EPA News Highlights 5.11.18

The Washington Post: Many Mocked This Scott Pruitt Proposal. They Should Have Read It First.
When Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt proposed a rule last month to improve transparency in science used to make policy decisions, he was roundly criticized by interest groups and academics. Several researchers asserted that the policy would be used to undermine a litany of existing environmental protections. Former Obama administration EPA officials co-wrote a New York Times op-ed in which they said the proposal "would undermine the nation's scientific credibility." The Economist derided the policy as "swamp science." But there is a lot to cheer about in the rule that opponents have missed. A careful reading suggests it could promote precisely the kind of evidence-based policy most scientists and the public should support.

The Washington Examiner: EPA Won't Redo Obama's Report On Risks From Deadly Paint Stripper
The Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday that it would not seek to redo an Obama administration report that listed the numerous health risks from exposure to the paint stripper chemical methylene chloride. The EPA is "not re-evaluating the paint stripping uses of methylene chloride and is relying on its previous risk assessments," the agency announced. The paint stripping chemical has caused dozens of deaths, and environmentalists have called on EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to ban the substance as a public health concern. The agency also said it plans to finish the regulatory process for the chemical that started under the Obama administration in 2016. It expects to send a final determination on the chemical "shortly" to the Office of Management and Budget for review.

The Associated Press: Action 'shortly' on solvent after Pruitt and families meet
The Environmental Protection Agency is promising quick action on new restrictions for a widely sold solvent used for paint stripping. Thursday's announcement comes after EPA administrator Scott Pruitt met with families of men who died after using products with the compound methylene chloride. The Obama administration in its last days proposed banning most consumer sales of methylene chloride. Lawmakers last month accused Pruitt of putting the rule on hold. Pruitt met Tuesday with families of a 31-year-old man and 21-year-old man who died after using paint-strippers.

The Washington Post: Mothers Lobbied Scott Pruitt To Ban A Toxic Chemical. Two Days Later, EPA Signaled It Would.
Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt has met with few environmental groups throughout his tenure. More often, he has conferred with industry representatives. But this week, the EPA chief agreed to meet with a different sort of lobbyist: the mothers of two men who died from exposure to paint strippers containing a toxic chemical. The result: Two days later, the EPA signaled on Thursday it will follow through on an Obama-era proposal to ban paint strippers containing a toxic chemical — leaving Democratic lawmakers, environmental groups and the families of victims cautiously optimistic they won Pruitt over, Brady Dennis and I reported Thursday.

Politico: Pruitt changes NAAQS review to consider 'adverse' effects of standards
EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt today directed the agency to change the review process for a critical air quality program to include the potential "adverse" effects of tighter standards. In a memo signed Wednesday, Pruitt directed the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, which advises on National Ambient Air Quality Standards issues, to provide advice on background pollution concentrations and the "adverse public health, welfare, social, economic or energy effects" from setting and achieving NAAQS standards. The Supreme Court has previously ruled that EPA cannot consider implementation costs whGasen setting NAAQS standards. Pruitt's memo argues that such information, even if not used to set a standard, can provide "important policy context for the public, co-regulators and EPA."

Oil & Gas Journal: Pruitt Signs Memo Outlining NAAQS 'Back To Basics' Review Process
US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator E. Scott Pruitt signed a memorandum describing a "back to basics" process for reviewing the federal Clean Air Act's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). The memo assures that EPA and its independent science advisors take a transparent, efficient, and timely approach, he said on May 10. The memo's principles will reform the process for setting NAAQS in a manner consistent with cooperative federalism and the rule of law, Pruitt maintained. "Getting EPA and its advisors back on track with CAA requirements, statutory deadlines,

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and the issuance of timely implementation rules will assure that we continue the dramatic improvement in air quality across our country," he said.

National News Highlights 5.11.18

The New York Times: Israel And Iran, Newly Emboldened, Exchange Blows In Syria Face-Off
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The Associated Press: Trump's High-Risk Doctrine? Swing For The Bleacher Seats
The way President Donald Trump sees it, why go for a solid single when you can swing for a home run? Trump's upcoming summit with North Korea's Kim Jong Un is only the latest example of the president's go-big strategy. From tax reform to international trade to foreign policy, Trump has pursued a high-risk, high-reward approach that advisers say can help produce results on longstanding problems — and that critics warn could trigger dangerous repercussions all the way from a trade war to global conflict. Drawn to big moments and bigger headlines, Trump views the North Korea summit as a legacy-maker for him, believing that the combustible combination of his bombast and charm already has led to warmer relations between North and South. As he welcomed home three Americans who had been detained in North Korea, Trump early Thursday used a televised, middle-of-the-night ceremony to play up both his statecraft and stagecraft.

