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GUEST COLUMN

Mattis rejects a president who betrays allies

James Mattis’ resignation letter laid bare the frightening future of national security under President Donald Trump. The defense secretary made it clear that he could no longer serve a president who betrays our friends and bows to our adversaries. The last straw was Trump’s green light to Turkey to massacre our Syrian Kurdish allies.

But what finally drove Mattis out was not just Trump’s callous indifference toward America’s friends. It was also the way Trump has turned foreign policy-making into a one-man show based on personal whim — or self-aggrandizement. The last significant foreign policy brake on the self-styled “genius” in the White House will now be gone. Americans better hunker down for 2019 — because Trump’s stunning decision on Syria highlights every dangerous component of his policymaking approach.

Consider them one by one: Trump’s foreign policy process has become so chaotic it is almost nonexistent. Trump suddenly tweeted the news that 2,000 U.S. forces would leave Syria within weeks without prior consultation with any of his team — not the Pentagon, not his secretary of state, not his national security adviser, not his commanders, not Congress, not NATO allies fighting alongside us in Syria, not the Kurds. In the preceding weeks, almost every top Trump adviser on Syria — both military and civilian — had been stating publicly that those troops would stay for some time to prevent an Islamic State revival or further advances by Iran. Syrian Kurds had also been recently reassured.



President Donald Trump, center, stands with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, second from left, before the Army-Navy game in December.

Just last month, the U.S. special envoy to the anti-Islamic State coalition, Brett McGurk, told reporters: “Americans will remain on the ground after the physical defeat of the (Islamic State) caliphate, until we have the pieces in place to ensure that that defeat is enduring. Nobody is declaring a mission accomplished.” From Mattis on down, all of these U.S. officials were blindsided by Trump’s tweet. As were the Kurds. Trump’s foreign policy decisions appear driven more by personal issues than security concerns. In a video defending his Syria decision, Trump declared, “We have won against ISIS.” Not true. There are an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Islamic State fighters believed to be in Syria and Iraq, who could re-emerge if U.S. troops leave prema-

turely. U.S. special forces — while small in numbers — give Kurds and Sunni tribesmen the confidence to keep fighting, while training them to take over after a future U.S. exit. They also gather intelligence on the growing Iranian presence in Syria. Those U.S. troops provide Washington with its main leverage in ongoing international negotiations over Syria’s political future, preparing the ground for U.S. troops to ultimately leave. Trump’s move has cut the legs out from under U.S. negotiators. So why did Trump tweet now? No sign security interests were considered. It’s possible that the unusual criticism he took recently from far-right Fox News commentators about the border wall convinced Trump he needed to fulfill a different campaign promise and bring the troops home. Or — since

Trump shows little interest in long-term strategic thinking, and views every foreign policy issue in terms of making the best monetary deal — his phone conversation last week with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan may hold the key. The two leaders discussed new arms deals — a quid pro quo for letting Turkey crush the Kurds? Which brings us to the third component: Trump emboldens autocrats while betraying allies. The president kowtowed to the despotic Erdogan, despite Turkey’s pledge to bury the Kurds. The Turks have already bombed the Kurdish Afrin region of Syria. Moreover, those who will gain most from the U.S. withdrawal, besides Erdogan, are Russia’s Vladimir Putin and Iran’s ayatollahs, whose hold on Syria will be solidified after a total U.S. exit. Putin swiftly praised Trump’s decision to quit Syria. (Mattis has long been disturbed by Trump’s attraction to the Russian leader). And, of course, the Kurds, who face Turkish slaughter from the sky, are stunned. It was Trump’s indifference to their fate that reportedly propelled Mattis to quit. He also knows that Trump’s betrayal will discourage any putative allies from working with the United States in the future. And so, the retired Marine general reached his limit. (He also opposed another sudden Trump order for half the 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan to return home, undercutting new U.S. efforts to negotiate a deal between Afghan leaders and the Taliban.) But Mattis’ stand won’t curb Trump unless the retired Marine general speaks out publicly. And unless a critical mass of Republican senators finally recognizes the danger of an unrestrained Trump and confronts him. Trudy Rubin is a columnist and editorial-board member for the Philadelphia Inquirer.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why does Trump protest so much?

