

Donald Trump's Failing Presidency

Special Report: After his election, Donald Trump had a narrow path to a transformational presidency, but it required breaking the neocon grip on U.S. foreign policy and telling truth to U.S. citizens. Already, Trump has failed, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The 100-day mark may be an artificial measuring stick for a U.S. president. Obviously much can happen in the remaining 1,361 days of a four-year term. But Donald Trump's decisions in his first three months in office have put him on an almost irreversible path to failure.

He now appears to be little more than a traditional Republican with more than a little dash of Kardashian sleaze in him, a boorish reality-TV star reading from a neocon script that could have been written for many of his GOP rivals, except he delivers his lines with worse grammar and a limited vocabulary, favoring imprecise words such as "beautiful" and "sad."

Trump also has the look of a conman. He sold himself as a populist who would fight for the forgotten Americans, but is following domestic policies aimed at comforting his super-rich friends while afflicting his most loyal blue-collar supporters.

He promises a tax package that will give huge breaks to the already well-to-do; he backed a Republican health-care plan that would have left 24 million Americans without insurance but saved billions for billionaires; he shows no sign of delivering on his trillion-dollar infrastructure plan although he keeps pushing his "beautiful" wall across the entire border with Mexico; and his hectoring of U.S. companies to stop exporting jobs has been more show than substance.

On the foreign policy front, Trump has broken his vow to move away from endless war and needless confrontation – and avoid their extraordinary costs in blood and treasure. After months of getting newspaper-slapped by the mainstream media over Russia-gate, Trump has put his tail between his legs and become a housebroken dog to neocon dogma. He also licks the hand of Israel and Saudi Arabia as he and his team keep repeating the favorite Israeli-Saudi mantra that "Iran is the principal sponsor of terrorism."

His administration also blames Iran – not Israel, Saudi Arabia and indeed the United States – for Middle Eastern instability. But it was President George W.

Bush and his neocon advisers who devised the disastrous invasion of Iraq with Israeli backing; it was President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who pushed for “regime change” in Libya and Syria, another Israeli-Saudi priority; it was Saudi Arabia and its Gulf State allies that have armed Al Qaeda, Islamic State and other Sunni terrorist groups; it is Israel that has persecuted the indigenous Palestinian population for generations and invaded Lebanon among other neighbors.

For all its faults, Iran has mostly opposed these operations and is now contributing military forces to fight Islamic State and Al Qaeda militants in Iraq and Syria. Yet, Trump has now conformed to the upside-down view of the Middle East that all the “important people” of Official Washington know to be true, that it’s all Iran’s fault, except – of course – what can be pinned on Russia.

Trump as Sociopath

Under intense pressure from the Democratic and Republican establishments – and facing an intelligence-community-driven hysteria over vague links between some of his advisers and Moscow – Trump has further buckled on his pledge to improve relations with Russia, instead ratcheting up rhetoric and threats.

Trump earned Official Washington’s pat on the head for firing 59 Tomahawk missiles at Syria on April 6 before any careful evaluation of a chemical-weapons incident in northern Syria could be conducted, an action that Hillary Clinton and the neocon-dominated commentator class of Official Washington just loved.

Trump regaled Fox Business Network’s Maria Bartiromo with the tale of how he disclosed the missile strike to Chinese President Xi Jinping during a state visit to Trump’s estate at Mar-a-Lago, giving the impression that he might be similarly reckless in attacking North Korea. Trump said he delivered the news over “the most beautiful piece of chocolate cake that you’ve ever seen,” allowing him to gauge the shock on Xi’s face.

“I said, ‘Mr. President, let me explain something to you’ – this was during dessert – ‘we’ve just fired 59 missiles’ – all of which hit, by the way, unbelievable, from, you know, hundreds of miles away, all of which hit, amazing,” Trump said.

“And he [Xi] was eating his cake. And he was silent,” Trump continued, adding that the Chinese president paused for 10 seconds before asking his interpreter to repeat what Trump had said. Trump clearly was relishing the moment, although it appears that a number of the Tomahawk missiles missed the targeted Syrian airbase with some striking a nearby village, killing nine civilians including

four children, Syrian media reported.

Though Trump insisted that Xi approved of the attack, Trump's sociopathic behavior most likely confirmed to Xi that Trump really is as mindlessly dangerous as many critics have warned.