TRUMP TWEETS

The Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/many-mocked-this-scott-pruitt-proposal-they-should-have-read-it-first/2018/05/10/31baba9a-53c2-11e8-abd8-265bd07a9859_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f7bcbc0a1887

Many Mocked This Scott Pruitt Proposal. They Should Have Read It First.
By Robert Hahn, 5/10/18

When Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt proposed a rule last month to improve transparency in science used to make policy decisions, he was roundly criticized by interest groups and academics. Several researchers asserted that the policy would be used to undermine a litany of existing environmental protections. Former Obama administration EPA officials co-wrote a New York Times op-ed in which they said the proposal "would undermine the nation's scientific credibility." The Economist derided the policy as "swamp science."

But there is a lot to cheer about in the rule that opponents have missed. A careful reading suggests it could promote precisely the kind of evidence-based policy most scientists and the public should support.

Critics typically argue that the proposed regulation would suppress research that contains confidential medical records and therefore scientists could not share underlying data publicly for privacy reasons. Such restrictions, these critics say, would have excluded landmark research, such as Harvard University's "Six Cities" study, which suggested that reducing fine particles in the air would dramatically improve human health and helped lead to more stringent regulation of fine particles in the United States.

These concerns are likely the result of rhetoric surrounding the rule. Pruitt describes the regulation as an attempt to end "secret science" at the agency. Conservatives have long prioritized the need for making all data and statistical models

used in regulatory decision-making available for independent scrutiny, with the intent to limit the use of studies that cannot be replicated. Breitbart went even further, characterizing the action as "a massive victory for both Pruitt and President Trump in their war on the Green Blob."

But it appears that few defenders or opponents of the proposal have actually read the proposed EPA regulation, which is only seven pages long. Both sides distort the regulatory text.

Here's what the rule would actually do. First, it would require the EPA to identify studies that are used in making regulatory decisions. Second, it would encourage studies to be made publicly available "to the extent practicable." Third, it would define "publicly available" by listing examples of information that could be used for validation, such as underlying data, models, computer code and protocols. Fourth, the proposal recognizes not all data can be openly accessible in the public domain and that restricted access to some data may be necessary. Fifth, it would direct the EPA to work with third parties, including universities and private firms, to make information available to the extent reasonable. Sixth, it would encourage the use of efforts to de-identify data sets to create public-use data files that would simultaneously help protect privacy and promote transparency. Seventh, the proposal outlines an exemption process when compliance is "impracticable." Finally, it would direct the EPA to clearly state and document assumptions made in regulatory analyses.

Here's what the EPA's rule wouldn't do: nullify existing environmental regulations, disregard existing research, violate confidentiality protections, jeopardize privacy or undermine the peer-review process.

The costs of compliance with EPA regulations are substantial. A draft report from the White House Office of Management and Budget suggests that significant EPA regulations imposed costs ranging from $54 billion to $65 billion over the past decade. These rules also realize substantial public-health and environmental benefits estimated to range from $196 billion to $706 billion over the decade.

Given the stakes for both the cost of compliance with EPA regulations and the real risks that pollution poses to public health and the environment, this rule should be read closely by critics and supporters for what it actually says. Just as transparency in science and evidence are essential, so, too, are intellectual honesty and accurate policy communication.

Taking steps to increase access to data, with strong privacy protections, is how society will continue to make scientific and economic progress and ensure that evidence in rule-making is sound. The EPA's proposed rule follows principles laid out in 2017 by the bipartisan Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking — humility, transparency, privacy, capacity and rigor — and moves us toward providing greater access to scientific data while protecting individual privacy.

Instead of throwing stones, the scientific community should come together to offer practical suggestions to make the rule better. For example, the rule should recognize the incentives for scientists to produce new research. Scientists need to have time to produce and take credit for their research findings. Thus, there will inevitably be a trade-off between the production of new insights and the sharing of data with others, including regulators.

The EPA should also establish use restrictions and a secure data infrastructure so that confidential business and personal data are adequately protected. Finally, it should set procedures to evaluate the effectiveness of this rule. Done right, this could improve government policy not only in the United States but also around the world.

It's still hard to tell how this rule will affect EPA decisions, but one thing is clear: The rule will make the evidence by which we make policy decisions more transparent. The policy might not be perfect, but its benefits will likely far outweigh its costs.

