear arsenals of Russia and America are set to lapse, leaving them unconstrained for the first time in almost half a century (see Briefing).

In the cold war a generation of statesmen, chastened by conflict and the near-catastrophe of the Cuban missile crisis, used arms control to lessen the risk of annihilation. Even then, nuclear war was a constant fear (see Books section). Their successors, susceptible to hubris and faced with new tensions and new technology, are increasing the chances that nuclear weapons will spread and that someone, somewhere will miscalculate. A complacent world is playing with Armageddon.

START worrying
One problem is that the critics of arms control overstate its aims so as to denigrate its accomplishments. Opponents of the Iran deal, such as John Bolton, Mr Trump's new national security adviser, complain that it has not stopped Iran from working on ballistic missiles or from bullying its neighbours. But that was never the intent of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as it is formally known. Instead, for at least ten years, the pact cuts off Iran's path to a bomb and makes any future attempt more likely to be detected early. Whatever Mr Netanyahu implies, Iran has kept its side of the agreement despite not getting many of the economic benefits it was promised.

Wrecking the Iranian deal has costs. Iran would be freer to ramp up uranium enrichment, putting it once more in sight of a weapon. The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), still the best bulwark against the spread of the bomb, would be undermined: other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, may well respond by dusting off their plans to become nuclear powers; and America would be abandoning a fix that shores up the NPT. Mr Trump would have to work even harder to convince Mr Kim that he can trust America—especially as Mr Bolton compares North Korea to Libya, whose leader gave up a nuclear programme only to be toppled by the West and butchered a few years later.

A second problem is mistrust, heightened since the revival of great-power competition between America and Russia after a post-Soviet lull. That ought to give arms control new urgency; instead it is eroding it. Take New START, which caps the number of strategic warheads deployed by Russia and America at 1,550 each. It will expire in 2021 unless Vladimir Putin and Mr Trump extend it, which looks unlikely. Instead Mr Trump boasts that America's nuclear arsenal will return to the "top of the pack", bigger and more powerful than ever before. That repudiates the logic of successive strategic-arms-control agreements with Russia since 1972, which have sought to hold back a nuclear arms race by seeking to define parity.

Fix it, don't nix it

Or take the insouciance with which the likes of Mr Bolton and his Russian counterparts condemn the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Struck in 1987 by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, this deal dismantled 2,700 ground-launched nuclear missiles with a range of 500-5,500km that put European deterrence on a hair-trigger. Today each side says the other is violating the INF. Mr Bolton et al argue that it is worth keeping only if it includes countries such as China—which they know will not happen.

Last comes the problem of technology. Better missile defence could undermine mutually assured destruction, which creates deterrence by guaranteeing that a first strike triggers a devastating response. Speaking on March 1st, Mr Putin brandished exotic new nuclear weapons he would soon deploy to counter future American missile defences. A new nuclear arms race, with all its destabilising consequences, is thus likely. A cyber-attack to cripple the other side's nuclear command and control, which could be interpreted as the prelude to a nuclear first strike, is another potential cause of instability in a crisis. Verifying the capabilities of software is even harder than assessing physical entities such as launchers, warheads and missile interceptors. New approaches are urgently needed. None is being contemplated.

Extending New START, saving the INF, creating norms for cyber-weapons and enhancing the Iran deal are eminently doable, but only if there is sufficient will. For that to gel, today's statesmen need to overcome a fundamental misunderstanding. They appear to have forgotten that you negotiate arms-control agreements with your enemies, not your allies. And that arms control brings not just constraints on weapons of unimaginable destructive force, but also verification that provides knowledge of capabilities and intentions. In a crisis, that can reduce the risk of a fatal miscalculation.

Cherish the scintilla of hope in North Korea, and remember how arms control needs shoring up. The alternative is a future where countries arm themselves because they cannot be sure their enemies will not get there first; where every action could escalate into nuclear war; where early warnings of a possible attack give commanders minutes to decide whether to fire back. It would be a tragedy for the world if it took an existential scare like the Cuban missile crisis, or worse, to jolt today's complacent, reckless leaders back to their senses. ■

T-Mobile and Sprint

Block the call

Regulators should squash plans for a big telecoms merger in America



SO MANY false starts would have soured other romances. Resistance from antitrust authorities halted a union between T-Mobile and Sprint, America's third- and fourth-largest wireless carriers, in 2014. A row over merger terms scuppered talks last year. But the attraction never dimmed.

This week the pair announced an all-stock deal that would create a company with a heft similar to that of AT&T and Verizon. The happy couple promises lower prices for customers, higher profits for shareholders and a sharpening of America's technological edge (see Business section). Regulators should be sceptical. The tie-up is bad for consumers; and there are better ways to build whizzy new networks.

