

Obama pushes tolerance, respect in childhood home Jakarta

By Margie Mason
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Following another week of dust-ups between the media and President Donald Trump, his predecessor shared a bit of wisdom from the other side of the world about tolerance and taking the daily news cycle in stride.

“I wasn’t worried about what was in the newspapers today,” former President Barack Obama said during a nostalgic visit to Indonesia’s capital, his childhood home. “What I was worried about was, ‘What are they going to write about me 20 years from now when I look back?’”

Obama has largely stayed away from U.S. politics and the Trump administration, but he did tout one of his accomplishments while in office.

“In Paris, we came together around the most ambitious agreement in history about climate change, an agreement that even with the temporary absence of American leadership, can still give our children a fighting chance,” he said.

Trump shocked many countries in June by announcing he was pulling out of the accord. He has also had a difficult relationship with members of the press and was recently condemned by Democrats and Republicans for a tweet that attacked a female MSNBC host.

Obama stressed the importance of stepping away from news sites where only like-minded views are shared, and warned about social media giving rise to resentment of minorities and bad treatment of



NOSTALGIC VISIT. Former U.S. President Barack Obama walks during his visit to Prambanan Temple in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Obama and his family vacationed in the country where he lived for several years as a child. (AP Photo)

people.

The former president was greeted by a crowd of thousands, including leaders, students, and businesspeople, in Jakarta, where he opened the Fourth Congress of Indonesian Diaspora. He is wildly popular in Indonesia, where many view him as an adopted son. A statue of the boy still remembered as “Barry” stands outside his old elementary school.

He reminisced about moving to Jakarta in 1967 when he was just six years old, shouting, “Indonesia *bagian dari diri saya!*” or “Indonesia is part of me!”

Obama said he had been gorging on the local food since arriving.

“If the rainy season came, the floods

were coming and we had to clean out the floors in our house and then chase the chickens because they had gone someplace else,” he said to roaring laughter. “Today, Jakarta is a thriving center of commerce marked by highways and high-rises. So much has changed, so much progress has been made.”

Obama lived in the country with his mother, an anthropologist, and his Indonesian stepfather. The couple split up after having his half-sister, and Obama moved back to Hawai’i when he was 10 years old to live with his grandparents. But he said he has never forgotten the years he spent in Indonesia.

“My time here made me cherish respect

for people’s differences,” he said, noting how he and his family had just visited two of the most treasured ancient temples — Borobudur, a Buddhist complex, and the Hindu compound of Prambanan — in the world’s most populous Muslim country.

Obama’s speech came on the final leg of his 10-day vacation in Indonesia. In addition to visiting the temples in the city of Yogyakarta on the island of Java, he and his wife, Michelle, and daughters, Sasha and Malia, went rafting and toured the resort island of Bali. He also met Indonesian President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo at the grand Bogor Palace in West Java, just outside Jakarta.

The Indonesian visit marked Obama’s first trip to Asia since leaving office. He urged the country to be a light of democracy and to never stop embracing differences. Indonesia has faced a rise in Islamic radicalism and anti-gay attacks, and was recently condemned by rights groups for jailing Jakarta’s former governor, an ethnic Chinese Christian, for blasphemy.

“The spirit of this country has to be one of tolerance. It’s enshrined in Indonesia’s constitution, it’s symbolized by mosques and temples and churches beside each other,” Obama said. “That spirit is one of the defining things about Indonesia. It is one of the most important characteristics to set as an example for other Muslim countries around the world.”

Kim’s North Korea gains a little economically, a lot militarily

By Hyung-jin Kim
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Ruthless dictator? Economic reformer? Shrewd master of nuclear brinksmanship?

When Kim Jong Un took control of North Korea in late 2011, speculation swirled around the young, Swiss-educated leader. What would he do for an economically backward authoritarian nation that had been in a high-stakes nuclear standoff with its neighbors and Washington for years?

Almost six years later, there are still unanswered questions, but some things about Kim have come into focus. His rule has actually seen the economy improve, and when it comes to the nuclear drive, it’s obvious that Kim, who rattled nerves July 4 by test-firing his country’s first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), has a more uncompromising stance than his late father, Kim Jong Il, who occasionally sat down for talks with Washington meant to gain concessions.

Kim Jong Un seems uninterested in negotiations until he perfects a nuclear missile capable of striking anywhere in the United States.

The stance has so far worked, and he’ll likely achieve the badly needed nuclear deterrence against the United States fairly soon if he’s not stopped.

Here’s a look at Kim’s nuclear gamble and what the future might hold.

What he’s doing

His father, who ruled North Korea from 1994 to 2011, also ordered a series of weapons tests, but he let diplomats pursue now-dormant international disarmament-for-aid deals.

No such talks have happened under Kim Jong Un. He has overseen three of the North’s five atomic test explosions and both of its successful satellite launches, which are seen by the U.N. as a disguised test of long-range missile technology.

And then there’s the July 4 ICBM launch, the North’s most successful missile test to date. Afterward, Kim said he will never put his nuclear and missile

programs on the negotiating table as long as U.S. hostility and nuclear threats persist.

What accounts for Kim’s boldness?

It might just be his nature. Kim, believed to be around 33, may have strategically chosen to push the nuclear program after determining that the United States won’t attack because of fears that a North Korean retaliation would cause enormous casualties in South Korea.

Kim may also have determined that China, North Korea’s main ally and aid benefactor, might agree to tougher international sanctions against North Korea but would stop short of doing anything to bring down Kim’s government, which could trigger a flood of refugees over their shared border and potentially a unified Korea with U.S.-allied Seoul in charge.

North Korea’s small yet gradual economic growth in recent years has also allowed Kim to focus on furthering his nuclear ambitions. His father, by com-

parison, resorted to outside handouts to feed many of his 24 million people after a devastating famine in the mid-1990s killed tens of thousands.

What he wants

Kim’s propaganda machine argues that the nuclear deterrence is a “treasured sword” meant to cope with U.S. aggression.

“Kim doesn’t want to resolve issues through diplomacy. He’s just trying to protect himself by reinforcing his country’s military power,” said analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea’s Sejong Institute.

Since his inauguration, Kim has not met any foreign leaders or traveled abroad. The most high-profile foreigner he has met: former National Basketball Association star Dennis Rodman, who regaled him with a rendition of “Happy Birthday” at an exhibition game during one of several trips to Pyongyang.

Kim has repeatedly promised to achieve Korean unification, and he likely thinks

Continued on page 8



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