Robert Hahn is a visiting professor at Oxford University's Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment and a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. He recently served as a commissioner on the U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking.

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The Washington Examiner

https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/epa-wont-redo-obamas-report-on-risks-from-deadly-paint-stripper

EPA Won't Redo Obama's Report On Risks From Deadly Paint Stripper

By John Siciliano, 5/10/18

The Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday that it would not seek to redo an Obama administration report that listed the numerous health risks from exposure to the paint stripper chemical methylene chloride.

The EPA is "not re-evaluating the paint stripping uses of methylene chloride and is relying on its previous risk assessments," the agency announced.

The paint stripping chemical has caused dozens of deaths, and environmentalists have called on EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to ban the substance as a public health concern.

The agency also said it plans to finish the regulatory process for the chemical that started under the Obama administration in 2016. It expects to send a final determination on the chemical "shortly" to the Office of Management and Budget for review.

Pruitt recently met with the parents of children who died from exposure to the chemical solvent. Wendy Hartley and Cindy Wynne met with Pruitt a few days before Thursday's announcement.

Hartley and Wynne said they were disappointed that the visit was not followed by a commitment to ban the substance.

But Senate Democrats said Thursday's announcement should be greeted with optimism that the EPA is moving ahead with a ban on the chemical.

Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware, the top Democrat on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, took the announcement to mean that the EPA "intends to finalize a ban on methylene chloride."

Carper, an outspoken critic of Pruitt, said the announcement "is welcome news, especially after the agency previously delayed finalization of this proposed ban indefinitely."

Nevertheless, Carper is "encouraged" that the EPA is relying on the Obama-era risk assessments, which "clearly and scientifically showed just how threatening products containing methylene chloride could be to people's health and safety."

However, "just like a law doesn't mean much if it is not enforced, intentions to finalize a ban on a deadly chemical don't mean much if that chemical stays on the shelves," he added.

The Associated Press

https://apnews.com/6cb39378fdbc4586a00cd3d48f02abbe/Action-'shortly'-on-solvent-after-Pruitt-and-families-meet

Action 'shortly' on solvent after Pruitt and families meet

5/10/18

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency is promising quick action on new restrictions for a widely sold solvent used for paint stripping.

Thursday's announcement comes after EPA administrator Scott Pruitt met with families of men who died after using products with the compound methylene chloride.

The Obama administration in its last days proposed banning most consumer sales of methylene chloride. Lawmakers last month accused Pruitt of putting the rule on hold. Pruitt met Tuesday with families of a 31-year-old man and 21-year-old man who died after using paint-strippers.

The EPA said Thursday it would act "shortly" to put the new regulation on the books.

Activist Liz Hitchcock said she and other campaigners against methylene chloride welcome the announcement. Hitchcock says she will watch the final wording of the rule closely.

The Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2018/05/11/daily-202-trump-reassures-anxious-hawks-that-he-s-willing-to-walk-away-from-north-korea-talks/5af4bf9530fb042588799475/

Mothers Lobbied Scott Pruitt To Ban A Toxic Chemical. Two Days Later, EPA Signaled It Would.

By James Hohmann, 5/11/18

Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt has met with few environmental groups throughout his tenure. More often, he has conferred with industry representatives.

But this week, the EPA chief agreed to meet with a different sort of lobbyist: the mothers of two men who died from exposure to paint strippers containing a toxic chemical.

The result: Two days later, the EPA signaled on Thursday it will follow through on an Obama-era proposal to ban paint strippers containing a toxic chemical — leaving Democratic lawmakers, environmental groups and the families of victims cautiously optimistic they won Pruitt over, Brady Dennis and I reported Thursday.

"I wanted to use Kevin's story to try to save more lives," one of the mothers, Wendy Hartley, told The Washington Post in an interview. Her son Kevin Hartley was a trained contractor who died last year at age 21 while refinishing a bathtub with White Lightning Low Odor Stripper near Nashville.

"We do not need any more lives lost due to this," Hartley said. "And if I could tell Kevin's story and get someone to listen to it and do something about, then I was willing to tell his story."

Since taking office, Pruitt has been laser-focused on undoing environmental and safety rules proposed by President Barack Obama's administration. But the EPA's announcement that it "intends to finalize" a proposed ban on certain uses of the chemical, called methylene chloride, would be an exception.