Consumer welfare first. The international evidence suggests that cutting the number of big operators would be bad for customers. Research by British regulators into 25 countries shows that average prices were up to one-fifth lower in markets with four network operators than in those with three. (Ignore the claims of T-Mobile and Sprint that the American market is contested by as many as eight firms: in its latest report on the industry, the Federal Communications Commission found that the four carriers accounted for over 98% of connections.)

T-Mobile itself is testament to the benefits of a more crowded market. Trustbusters not only zapped its discussions in 2014 with Sprint but also blocked an earlier attempt by AT&T to buy it in 2011. The firm has thrived on its own. It has added almost 40m customers in the past five years by cutting prices and adding features such as free video-streaming. Subscribers everywhere have felt the benefits. Between 2013 and 2016 overall consumer prices in America rose by 4.5%; prices for wireless telephone services decreased by 8%. Consolidation threatens

a different outcome. The combined firm projects relatively slow growth in revenue, a jump in profit margins and rapid deleveraging. That does not sound like the plan for a price war.

If regulators have opposed such tie-ups before, why do T-Mobile and Sprint expect a different answer this time? One explanation is the risk that Sprint, which is heavily indebted and has been struggling for a while, might go bust if it remains a stand-alone entity. But that ought not to sway the trustbusters. Sprint could shed its debts in a Chapter 11 bankruptcy process and re-emerge in better shape, or it might get swallowed up by a different firm entirely.

Trumpeterian destruction

The second explanation is that the two firms think that they can win a public-interest argument about technological leadership. The bosses of T-Mobile and Sprint argue that by bringing together their bands of spectrum, they would be able to build America's first national 5G network. Their merger presentation, featuring slides with headlines such as "US must lead innovation again" and "Global economic leadership is at stake!", was aimed as much at economic nationalists in the White House as analysts with spreadsheets.

It is true that 5G networks are expensive to build: they require more antennae, base stations and fibre-optic cables than their predecessors. It is also true that 5G's speed provides a platform upon which all sorts of data-hungry new services, from self-driving cars to industrial robots, can develop. But that does not mean operators have to build their own, separate networks. Mobile providers in South Korea have agreed to share the costs and use of 5G infrastructure. Mexico is building a wholesale mobile network; its capacity can be leased out to different firms. Better this approach than muted competition and price-gouged consumers. The union of T-Mobile and Sprint is one that regulators should not bless. ■

Britain's Windrush scandal

Identity crisis

The mistreatment of Caribbean Britons shows the need for a better way of checking identity



THE harassment of the Windrush generation of Caribbean migrants is a shameful chapter in Britain's history, and ministers are paying for it. One home secretary resigned on April 29th; her predecessor, Theresa May, now the prime minister, is weakened. It falls to Sajid Javid, who took charge of the Home Office this week, to clear up the mess.

There is little to like about Mrs May's migration policy. The state-led hounding of thousands of law-abiding British citizens was a side-effect of the "hostile environment" for illegal immi-

grants that she created as home secretary.

Indeed, Mrs May's rigid insistence on reducing net inflows to the arbitrary level of 100,000 a year created a hostile environment for all migrants, not just the illegal ones (see Britain section). Landlords, employers and others were given new duties to check people's migration status. The result has been that those with incomplete paperwork have been denied homes, jobs and public services, and have even been locked up. Mrs May sent mobile billboards bearing the legend "GO HOME OR FACE ARREST" to migrant-heavy districts. She ridiculed "citizens of nowhere" and threatened to make companies publish lists of their foreign workers (before backing down). Cowboyish Home Office officials desperate to reach their targets have

Reporting on Trump

Lexington's column on the FBI raiding the office of President Trump's lawyer did not mention some salient facts (April 14th), notably the issues associated with attorney-client privilege. If lawyers can have their offices ransacked and then be subject to prosecutions for what is discovered, what effect will this have on representation for difficult cases? Nor did the column mention the asymmetry of how attorney-client privilege was used in the FBI's timid investigation of Hillary Clinton's e-mail server, specifically in the case of the testimony of her chief of staff. Finally, there was no discussion of how far afield Robert Mueller, the special counsel, has taken the focus of his investigation compared with the original remit of Russian influence.

If you don't like this president, fine. Lots of us don't and there is plenty of legitimate ammunition to discuss. Now, however, you are feeding the narrative that the mainstream media is just hopelessly biased. This leads to a general discounting of your reporting. People just stop watching or reading what you write. There is also something worse. What goes around eventually comes around. What will you say when the attorney's office of a politician of whom you approve gets ransacked by his political opponents?

STEPHEN ARBOGAST
Professor of the practice of finance
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Your lament for what the Republican Party has become was, if anything, too mild ("How the elephant got its Trump", April 21st). It has become the party of lies and xenophobia, of irresponsibility and moral corruption, fetishising blind loyalty to a very bad man. Beseeching responsible Republicans to resist this misses the mark, when you indicate that the party is irredeemable. What they should do is quit, as I did after 53 years of active commit-

ment. I cannot associate myself with today's Republicanism. I am heartbroken.

