**Attack on the Trump Regime from an Establishment Point of View**

**By Martin Hittelman**

**Fear**

Trump in the White House

*Woodward, Bob. Fear: Trump in the White House. Simon & Schuster.*

By Bob Woodward

Woodward, Bob. Fear: Trump in the White House (pp. 219-220). Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

Bob Woodward’s short book on the Trump White House is an exposure of how the White House operates under the Trump Regime. It is a conservative attack on the wild and crazy president. A basic premise is that the United States has been a country that is saving the world from tyrants, when in reality the United States international goal has been to make the world safe for American capital. This premise is never under question. *“The great gift of the greatest generation to us,” Mattis opened, “is the rules-based, international democratic order.”* ***This global architecture brought security, stability and prosperity****.* **The question of who it brought this security, stability, and prosperity to is never addressed.**

The basic thrust of the book is that Trump threatens to disrupt the U.S. system of international order by upsetting negotiated treaties and security agreements. Trump speaks to a public that does not agree with international involvements and exclusively supports an American First approach to everything.

An underlying theme is that Trump is, without a doubt, **uninterested in data** that does not support his politically motivated statements. His rhetoric includes the need to have other countries pay the bills for their defense systems that are now supported with United States money and military forces. Woodward is not clear on whether Trump believes everything he tweets or that he tweets just excite and unite his followers.

In any case, the book does illustrate the fact that Trump is a compulsive liar. It also makes clear that the Trump Regime is an operating nightmare. An example: *““I don’t know how much longer I can stay,” Gary Cohn told Porter, “because* ***things are just crazy here.*** *They’re so chaotic. He’s never going to change. It’s pointless to prepare a meaningful, substantive briefing for the president that’s organized, where you have a bunch of slides. Because* ***you know he’s never going to listen****. We’re never going to get through it. He’s going to get through the first 10 minutes and then he’s going to want to start talking about some other topic. And so, we’re going to be there for an hour, but we’re never going to get through this briefing.” Porter tried to prepare organized briefing papers with relevant information, different viewpoints, costs/benefits, pros and cons and consequences of a decision.* ***It didn’t work****.””*

The book’s Prologue says it all:

*“In early September 2017, in the eighth month of the Trump presidency,* ***Gary Cohn****, the former president of Goldman Sachs and the president’s top economic adviser in the White House, moved cautiously toward the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office. In his 27 years at Goldman, Cohn—6-foot-3, bald, brash and full of self-confidence—had made billions for his clients and hundreds of millions for himself. “*

[**A description favorable to the competency of Cohn – the entire book sets out to support the effort of those who want to continue the current U.S. efforts to, dare I say it, rule the world. MH**]

*“He had granted himself walk-in privileges to Trump’s Oval Office, and the president had accepted that arrangement. On the desk was a one-page draft letter from the president addressed to the president of South Korea,* ***terminating the United States–Korea Free Trade Agreement****, known as KORUS. Cohn was appalled. For months Trump had threatened to withdraw from the agreement,* ***one of the foundations of an economic relationship, a military alliance and, most important, top secret intelligence operations and capabilities. “***

**[An argument in favor of the status quo imperialistic role of the U.S. in international affairs - MH]**

***“Under a treaty dating back to the 1950s****, the United States stationed 28,500 U.S. troops in the South and operated the most highly classified and sensitive Special Access Programs (SAP), which provided sophisticated Top Secret, codeword intelligence and military capabilities. North Korean ICBM missiles now had the capability to carry a nuclear weapon, perhaps to the American homeland. A missile from North Korea would take 38 minutes to reach Los Angeles. These programs enabled the United States to detect an ICBM launch in North Korea within seven seconds. The equivalent capability in Alaska took 15 minutes—****an astonishing time differential****. The ability to detect a launch in seven seconds would give the United States military the time to shoot down a North Korean missile. It is perhaps the most important and most secret operation in the United States government. The American presence in South Korea represents the essence of national security. Withdrawal from the KORUS trade agreement, which South Korea deemed essential to its economy, could lead to an unraveling of the entire relationship. “*

[**Woodward is just making the argument for Cohn and his cronies within and outside the Trump regime - MH**]