Trump seems to enjoy watching shocked looks on people's faces. I'm told that he explained to an associate that one of his joys in grabbing women by "the pussy" is to see their stunned reaction, fitting with his boast to Billy Bush of "Access Hollywood" that women are powerless to object given his status as a star. "When you're a star, ... you can do anything," Trump said. "Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything."

Trump is more respectful – and obedient – toward men with real money. His head was surely turned when Sheldon Adelson, one of Israel's most devoted advocates who has publicly suggested dropping a nuclear bomb inside Iran to coerce its government to do what Israel wants, donated a record \$5 million to Trump's inaugural festivities.

Indeed, what we have learned about Trump in the first 100 days is that he is a thin-skinned, insecure narcissist who obsesses over slights and relishes tangible signs of praise and approval. The Clinton campaign was right about one thing at least, that Trump's fragile ego puts the future of mankind at risk given his control of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Further enhancing that danger is that Trump apparently thinks his erratic behavior is a plus, not realizing that there are limits to what a madman can get away with even if he has his twitchy finger on the nuclear button. At some point, one of Trump's crazed bluffs will be called and then he will have little choice but to prove that he is, indeed, a madman.

Lost Hope

Not that these criticisms come as much surprise, but there was hope – after his surprise election – that this irascible and arrogant figure might at least have the backbone to stand up against Official Washington's neoconservative foreign policy orthodoxies and challenge the Israeli-Saudi dominance of U.S. policies in the Middle East.

The thinking went that Trump was a self-centered sonuvabitch but that personality might help him resist the pressures from the Washington establishment and thus avert a new, dangerous and expensive Cold War with Russia. Cooperation with Russia also held out prospects for finally ending the endless wars of his immediate predecessors.

Some Trump supporters told me that perhaps someone like Trump was the only hope to shatter the orthodoxies that had come to encase Official Washington's thinking in concrete. These hopeful supporters saw him as an uncouth buffoon, yes, but maybe someone who wouldn't care what was said about him on CNN or in The New York Times or at a Brookings Institution conference, someone who was unorthodox enough to sledgehammer cracks in the official group thinks, allowing some necessary light of fresh thinking to finally pour through.

But even if that were the case – if Trump were that person – he faced very difficult obstacles, including the reality that neocon groupthink had solidified deeply into the foundation of the U.S. establishment, expanding from its initial base in the Republican Party to effective control of the national Democrats as well, although Democrats prefer different labels such as liberal or humanitarian interventionist to neoconservative (more a semantic difference than substantial).

For Trump, Official Washington's foreign-policy consensus meant there were few credentialed individuals who could help him break the mold – and win Senate confirmation. Trump would have to look for people outside the traditional establishment and such people would find themselves under an aggressive review process looking for any misstep to disqualify them. And the few who might survive that ordeal would find themselves in largely hostile bureaucracies – at the State Department, the Pentagon, the intelligence agencies, or the National Security Council – that would be determined to either bring the outsider to heel or destroy him or her with leaks and obstructions.

The 'Deep State'

Despite denials from mainstream commentators about America having a "deep state," one does exist in Washington, as should be obvious watching the cable news shows or reading the major newspapers. Indeed, there is arguably less diversity allowed in the vaunted "free press" of America than in some supposedly authoritarian states.

For instance, even people with solid professional credentials who disagree with the U.S. government's interpretation of the evidence on the April 4 chemical incident in Syria are excluded from participation in the public debate. The major U.S. media even takes pride in that exclusion because these people are deemed "fringe" or responsible for "propaganda" or guilty of "fake news." The tendency toward careerist "groupthink" is very powerful in Washington and the national media.

So, Trump faced daunting challenges when he entered the presidency, requiring him to move quickly and decisively if he hoped to change the direction of the

neocan endless-war bandwagon. He needed to put the establishment forces on the defensive by telling the truth about events where the Obama administration had kept the American people in the dark, such as the Syria-sarin case on Aug. 21, 2013, which was pinned on the Syrian government though evidence pointed toward anti-government rebels, and the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, which was blamed on Russia while key U.S. intelligence evidence was kept hidden. [See here and here.]

Trump also needed to show that he would not be the patsy of either Israel or the Saudi royal family. That would have required telling some unpleasant truths, such as the well-known fact inside the U.S. intelligence community that Saudi Arabia and its Gulf State allies have been state sponsors of terrorism for decades, making the fanatical killers from Al Qaeda and Islamic State possible, and that Israel has bent U.S. foreign policy in the region for generations.

