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Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Inside C2

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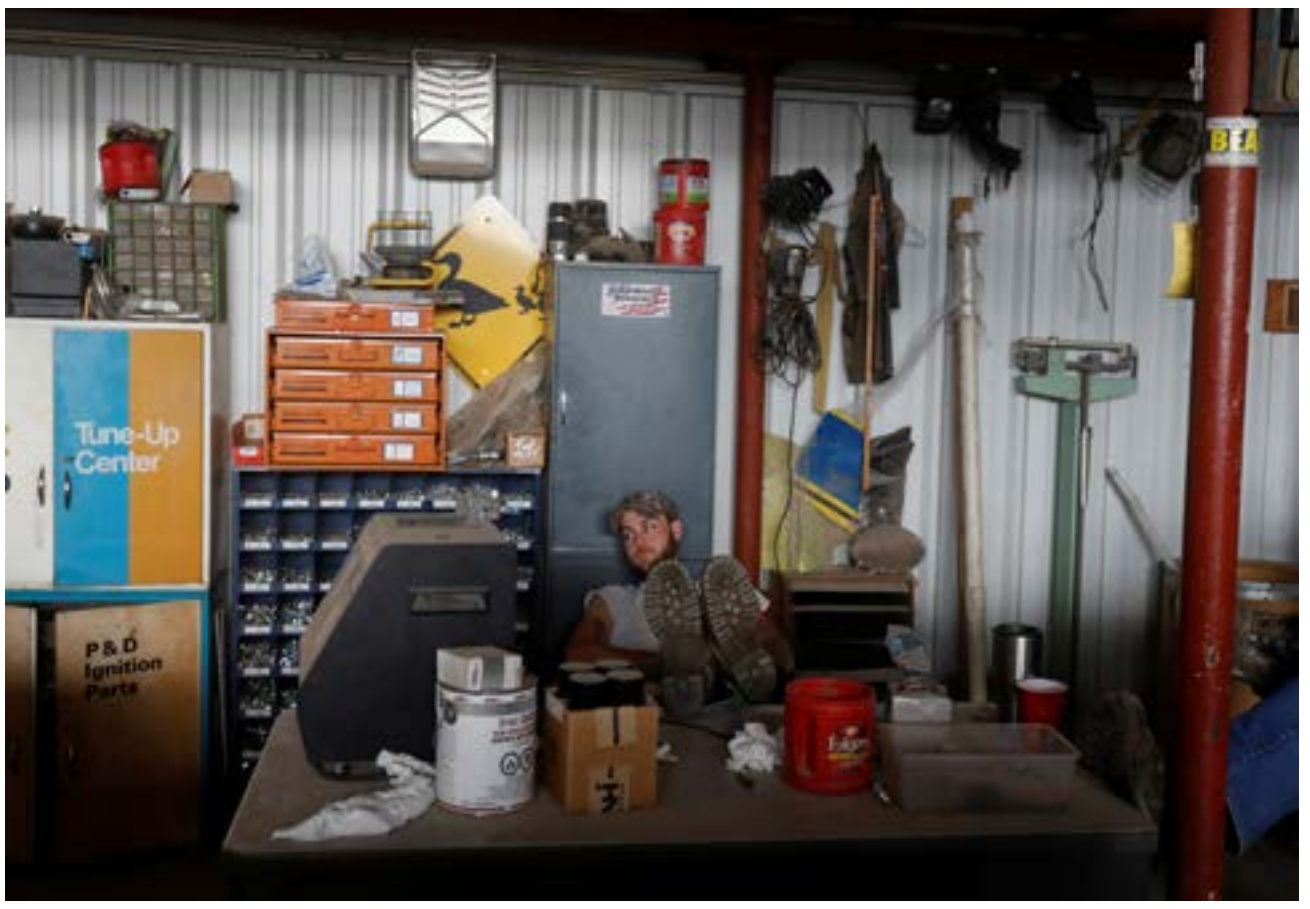
Trump's trade war splits a Missouri county into winners and losers