*“Cohn could not believe that President Trump would risk losing vital intelligence assets crucial to U.S. national security. This all stemmed from Trump’s fury that the United States had an $18 billion annual trade deficit with South Korea and was spending $3.5 billion a year to keep U.S. troops there.*

*Despite almost* ***daily reports of chaos and discord in the White House****, the public did not know how bad the internal situation actually was. Trump was always shifting, rarely fixed, erratic. He would get in a bad mood, something large or small would infuriate him, and he would say about the KORUS trade agreement, “We’re withdrawing today.”*

*“But now there was the letter, dated September 5, 2017,* ***a potential trigger to a national security catastrophe.*** *Cohn was worried Trump would sign the letter if he saw it. Cohn removed the letter draft from the Resolute Desk. He placed it in a blue folder marked “KEEP.” “I stole it off his desk,” he later told an associate. “I wouldn’t let him see it. He’s never going to see that document. Got to protect the country.”*

*In the* ***anarchy and disorder*** *of the White House, and Trump’s mind, the president never noticed the missing letter. Ordinarily* ***Rob Porter****, the staff secretary and organizer of presidential paperwork, would have been responsible for producing letters like this to the South Korean president. But this time, alarmingly, the letter draft had come to Trump* ***through an unknown channel.*** *Staff secretary is one of the low-profile but critical roles in any White House. For months, Porter had been briefing Trump on decision memos and other presidential documents, including the most sensitive national security authorizations for military and covert CIA activities. Porter, 6-foot-4, rail-thin, 40 years old and raised a Mormon, was one of the gray men: an organization man with little flash who had attended Harvard and Harvard Law School and been a Rhodes Scholar. Porter later discovered there were multiple copies of the draft letter, and either Cohn or he made sure none remained on the president’s desk.*

*Cohn and Porter worked together to* ***derail what they believed were Trump’s most impulsive and dangerous orders.*** *That document and others like it just disappeared. When Trump had a draft on his desk to proofread, Cohn at times would just yank it, and the president would forget about it. But if it was on his desk, he’d sign it. “It’s not what we did for the country,” Cohn said privately. “It’s what we saved him from doing.” It was no less than an administrative coup d’état, an undermining of the will of the president of the United States and his constitutional authority. In addition to coordinating policy decisions and schedules and running the paperwork for the president, Porter told an associate, “A third of my job was trying to react to some of the really dangerous ideas that he had and try to give him reasons to believe that maybe they weren’t such good ideas.” Another strategy was to delay, procrastinate, cite legal restrictions. Lawyer Porter said, “But slow-walking things or not taking things up to him, or telling him—rightly, not just as an excuse—but this needs to be vetted, or we need to do more process on this, or we don’t have legal counsel clearance—that happened 10 times more frequently than taking papers from his desk. It felt like we were walking along the edge of the cliff perpetually.” There were days or weeks when the operation seemed under control and they were a couple of steps back from the edge.”*

*“Other times, we would fall over the edge, and an action would be taken. It was like you were always walking right there on the edge.” Although Trump never mentioned the missing September 5 letter, he did not forget what he wanted to do about the trade agreement. “There were several different iterations of that letter,” Porter told an associate. Later in an Oval Office meeting, the South Korean agreement was being heatedly debated. “I don’t care,” Trump said. “I’m tired of these arguments! I don’t want to hear about it anymore. We’re getting out of KORUS.” He started to dictate a new letter he wanted to send.* ***Jared Kushner,*** *the president’s son-in-law, took Trump’s words seriously. Jared, 36, was a senior White House adviser and had a self-possessed, almost aristocratic bearing. He had been married to Trump’s daughter Ivanka since 2009. Because he was sitting closest to the president, Jared started writing down what Trump was saying, taking dictation. Finish the letter and get it to me so I can sign it, Trump ordered him. Jared was in the process of turning the president’s dictation into a new letter when Porter heard about it. “Send me the draft,” he told him. “If we’re going to do this, we cannot do it on the back of a napkin.* ***We have to write it up in a way that isn’t going to embarrass us.****” Kushner sent down a paper copy of his draft. It was not of much use. Porter and Cohn had something typed up to demonstrate they were doing what the president had asked. Trump was expecting an immediate response. They wouldn’t walk in empty-handed. The draft was part of the subterfuge.*