If Trump really had the guts that he likes people to think he has, he could have frozen or seized Saudi assets as punishment for the kingdom's state sponsorship of terrorism and for using Sunni extremists as a paramilitary force in its sectarian rivalry with Shiite-ruled countries like Iran. Or if he wanted to demonstrate his defiance of the hyped-up Russia-gate allegations, he could have immediately announced a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin on how to bring the "war on terror" to a conclusion, rather than play a timid defense.

At the outset of his presidency, Trump could have really shaken things up. But instead he wasted his first days proving that he was the pumped-up fool that his detractors said he was. Rather than show some grace toward the defeated Democrats, he insisted absurdly that his inaugural crowd was bigger than President Obama's (which it wasn't). He failed to appreciate or defuse the anger from the Women's March, which filled the streets of dozens of cities the day after his Inauguration (with women wearing pink pussy hats to chide Trump for his boasts about grabbing women in the crotch).

Trump also could have acknowledged that he lost the popular vote but note that he had won under the rules of the Constitution and intended to be President for all the people. Instead he put forth the absurd notion that he had won the popular vote, which he lost by almost three million ballots (and, no, there is no evidence of five million illegal votes for Clinton).

Phony Tough Guy

Over those crucial early days, Trump continued to tweet out silly comments, replete with bad spelling and sloppy grammar. His aides then had to defend his "alternative facts," which played into the theme that Trump was a pathetic know-nothing who acted like a pompous know-it-all. All of that might have fit his

image as a cad who cared nothing for what the powers-that-be thought about him, but it turned out that Trump was essentially a phony tough guy who could be brought to his knees if pounded sufficiently by the opinion leaders.

Under the daily barrage of Russia-gate headlines, Trump tossed aside his first national security adviser, retired Gen. Michael Flynn, (essentially for not remembering every detail of a phone conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kisylak). Trump then had his foreign-policy team join in bashing Russia (to prove he wasn't Putin's "puppet," as Hillary Clinton had called him).

Trump's policies toward Ukraine and Crimea became indistinguishable from those of President Obama's. Trump also showed no curiosity regarding how the Obama administration had stoked the Ukraine crisis and, in 2014, had facilitated the violent putsch that overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich and provoked Crimea's secession from Ukraine and the Ukrainian civil war.

In early April, after weeks of ignominious retreat under media fire, Trump hoisted his white flag of capitulation. He pleased the neocons and the liberal hawks with a rush to judgment on a mysterious chemical incident in an Al Qaeda-controlled area of northern Syria. Quickly blaming the Syrian government, Trump ordered the firing of 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian airbase on April 6. He also suggested that the Russians shared in the Syrian government's guilt.

And, just like Obama, Trump hid whatever evidence he had from the American people, insisting that they accept his "high confidence" in his White House assessment. Under Trump, Americans were still being treated like the proverbial mushrooms except Trump's crude declarations had replaced Obama's smooth disingenuousness. Indeed, except for Trump's Kardashian personality and his limited vocabulary, Trump's foreign policy reflects more continuity with Obama – and with Hillary Clinton's hawkishness – than any genuine differences.

If anything, Trump is now shifting U.S. foreign policy more into line with what the neocons demand than Obama did. With Trump's goal to work more cooperatively with Russia smashed by Russia-gate, he is now cementing a foreign policy that is almost indistinguishable from what Trump's vanquished Republican rivals, such as neocon Senators Marco Rubio of Florida, or Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, would have espoused. Or, for that matter, Hillary Clinton.

As The Wall Street Journal reported on Monday, "The Trump administration's still-emerging foreign policy has come into sharper focus as Defense Secretary Jim Mattis continues a whistle-stop tour through the Middle East, quietly placing building blocks for resetting ties that had been strained under the Obama White House.

“Over the past week, Mr. Mattis visited leaders in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel bearing the message that the Trump administration wants to realign with those nations and stressing that Washington and capitals in the region have shared interests, such as fighting terrorism. An animating feature of Mr. Mattis’s effort is to counter what he repeatedly has described as the malign influence of Iran.”

In other words, Trump is signaling that he is now in thrall to the influential Israeli-Saudi tandem and that means he will continue to deform U.S. foreign policy to meet Israeli-Saudi regional desires, which include a new bid for “regime change” in Syria and a heightened confrontation with Iran and Russia.