NEW MADRID COUNTY, Mo. (Reuters) - People don't talk about trade tariffs in this stretch of the Mississippi River basin, where grains and metals have paid the bills for generations.
They skirt the subject at church fundraisers and sidestep it at Jerry's Café and Quick Stop, where farmers and aluminum workers gossip about everything else.
Here, the winners and losers in U.S. President Donald Trump's trade war live side-by-side.
The Republican president's tariffs on imported metals were instrumental in reviving an aluminum plant that most locals had written off for dead. But in the fields surrounding the plant and across the county, farmers anxious over trade retaliations against U.S. crop exports are delaying equipment purchases, renting their land to hunters and pre-selling crops before harvest - locking in today's prices for fear they will fall.
"People don't want to talk about trade," said Justin Rone, a farmer with deep family roots in soybeans and cotton. "It's safer to talk about how best to grow your crop, keep your head down and pray."
Farmers' fears were realized Friday as the United States and China levied dueling tariffs on $34 billion worth of each country's goods. Many U.S. agricultural exports, including soybeans, now face 25 percent duties.
Neil Priggel knows both sides of the trade war's impact on his community. He worked at the Noranda Aluminum smelter before it went belly-up in 2016 and also runs his family's 4,000-acre farm along with two brothers.
As Trump announced steel and aluminum tariffs in March, Priggel stared at the TV news and thought: We're saved. We'll get our jobs back.
His very next thought: We've got to protect the farm.
Priggel and other farmers here, where about 70 percent of voters supported Trump, know their crops are obvious targets for countries striking back against U.S. tariffs. They also know the tax on metal imports helped lure new owners to reopen the plant that has long financed their neighbors' mortgages, truck payments and groceries.
Kathee Brown worked at Noranda for three decades. She returned in March a one-person human resources division for what's now called Magnitude 7 Metals. Her phone rings constantly.
Is it true the plant is coming back?
Did you get my application?
At her dusty office desk, its drawers still full of old invoices, she checks her voicemail – full, again. Many callers are former plant workers; sometimes they break into tears when she calls back.
The plant's new owners plan to hire 465 people, for now.
More than double that number have applied.
Getting the smelter back was a long shot, locals say, just like getting a high-paying factory to this rural corner of Missouri in the first place. When it was built in 1969, they named its site for the patron saint of lost causes: the St. Jude Industrial Park.
Workers rode out years of aluminum price drops, labor strikes, recessions and fights with electricity suppliers. The company would cut shifts, lay off workers, then hire them back, workers say.
But the plant closed in early 2016 after a series of crippling blows: global aluminum prices plunged; a New York private equity fund heaped on $1 billion in debt in a leveraged buyout; an explosion disabled the plant's cast house; a power-outage shut two production lines.
About 1,000 people had to go find jobs, often at much lower pay, said Mark Baker, a farmer and presiding commissioner for New Madrid County.
"People lost homes," said Dick Bodi, mayor of New Madrid, Missouri. "People got divorced."
Local police and ambulance budgets were cut. The county went into



Farmer Jacob Jordan, 24, rests before starting the day of farming at at Bean and Bean Cotton Company in Gideon Missouri,

the red for two years, Baker said. Noranda never made a $3.1 million tax payment to the New Madrid school district, forcing job cuts and halting school repairs, said Sam Duncan, county superintendent of schools.
The district saw a 10 percent drop in school enrollments as families left the area, Duncan said.
But most stayed, often turning to the region's other dominant for work.
"The only people hiring were the farmers," said Dalton Bezell, 31, who worked for Noranda.
By late summer, Noranda's staff had shrunk to nine people, making a fraction of their previous salaries.
Their job: Secure the plant and try to figure out a way to revive it.
Steve Rusche, now chief operating officer of Magnitude 7 Metals, was among the nine.
He watched as prospective buyers toured the plant – not to restart it, but to chop it up and sell it for scrap.
One was different: Magnitude 7 Metals LLC, founded by former Glencore Plc aluminum trader Matt Lucke, who wanted to operate the plant if it could work financially, Rusche said.
Lucke did not respond to requests for comment.
The Republican-controlled state legislature helped by passing a controversial law making it easier for manufacturers to hire non-unionized workers, a bill plant representatives supported. Some of Noranda's remaining crew of nine helped to cut electricity deals and lock in raw material prices for the new company.
"The pivot point was when things started to come out of Washington about the metal tariffs," Rusche said.
Last June, Magnitude 7 Metals Chief Executive Officer Bob Prusak testified before the Commerce Department at a public hearing about a department investigation into aluminum imports. Tariffs, he told