The chemical, used by professional contractors and do-it-yourselfers to remove paint, has been linked to dozens of deaths – including 12 people between 2000 and 2011 who specialize in refinishing bathtubs, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report.

The EPA first proposed banning the use of methylene chloride in paint and coating removal products in the waning days of Obama's second term. A year earlier, Congress had granted the EPA new powers to restrict the use of that and other chemicals in an amendment to the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act, the nation's main chemical safety law.

But in December, the Pruitt's EPA indefinitely postponed bans on certain uses of methylene chloride and two other deadly chemicals often found in consumer products. For a time, it seemed like the ban was headed to the trash bin, along with many other Obama-era rules after President Trump's election.

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That delay in December kicked off an effort to salvage it. Several Democratic lawmakers asked Pruitt about the chemical and urged him to ban it in a pair of hearings on Capitol Hill last month. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-N.Y.) asked Pruitt if he had anything to say to the people whose family members died given the lack of EPA action.

Pruitt didn't directly address that question, but he made clear that the agency hadn't abandoned its evaluation of the chemical's safety. "There has been no decision at this time," he said at the April 26 hearing.

That did little to satisfy Pallone. "Look, you say you're going to do something, but these chemicals are still on the shelves, and they make a mockery of [chemical reform] legislation that this committee works so hard on," Pallone said. "And it makes a mockery of EPA. You have the power immediately to get this chemical off the shelves. And you're not doing it. And you should do it."

The lobbying effort also continued behind the scenes. After the hearings, the Environmental Defense Fund contacted Pruitt's office on behalf of the families of Kevin Hartley and and Drew Wynne, 31, was running a cold-brew coffee business in Charleston, S.C., when he died last year while stripping paint from the floor of a walk-in refrigerator using a product called Goof Off.

The group asked for a meeting with the administrator and the EPA agreed. So this past Tuesday morning, Wendy Hartley, along with Cindy Wynne and her other son Brian Wynne, met Pruitt and several of his aides at his office in EPA headquarters.

The families brought with them photographs and the death certificates of the two men, and explained to Pruitt what happened to them.

Pruitt "was very attentive to us," Cindy Wynne told The Post in an interview earlier this week before the EPA's announcement. "He was somewhat surprised when we showed him the cans from Lowe's," where her son had purchased the paint stripper.

Her son, Brian, asked Pruitt if he agreed that methylene chloride was a problem. Pruitt responded, "I do."
But when pressed on whether he would finalize the ban, the administrator did not make a commitment, the family members said.

"We all have the same sense that for a moment there, we felt like there was positive momentum," Brian Wynne said. "And then that went out of the room pretty quickly when he was steadfast against the word 'ban.'"

In an interview after the announcement Thursday, the brother said he was now "cautiously optimistic" that Pruitt would follow through.

"This is a positive development," Brian Wynne said. "It was a surprising one. We certainly didn't see this coming in our meeting with Administrator Pruitt. But we're certainly encouraged by this sign that he seems ready to take action."
Public health and environmental groups also reserved full-throated cheers until the rule's language is made public and submitted to the White House's Office of Management and Budget, which the EPA said will happen "shortly." Sarah Vogel, EDF's vice president for health, urged the EPA to "move quickly to implement a ban, and that includes ensuring necessary administrative procedures are followed to guarantee a permanent ban and that these products are promptly removed from store shelves."

The EPA said the "meeting with the families was constructive."

"It provided the families the opportunity to share with Administrator Pruitt the circumstances in each of their cases and the Administrator the opportunity to hear directly from them," Wilcox said. "There was an exchange of ideas, and we appreciate EDF reaching out to request the meeting."

Politico

https://subscriber.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/05/pruitt-changes-naaqs-review-to-consider-adverse-effects-of-standards-1193678

Pruitt changes NAAQS review to consider 'adverse' effects of standards

By Alex Guillen, 5/10/18, 10:13 AM

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt today directed the agency to change the review process for a critical air quality program to include the potential "adverse" effects of tighter standards.

In a memo signed Wednesday, Pruitt directed the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, which advises on National Ambient Air Quality Standards issues, to provide advice on background pollution concentrations and the "adverse public health, welfare, social, economic or energy effects" from setting and achieving NAAQS standards.

The Supreme Court has previously ruled that EPA cannot consider implementation costs when setting NAAQS standards. Pruitt's memo argues that such information, even if not used to set a standard, can provide "important policy context for the public, co-regulators and EPA."

Pruitt also committed EPA to finish reviews of two controversial standards before the end of President Donald Trump's first term.