This strategy surrenders to the same falsehoods that brought George W. Bush’s presidency to disaster. It means the Saudis, the Qataris and other Sunni sheikdoms will again have a free hand to quietly slip U.S.-manufactured weaponry to Al Qaeda and its cohorts. It means the U.S. government will have to pile on evermore lies to conceal the sickening reality of a de facto U.S./Al Qaeda alliance from the American people.

The attendant tensions with Russia – and eventually with China – also could provoke a nuclear confrontation that Trump is psychologically unfit to manage. Playing madman – and counting on President Putin or President Xi to play the adult – is not as clever as it may sound. Putin and Xi have their own internal political pressures to consider – and they may feel compelled to call one of Trump’s bluffs.

Thus, Trump now appears on course to become a failed U.S. president, maybe one of the worst. But let’s all hope he is not the last.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in print here or as an e-book (from Amazon and barnesandnoble.com).

The Risk of Brushing Aside Intelligence

The mainstream U.S. media, which knows President Trump disdains facts, accepted his claims about the April 4 Syrian chemical incident without question and ignored doubts of intelligence analysts, a dilemma that Lawrence Davidson addresses.

By Lawrence Davidson

Government intelligence agencies, particularly those in the United States, have a problem. Its nature was spelled out by the retired British diplomat Alastair Crooke in an article entitled "Trump's 59-Tomahawk Tweet" on April 8. As the title suggests, Crooke was reacting to President Trump's precipitous attack on a Syrian government airbase, following the chemical weapons episode of April 4 at the Syrian town of Khan Sheikhoun.

Crooke notes that U.S. intelligence had raised doubts as to the Syrian government's responsibility for the release of poison gas. It seems likely that the Russians had alerted U.S. forces that the Syrian air force was going to attack a rebel warehouse in Khan Sheikhoun that was allegedly full of explosives and weapons. Unbeknownst to the Russians, the Syrians and the Americans, the warehouse also held a poisonous mix of organic phosphates and chlorine.

There is also evidence suggesting that whatever released the poison gas came from an explosive device placed on the ground. Wherever the resulting gas cloud came from, and a Syrian government bomb is certainly not the only possibility, it spread over a local neighborhood and killed a number of exposed residents.

The American mass media nevertheless immediately blamed Damascus for an attack using chemical weapons. Trump, also immediately, believed the mass media. He is, after all, increasingly known as the Fox TV president. Taking his cue from the media, he paid insufficient heed to his own intelligence agencies' doubts. As a result, as Crooke puts it, "the Tomahawks flew."

All of this led Crooke to ask "whether Western intelligence agencies still retain an ability to speak-out to power." Can they still, effectively, convince their governments not to assume that mainstream media information is accurate, but "rather to await careful investigation" before "rushing to judgment" on important issues?

If the answer to Crooke's questions is No, then what is left of the integrity of the intelligence agencies? Are they now reduced to producing "politicized intelligence assessments" that validate predetermined government policies?

Unfortunately, for the United States, this fate appears to threaten the government's professional intelligence personnel. They seem impotent before a president who has never admitted to a serious mistake in his life – a man who believes that truth is nothing more or less than his own opinion. It might very well be that, facing a crumbling domestic situation produced by his own ill-advised behavior, President Trump sought to recover some credibility by "retaliating" against an alleged crime by Bashar al-Assad.

At least in the short run his maneuver appears to have worked. Trump got an embarrassing amount of positive press following this latest bellicose posturing, and too many editorialists and “talking heads” have asserted that his shooting off 59 Tomahawk missiles (only 39 percent of which hit their target), and thereby killing yet more Syrians, was a “beautiful” and “presidential” act. These commentators also are not known to admit to being wrong.

Historical Precedents

There are actually many historical precedents for this current dilemma of the intelligence agencies. It stands to reason that every once in a while people whose job it is to analyze world affairs will end up telling their national leaders what they don't want to hear. And while some politicians can handle this better than others, many can't handle it at all.

Here are some examples of the latter. Documented descriptions of the first two examples can be found in my book *America's Palestine* (University Press of Florida, 2001) and a documented description of the third example can be found in my book *Foreign Policy Inc.* (University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

—In 1918, the British War Cabinet, led by David Lloyd George and Alfred Balfour, was in the midst of negotiating what would become known as the Balfour Declaration with the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The British sought the support of world Jewry (which they mistakenly believed the WZO represented) for the Entente war effort in exchange for a British promise to support a “Jewish National Home” in Palestine if, in fact, the British were victorious.