A digital screen shows the direction for fertilising Gideon, Missouri, U.S., May 16, 2018. Picture taken May 16, 2018. REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton

them, were "nothing short of critical to get us up and running," according to a video of the hearing.More investors joined as Trump threatened and later imposed the metal tariffs.
The plant ramped up hiring and opened its first production line on June 14.
"Now, there's hope," said Bodi, the New Madrid mayor.
FEAR IN FARM COUNTRY
Hope is fading on the farms of New Madrid county.
The region was among Missouri's top soybean and corn producers last year, according to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). DuPont Pioneer runs a massive soybean seed production plant here. A nearby riverbank is crowded with farm bins and barge loaders operated by global grain trader Archer Daniels Midland, farm cooperative Riceland Foods Inc and suppliers Crop Production Services and Agrium Inc.

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

LOCAL NEWS

FEMA grants more than $76 million to the Texas General Land Office for PREPS program reimbursement

AUSTIN, Texas – The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has awarded $76.7 million to the Texas General Land Office as a reimbursement for the management and execution of the Partial Repair and Essential Power for Sheltering (PREPS) program following Hurricane Harvey.

The PREPS program provided emergency repairs and power restoration to single-family, owner-occupied homes. These repairs made the home safe, sanitary, and secure so that the homeowner could return home, rather than shelter in a hotel or rental property, while they continued to work on their full recovery.

The measures taken during the PREPS repair process provided only the minimal and essential repairs necessary to make the home safe and sanitary.

This FEMA grant of $76 million requires a 10 percent non-federal match, or $8.5 million, of the nearly $85 million award.

The total cost of the PREPS program, with previous reimbursements, was more than $170.5 million.

This funding comes from FEMA's Public Assistance grant program which reimburses state agencies for actions taken during response and recovery from disasters, such as Hurricane Harvey. Eligible applicants include states, federally recognized tribal governments, U.S. territories, local governments, and certain private nonprofit organizations.

FEMA obligates funding for these projects directly to the state. It is the state's responsibility to ensure that the eligible final recipients receive these awards. Following the state's review process and upon receipt of appropriate documentation, they will provide funds to the final recipients on a reimbursable basis.

For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at https://www.dps.texas.gov/dem/.

Congressman Al Green's Statement on Maintaining Border Security and the Abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

(Houston, TX) - Congressman Al Green released the following statement regarding border security and immigration enforcement reform:

"Immigration has been at the heart of our Nation's effort to form a more perfect Union. What began in 1891 as the Office of Superintendent of Immigration in the Treasury Department, became Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in 1933. As late as 2003, INS was abolished, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was born within the Department of Homeland Security. The functions of INS were placed under ICE and other agencies. Throughout the past 127 years, several entities have emanated from the initial 1891 immigration enforcement effort. Currently, by taking babies from their parents, ICE has become a symbol of national shame. It has placed a stain on our Nation's global image. The state of immigration and enforcement must continue to evolve. It is not perfect, and we must not mistakenly believe that ICE is where the buck stops. Just as INS was abolished to create ICE,

we should abolish ICE to create an agency that is better balanced between immigration and enforcement; such that enforcement is not overemphasized and immigration is not deemphasized. I support just and balanced enforcement through comprehensive immigration reform, not open borders."