President Donald Trump’s rantings against the Mueller investigation have intensified, leading most to wonder if an innocent man would protest so much? Because the inappropriate attacks are so over the top, I began to wonder if the collusion might go beyond just political support for the 2016 election, but might mean that Trump sold his soul (and ours) to the Russians. Most of us, even if we had \$1 billion, would not even think about pursuing more money, but greed is a disease like gambling. What if Putin offered Trump \$100 billion in money, gold, and real estate to deliver the U.S. to Russia? The road map to deliver: sow hate and division among the American people. Done, check. Attack and undermine American institutions like the FBI, CIA, and the Justice Department. Check. Abdicate leadership in and support of NATO. Done. Alienate U.S. allies. Check. Create chaos in the Executive branch. Check. Undermine the Joint Chiefs of Staff for our military by replacing experience with inexperience. Underway. Create discord in western trade and environmental agreements by trashing or terminating those agreements. Attack or destroy nuclear proliferation agreements. Ongoing. Create distractions such as immigration and walls, and finally, prematurely back out of a long, hard, successful effort in Syria against ISIS, with Putin’s thanks. Perhaps Trump is just faking incompetence and stupidity. Maybe he was born in St. Petersburg? DAVID FITCH
Astoria

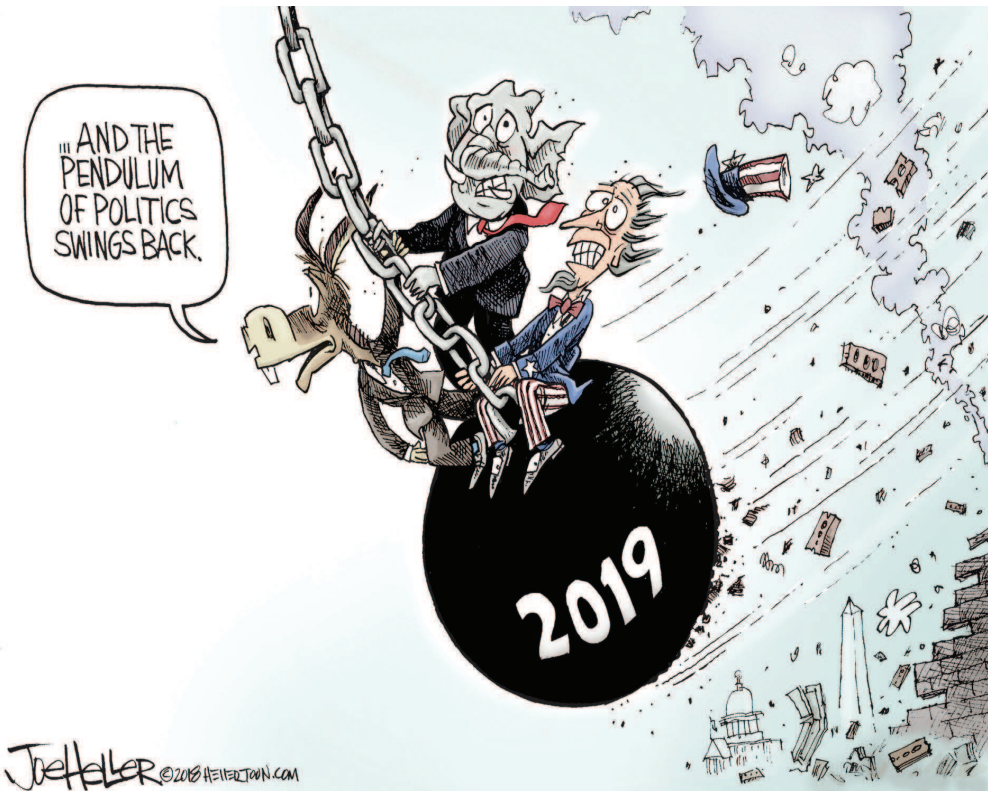
Council ignored residents’ appeals against hotel

On Dec. 12, the Astoria City Council voted 3-2 in favor of allowing a wealthy, out-of-state hotel developer to construct a four-story, shoe-box shaped, view-blocking, out of proportion monstrosity along our riverfront, and in so doing, voted against the residents of Astoria (“Riverfront hotel project in Astoria wins appeal,” The Daily Astorian, Dec. 13). In a packed City Hall, a stream of residents provided unanimous testimony against permitting the hotel as proposed. But a slick presentation by the hotelier’s team bamboozled the mayor and two councilors into approving the 45-foot-high wall of a hotel just a few feet from the Riverwalk in the Bridge Vista section of Astoria.