FRANK ROBINSON
Albany, New York

Poland's government

Your leader on the Polish government read in places like an election pamphlet from the opposition Civic Platform party ("A Polish pickle", April 21st). The governing Law and Justice (PiS) party received an overwhelming mandate from the Polish people in 2015, including a clear instruction to rebalance a judiciary, which had been stacked with allies by the former government without any complaint from the European Union.

To counter its weakness at home, Civic Platform is seeking to Europeanise what are essentially domestic issues and fight its battles in Brussels rather than Warsaw. By imposing an agenda of ever increasing centralisation and trying to force a mythical European identity on member states (the same policies that contributed to Brexit), the EU is behaving, in the eyes of many in Poland, like the former Soviet Union.

ASHLEY FOX, MEP
Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament
Brussels

Poland's Mazowsze region is as "gorgeous as a Chopin concerto" ("Change of state", April 21st)? The maestro's two piano concertos have been called many things including, rather unkindly, bad pieces for orchestra. But now we are invited to think of them as "an undulating quilt of cereal fields". Corn?

MICHAEL KNIGHT
Geneva

Singapore's politics

The People's Action Party has retained power in Singapore not because the electoral system is "manicured" ("Not much leeway", April 28th), but because it knows and expects that if it does not measure up it will be voted out. We have had 14 general elections since 1959, all free and fair and robustly

contested by many parties.

The Public Order and Safety (Special Powers) Act and the Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods have nothing to do with keeping "unruly critics" in check or the government in power. The act applies to serious incidents affecting public order, including terrorist attacks. The London riots in 2011 started out as a peaceful demonstration that degenerated into violence, fuelled by social media. We drew lessons from this and other incidents in formulating our act. The committee hearings looked into serious issues similar to those which *The Economist* has decried.

As for political succession, the next generation of leaders is following the same process as previous generations. They are working as a team and taking the measure of one another. They will agree, in good time, who among themselves will be *primus inter pares*. Ultimately voters have the final say, because whoever becomes prime minister must convince the electorate to give him and his party the mandate to govern, as in the Westminster model. Our variant may not be rambunctious enough for *The Economist*, but it has worked well for Singapore.

FOO CHI HSIA
High commissioner for Singapore
London

The grateful dead

"Funerals of the future" (April 14th) looked at the increasingly expensive business of disposing of the dead. One way to reduce costs is to rehearse a funeral. Death often comes unexpectedly and inconveniently, causing friends and family to have to plan suddenly for the funeral. A funeral rehearsal, flexibly scheduled, so that all can attend, including the soon-to-be-departed as a participant in the flesh, is more satisfying. He or she could lie in comfort and listen to the encomiums. If they are not sufficiently positive, one could rise up and glare.

THOMAS CALHOUN
Bethesda, Maryland

My wife, Mary, died in February. Her body will train student doctors in anatomy through a not-for-profit consortium of local medical schools, the Humanity Gifts Registry. The removal of my wife's body was done caringly. There is a memorial service for families and students and the ashes are returned.

LEONARD FINEGOLD
Media, Pennsylvania

When I was a criminal investigator I participated in 20 exhumations of coffins buried in concrete vaults. Fancy and expensive caskets. Without exception, after only a few years each casket had failed in some way, most often because of the so-called hermetic seal. The end result were contents which in no way resembled a sleeping loved one. From soupy flotsam to giant mould blooms, the interiors were hideous. Bottom line is, do not waste your money.

