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afgazad@gmail.com

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MELVIN GOODMAN

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Donald the Destroyer Versus Civil Society



Photo by Kyle Ryan

The mainstream media have examined the governance of Donald Trump over the first term and the hundred days of the second term, using the familiar techniques of bureaucratic politics and the use of mostly anonymous sources. In this way, the media have examined the politics, policies, and fulsome propaganda of the Trump's presidency. But the media for the most part have foresworn or underplayed the central question of Trump's presidency: Is Donald Trump psychologically fit to be president of the United States and, even more worrying, the commander-in-chief of the most powerful and expensive military forces in the world? We know the answer to that question and it couldn't be more worrisome.

The first term produced several books on Trump's dangerously disordered presidency, including a trenchant one by Trump's niece, Mary Trump ("Too Much and Never Enough") that diagnosed Donald Trump's threat to domestic and international security. There was sufficient polling by 2018 to indicate that most Americans agreed that Trump was unfit to be

president. The mental health experts who contributed to these works fortunately ignored the so-called ethical principle of the American Psychiatric Association (the Goldwater Rule), which prohibited psychiatrists from diagnosing a public figure they had not personally encountered. But the erratic behavior of Trump during the 2015-2016 campaign and the first two years of his first term prompted a reassessment and a challenging principle: the duty to warn. Now it is seven years later, and Trump's actions and statements have created the highest level of domestic and international anxiety since the end of World War II.

Trump's malignant narcissism has certainly worsened—his claims that he knows more than anyone else and that only he can fix our problems marked the first term; “I run the country and the world” typifies the second term. His demonization of his perceived enemies as a result of two congressional impeachments and numerous court cases has become far more threatening. His treatment of women, minorities, and immigrants point to paranoia as well as a cruel and heartless approach designed to rid the country of migrants and force women and minorities out of the federal work force. The lack of empathy, of course, accompanies narcissism.

There has been far more damage and destruction in the first hundred days of the second term than there was in the full four years of the first term. There were moderates in the latter period who seemed prepared to deal with Trump's paranoia and impulse control that were constantly on display and threatened destructive acts. There was an unusual level of public criticism from chief of staff John Kelly, secretary of state Rex Tillerson, national security adviser H.R. McMaster, and director of national intelligence Dan Coats. The criticism by Tillerson and McMaster cost them their jobs. As retired and active general officers, the criticism by Kelly and McMaster violated the professional military's duty to never criticize a sitting president. Economic disasters were avoided because economic advisers such as Gary Cohn and secretary of the treasury Stanley Mnuchin kept certain information from Trump's purview, even removing documents from the president's desk in the Oval Office.

The second term already is a greater disaster, as cabinet level appointees such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Director of Homeland Security Kristi Noem embarrass the country and themselves with desperate attempts to demonstrate fealty to their Donald. Rubio has cancelled the visas of more than 1,500 international students (only to have the courts bring at least a temporary halt to the process). Noem has flown to El Salvador for a photo opportunity at the CECOT prison in front of the prisoners flown illegally from the United States. She was smiling and brandishing her \$50,000 Rolex watch. There are no limits on the efforts of Trump's appointees to prostrate themselves for their leader.

Attorney General Pam Bondi is destroying the Department of Justice, and illegally using the 1798 Alien Enemies Act to deport immigrants. FBI Director Kash Patel is destroying the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and reassigning experienced agents to participate in the roundup of immigrants. Lord knows what is happening to Pete Hegseth's Pentagon, where the rumors are frightening in terms of the threat to U.S. national security. And does anyone really believe that Marco Rubio can lead the Department of State, the National Security Council, what little is left of the Agency for International Development, and the National Archives? The only certainty is the weakening of U.S. national and international security.

The first hundred days of the second term created crude displays that we could see for ourselves, including the mugging of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, the most heroic figure in the international arena, and Trump's appearance with El Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, a leader in the field of domestic terrorism, that was nauseating to watch. Vice President J.D. Vance smirked his way through both of these meetings, and even upbraided Zelensky for not thanking the president of the United States for all he had done for Ukraine, which presumably includes interrupting military supplies and military intelligence in a way that led to additional civilian Ukrainian deaths. Trump even suggested to Bukele that more prisons should be built in El Salvador to accommodate our "homegrown" terrorists, meaning U.S. citizens.

The first hundred days of the second term has been far worse and dangerous than the four years of the first term because America's putative civic leaders been willing to prostrate themselves to avoid or weaken the abuses and threats of Donald Trump. Publishers from the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times, Jeff Bezos and Dr. Soon- Shiong, who depend on government support in their other endeavors, have altered the news gathering of their papers. Some of the most prominent and powerful law firms in the country offered tens of millions of dollars to do pro bono legal work for Donald Trump and his family.

University presidents, particularly at Columbia University, bent the knee rather than challenge or defy Trump's dictates. Harvard University is getting much credit for standing up to Trump to protect its tax status, but Harvard's first instincts were to comply with the White House by removing the two leading officials of its Middle East Institute. Too many campuses are restricting freedom of speech in order to comply with Trump's phony campaign against antisemitism, which is in fact a campaign against those who criticize Israel's genocidal war.

Paul Krugman, a columnist at the New York Times, resigned because Times' editorial staffers were weakening his columns. The senior producer at CBS's 60 Minutes resigned

because of similar interference from CBS's parent company, Paramount Studios; the same thing happened at ABC, where its parent company, Disneyland, caved in to a Trump law suit that should have been fought.

The political destruction and the craven behavior is sadly reminiscent of Germany 1933. But Hitler removed far fewer civil servants and the like in the beginning because he was motivated by racial policies and not politics. Hitler initially removed the Jews who he believed were undermining Germany; Trump is targeting a far larger number of perceived enemies who he believed were undermining him. Think of judges, lawyers, and the members of the so-called "deep state." The major incidents in Germany were reported in the international press, but not the German press. Our own press needs to be more aggressive.

There are obvious reasons for not going too far in comparing Germany and the United States or, for that matter, Hitler and Trump. Hitler wanted war; Trump doesn't. But both are despicable man. Germans were anxious for good reason as early as 1933. Americans are anxious in 2025 for reasons not altogether different. The German people became hostage to Hitler in the 1930s; we cannot let that happen to us in the 2020s.a

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Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#) and [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#). and [A Whistleblower at the CIA](#). His most recent books are "American Carnage: The Wars of Donald Trump" (Opus Publishing, 2019) and "Containing the National Security State" (Opus Publishing, 2021). Goodman is the national security columnist for [counterpunch.org](#).