

Flattery, Ego, and the Nuclear Button: Why Trump's Temperament Endangers Global Security

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

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In the high-stakes arena of nuclear strategy, the margin for error is razor-thin—and emotional stability is non-negotiable. Yet during Donald Trump's presidency, we witnessed the convergence of nuclear authority and unchecked ego in ways that revealed systemic vulnerabilities few were willing to confront. Recent reports that Trump may have been unaware of an assassination attempt on Vladimir Putin raise deeper questions not only about his attentiveness, but about the very structure of nuclear command. What if such critical intelligence was ignored, not due to oversight, but due to personal friction or emotional vanity—say, because the briefer didn't flatter him? This essay explores how Trump's well-documented preference for appearance, loyalty, and submission—especially from women—created an environment in which national security was filtered through personal mood. Drawing from Cold War deterrence theory, firsthand accounts, and known behavioral patterns, we argue that the greatest threat to global stability may not be foreign aggression—but the temperament of the person who holds the launch codes.

Keywords: Trump, nuclear command, ego, deterrence, Putin, intelligence briefing, Tulsi Gabbard, emotional stability, flattery, gender dynamics, national security, unpredictability, psychological screening, missed briefing, Cold War, Stanislav Petrov, mutual assured destruction, White House, nuclear strategy, existential risk. A collaboration with GPT-4o. CC4.0.

I. Introduction

On the global chessboard of nuclear diplomacy, timing and perception are everything. Recently, reports emerged suggesting that former President Donald Trump was unaware of an assassination attempt on Russian President Vladimir Putin—a stunning revelation, given the magnitude such an event holds in global stability. This wasn't some minor diplomatic snub. A credible threat to the head of a nuclear superpower could, under the wrong interpretation, be mistaken as the first move in a decapitation strike, triggering a retaliatory nuclear response. That a former or current president might be uninformed of such an event is not a political faux pas—it's an existential risk.

But why would a president miss such critical intelligence? Here's where speculation, though provocative, serves a deeper purpose. What if the morning briefing was delivered by someone like Tulsi Gabbard—an experienced military veteran and former congresswoman—yet Trump dismissed it, not because of its content, but because she failed to perform her role in a way that flattered his ego? What if the tone wasn't deferential enough, or the attention wasn't sufficiently personal? What if, simply put, he wasn't "in the mood" to listen because he didn't feel admired?

This theory may seem exaggerated, but it reflects a well-documented pattern: Trump's interactions with women—whether as political allies, staff, or public figures—are consistently shaped by aesthetic judgment, power dynamics, and emotional responsiveness. This is not merely an issue of sexism or inappropriate workplace behavior. It is a fundamental flaw in leadership—particularly when that leadership holds unilateral launch authority over the most destructive arsenal humanity has ever created.

This piece does not aim to debate policies or party lines. It interrogates a far more urgent question: Can a man who filters reality through personal vanity, especially as it relates to women, be trusted with decisions that could end civilization? What may appear as interpersonal dysfunction in everyday politics becomes catastrophic at the nuclear level. When ego replaces strategy, the entire logic of deterrence begins to break down.

II. Strategic Stability Requires Emotional Discipline

At the heart of nuclear deterrence lies a deceptively simple assumption: that all parties involved are rational actors. The entire doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) hinges on the belief that no leader, however provocative or cornered, would launch a nuclear strike knowing it would guarantee the annihilation of their own nation. It's a terrifyingly fragile equilibrium, held in place not by weapons or technology, but by psychology—by the ability of leaders to absorb pressure, remain calm under duress, and respond with clarity in moments of confusion or fear.

This is why emotional discipline is not just a virtue in global leadership—it is a prerequisite for human survival.