*At a formal meeting,* ***the opponents of leaving KORUS raised all kinds of arguments****—the United States had never withdrawn from a free trade agreement before; there were legal issues, geopolitical issues, vital national security and intelligence issues; the letter wasn’t ready. They smothered the president with facts and logic. “Well, let’s keep working on the letter,” Trump said. “I want to see the next draft.” Cohn and Porter did not prepare a next draft. So, there was nothing to show the president. The issue, for the moment, disappeared in the haze of presidential decision making. Trump got busy with other things. But the KORUS issue would not go away.*

*Cohn spoke to* ***Secretary of Defense James Mattis****, the* ***retired Marine general*** *who was perhaps the most influential voice among Trump’s cabinet and staff. General Mattis, a combat veteran, had served 40 years in the Corps. At 5-foot-9 with ramrod-straight posture, he had a permanently world-weary demeanor. “We’re teetering on the edge,” Cohn told the secretary. “We may need some backup this time.” Mattis tried to limit his visits to the White House and stick to military business as much as possible but realizing the urgency he came to the Oval Office. “Mr. President,” he said, “****Kim Jong Un poses the most immediate threat to our national security.*** *We need South Korea as an ally. It may not seem like trade is related to all this, but it’s central.”* ***American military and intelligence assets in South Korea*** *are the backbone of our ability to defend ourselves from North Korea. Please don’t leave the deal. Why is the U.S. paying $1 billion a year for an anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea? Trump asked. He was furious about the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system and had threatened to pull it out of South Korea and move it to Portland, Oregon. “We’re not doing this for South Korea,” Mattis said. “****We’re helping South Korea because it helps us.”*** *The president seemed to acquiesce, but only for the moment.*

*In 2016, candidate Trump gave Bob Costa and myself his definition of the job of president: “More than anything else, it’s the security of our nation. . . . That’s number one, two and three. . . . The military, being strong, not letting bad things happen to our country from the outside. And I certainly think that’s always going to be my number-one part of that definition.” The reality was that the United States in 2017 was tethered to the words and actions of an* ***emotionally overwrought, mercurial and unpredictable leader.*** *Members of his staff had joined to purposefully block some of what they believed were the president’s most dangerous impulses. It was a nervous breakdown of the executive power of the most powerful country in the world. What follows is that story.”*

**And that is about it for entire book.** The rest of the book just goes into the details of the way in which Trump is leading the country into ruin with his **stupidity, arrogance, lack of attention to any details, laziness, vindictiveness, and general personality defects.**

While Trump is all of the above, that is not proof that the policies of his enemies within his administration are any better than his or that their policies meet the needs of the planet and its inhabitants. The **basic shared beliefs** of Trump and his opponents within his administration regarding capitalism, the need for the rich to accumulate their wealth, the need to make the world a safe place for U.S. corporations to operate and exploit the labor and natural resources of other countries, the value of U.S. militarism- and an opposition to social welfare are not questioned in *Fear.*

One of the heroes of the Woodward book is retired four-star Marine general **Jim, Mad Dog, Mattis.** Woodward writes: *As CentCom commander from 2010 to 2013, according to one senior aide, Mattis believed that Iran “remained the greatest threat to the United States interests in the Middle East.” He was concerned that the Israelis were going to strike the Iranian nuclear facilities and pull the United States into the conflict. Mattis also believed the United States did* ***not have enough military force in the region*** *and did not have robust rules of engagement.*