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice

Bruce Edler, 56, a farmer for 40 years, fills seed planters with soybean seed in Gideon Missour

A model poses with Northwest Cherries during a promotional event in Shenzhen

Employee, James Perkins, stands while working at the Magnitude 7 Metals LLC aluminium smelter which is reopening and taking on hundreds of local workers in New Madrid, Missouri

Workers inside the Magnitude 7 Metals LLC aluminium smelter which is reopening and taking on hundreds of local workers in New Madrid Missouri

The Magnitude 7 Metals LLC aluminium smelter which is reopening and taking on hundreds of local workers in New Madrid Missouri

A guest poses with Northwest Cherries during a promotional event in Shenzhen

Corn is loaded into a truck at a farm in Tiskilwa, Illinois

A trailer is filled with soybeans at a farm in Buda, Illinois

Corn and soybean farmer William Hejl checks his cornfield in Amenia

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

Major Canadian Employers Are AlreadyConsidering Covering The Drug, Says Industry Insider

Could Medical Marijuana Be Your Next Employee Health Benefit?

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The winds of change are blowing through employee benefit plans across Canada, and they smell like weed.

Benefits industry insider Mike Sullivan caught a whiff at a recent meeting with some of his clients, who represent private companies with benefit plans that cover about three million Canadian workers across a range of industries.

"This group that was in attendance, the No. 1 topic of discussion was medical cannabis," said Sullivan, who is president of Cubic Health, which provides analytics to employers who sponsor health benefit plans.

"That's what everybody wanted to talk about — but not in a negative way: there's a lot of support for looking at this and examining it in a thoughtful, responsible way," Sullivan told an audience at a cannabis business conference held in Toronto by the Canadian Institute May 25.

The insurance industry itself has been hesitant to cover medical marijuana, according to Sullivan.

"Insurance company actuaries cannot get their head around how to price the risk of medical cannabis," he said, citing the range of products available, the personalized nature of dosing, and the wide range of potential indications as complicating factors.

But that doesn't matter to medium- and large-sized Canadian employers, Sullivan said. They generally use insurance companies to administer their employee health benefit plans while paying the costs of coverage themselves, an arrangement known as a self-insured, self-funded or "administrative services only" plan.

Self-insured companies get to choose what their benefit plans cover — and apparently, some of their workers want them to cover medical marijuana.

"Employers are hearing it from their employees," said Joan Weir, director of health and disability policy with the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association. "Will it ever be a benefit?"

'Mutual Benefit' To Employers, Employees

Those employers, said benefits expert Mike Sullivan, are seeking the answer to a question: "Can they do a better job of getting people back to work sooner, and staying at work," by covering medical marijuana?

Large Canadian companies with self-funded employee benefit plans are seriously considering covering medical cannabis for their workers, according to a benefits industry insider. (Photo/Bloomberg)

Of course, paying for employees' medical marijuana raises a host of complex questions, especially in safety-sensitive industries like resource extraction or construction. But workers in those industries are already using employer-covered drugs, said Sullivan, especially opiates and benzodiazepines.

"I think it's a very naive argument for employers to say, 'Well, we don't want to open up the door here,'" he said. "The door is already open."

As self-insured health benefit plans start covering medical marijuana, employees shouldn't expect blanket approvals for the drug. Coverage will have to be approved on a case-by-case basis, said Sullivan.

Jonathan Zaid, executive director of Canadian For Fair Access to Medical Marijuana, convinced the University of Waterloo student union to cover his medical cannabis under its health benefit plan in December 2014. Covering medical marijuana brings "mutual benefit" for patients and their employers, according to Jonathan Zaid, executive director of Canadians for Fair Access to Medical Marijuana. (Photo CBC)

"We hear wide-ranging anecdotal reports that are extremely positive from patients, saying that they're going back to work, they're having better family and social lives, they're happier, their symptoms are more manageable, and they're often going off of other pharmaceutical drugs which are all insured," Zaid said.

Some Plans Already Cover Marijuana

Zaid himself has been covered for medical cannabis by the University of Waterloo student union's health benefit plan since December 2014. He said it took eight months of discussions to reach an agreement with his plan sponsor.

A small number of other self-insured Canadian health benefit plans already cover medical marijuana in certain circumstances.

Windsor, Ont.. union LIUNA Local 625 recently started covering medical marijuana as a way to reduce opioid use among members. Earlier this year, a Nova Scotia human rights board said the Canadian Elevator Industry Welfare Trust Plan had to cover medical marijuana expenses for employee Gordon "Wayne" Skinner, although that plan's board of trustees is appealing the decision.