Specifically, (a) the British believed the WZO could facilitate entrance of the United States into the war through its influence with President Woodrow Wilson. And indeed, American Zionists such as Louis Brandeis did have access to the President. However, Wilson was determined to bring the U.S. into the war quite independently of Zionist wishes.

Then, (b) the British were convinced that the WZO could prevent the Russian government (by that time under Soviet control) from leaving the war. This was based on the fact that Leon Trotsky was a Jew. But the British intelligence post at their Petrograd embassy informed the leaders in London that Trotsky was hostile to Zionism, seeing it as a divisive nationalist movement. It is here that intelligence information was ignored by Lloyd George and Balfour in favor of political wishful thinking – their firm, if fallacious, belief in Jewish world power.

—If we move forward to 1947-1948 something similar occurred. This incident involved the U.S. President Harry Truman. Truman had been Vice President when,

on April 12, 1945, Franklin Roosevelt died. Succeeding to the presidency in mid-term, he stood for election to that office on his own in 1948.

It was a point of pride for him that he win the election, and like Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour 30 years earlier, he was convinced that the Zionists wielded enough influence with American Jews to help him achieve his goal. Now an informal deal was struck. The Zionists would help get Truman elected and Truman would help the Zionists get approval for the division of Palestine by the United Nations and subsequently grant diplomatic recognition to the new state of Israel.

Taking a stand against this arrangement was the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (NEAA) of the State Department. Those in the NEAA were privy to a range of intelligence sources that Truman knew little of and cared less about.

Thus, when members of the division informed Truman that pressure for partition at the United Nations and precipitous diplomatic recognition of Israel would all but destroy U.S. relations with the Muslim world, and thus harm America's national interests, Truman refused to take this information seriously. Indeed, Clark Clifford, one of Truman's chief political advisers, told a representative of the NEAA that Harry Truman's election was the only "national interest" that counted.

-The Zionists have long been a particularly intrusive political lobby throughout much of the West. However, politicians do not need this outside influence to become so fixated that they will ignore their own intelligence services.

Following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, President George W. Bush became convinced that the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was involved in the attack. When the American intelligence services told him this was unlikely, he refused to believe them and sought to establish an independent "intelligence" operation in the Pentagon that would tell him what he wanted to hear – a list of alleged Iraqi transgressions that soon included the fallacious claim that Saddam possessed "weapons of mass destruction."

None of Bush's convictions proved true, yet he launched an invasion of Iraq anyway, killing at least half-a-million Iraqis, destroying the country's political and social infrastructure, and destabilizing the entire Middle East.

Intelligence agencies have many functions and we know that some of them can be downright criminal. But it can be argued that their main role is the gathering and analysis of information from around the world so that their respective governments can have an accurate idea of what is going on and make decisions accordingly. The suborning of that role almost always leads to very bad

decisions.

There seems to be a correlation between this sort of corruption and national leadership that is egocentric, biased and pig-headed. Leaders who either think they know more about foreign matters than the experts (George W. Bush and Donald Trump), or believe that their own religious mythology and racial stereotypes count for more than the rights of other peoples and nations (Lloyd George and Balfour), or are so consumed by their personal political ambitions (Harry Truman) that they will ignore fact-based intelligence information that complicates those aims.

Of course in the democratic West all such leaders are to some extent reflections of those who voted for them. So keep in mind the old cartoon adage: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

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Giving Peace a Chance in Korea

Vice President Mike Pence has declared that “all options are on the table” regarding North Korea and “the era of strategic patience is over.” But peaceful negotiations may be the only option that makes sense, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

As the Trump administration rattles the sabers over North Korea and its nuclear-weapons program, peace advocates are countering with warnings about the grave dangers if war breaks out on the peninsula and expressions of hope if fresh thinking about peace and reconciliation can prevail.

“If we are ever going to build the critical mass of an anti-war movement with a U.S. social movement,” said Christine Ahn, the former executive director of the Korea Policy Institute and currently the International Coordinator of Women Cross DMZ, “we have to fight together now, to put an end to this saber rattling, and potential first strike that the U.S. may conduct on North Korea.”

I spoke recently with Ahn about the critical nature of the situation on the

Korean Peninsula. In 2015, her group organized a historic crossing of the demilitarized zone by 30 women from 15 countries, including many countries that had participated and fought in the Korean War. It included Gloria Steinem, two Nobel Peace laureates, renowned peace activists from Guam, from the Philippines and from Okinawa, Japan.