*He wrote a memo to President Obama through Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta seeking* ***more authority to respond to Iranian provocations****. He was worried that the Iranians might mine international waters and create an incident at sea that could escalate. Tom Donilon, the national security adviser, answered Mattis. A memo, soon referred to as “the Donilon memo,” directed that under no circumstances would Mattis take any action against Iran for mining international waters unless the mine was effectively dropped in the path of a U.S. warship and presented an imminent danger to the ship.* ***The Donilon memo would be one of the first orders Mattis rescinded when he became secretary of defense****. Mattis continued to* ***beat the drum on Iran.*** *He found the war plan for Iran insufficient. It was all aviation dependent; all air power. It did not have a broad joint-force plan. The plan had five strike options—first against small Iranian boats, another against ballistic missiles, another against other weapons systems and another for an invasion. “Strike Option Five” was the plan for destroying the Iranian nuclear program. Mattis wrote a scathing memo to the chief of naval operations saying your Navy is* ***completely unprepared for conflict in the Persian Gulf****.*

**Mad Dog Mattis is somehow seen by Woodward as a hero in the Trump Whitehouse.**

Woodward writes a lot about the **threat of North Korean nuclear weapons**. He writes nothing about the **United States nuclear weapons being a threat to the world.** He does not even suggest that there is something to be said when the head of the country with most of the weapons of mass destruction self-righteously denounces and threatens other countries that are trying to develop their own weapons. In the historical and current view of the United State government, **the only weapons that other countries should possess are those that we sell them**.

As an example of Trump and possible war: “*President Trump’s tweets may have come* ***close to starting a war with North Korea*** *in early 2018. The public never learned the full story of the risks that Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un took as they engaged in a public battle of words. It began on New Year’s Day in an address by Kim, reminding the world, and the American president, of his nuclear weapons. “It’s not a mere threat but a reality that* ***I have a nuclear button on the desk in my office****,” Kim declared. “All of the mainland United States is within the range of our nuclear strike.”* ***It was an ugly and provocative threat****.*

*Lingering after receiving his President’s Daily Brief on January 2, President Trump said, “In this job* ***I’m playing five hands of poker simultaneously,*** *and right now we’re winning most of the hands. Iran is busting up and the regime is under intense pressure. Pakistan is terrified of losing all of our security aid and reimbursements. And South Korea is going to capitulate to us on trade and talks with North Korea.” He seemed on top of the world but he didn’t mention the fifth poker hand. Real power is fear. The answer on North Korea was to scare Kim Jung Un. “He’s a bully,” Trump told Porter. “He’s a tough guy. The way to deal with those people is by being tough. And* ***I’m going to intimidate him and I’m going to outfox him****.” That evening, Trump sent a taunting, mine-is-bigger-than-yours tweet that shook the White House and the diplomatic community: “North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times,” Trump wrote on Twitter at 7:49 p.m. “****Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!”***

**Talk about an ugly and provocative threat**.

Yuval Noah Harari observes in ***Samiens: A Brief History of Humankind*** that: “***Wars are not a pub brawl****. They are very complex projects that require extraordinary degrees of organization, cooperation and appeasement. The ability to maintain peace at home, acquire allies abroad, and understand what goes through the minds of other people (particularly your enemies) is usually the key to victory. Hence an* ***aggressive brute*** *is often the worst choice to run a war. Much better is a cooperative person who knows how to appease, how to manipulate and how to see things from different perspectives. This is the stuff empire-builders are made of.*” An aggressive brute is also not the best person to run a country (especially if that country has the ability to destroy the earth).

One continuing theme of *Fear* is that **Trump wanted other countries to pay for the protection that the United States was providing them**. Bannon and others encouraged him to continue that line of thinking while all of his “experts” kept telling him that the United States gets a lot out of those other countries in the way of intelligence that helps the United States to continue to be a power in the world. An example is Afghanistan:

“*Trump was one of the most outspoken foes of the 16-year-old Afghanistan War, now the longest in American history. To the extent Trump had a bedrock principle, it was opposition, even ridicule, of the war. Beginning in 2011, four years before his formal entry into the presidential race, he launched a drumbeat of Twitter attacks. In March 2012, he tweeted, “Afghanistan is a total disaster. We don’t know what we are doing. They are, in addition to everything else,* ***robbing us blind.****” In 2013, the tweets picked up. In January, it was, “Let’s get out of Afghanistan. Our troops are being killed by the Afghanis we train and* ***we waste billions*** *there. Nonsense! Rebuild the USA.” In March, “We should leave Afghanistan immediately. No more wasted lives. If we have to go back in, we go in hard & quick. Rebuild the US first.” In April, “Our gov’t is so pathetic that some of the billions being wasted in Afghanistan are ending up with terrorists.” And in November, “Do not allow our very stupid leaders to sign a deal that keeps us in Afghanistan through 2024-with all costs by U.S.A. MAKE AMERICA GREAT!” And in December 2015, Trump tweeted, “A suicide bomber has just killed U.S. troops in Afghanistan. When will our leaders get tough and smart. We are being led to slaughter!*”