Veterans Affairs Canada also reimburses a growing number of military veterans for medical cannabis.

From the perspective of benefit plan sponsors, there's strong medical evidence that medical marijuana is effective for three specific conditions, according to Cubic health's Mike Sullivan: spasticity in multiple sclerosis patients, nausea reduction for chemotherapy patients, and relief of chronic pain.

Loblaw Companies is covering medical marijuana for employees through their health benefit plans, but only in a limited number of cases. (Photo/Reuters/Canadian Press)

Grocery and pharmacy giant Loblaw Companies started covering medical marijuana for for employees in late March — but Sullivan noted that Loblaw is only covering MS and chemotherapy patients, leaving out the potentially large population of chronic pain patients who could benefit from coverage.

"It's curious to me that they cherry-picked the two groups that are going to be very, very, very small in number, and that they just said [the annual coverage limit] is going to be $1,500," Sullivan told CBC News. "Where did that number come from?"

Licensed Marijuana Producers Lay Groundwork

Marijuana has not been assigned a Drug Identification Number from Health Canada, which makes it difficult for insurers to process claims. But some licensed marijuana producers are are laying the groundwork for employers to cover their products by assigning them Product Identification Numbers instead.

"We want to make it as easy as possible" for insurance administrators to cover costs, said Philippe Lucas, vice president of patient research and access at licensed producer Tilray.

Lucas said some Tilray customers are already getting their costs covered by major insurance plan administrators like Great West Life, Sun Life and Wawanesa by way of employees' individual healthcare spending accounts, which allow discretionary spending of an annual amount of money on approved medical expenses.

Tilray is also actively lobbying employee benefit plan sponsors to include cannabis in their coverage, he said.

Meanwhile, Lucas sees changing attitudes towards medical marijuana among insurance industry players.

"I think that there's a hesitance by some industry members of being the first out of the gate to offer medical cannabis, but there's a greater fear of being the last out of the gate to offer this coverage," he said. (Courtesy http://www.cbc.ca/news)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

President Donald Trump meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G20 Summit on July 7, 2017, in Hamburg, Germany. (Photo/AP)

The Helsinki Summit

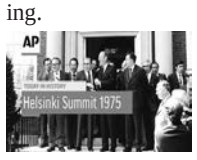
Trump-Putin Summit: Last Hope For World Peace Or Futile Diplomacy?

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

On July 16, US President Donald Trump will meet in the Finnish capital Helsinki a triumphant Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has just secured another victory in the Syrian war and obtained the international recognition he wanted from hosting the World Cup.

The Russian president will seek to exploit the growing rift between the United States and the European Union and the intensifying Iranian-Israeli rivalry to achieve his two main goals: Break Russiaout of international isolation and become the sole kingmaker in Syria.

But in pursuing a deal with Trump, Putin poses the biggest threat to the legitimacy of his US counterpart domestically and internationally. The US establishment and intelligence community largely believe that the Kremlin favoured him in the 2016 US presidential race and an investigation into alleged Russian interference is still ongoing.



At the same time, Trump is confronted with an increasingly disgruntled group of allies who are wary of Russia's aggressive posturing. That he will be meeting Putin right after attending the NATO summit in Brussels and visiting the UK (which has just had a major diplomatic crisis with Moscow), will not please any of them.

A history of Helsinki summits

The choice of Helsinki as the venue of the summit is not coincidental. The Finnish capitalhas hosted leaders of the two superpowers for important talks on two other major occasions.

In September 1990, a month after Iraq invaded Kuwait, US President George H W Bush met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Helsinki to discuss the crisis in the Gulf.

Preoccupied with the dissolution of the Eastern bloc after the fall of the Berlin Wall and with a Soviet Union on the verge of collapse, Gorbachev was negotiating from a position of weakness. Bush wanted his commitment to implementing sanctions on Saddam Hussein's regime and he got it, in exchange for support for his counterpart's reform plans.

In March 1997, US President Bill Clinton met Russian President Boris Yeltsin to discuss a range of security and economic issues, including nuclear disarmament. At that summit, the Russian president had no trump cards to play.