Dennis Bernstein: In a moment I want to talk to you about one of the struggles that has to do with this, the deployment of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, known as THAAD. But first, I'd like you to speak to what you see as the multiple dangers facing Koreans. Do you think we are at a critical moment? Give us your response there please.

Christine Ahn: Well, Dennis, I do think that we are in a critical moment. First and foremost, my concern is that the only communication that we have with North Korea is one of military posturing and aggression. And we see that on both sides. North Korea is conducting missile tests, nuclear tests. They're building up their arsenal and their capacity to launch the ICBM with a nuclear warhead that could hit the United States.

I don't think they're wanting to do it, to be an aggressor or to truly kill Americans. They're doing it out of self-defense. And as you mentioned earlier, when President Trump was having dinner with President Xi Jinping from China, and over chocolate cake he explains that the U.S. has bombed, sent 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles to Syria that he was sending a message to China. That if they don't put pressure on North Korea that the U.S. will unilaterally act.

And they have said that all options are on the table, which includes military action which is absolutely insane, to even use that kind of saber rattling. I mean, even the Obama administration, which had a terrible policy, the so-called "strategic patience," which is ultimately more sanctions, more isolation, more aggressive military exercises, in the hopes of regime collapse in North Korea. Well, that didn't happen. And what you see, actually, is images from North Korea of economic development of their [country]... in fact North Korea's GDP [Gross Domestic Product], it grew by more than the EU [European Union]. I mean, it doesn't say a whole lot, but it just shows that despite the international sanctions, and the kind of pressure and isolation that they experience, that they are doing what they can to survive. And they are.

And I just think that, my hope in this dangerous hour, and why I think it's so dangerous, is that there is a political vacuum in South Korea. As your listeners may or may not know, for weeks, starting in last October, the South Korean people took to the streets, to hold candlelight vigils on a weekly basis. They were holding these candlelight vigils to bring light to a deeply corrupt government ... calling for a different kind of government that respected the

rights of labor, of working people, of farmers. [...] For the tragic ... deaths of hundreds of high school students that were killed in a ferry accident, while the president [Park Geun-hye] was, who knows what, like, getting her hair done or something. And the massive corruption of the Tragos, the transnational corporations, the Samsungs, the Hyundais. How it has just completely corrupted the political system. And so, the people took to the streets. And they led ultimately to her impeachment. And so, she's now, actually, in prison because of the extraordinary work of people fighting for democracy.

But what we have right now is a very dangerous political vacuum. And so there is going to be a snap election on May 9th. And by all indications the front runner is a guy named Moon Jae-in. He's a former human rights lawyer. He was the chief of staff under Roh Moo-hyun, who was the last progressive president. And he has since been going to visit Pyongyang before going to Washington, D.C.

DB: So he decided to go to North Korea. So he is inclined to be with that people's' movement that you were just describing?

CA: Absolutely. He says that engagement and diplomacy with North Korea is the best guarantee for our security, in South Korea. That is sensibility. And I think that the people in South Korea... you know, Tim Shorrock, a really fabulous journalist, who writes often for the Nation, who is now in South Korea. He wrote a great piece and he said it's like the complete contrast in what we're seeing in South Korea as people... I mean here in the United States, so many of us, especially the Korean-American community, is completely on edge. We're thinking, "Oh, my God, is the Trump administration going to want to first strike against North Korea?" Because they are so unpredictable, and we have no sense of what their policy is. They said we've done this review, and it ranges from military aggression or coercive diplomacy, to engagement, so it's so schizophrenic and we have no idea. And what we have seen is them sending cruise missiles to Syria and to Afghanistan. And so ... what can we expect?

DB: And it's not only what can you expect, in fact, it was stated today by the Vice President that that was actually not a coincidence, that was a message. That was... those were double messages. The big bomb, the attack on Syria.. that Trump will go after the North.

Now, I need to ask you to, just for a moment, I've heard generals bandying this about on the corporate networks that, really, if the U.S. forces decided they could take out Korea without nuclear weapons, the initial thing would take, you know, maybe it would take several months, to do it. But it could be done. What would happen? What might that look like?

CA: Oh, it's just sheer fantasy. It's just sheer fantasy. And successive

administrations from the Bush administration, the Clinton administration before it, and the Obama administration, trust me, they have all thought this through. And, on one hand, you have intelligence think tanks that say that, actually, U.S. intelligence is murky at best. We have no idea where all the nuclear sites are. It's all underground. Our intelligence is very murky.

