NEW YORKER

Michael Flynn and the White House

In the February 27, 2017, issue of *The New Yorker*, in "General Chaos" (p. 40), **Nicholas Schmidle** profiles Michael Flynn—the retired lieutenant general who, last week, resigned from his role as national-security adviser to Donald Trump—and considers what Flynn's down-fall reveals about the Trump White House. Schmidle spent several weeks interviewing Flynn, his closest military colleagues, and sources inside the Trump Administration. In August, 2015, Flynn—a lifelong Democrat whom Obama nominated, in 2012, to be the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency—met Trump for the first time. Flynn was deeply impressed, telling Schmidle, "I knew he was going to be the President of the United States." Of Trump's victory, Flynn said, "I like to think that I helped get Donald Trump elected President. Maybe I helped a little, maybe a lot." He continued, "I made some mistakes, but I'm still serving. It's like being a priest, you know. I've been called to serve."

Flynn had been one of Trump's earliest supporters, and Trump rewarded Flynn's loyalty by making him national-security adviser, one of his first major decisions. Flynn's challenge was unique, as Steve Bannon, Trump's chief political strategist, had seemingly moved to set up a kind of "parallel, shadow" national-security staff for his own purposes, one council staffer told Schmidle. When Bannon sent questions to the National Security Council staff, on February 5th, requesting a breakdown of contributions to NATO from individual members since 1949, many of the rank-and-file staffers were alarmed. "Those were Flynn's people, not political operatives," the staffer said. When asked whether it was appropriate for Bannon to have a permanent seat on the N.S.C., Flynn mentioned other political advisers who enjoyed similar access. He brought up Valerie Jarrett, a senior adviser to Obama. Jarrett did not have a seat on the N.S.C., Schmidle informed him. "She didn't? How about, like, Axelrod? He was Clinton, right?" David Axelrod, who was Obama's chief strategist, sometimes sat in on N.S.C. meetings but did not participate in policymaking discussions. Look, Flynn said, "the President shapes the team that he needs to be able to do the job that he has to do. So that's kind of where we are on that one."

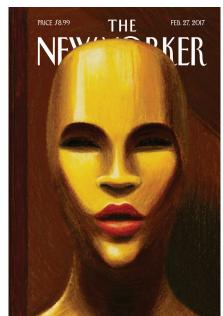
Flynn's dealings with Russia have historically been controversial. In 2013, Flynn took a trip to Moscow to speak to a group of officers from the G.R.U., Russia's intelligence agency. Steven Hall, the C.I.A.'s chief of Russia operations at the time, was skeptical of Flynn's mission, telling Schmidle, "He wanted to build a relationship with his counterparts in the G.R.U., which seemed, at best, quaint and naïve . . . Every time we have tried to have some sort of meaningful coöperation with the Russians, it's almost always been manipulated and turned back against us." In 2015, a D.C.-based representative of RT, the English-language Russian television channel, contacted Flynn's speakers' bureau and invited him to Moscow for the channel's tenth-anniversary celebration. The fee was approximately forty thousand dollars, according to a source familiar with the arrangement. A recent U.S. intelligence report said that the channel had become an important part of a "Kremlin-directed campaign to undermine faith in the US Government." Flynn told Schmidle, "We have to figure out how to work with Russia instead of making it an enemy."

Three weeks into his job as national-security adviser, the Washington Post revealed that Flynn, while he was still a private citizen and

Barack Obama was still President, had discussed American sanctions against Russia with Sergei Kislyak, the Russian Ambassador in Washington. Initially, Flynn denied talking about sanctions with the Ambassador; he told Schmidle "I've had a relationship with him since my days at the D.I.A."—the Defense Intelligence Agency, which Flynn directed from 2012 to 2014. The Justice Department had informed Trump officials of concerns about Flynn's conversations with the Russian Ambassador and his public accounting of them—yet Flynn remained an important player in national-security matters. "Flynn was always in the room, and on every call," one Administration official told Schmidle.

After Trump asked for his resignation last week, Flynn spent the next few days with his wife, taking long walks, "reflecting and capturing his thoughts," a close associate told Schmidle. Flynn was going through a "range of emotional swings." There were reports of investigations on an array of fronts: an F.B.I.-led inquiry into Flynn's communications with the Russian Ambassador; an Army-led one into payments that Flynn might have received from the Russian government during his trip to Moscow, in 2015; and calls for probes from members of the Senate and House intelligence committees. Flynn has been consulting with a lawyer.

Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House intelligence committee, told Schmidle that Trump had known "for weeks" that Flynn was lying, and the fact that the Administration was "O.K. with that tells you a lot about their comfort level misleading the public." A former C.I.A.



official raised similar concerns about how long Flynn was allowed to stay in his job. "We've now got a guy briefed on our most closely guarded secrets about a whole host of issues—including Russia—who has been canned," the official said." White House officials have sought to portray Flynn as having had his conversations with the Russian Ambassador on his own, but Schiff and others are doubtful. Schiff said it would be "extraordinary" if Flynn was "some kind of free agent, entering into discussions with the Russians about undermining President Obama's sanctions against Russia for its interference in our elections to help elect Donald Trump." "This story is bigger than Mike Flynn," a senior military-intelligence official said. "Who told Mike to go do this? I think somebody said, 'Mike, you've got some contacts. Let them know it's gonna be all right.' Mike's a soldier. He did not go rogue."

The Academy's Diversity Campaign Is Rattling Some Egos

In "Oscar Dearest" (p. 26), **Michael Schulman** sits down with Cheryl Boone Isaacs, president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and explores a tumultuous awards era, rife with controversy around racism, sexism, and ageism. In 2015 and 2016, all twenty acting nominees were white, and #OscarsSoWhite began trending on social media. Boone Isaacs, the Academy's first black president and third female president, tells Schulman, "It became apparent that doing business as usual wasn't going to be enough." The board unanimously approved a plan to diversify the voting body quickly by aggressively recruiting new members while shifting oldtimers to "emeritus status." Mother Dolores Hart, the actress who starred opposite Elvis Presley before renouncing Hollywood to become a nun, was one of the casualties. She told Schulman, "I think if they cut off too much of the elder community, they're going to clip the *wisdom* dimension of the Academy." Tab Hunter, an Academy member since 1974, told Schulman that the Academy's response to #OscarsSoWhite "was an overreaction." He continued, "If there's no role for a Chinaman, there's no role for a Chinaman!" In June, the Academy released a list of almost seven hundred new members—forty-six per cent of whom are female and forty-one per cent are nonwhite, representing fiftynine different countries.

"The diversity issue opened up a now familiar dynamic in American life: as marginalized groups attain more influence, others feel resentful," Schulman writes. "But, much like Presidential politics, the Oscar race is not as simple as voters checking a box; behind the scenes, it is driven by a vast, self-perpetuating machinery." For Academy voters, awards season is a roving party that begins before Thanksgiving and extends well past New Year's. Of the events that studios arrange to promote their movies, one self-described "candidate-whisperer" told Schulman, "You go in there lubricated by the talent and then you get fucked over by the charm." Negative campaigning plays a role as well: any rap against a movie or an actor—the sexual-harassment allegations against "Manchester by the Sea"s Casey Affleck, for example—is attributed to a Machiavellian rival working the grapevine or manipulating a journalist. The Academy has had to police the increasingly aggressive campaign scene—it's against the rules to ask for votes explicitly, and the Academy now forbids ads that cast "a derogatory light on a competing film."

Boone Isaacs emphasized that her goal in changing membership was never to change what got nominated. "Voting is personal," she told Schulman. "I have no influence over that." Boone Isaacs had seen moments of "inclusion" come and go in Hollywood. "It's just how the wheel moves," she said. This year, for the first time in Oscar history, all four acting categories included black nominees—but the nominations included no female directors or cinematographers.

Europe Is Supposed to Protect Young, Unaccompanied Refugees. Why Is It Failing Them?

In "The Children's Odyssey" (p. 52), **Lauren Collins** reports on the standoff over the thousands of children seeking asylum in Europe. "Unaccompanied minors are the de-facto vanguard of the greatest migration since the Second World War—its innovators and its guinea pigs," Collins writes. Among the 1.3 million people who sought asylum in Europe in 2015 were nearly a hundred thousand unaccompanied children. Under the Dublin III Treaty, refugees must apply for asylum in the first European Union country they enter. However, an unaccompanied minor with a close relative elsewhere in Europe has a right to pursue asylum there. Once children arrive in Europe, they supposedly have a right to medical care, psychological counselling, education, and legal aid, but many of them aren't getting it.