Even as EPA continues internal deliberations over revising the 2015 ozone standard, Pruitt committed the agency to meeting the October 2020 deadline to again review the standard. He also directed EPA to complete its review of the particulate matter standard by December 2020.

The memo also:

— Calls for "more efficient ways" to conduct the scientific and policy assessments that underlie NAAQS reviews;

— Requests a "clearer distinction" between the scientific conclusions and the "wider range of policy concerns" that Pruitt considers in setting standards;

— Urges CASAC members who disagree with the panel's consensus to "share their own individual opinions;" and

— Advises EPA to issue implementation rules and guidance concurrent with NAAQS revisions.

WHAT'S NEXT: The memo directs EPA to begin work on the next ozone review in order to complete it by October 2020.

Oil & Gas Journal

https://www.ogj.com/articles/2018/05/pruitt-signs-memo-outlining-naaqs-back-to-basics-review-process.html

Pruitt Signs Memo Outlining NAAQS 'Back To Basics' Review Process

By Nick Snow, 5/10/18

US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator E. Scott Pruitt signed a memorandum describing a "back to basics" process for reviewing the federal Clean Air Act's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). The memo assures that EPA and its independent science advisors take a transparent, efficient, and timely approach, he said on May 10.

The memo's principles will reform the process for setting NAAQS in a manner consistent with cooperative federalism and the rule of law, Pruitt maintained. "Getting EPA and its advisors back on track with CAA requirements, statutory deadlines, and the issuance of timely implementation rules will assure that we continue the dramatic improvement in air quality across our country," he said.

The reforms advance initiatives President Donald J. Trump set out in an April 12 memorandum directing Pruitt to take specific actions to ensure efficient and cost-effective NAAQS implementation, including permitting decisions for new and expanded manufacturing facilities and with respect to the Regional Haze Program.

EPA said that Pruitt's memo commits it to begin the next review of the ground-level ozone NAAQS so it can finalize any revisions by the October 2020 deadline under the CAA. It also requires that the agency complete its review of the particulate matter NAAQS by December 2020.

Responding to Pruitt's announcement, an American Petroleum Institute official noted that US ozone concentrations have fallen 17% since 2005, partly due to the oil and gas industry's investments to improve the environmental performance of its products, facilities, and operations.

"We look forward to continuing this progress in achieving our shared goals of protecting public health and the environment and meeting the nation's energy needs," API Regulatory and Scientific Affairs Senior Director Howard J. Feldman said.

Manufacturers applaud EPA for recognizing the problems that have plagued past air quality determinations and for taking strong steps to correct them, observed Ross Eisenberg, the National Association of Manufacturers VP for Energy Resources. "We hope today's announcement leads to better, more effective regulations and improved air quality," he said.

The New York Times

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/10/world/middleeast/israel-iran-syria-military.html

Israel And Iran, Newly Emboldened, Exchange Blows In Syria Face-Off

By Isabel Kershner and David M. Halbfinger, 5/10/18

JERUSALEM — The tense shadow war between Iran and Israel burst into the open early Thursday as Israeli warplanes struck dozens of Iranian military targets inside Syria. It was a furious response to what Israel called an Iranian rocket attack launched from Syrian territory just hours earlier.

The cross-border exchanges — the most serious assaults from each side in their face-off over Iran's presence in Syria — took place a little more than a day after the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement.

Israel's defense minister said that Israeli warplanes had destroyed "nearly all" of Iran's military infrastructure in Syria after Iran launched 20 rockets at Israeli-held territory, none reaching their targets.

Iran struck shortly after President Trump pulled out of the nuclear agreement, raising speculation that it no longer felt constrained by the possibility that the Americans might scrap the deal if Iran attacked Israel.

Israel appeared newly emboldened as well, partly because of what seemed like extraordinary latitude from Russia, Syria's most important ally, allowing the Israelis to act against Iran's military assets in Syria.

Moscow did not condemn Israel's strikes, as it had in the past, instead calling on Israel and Iran to resolve their differences diplomatically.

And Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, who spent 10 hours with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Wednesday, told his cabinet on Thursday that he had persuaded the Russians to delay the sale of advanced weapons to Syria.

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Russia and Iran have been allies in the Syrian war, defending President Bashar al-Assad. But as the war appears to be winding down, some analysts say the aims of Russia and Iran are diverging: Moscow prefers a strong secular central government in Syria, while Tehran prefers a weaker government that would allow Iran-backed militias free rein.