So, and even based on the intelligence we have in the 1990s, when the Clinton administration almost did conduct a first strike on Pyongyang, the nuclear reactors in North Korea. The Defense Department came back and said "You know what?"... and this was even before North Korea possessed nuclear weapons. They said, "If there was a first strike by the United States, we would have a counter reaction not with nuclear weapons but North Korea's conventional weaponry, that would lead ultimately within the first 24 hours to up to a million people killed."

And so, unfortunately, the military option is not really an option for the United States, unless it's some reckless, mad, insane person that wants to kill innocent civilians. And Seoul, South Korea is just like 40 miles away from the DMZ [demilitarized zone]. And so, for a U.S. president to do something so reckless like that would spell the death, basically, of the U.S./South Korea alliance. And I think the U.S. needs to be very careful in this moment, especially when you have a citizenry, in South Korea, that wants more justice. They want greater equality. They want more transparency. They want good government. And they want a different kind of policy, inter-Korea policy. They don't want to maintain the hard-line, isolationist stance. [...] By all means, I'm not trying to romanticize how South Koreans are viewing North Koreans. They see a tremendous cost in the process of reunification, but they don't want to ultimately lead to their own mutual destruction.

And so, that's my hope, is that on May 9th that we have a progressive president in South Korea, and they can talk some sense into Washington, D.C. And, who knows where the wind will turn, but I do have a sense that we can't continue the way that we have. We can't do it because it's too costly for the U.S. to maintain the massive 800 military bases around the world. You know this economy cannot withstand the amount of pressures, and especially in the Trump budget, where he's advocating for a \$54 billion increase in the already \$600 billion bloated military budget. You know, this is the moment when progressives and... when all of us, women, veterans, the Black Lives Matter, the immigrants rights movement, we have to come together, and especially put our focus... I mean the climate march is happening this weekend. The EPA is going to be cut, and so we have to have a true discussion, in this country, about our security, our human security.

DB: Let me just jump in here. One of the terribly interesting things here is that the United States would not have to declare war because they never ended the Korean War. And that's, of course, something that you all have been working on for a long time. But, I would like you to say a little bit more about the hope. You're talking about a candidate on the ground who will actually represent the people after many years of terrible repression and in a right-wing government that was moving from authoritarian to worse. So, it must be an extraordinarily mixed bag on the one hand, you've got this movement, this grassroots movement, that has been fighting for so long, on the verge of electing somebody that might actually represent them. And it's the brink of their version of World War III.

CA: Uhhh, I know, isn't it absolutely nuts? Yes, I mean it is the light at the end of the tunnel, I feel. And I think that you bring up the really good point. People say "Oh, the 'mother of all bombs' that the U.S. unleashed on Afghanistan"...

DB: And I meant to say that you mentioned that all those other presidents you mentioned didn't go to war against the North. Well, all those other presidents also didn't drop "the mother of all bombs" on Afghanistan but this guy came in, and in 100 days he's dropping it.

CA: I know. I know. Well, and that's the point that I make, which is, North Korea doesn't need to see what the brutality that the U.S. military can unleash. They already have their own experience, and their own history. There's a photo that a Getty Images photographer took in 1951, and I think K.J. Noh sent this really heartbreaking passage of a quote from General MacArthur, who is not a kind-hearted person, who's a brutal military man. Even he said that he almost vomited by seeing the carnage, and the massive destruction that the U.S. military bombing campaign unleashed on both North and South Korea. I mean, 80% of North Korean cities were bombed to bits...

DB: ...80% of the North Korean cities were bombed in this fake Korean, not a fake war, but the way it was conceived...

CA: ...as a police action is how I think Truman sold it to the Congress! And got, you know, this like rogue United Nations command that brought in 20 countries to fight under... it's the first coalition of the willing. And so, the Korean War, I think bringing it back home, and to the cost to our security here at home, is that it was the Korean War that inaugurated the massive military spending. It wasn't Vietnam. It was the Korean War. And I think it would have huge significance if we could formerly end the Korean War.

And so, that's the point that I've been trying to teach, is in 1953, three years

into the war, after 4 million people were killed, including up to 40,000 U.S. soldiers, we signed an armistice agreement. It's not something "over there." This is our problem, here, because it was our U.S. military commander, [Gen. William] Harrison, that signed the armistice, the cease fire, with the North Korean commander. And they promised on July 27, 1953, that within 90 days, this is article 4, paragraph 6, of this armistice agreement, where they said "We will return to negotiate a peace settlement."