Later in the book Woodward writes: “*The National Security Council gathered in the Situation Room at 10:00 the next morning, July 19, to brief Trump on the Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy. McMaster spent the initial part of the meeting identifying objectives and framing issues for discussion.* ***Trump looked bored and seemed disengaged.*** *After about five minutes, he interrupted. “****I’ve been hearing about this nonsense about Afghanistan for 17 years with no success,****” he said before McMaster had finished laying out the issues. We’ve got a bunch of inconsistent, short-term strategies. We can’t continue with the same old strategy.*”

*“I don’t care about you guys,” he told Mattis, Dunford and McMaster. We’re losing big in Afghanistan. It’s a disaster. Our allies aren’t helping. Ghost soldiers—those paid but not serving—are ripping us off.* ***NATO is a disaster and a waste,*** *he said. The soldiers had told him that NATO staff were totally dysfunctional. “Pakistan isn’t helping us. They’re not really a friend,” despite the* ***$1.3 billion a year in aid*** *the U.S. gave them. He said he refused to send any additional aid. The Afghan leaders were corrupt and making money off of the United States, he insisted. The poppy fields, largely in Taliban territory, are out of control. “The soldiers on the ground could run things much better than you,” the president told his generals and advisers. “They could do a much better job. I don’t know what the hell we’re doing.”*

*It was a 25-minute dressing-down of the generals and senior officials. “Look, you can’t think of Afghanistan in isolation,” Tillerson said. “You’ve got to think about it in a regional context. We’ve never before taken this sort of multilateral approach to Afghanistan and the region.” “But how many more deaths?” Trump asked. “How many more lost limbs? How much longer are we going to be there?” His antiwar argument, practically ripped from a Bob Dylan song lyric, reflected the desires of his political base* ***whose families were overrepresented in the military forces.*** *“The quickest way out is to lose,” Mattis said. Trump pivoted. Prime Minister Modi of India is a friend of mine, he said. I like him very much. He told me the U.S. has gotten nothing out of Afghanistan. Nothing.* ***Afghanistan has massive mineral wealth.*** *We don’t take it like others—like China.* ***The U.S. needed to get some of Afghanistan’s valuable minerals in exchange for any support.*** *“I’m not making a deal on anything until we get minerals.”*

**So much for American exceptionalism!!**

Trump was appalled at the level of the U.S. trade deficits. According to Woodward, except for Peter Navarro, most main-stream economists differed with Trump’s views on the evil of such deficits: *“Nearly all economists disagreed with Trump, but he found an academic economist* ***who hated free trade as much as he did.*** *He brought him to the White House as both director of trade and industrial policy and director of the National Trade Council.* ***Peter Navarro*** *was a 67-year-old Harvard PhD in economics. “This is the president’s vision,” Navarro publicly said. “My function really as an economist is to try to* ***provide the underlying analytics that confirm his intuition****. And his intuition is always right in these matters.*

*Gary Cohn was convinced that* ***trade deficits were irrelevant*** *and* ***could be a good thing,*** *allowing Americans to buy cheaper goods. Goods from Mexico, Canada and China were flooding into the United States because they were competitively priced. Americans who spent less money on those imported goods had more money to spend on other products, services and savings. This was* ***the efficiency of global markets****. Cohn and Navarro clashed. At one meeting in the Oval Office with Trump and Navarro, Cohn said that 99.9999 percent of the world’s economists agreed with him****. It was basically true.*** *Navarro stood virtually alone. Navarro took Cohn on, calling him a* ***Wall Street establishment idiot.*** *The core of Navarro’s argument was that U.S. trade deficits were driven by high tariffs imposed by foreign countries like China, currency manipulation, intellectual property theft, sweatshop labor and lax environmental controls.”*