The economic situation in Russia had been persistently deteriorating while the government was waging a highly unpopular war in Chechnya. Badly needing US financial support and backing, Yeltsin decided to concede to the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe in return for Russia's integration in the global economy with US help. For that disastrous decision, he was labelled a "US puppet" by his opponents.

On July 16, President Trump will meet President Putin, but this time around, it seems, the roles have been reversed. The US president is facing a growing legitimacy crisis at home, where he is perceived as "a Russian puppet", while his Russian counterpart has been dealt a powerful hand.

US President George Bush holds a framed cartoon presented to him by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on September 9, 1990 in Helsinki. The cartoon shows Mr World holding up the hands of Bush and Gorbachev after their knockout of the Cold War [AP/Doug Mills]

The Trump-Putin deal

This will be the fourth meeting between the two leaders since Trump took office in January 2017. They met twice during the July 2017 G20 summit in Germany and once on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit (APEC) summit in Vietnam last November.

Since they last met, Trump succumbed to domestic pressure and took a number of anti-Russian measures, including approving lethal weapons sales to Ukraine in December, expelling Russian diplomats from the US in March, striking the Syrian regime and imposing additional sanctions on Russian officials in April.

Putin, too, upped the ante by giving a provocative speech on March 1, issuing unveiled threats of an arms race with the US. Then, after his re-election, he took advantage of the simmering US-EU trade war and the Iran nuclear deal crisis to re-engage with France and Germany, while also negotiating with Israel on key points of concern regarding the Syrian war.

Trump will give up Syria to Putin the way Gorbachev left Iraq to Bush in 1990.

Putin's actions left Trump with no choice but to move up the meeting and send his national security adviser John Bolton to Moscow to set it up.

The US president plans to meet alone with his Russian counterpart and his translator, triggering concerns in the US and Europe regarding what he might concede if left alone in the room.

Trump and Putin with translators at the G20 Summit

But despite these fears, no real breakthrough in US-Russian relations should be expected until Special Counsel Robert Mueller finalises his investigation. Lifting US sanctions on Russia, recognising its annexation of Crimea, and pulling US troops out of Eastern Europe are all off the table for the Helsinki summit; Trump's hands are tied by US domestic politics.

The only issue on which he can concede to lure in the Russian president is the Syrian war. Trump will give up Syria to Putin the way Gorbachev left Iraq to Bush in 1990.

The prerequisites for this deal are already in place. Trump's closest ally, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is scheduled to meet Putin on July 11, just five days before the Helsinki summit; this will be their third meeting this year.

Russia is engaging the Israeli prime minister, aiming to repeat the Deraa scenario in Quneitra province near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Trump seems fine with the idea of ultimately removing US troops from the al-Tanf area on the Jordanian-Iraqi-Syrian border in return for keeping Iranian forces and their proxies away from southwest Syria.

The al-Tanf area on the Jordanian-Iraqi-Syrian border

Trump's endgame is not Syria. What he ultimately wants is for Putin to remain neutral in the US diplomatic offensive on Iran. The White House hopes Russia will follow through on the initial agreement with Saudi Arabia and OPEC and increase its oil output to compensate for the drop in Iranian oil exports caused by the reimposition of US sanctions.

This move would diminish the effect of the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal on international markets and minimise a potential negative impact on the US economy ahead of mid-term elections in November. Moreover, Trump is also attempting to outmanoeuvre the Europeans in their rapprochement with Moscow by offering Putin to rejoin the G7.

And it already seems that the agreement between the two leaders is solidified even before they met. Russia is passively watching as the EU states scramble to save the nuclear deal with Iran, while the US has done nothing to help the Syrian opposition factions it once supported against the Russian and Syrian regime operation in Deraa.

Apart from that, the aftermath of the summit will also give an indication of how relations between Washington and Moscow will develop in the near future. Will a direct line of communication be re-established, most notably on arms control negotiations? Will the Russian ambassador in Washington have more access to US officials moving forward? Will the US establishment become more receptive to engaging Moscow without tangible shift in Russian policy post-Helsinki summit? If there is a change on one or more of these fronts, it could bring more dynamism into US-Russian relations. (Courtesy https://www.aljazeera.com)