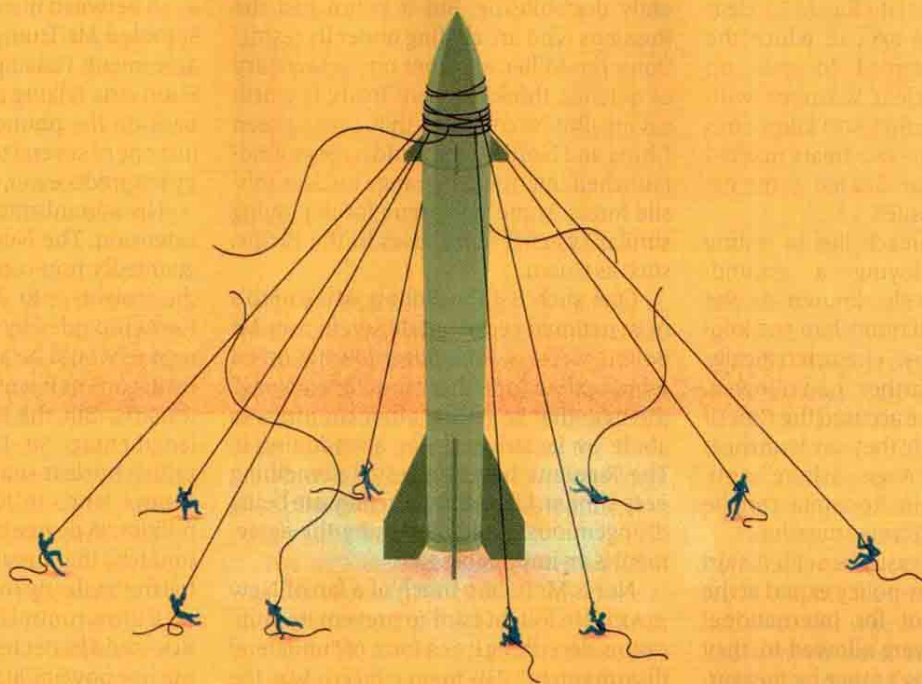
MIKE POST
Los Angeles



I am reminded of "The Big Lebowski". Reacting to the expense of a funeral urn, Walter Sobchak (played by John Goodman) shouts at the undertaker that "just because we're bereaved doesn't make us saps!" But as the urn is the funeral parlour's "most modestly priced receptacle", he instead places his friend's ashes in an empty coffee tin.

AUGUSTUS HANEY
New York

Letters are welcome and should be addressed to the Editor at The Economist, The Adelphi Building, 1-11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT
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A farewell to arms control

Old deals to limit nuclear weapons are fraying. Both politics and technological change make their refurbishment or replacement unlikely

SINCE 1972, when the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) agreement was signed, there have always been negotiated constraints on the nuclear arsenals controlled from Washington and Moscow. In three years, if nothing is done, that half-century of strategic arms control will be over. In 2021 the curbs on warhead numbers and the protocols for exchanging information provided by the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) of 2011 will lapse unless it is extended. The consequence of the treaty's demise could be a dangerous and expensive new arms race.

It far from the only reason for such nuclear worries. Both President Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, revel in a form of nuclear braggadocio that would have been anathema to their predecessors. Mr Trump boasts about the size of his nuclear button and promises to return America's nuclear arsenal to "the top of the pack". Mr Putin made the central set-piece speech of his recent re-election campaign an extended riff on Dr Strangelove, gloating over a slew of novel, blood-curdling weapons, including one that appears to boast the most powerful warhead ever created, the better to drench coastal cities with irradiated tsunami.

The deal that constrains Iran's development of nuclear weapons is being system-

atically undermined by the Trump administration. Summitry with North Korea is more likely to result in grudging recognition of it as a nuclear-weapon state than to lead to the dismantling of its arsenal of missiles. If the talks break down the peninsula could become even more unstable. The main bulwark against the spread of nuclear weapons, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, is holding up; but it is in worse shape than at any time since it entered into force in 1970.

You can't fight in here

It seems a long time since Barack Obama's Prague speech, in which he talked about working towards a world free of nuclear weapons. In 2010, a year after setting out that goal, Mr Obama's administration negotiated the New START agreement with Dmitry Medvedev, Mr Putin's more emollient sidekick and placeholder. The treaty obliged both sides to field no more than 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads with no more than 800 missiles and bombers to carry them. Like SALT I and most arms-control deals since, New START contained detailed verification and monitoring arrangements. These not only ensured that the two parties were doing what they had said. They also provided insights into how they ran their nuclear forces which

improved confidence on both sides.

Since then things have got steadily worse. To get New START ratified by the Senate, Mr Obama had to show that the limited number of nukes it allowed would be of tip-top quality. Thus he embraced a sweeping modernisation programme which calls for the refurbishment of warheads and new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarines and bombers; the Congressional Budget Office expects it to cost about \$1.2trn over the 30 years from 2016. The Russians began their own ambitious nuclear upgrades, too. Bob Einhorn, a former arms-control negotiator now at the Brookings Institution, a think-tank, fears that "the dynamics of nuclear modernisation" could lead to new technologies and therefore new strategic uncertainties which increase risks even if the limits of New START are adhered to.

If all this were going on during a period when relations between Russia and America allowed for the conduct of normal business, including follow-on arms-control agreements, there might not be too much to worry about, other than the expense. They aren't. In 2013 Mr Obama floated the possibility of the two countries cutting the number of their deployed nuclear warheads by a further third. But Mr Putin made it clear, according to Mr Einhorn, that he had "zero interest" in the proposal. For Mr Putin, nuclear weapons are not just the ultimate guarantor of Russia's security but a symbol of national pride that demands respect (and fear) from adversaries.

Just a few months after Mr Putin's rebuff, in January 2014, Rose Gottemoeller, then under-secretary for arms control at the State Department and now deputy sec- ➤