*“The North American Free Trade Agreement (****NAFTA)*** *had sucked the manufacturing lifeblood out of the U.S. just as Trump predicted, Navarro said, turning Mexico into a manufacturing powerhouse, while* ***driving U.S. workers to the poorhouse.*** *U.S. steelworkers were being laid off and steel prices were dropping. Trump should impose tariffs on imported steel.”*

Much of *Fear* deals with the **infighting** that occurs among the Trump appointees. Peter Navarro, Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller, and Wilbur Ross were on the nationalist side and Mnuchin, Cohn, Priebus, and Porter were on the “Wall Street Wing.” Trump basically stood with whomever Fox News favored at a given time. Trump’s daughter Ivanka and son-in-law Kushner hated Bannon. ““*Kelly, McMaster, Tillerson and Mattis joked darkly that it was inexplicable that the president was voicing more ire at South Korea than our adversaries—China, Russia, Iran, Syria and North Korea.* ***The senior White House staff and national security team were appalled****.”*

“***Reince Priebus****, Trump’s first chief of staff, believed the White House was not leading on key issues like health-care and tax reform, and that foreign policy was not coherent and often contradictory. The Trump White House did not have a team of rivals but* ***a team of predators,*** *he concluded. “When you put a snake and a rat and a falcon and a rabbit and a shark and a seal in a zoo without walls, things start getting nasty and bloody. That’s what happens.” In July 2017, Priebus was replaced by Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly.”*

*“Trump clashed with his national security adviser, H. R. McMaster; his chief of staff, retired General John Kelly; and his secretary of state, Rex Tillerson. In contrast, his vice president,* ***Mike Pence****, kept a low profile, avoiding conflict.*”

And then there is the addressing of the whole **Mueller investigation** and Trump’s attack on the main-stream media (other than his co-conspirator – Fox News). It is interesting to read about Trump’s rage and twitter storms, but it really has little to do with actual policy being implemented.

Woodward spends time on the frustration of long-time Trump lawyer **John Dowd.** Dowd was a “*the seasoned, gray-haired litigator who had represented Trump for decades in divorces and bankruptcies, asked John Dowd, 76, one of the most experienced attorneys in white-collar criminal defense.*” Dowd agreed to work for only $100,00 a month as a favor to Trump.

“*Dowd discussed the known facts with Trump’s legal advisers and reviewed the material for possible vulnerabilities. Based on a preliminary review of the known evidence, he did not see anything to support a charge of collusion with the Russians or obstruction of justice*.” Dowd believed that getting information on Hillary Clinton from Russian operatives was not a crime and, in any case, **everyone gets dirt on their opponents.** Since he thought Trump was innocent, Dowd cooperated with the Mueller investigators by providing them with the information they sought. However, knowing that Trump was a **pathological liar**, Dowd opposed Trump testifying. He thought Trump would be guilty of perjury. During that time, Trump claimed he would be a great witness and was not opposed to testifying. This led Dowd to resign. This part of the book has little to do with national policy.

Finally, Woodward does a good job explaining why Trump depends on Tweeting: “*“This is my megaphone,” Trump said again. “Let’s not call it Twitter. Let’s call it social media.” Though the White House had Facebook and Instagram accounts, Trump did not use them. He stuck to Twitter. “****This is who I am. This is how I communicate.*** *It’s the reason I got elected. It’s the reason that I’m successful.” The tweets were not incidental to his presidency. They were central. He ordered printouts of his recent tweets that had received a high number of likes, 200,000 or more. He studied them to find the common themes in the most successful. He seemed to want to become more strategic, find out whether success was tied to the subject, the language or simply the surprise that the president was weighing in. The most effective tweets were often the most shocking. Later, when Twitter announced the number of permissible characters in a single tweet was being doubled from 140 to 280, Trump told Porter he thought the change made sense on one level. Now he would be able to flesh out his thoughts and add more depth. “It’s a good thing,” Trump said, “but it’s a bit of a shame because* ***I was the Ernest Hemingway of 140 characters.****”*

And so it goes