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OPINION

On the Verge of another Unnecessary War

Will government leaders regret their complicity?

BY LISA FULLER

President Bill Clinton's greatest regret was his failure to respond to the Rwandan genocide. He estimated that U.S. intervention could have saved 300,000 lives.

The Vietnam War was former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's biggest regret. He wrote an entire book to explain why he was "terribly wrong."

Former Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, Sen. Tom Harkin, and Sen. Walter Jones have all said that they deeply regret authorizing the war in Iraq. Jones once lamented, "I helped kill 4,000 Americans, and I will go to my grave regretting that."

In each case, government leaders regretted their complicity in hundreds of thousands of deaths. In each case, they had chosen to prioritize

politics above ethics. Today's political leaders are about to make the same mistake.

We are now on the verge of another unnecessary war — this time with North Korea — and it is likely to wreak more havoc than Vietnam, Iraq and Rwanda combined.

Top nuclear security expert Scott Sagan warns that the risk of war is far higher than during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and predicts that one million people could die on the first day — a figure that exceeds the death toll of the entire Rwandan genocide. Even more worryingly, Russia and China are making military preparations, suggesting that a Korean war could quickly escalate into a world war.

Despite this horrific scenario, President Trump continues to ratchet up tensions by issuing bombastic threats and overseeing provocative military exercises. He is increasingly keen to launch a "preventative" strike, and there are multiple indications that he plans to do so within the next three months unless North Korea agrees to denuclearize. At the same time, he is

forbidding diplomacy, blocking any possibility of a peaceful solution to the crisis.

Put simply, war could be inevitable if Trump remains in power. Government leaders therefore have an ethical obligation to remove him from office before he fulfills his dream of using nuclear weapons.

Impeachment, however, is no longer a viable solution — the impeachment process takes several months, whereas Trump is reportedly looking to drop the first bomb by March.

Congress or Trump's Cabinet will therefore need to invoke the 25th Amendment, which would immediately suspend Trump's presidential authority on the grounds that he is "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office." While the amendment can be invoked on political grounds alone, Trump's behavior suggests he has a cognitive inability to do his job: Neurologists warn that Trump is displaying symptoms of dementia, while prominent psychiatrists have argued that Trump's particular brand of mental instability poses a grave risk to national security.

There are, however, measures short of dethroning Trump that would be helpful. Congress could pass legislation such as the Preventing Preemptive War in North Korea Act, the Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act or the No First Use Bill. All three bills would constrain the President — be it Trump or any of his successors — from unilaterally launching a pre-emptive nuclear strike. Congress has yet to prioritize any of these bills, and they have all remained at a standstill since they were introduced.

Finally, government officials should follow the leads of lawmakers like Sen. Chris Murphy and Rep. Ted Lieu and speak out frequently and loudly to mobilize public opposition to a potential war.

Political leaders who muster the courage to act may be taking a political risk, but they will save themselves from the prospect of spending the rest of their lives wondering if they could have prevented a historic tragedy.

Lisa Fuller is a former civilian peacekeeper who worked in war zones such as Iraq, South Sudan, and Sri Lanka.

Help for Struggling Millionaires Is On the Way

Gutting the estate tax is a bad idea

BY CHUCK COLLINS

It isn't easy being a millionaire these days, especially if you've got less than \$20 million. Fortunately, Congress is watching out for you.

Yes, the Republican tax cut bonanza targets lower end millionaires for special relief. Now those struggling to scrape by with \$15 million or \$20 million can breathe more easily. And even lowly billionaires will be able to keep more of their wealth.

Why? Because Congress just increased the amount of wealth exempted by the estate tax, our nation's only levy on inherited wealth.

In the bad old days, a family had to have \$11 million in

wealth before they were subject to the tax. This exempted the 99.8 percent of undisciplined taxpayers who, in the words

of Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, had squandered their wealth on "booze, women, and movies."

Now no family with less than \$22 million will pay it (or individuals with less than \$10.9 million). This gift to "grateful heirs" will cost \$83 billion over the next decade.

Gutting the estate tax is a bad idea — it raises substantial revenue from those with the greatest capacity to pay. Even in a weakened state, it would have raised over \$260 billion over the next decade.

The estate tax was established a century ago during the first Gilded Age, a period of grotesque inequality. Champions of establishing a tax on inherited wealth included President Theodore Roos-

evelt and industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who viewed it as a brake on the concentration of wealth and power.

Modern Republicans, however, paint the tyrannical "death tax" as an unfair penalty on small businesses and family farmers. But that's a myth.

The most vocal champion of estate tax repeal is Rep. Kristi Noem, a South Dakota Republican who became the GOP poster child for farmers touched by the estate tax. House Speaker Paul Ryan appointed her on the tax conference committee to advocate for estate tax repeal because of her compelling story.

Noem says her family was subject to the tax after her father died in a farm accident in 1994, a story she repeats constantly.

The only problem, as journalists recently discovered, is that her family paid the tax only because of a fluke in

South Dakota law that was changed in 1995. Her experience has little to do with the federal estate tax, which has been substantially scaled down in recent decades.

And while Noem was complaining about government taxes, the family ranch has collected over \$3.7 million in taxpayer funded farm subsidies since 1995.

Noem attacked the reporting as "fake news," even though it was based on legal documents she filed herself.

The reality is that the small number of estate tax beneficiaries aren't farmers at all. They're mostly wealthy city dwellers.

Still, the fact that the estate tax lives on creates an opportunity to make it better.

Lawmakers should institute a graduated rate structure, so that billionaires pay a higher estate tax rate than families with a "mere" \$22 million. And loopholes should

be closed so they can't pay wealth managers to hide their wealth in complicated trusts and offshore tax havens.

Estate tax revenue could be dedicated to something that clearly expands opportunity for everyone else.

Bill Gates Sr. argues that the estate tax should fund "a GI bill for the next generation." In exchange for military and community service, young adults should be able to get substantial tuition assistance for higher education or vocational training, paid for by a progressive estate tax.

If Congress were concerned about the middle class, that's the kind of proposal that would become the law of the land.

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