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## ***Could Trump Bring Down the American Empire?***

More than any other presidency in the modern history of the United States, Donald Trump's has been a permanent threat of socio-political shipwreck. He has deliberately excited and fuelled conflicts, involving xenophobic and racist currents in society, with an always nasty political discourse. Trump's eccentricities have been widely highlighted by the press, but his attacks on the U.S. military presence in the world and its commitments to that end have received far less attention.

Such is the essence of an essay by journalist and historian Gareth Porter, published on the website TRUTHDIG.

Trump had come to the White House with a commitment to end U.S. military interventions. This was based on a worldview in which wars for military domination have no place. In the last speech of his victory tour in December 2016, Trump promised: "Let's stop tearing down foreign regimes that we shouldn't have been involved with. Instead of investing in wars, we will invest in rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure...".

At a meeting in the summer of 2017, where Defense Secretary James Mattis defended new military measures against the Islamic State in North Africa, Trump expressed his displeasure at the endless wars and Mattis claimed that "we are doing it to prevent a bomb from exploding in Times Square," to which Trump replied, furiously, that the same could be said about anything that happened in any country on the planet.

Trump's national security team was so alarmed by his questioning of military commitments and troop deployments that they invited him to the Pentagon. They were

hoping to make him better understand their arguments with the usual rhetoric of the international democratic order based on the rules of globalism.

Ignoring decades of wars in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, Mattis and other high-ranking officials argued that “this order is what has kept the peace for 70 years.” Trump shook his head in disagreement and diverted the discussion to a subject he found particularly irritating: economic and military relations with South Korea. “We spend \$3.5 billion a year there to keep troops in South Korea,” complained Trump. “I don’t know why they’re there. Let’s bring them all home!”

In September 2017, while Trump threatened to destroy North Korea in tweets, he privately held an opinion against the presence of troops in South Korea and his determination was to eliminate it, according to Bob Woodward.

Political-diplomatic events with the two Koreas in early 2018 reinforced Trump’s view that U.S. troops should withdraw from there, so he accepted North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s offer to hold a summit.

Trump ordered the Pentagon to study options for the withdrawal of these U.S. troops. That idea was viewed by the media and most of the U.S. national security elite as completely unacceptable. But the Pentagon’s military and intelligence specialists long knew that U.S. troops were not needed to deter North Korea or defend against an attack through the demilitarized zone.

Trump’s willingness to practice personal diplomacy with Kim was driven by his ego, but also by the idea that it would contribute to ending or attenuating the deployment of troops in South Korea. Obviously, such a thing could not happen without a clear rejection of the national security ideology that had dominated Washington’s elites for generations.

Bob Woodward tells in his book “Fear in the White House” that Trump was eager to put an end to the three great wars inherited from Barack Obama: in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, about which he said in July 2017 that he was very tired.

“We should proclaim victory, end wars and bring our troops home,” he said, repeating the political tactic with which Washington covered up its defeat in Vietnam in 1966.

Trump feared he would be held responsible for the consequences of defeat in a war. This was the same fear that had led Lyndon Johnson to abandon his strong resistance to large-scale intervention in Vietnam in mid-1965 and Barack Obama to accept a major escalation in Afghanistan that he had been objecting to.

Trump’s mercantilist worldview poses economic dangers for the United States that may lead him to reject the tactics of multiple permanent wars. But his unorthodox approach has

encouraged him to challenge the essential logic of the U.S. military empire more than any previous president. And the final years of his administration will surely bring him more struggles over these issues with those in charge of the empire, predicts Gareth Porter in Truthdig.

A CubaNews translation by Walter Lippmann.