Israel has conducted scores of strikes on Iran and its allies inside Syria, rarely acknowledging them publicly. But before Thursday, Iran had not retaliated, seemingly handcuffed while it awaited Mr. Trump's decision on the nuclear accord.

Even so, the Iranians have plenty to lose if the conflict continues to grow. They still seem determined to preserve the nuclear accord despite renewed American sanctions. The accord also includes Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany and the European Union.

"We see now that Netanyahu feels that Iran's capacities in Syria are vulnerable, that he can target them, that Iran's capacities to strike back are weakened — he took out some of these capacities, probably less than he claims — and that Iran has no significant way to react without risking itself," said Ofer Zalzberg, an analyst at the International Crisis Group.

Israel made it clear on Thursday that its planning for the airstrikes had been known internally as "Chess," and it looked in the aftermath as though Iran might have been baited into a trap on the Syrian game board.

Iran's rocket attack against Israel came after what appeared to have been an Israeli missile strike against a village in the Syrian Golan Heights late on Wednesday.

Early on Thursday, Iranian forces fired about 20 Grad and Fajr-5 rockets at the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, targeting forward positions of the Israeli military, according to an Israeli military spokesman. The barrage was launched under the command of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and used Iranian weapons, said the Israeli spokesman, Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus.

Four of the rockets were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome antimissile defense system, and the rest fell short of the Israeli-controlled territory, the military said. Indeed, by Thursday morning, Israeli life returned to routine in the Golan Heights, with children going to school.

Still, the rocket attack was a significant escalation in Iran's maneuvers in the Middle East. Though Israel has hit Iranian forces in Syria with a number of deadly airstrikes, Tehran had been restrained in hitting back, until now.

"Iran had to make a point: that it can respond, even if it's a weak response," said Joshua M. Landis, a Syria expert and director of the Center of Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma. "But it also revealed a weakness: Those rockets don't have any brains."

Israel said its response struck a severe blow to Iran's military capacity in Syria. In a statement, the military said the targets included what it described as Iranian intelligence sites; a logistics headquarters belonging to the Quds Force; military compounds; munition storage warehouses of the Quds Force at Damascus International Airport; intelligence systems associated with those forces; and military posts and munitions in the buffer zone between the Syrian Golan Heights and the Israeli-occupied portion.

"If there is rain on our side, there will be a flood on their side," Israel's defense minister, Avigdor Lieberman, said Thursday morning in remarks broadcast from a policy conference in Herzliya, near Tel Aviv. "I hope we have finished with this round and that everybody understood."

In all, at least 23 people were killed in the strikes, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group. The Syrian Army, by contrast, said that three people had died. Israel reported no casualties on its side.

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Israel said it had no intention of further escalation, and analysts looking for clues to Iran's potential response noted that its news media was largely ignoring the overnight hostilities, focusing instead on the nuclear deal. The English-language report on the airstrikes from Iran's Fars news agency made no mention of Iranian involvement.

In a sign of international concern that the conflict could escalate, however, Britain, France, Germany and Russia were quick to call for calm. "We proceed from the fact that all issues should be solved through dialogue," the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said at a news conference.

The White House condemned the missile attack on Israel, saying in a statement that it strongly supported "Israel's right to act in self-defense" and called on Iran "to take no further provocative steps."

It also inflicted new financial pain on Iran on Thursday. The Treasury Department said it had teamed with the United Arab Emirates to disrupt an Iranian currency exchange network that transferred millions of dollars, in coordination with Iran's central bank, to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. "We are intent on cutting off I.R.G.C. revenue streams wherever their source and whatever their destination," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement.

Iran has taken advantage of the chaos in Syria to build a substantial military infrastructure there. It has built and trained large militias with thousands of fighters and sent advisers from its Revolutionary Guards Corps to Syrian military bases.

Mr. Netanyahu said this week that the Revolutionary Guards had moved advanced weapons to Syria, including ground-to-ground missiles, weaponized drones and Iranian antiaircraft batteries that he said would threaten Israel's military jets.

Israel's political and security establishment has been unified and vocal in vowing to thwart Iran's efforts to entrench itself militarily across Israel's northern frontier and to build what Israeli and American officials refer to as a land corridor from Iran, through Iraq and Syria, to Lebanon.

Israel had warned Tehran that it would respond to any attack. Israel also broadcast warnings to Syria, saying that allowing Iranian entrenchment in its territory put Mr. Assad's government at risk.