That was a promise, and it's been 64 years now. And it's not just North Korea that is calling for a peace treaty. I was just on a webinar with one of the leading South Korean women peace activist, Ahn Shin Shanya, she said "We see the massive militarization of South Korea, and the ongoing... the longest foreign military occupation by the United States in Korea's entire history, as a result of this armistice, the cease fire, that has maintained the Korean peninsula in a state of war."

So, I think it's crucial that Americans understand that we... it's not about them, it's about us. It's about our responsibility, because we have 30,000 U.S. troops in South Korea. It is our aggressive posturing, our military exercises, where we simulate an invasion of North Korea, the decapitation of its leader. And it's odd that we're the signatories of that cease fire, with a commitment to signing a peace treaty.

If we could just get that straight I think we could set a lot in motion [because] ultimately there is no other option. The only option that the Trump administration, and the United States, has with North Korea is diplomatic. Which is a resolution of this conflict. We can freeze North Korea's nuclear program, we can sign a non-aggression pact that begins a mutual peace building process. It is possible. We did it with Iran, we did it with Cuba.

It's going to take political will, and I think for the listeners in the [San Francisco] Bay Area, [U.S. Representative] Barbara Lee, she must be a champion. And I think one thing that I found so significant about Barbara Lee, not only was she one of the only lone and sane voices in trying to stop the war in Iraq, there was a radio interview that she did with somebody, where she said that she actually had a long conversation with her father who was a veteran of the Korean War, before she made that courageous vote in Congress, the vote against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. And he explained to her, "that war was a brutal war, we cannot afford to go to war."

And so, I think Barbara Lee, in her own personal connection to Korea, by way of her father, who is a veteran of the war... We have to call on Barbara Lee, she should try to push Trump about this War Powers Act. She's been a big champion on challenging the U.S. military aggression in Syria, and Afghanistan. We have to

call on her to do the same for North Korea.

I really hope that listeners in the Bay Area will pick up the phone and call Barbara Lee's office, and say, "We need you to be a champion. We're here on the West Coast and if North Korea conducts a strike as a counter-strike to our first strike, you know, there is a possibility it could hit the coast of California." We don't need to go there.

DB: Yeah, and speaking of that, we must mention in the final minutes that we have that standing against this hope that you're outlining, is the fact that we've got this deployment, this speeded up deployment, of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, THAAD. And this is a forward fighting tool that makes everybody in the freaking region nervous. And China is on the edge on this one, as well.

CA: Absolutely. Well, first of all, it's a missile defense system that everybody is questioning its feasibility. And so, this is a Lockheed Martin product that I think costs \$15 million to produce. And that's our tax dollars, yours and mine and everybody else listening. And so many experts, from South Korea to MIT here in the United States, have said, "This will do nothing to deter low-range North Korean missiles." And that's what South Korea would need some kind of defense from. And so it's just been sold, and forced down the throat of the South Korean people. And [former South Korean president] Park Geun-hye, at the time last summer, she just agreed to it without any public debate, without any presidential approval. And so the leading contenders in the South Korean presidential race have said "Let's wait for the next president, to try to determine whether this is beneficial for the people of South Korea."

But instead, in this political vacuum, the U.S... when General Mattis went to South Korea, that was like top on his list, "We're deploying THAAD." And so, the South Korean people, unfortunately, have been caught in this growing stand-off between the U.S. and China.

And so, China has basically punished South Korea through a number of economic boycotts. They have not allowed K-pop stars to go to concerts. And they have really boycotted the Lotte department stores, as has the South Korean groups that are living in this area, this Seongju, which is a farm land, which is where they are going to put this missile defense site, next to schools where children will be exposed to all kinds of radiation, and other damaging impacts, of having this high radar.

And it's just putting Korea, you know, we interviewed a bunch of South Korean women who have been organizing against this THAAD missile defense system. And they say "They are taking us so far away from building trust, and rapport, and

reconciliation with North Korea. We don't want this." And, unfortunately, who's benefitting? And it's the military contractors. And so, we have to push back. We want a genuine alliance, I think, for the people. We can do that. It doesn't have to be a military alliance that just sends its military contractors. We have to think a different way. And, unfortunately, we have our big fight here against the Trump administration, but hopefully the silver lining is there is a progressive president in South Korea that's going to have to shift.

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