One councilor’s words will forever ring inside the council chambers — “In a few years you won’t even notice the hotel is there.” The two votes for the people and our town were cast by Cindy Price and Zetty Nemlowill. Councilors Price and Nemlowill got it right, and provided valid logical reasons to reject the hotel as designed. Both are leaving the council in January but will long be remembered for their service, consistently thoughtful and meaningful opinions, and their input to council deliberations. Their votes supported a vision of Astoria that recognizes the value of its history and preservation of its environment and character, while allowing and encouraging changes that will benefit the future community at large, rather than assisting a few individuals to profit at the expense of Astoria residents. CHRISTOPHER FARRAR
Astoria

Amazing transformation

An amazing transformation has begun on the beach dunes of Gearhart. This has all happened through the hard work of City Manager Chad Sweet, Mayor Matt Brown, the City Council, Planning Commission and city staff in bringing a new code to our city after years of work. I want to sincerely thank them for their efforts, and for their diligence in the careful management of the ongoing work, with a path leading to restoration. As you now walk to the beach, or through the dunes, there are areas of openness and light. Finally, the fire department has vehicle access to defend areas of the city and the dunes. Residents and visitors can walk safely through several open areas. At long last, the management of acres of impenetrable Scotch broom and initial battle with blackberries has begun. I’m most thankful for the forthcoming restoration of the grace and beauty of Dune Meadows Park — west end of Pacific Way, dedicated in 1947 specifically for the use of the community to see the ocean. It seems most fitting to end this 100th year of historic Gearhart, and start the next 100, in the heart of our city. Thanks to funding from generous homeowners, all in the community will again be able to sit on the benches and enjoy the Pacific Ocean. You are providing an amazing beginning to 2019 and the next 100 years of community kindness in reclaiming the beauty of our precious beach. You have my deepest appreciation. MARGARET MARINO
Gearhart



An ill-advised project

The proposal to build a new city hall and police station on the South Wind property (“Cannon Beach gets a reality check on South Wind,” The Daily Astorian, Dec. 24) is ill-advised economically, as well as geologically. The property is located within a large landslide mapped by state geologists and published in 1972. The marine sedimentary rocks in this region are highly landslide prone, with an estimated 70 percent of the entire upland area of this portion of the Coast Range having undergone some type of downslope movement in the past, according to the 1972 state report. As a geologist, I mapped landslides along most of the developed shoreline of Clatsop County for the Clatsop-Tillamook Intergovernmental Council in 1977 and 1978, and can attest to the instability of much of the region, especially on moderate to steep slopes. When weighing the risk of tsunamis versus landslides it should be kept in mind that major earthquakes, such as those generated along the Cascadia Subduction Zone, also commonly cause large landslides. This, in combination with the property having been largely logged off, make it a poor choice for development. MARTIN ROSS
Rockport, Massachusetts

House bill supports bipartisan issues

In November, a Pew study found that 53 percent of people get stressed when talking politics with someone they disagree with. We need to focus on reversing this trend in very key ways that engage

people, and encourage them to defend the roots of what created our democracy, and to fortify the institutions which hold it together. Focusing on values that resonate in bipartisan ways with people, regardless of political persuasion, will help to unite us. Additionally, electing legislators with the interest of protecting people, and the passage of legislation that will effectively patch the cracks in the fabric of our broken system, will further the endeavor. Which is why, as part of Indivisible’s “Whose House, Our House” nationwide observance on Jan. 3, we invite people to join us in supporting House Resolution (HR) 1. This bill spearheads efforts to address issues that have been expressed as important to people from all along the left, right, and center of the political spectrum: to make voting more accessible, reduce the influence of big money in politics, and to fortify government ethics laws. We’re seeing a very real opportunity for these issues to finally be tackled, but the effort needs our help. We ask that you all join us in a coordinated effort Jan. 3 to contact our federal legislators — Sen. Jeff Merkley, Sen. Ed Wyden, and Rep. Suzanne Bonamici — and encourage them to support HR 1. And then, of course, please reach out to President Donald Trump and encourage him to sign it. TIFFINY MITCHELL
ERIC HALPERIN
BEBE MICHEL
KEVIN WIDENER
TIM KELLER
KEN POTTER
MARY BETH COTTLE
Indivisible Vote the Future Team