The tensions between Iran and Israel have been complicated further by Mr. Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement on Tuesday.

Israel had railed against the agreement, and Mr. Trump had campaigned on the promise of withdrawing from it, but European countries and many analysts had seen it as a crucial element holding back Iran and Israel, implacable foes, from all-out conflict.

As Mr. Trump announced his decision, Israel put its troops on "high alert," called up reservists, set up Iron Dome batteries and instructed the authorities in the Golan Heights to prepare public bomb shelters after detecting what it said was irregular activity by Iranian forces.

Israel's strikes early Thursday were some of the country's largest aerial operations in decades across the Syrian frontier, and by far the broadest direct attack yet on Iranian assets. "This was an operation we prepared for, and were not surprised by," Colonel Conricus said.

Israel said Russia had been informed before the overnight attack.

In recent years, Iran has helped Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed force in Lebanon, amass a huge arsenal of rockets it can use against Israel as a deterrent against Israeli strikes on Iran's nuclear program.

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Israel has carried out scores of strikes against what it says are advanced weapons and convoys destined for Hezbollah. But since February, when Israel intercepted what it later called an armed Iranian drone that had penetrated its airspace from Syria, setting off a day of heated cross-border exchanges, Israel's efforts appear to have been more focused on Iranian assets in Syria.

"Israel doesn't want another Hezbollah inside Syria, it doesn't want another Lebanon," said Andrew J. Tabler, a Syria scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "The Israelis think they can surgically strike and not create a wider conflict. They think that Assad, working with the Russians, will have an incentive not to respond."

The Associated Press

https://apnews.com/22f986def6eb42c0b8c035ca4b0d7f95

Trump's High-Risk Doctrine? Swing For The Bleacher Seats

By Catherine Lucey, Jonathan Lemire, and Ken Thomas, 5/10/18

WASHINGTON (AP) — The way President Donald Trump sees it, why go for a solid single when you can swing for a home run?

Trump's upcoming summit with North Korea's Kim Jong Un is only the latest example of the president's go-big strategy. From tax reform to international trade to foreign policy, Trump has pursued a high-risk, high-reward approach that advisers say can help produce results on longstanding problems — and that critics warn could trigger dangerous repercussions all the way from a trade war to global conflict.

Drawn to big moments and bigger headlines, Trump views the North Korea summit as a legacy-maker for him, believing that the combustible combination of his bombast and charm already has led to warmer relations between North and South. As he welcomed home three Americans who had been detained in North Korea, Trump early Thursday used a televised, middle-of-the-night ceremony to play up both his statecraft and stagecraft.

"I think you probably broke the all-time, in history, television rating for three o'clock in the morning," Trump told reporters on the tarmac at Joint Base Andrews.

Trump has also played the disruptor's role in recent weeks and months by withdrawing the U.S. from the Iran nuclear deal, imposing sweeping tariffs on allies and announcing he's moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, which is claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians.

It's all a sharp contrast to his play-it-safe predecessor.

"You hit singles, you hit doubles; every once in a while we may be able to hit a home run," President Barack Obama said of his own foreign policy. "But we steadily advance the interests of the American people and our partnership with folks around the world."

Not all of Trump's attention-grabbing gambits have worked — and the potential risks going forward are daunting.

His push to overturn Obama's landmark health care law ended in a humiliating defeat for the Republicans. His decision to impose new tariffs on steel and aluminum imports has left global markets in a state of flux and unnerved some of America's closest allies about the potential for a trade war. And his withdrawal from the international nuclear agreement with Iran, with strong support from Israel, has escalated tensions in the already volatile region.

Critics say Trump sometimes focuses on bold gestures first — and fallout later.

For now, scoring a diplomatic win with Pyongyang has become Trump's top focus.

His outside-the-box approach to North Korea — complete with ominous taunts of raining "fire and fury" on the North while belittling its leader as "Little Rocket Man" — alarmed many global capitals and much of Washington's national security establishment, increasing worries about nuclear war.

But Trump believes it brought Kim to the negotiating table, with a summit between the two men now set for June 12 in Singapore.

Trump told one confidant that he now believes a deal with North Korea, rather than in the Middle East, could be his historic victory. White House officials also believe that a triumph on the Korean Peninsula — something that has eluded the United States for generations — could bolster Trump's approval ratings, help inoculate him against the investigations swirling around him and maybe even trickle down to help Republicans in this fall's midterm elections.