Collins tracks the journey of Wasil, a twelve-year-old boy who left his home in Afghanistan in December, 2015, hoping to connect with his uncle in England. Wasil travelled almost four thousand miles over several months, across much of Asia and Europe, before reaching an informal refugee camp in Calais, France, known as the Jungle, favored for its proximity to the Channel Tunnel that connects France and England. Thousands of refugees and migrants from all over the world congregated at the camp with the sole objective of making it onto British soil. But the children at such places confront a number of dangers: vermin, feces-contaminated water, bullying, petty crime, violence, sexual abuse, and disease. "I did not come here for luxury," Wasil told Collins. "But I can't believe this is happening in Europe." The French government demolished the Jungle in October, though refugee camps are forming again in northern France.

Political infighting among the European states has left many refugee children in limbo. Wasil was sent to the U.K. in November, but his whereabouts are unclear. The Home Office declined to comment on his application, but said, "We are committed to reuniting children with their families under the Dublin process, but it is essential that we carry out the proper safeguarding and security checks, working closely with local authorities and social workers." While unaccompanied minors continue to arrive in Europe in droves, their fate remains unresolved.

Is Keith Ellison's D.N.C. Run Uniting Democrats, or Deepening Their Divisions?

In "The Protest Candidate" (p. 34), Vinson Cunningham profiles Keith Ellison, the Minnesota congressman who, by running for the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee, hopes to lead a populist opposition against Donald Trump. When Ellison-the first Muslim to be elected to the U.S. Congress and an early and fervent supporter of Bernie Sanders's Presidential campaign-announced his candidacy for the D.N.C. chairmanship, in November, Sanders, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, and Schumer's predecessor, Harry Reid, endorsed him. The work of organizing, Ellison told Cunningham, "isn't just about winning elections. It's about building community. It's a way for neighbors to talk about stuff, when neighbors don't usually talk." Ellison gained an advantage in the race by announcing his candidacy early, but "he has faced several obstacles in the months since: recurring questions about his more radical past; a palpable if rarely articulated uneasiness with his faith; and, perhaps most perplexing, the shadow of Bernie Sanders, whose support accounts for both the initial strength of Ellison's run and the intensity of the opposition that has gathered against him," Cunningham writes. Ten candidates are competing for the D.N.C. chair, and Ellison's chief rival, Thomas E. Perez, increasingly appears to have seized the role of front-runner. Perez's entry into the race "turned it into a proxy battle, with Ellison representing the left-leaning Sanders-Warren wing of the Party and Perez serving as an avatar of Obama-like technocracy," Cunningham writes. Perez bristles at the suggestion that he is the favored candidate of the Democratic establishment, telling Cunningham, "I've always believed that, rather than focussing on labels that aren't accurate, and labels that are, frankly, loaded terms, it's important to focus on facts, and focus on a person's actions that really define his values." Although Barack Obama has an apparent preference for Perez, who was formerly Obama's Labor Secretary, Ellison tells Cunningham, "I think the President is a fair man. I think he'll stay with what he said, which is that he won't be involved in the D.N.C. race."

In January, Cunningham attended a debate, in Washington, between Ellison and his opponents, and later accompanied him to a protest against Trump's nomination of Betsy DeVos as the Secretary of Education. Ellison told Cunningham, "now Trump's in power. So the D.N.C. should be leading the resistance to that. And I don't think that there's any inherent magic in occupying the outsider status. I think that Democrats, and people with compassion, people who love tolerance and inclusion, we ought to get comfortable in power."

Plus: In Comment, **George Packer** reflects on Donald Trump's latest White House press conference, and considers how, after a month in office, he has "already proved himself unable to discharge his duties" (p. 21); in Shouts & Murmurs, **Ian Frazier** cites the many benefits of hiring mummies over zombies (p. 33); **Elizabeth Kolbert** reads several books about the limitations of reason (p. 66); **Peter Schjeldahl** attends shows of work by Alexei Jawlensky and Vija Celmins (p. 72); **Alex Ross** reviews "Ipsa Dixit," a composition by Kate Soper (p. 74); **Hilton Als** attends a musical adaptation of the 1950 film "Sunset Boulevard" at the Palace, directed by Lonny Price (p. 76); poetry by **Ada Limón** (p. 47); and **Charles Rafferty** (p. 59); and new fiction by **Lore Segal** (p. 62).

Podcasts: Dorothy Wickenden speaks with the author Sissela Bok about political spin; and Lore Segal reads her short story.

Digital Extras: Ada Limón and Charles Rafferty read their poems; and a slide show of art works by Vija Celmins and Alexei Jawlensky.

The February 27, 2017, issue of The New Yorker goes on sale at newsstands beginning Monday, February 20.