While some White House aides characterized Trump's moves as evidence of bold thinking, there is also concern that he has little sense of the potential repercussions from some of his big moves, believing that if things don't work out, that he can always just reverse course.

In the early months of his administration, Trump latched on to the belief that he could be the president to bring peace to the Middle East. Fond of the idea of making history, the president told advisers he was driven to accomplish something that his predecessors could not and believed that his negotiating skills and strong relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could lead to the unprecedented achievement, according to four White House officials and outside advisers.

At one moment last spring, Trump mused in the Oval Office that he wouldn't even require a second term to settle things in the region, according to two people familiar with the exchange but not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

Though he did break with tradition to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, the White House plan bogged down and the divide between Israelis and Palestinians seems as intractable as ever, prompting Trump's attention shift to North Korea. Warned by Obama days after his election that the threat posed by Pyongyang could define his presidency, Trump answered Kim's threats with bellicose warnings of his own and rallied an international pressure campaign against North Korea.

Some Republicans have suggested his efforts should bring him the Nobel Peace Prize, an idea Trump clearly savored at a recent rally in Michigan when the crowd chanted "Nobel." Asked about the chatter in the Oval Office this week, Trump said: "I want to get peace. It's the main thing. We want to get peace. That was a big problem, and I think it's going to work out well."

Then he added his catchall caveat: "We'll see."

Long before he was president, the onetime New York real estate developer and reality television star often spoke about the benefits of acting boldly. In "The Art of the Deal," he put it this way: "I like thinking big. I always have. To me it's very simple: if you're going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big."

Trump appears to have embraced the "Great Man" theory of history, believing that individuals more than circumstances or trends alter the course of events. In his 2016 GOP convention speech, he famously declared "I alone can fix it," in referencing the nation's problems.

Trump and his team also believe that his bold tactics have the added benefit for Trump of overshadowing the threats his administration faces from the ongoing Russia probe and the legal web surrounding his personal attorney, Michael Cohen, and porn actress Stormy Daniels.

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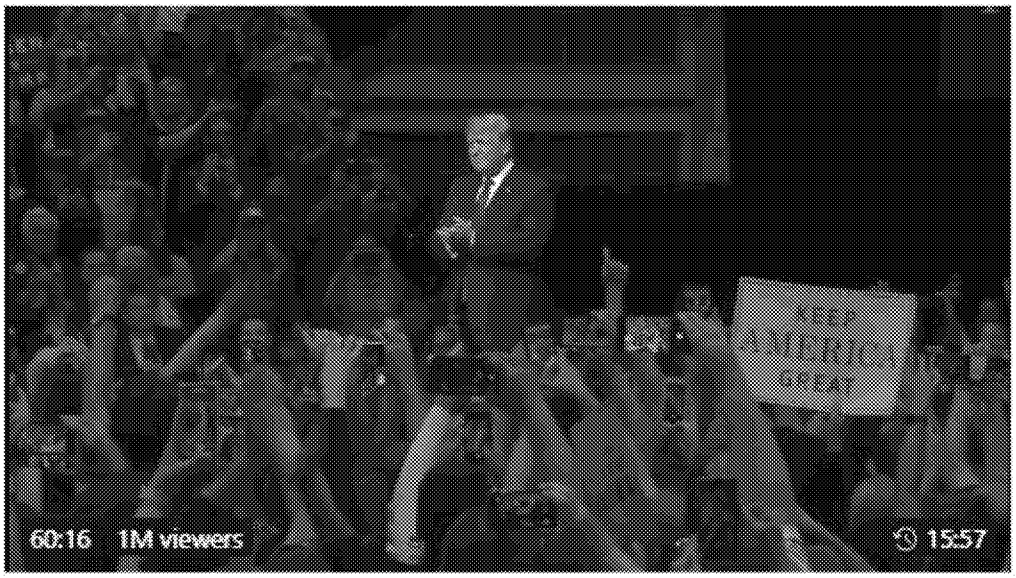
Rice University presidential historian Douglas Brinkley said Trump's diplomacy with North Korea is a "high-risk game."

"But if he pulls off the denuclearization of the North Korean Peninsula, it will be the landmark achievement," said Brinkley. "It's Trump's big going-to-China moment."

TRUMP TWEETS

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · 13h

Thank you Indiana! #MAGA



President Trump and VP Pence Hold a Rally in Indiana

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Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · 23h

The highly anticipated meeting between Kim Jong Un and myself will take place in Singapore on June 12th. We will both try to make it a very special moment for World Peace!

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