History offers sobering examples of just how close we've come to global catastrophe, and how the cool judgment of individual actors prevented annihilation. In 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was not brute force but composure—particularly on the part of John F. Kennedy and his Soviet counterpart Nikita Khrushchev—that allowed for a resolution. Later, in 1983, Soviet Lieutenant Colonel Stanislav Petrov received what appeared to be an early warning of a U.S. missile launch. Protocol dictated that he report the alert up the chain of command, potentially triggering a retaliatory nuclear strike. But Petrov, trusting his instincts and refusing to panic, held back. It turned out to be a false alarm. One calm man, in a moment of extreme pressure, quite literally saved the world.

Contrast this with a leader who is impulsive, emotionally volatile, or prone to interpret events through the lens of personal grievance. Deterrence theory begins to unravel. When leaders cannot be trusted to remain grounded, allies grow uncertain, adversaries grow paranoid, and the thin line separating peace from catastrophe becomes even more brittle.

While unpredictability has its uses in international negotiations—offering a psychological advantage or keeping adversaries guessing—it is catastrophically dangerous in nuclear diplomacy. The so-called “madman theory” that President

Nixon once toyed with was carefully choreographed performance, part of a psychological strategy meant to appear erratic without ever crossing lines of actual instability. But real unpredictability, rooted in ego rather than strategy, is not a tactic. It is a threat multiplier.

The prospect of a U.S. president ignoring, misinterpreting, or outright discarding a critical piece of intelligence—especially one involving a nuclear-armed adversary—because of mood, ego, or interpersonal tension is not hypothetical. It is a growing concern, especially when such a leader has shown again and again that emotion governs perception, and perception governs action.

In this kind of world, it doesn't matter how many safeguards exist on paper. If the person at the top sees national security as an extension of personal gratification—or worse, personal offense—the doctrine of deterrence becomes an illusion.

III. Trump's Ego and the Gendered Dynamics of Power

Donald Trump's public and private interactions with women throughout his career reveal a pattern that is not incidental—it is foundational to his worldview.

Whether in the boardroom, the Oval Office, or on a debate stage, Trump's behavior consistently reinforces a framework in which women are assessed, categorized, and engaged with not primarily as professionals or equals, but as aesthetic or emotional instruments. This isn't just about sexism; it's about the dangerous intersection of personal psychology and political power.

A look at Trump's inner circle—both during his presidency and in the years leading up to it—reveals a recurring motif: the presence of conventionally attractive women in key roles. Melania Trump, former model and First Lady, was presented less as a policy partner and more as a decorative symbol of taste and status.

Ivanka Trump, his daughter, held an unprecedented and loosely defined position as both advisor and brand extension—a role often blurred by Trump's own inappropriate public comments about her appearance. Hope Hicks, the young and camera-ready communications director, enjoyed Trump's enduring favor and trust. Tulsi Gabbard, a military veteran and former Democratic congresswoman, was one

of the rare political adversaries he praised, often with a tone more admiring than strategic. Kristi Noem, the photogenic South Dakota governor, was floated as a potential running mate.

In each case, professional qualifications often took a backseat to loyalty, image, and personal dynamics. Women who fit a certain aesthetic—glamorous, deferential, or brand-aligned—were rewarded with proximity to power. Those who deviated, challenged, or did not flatter were often discarded, publicly insulted, or diminished. Trump did not just seek loyalty; he sought a very specific *style* of loyalty—one that combined political alignment with emotional validation, often performed through appearance, tone, or submission.

This dynamic has broader implications. It means that the president's receptiveness to input may depend not on the gravity of the message, but on the messenger's conformity to a psychological ideal. A woman delivering critical intelligence, if perceived as insufficiently warm, submissive, or visually pleasing, might be disregarded not because of the information—but because of her failure to gratify. This isn't mere speculation; former officials have reported that Trump's attention during briefings often shifted based on who was speaking and how they were presenting themselves.

In a political climate where trust, competence, and courage should define leadership roles, Trump's apparent preference for emotional resonance over professional merit—particularly in his interactions with women—reveals a chilling fragility. When aesthetic appeal and performative loyalty are gateways to influence, national security becomes a court drama, not a strategic apparatus.

Worse still, this pattern is not just personal—it echoes in policy. When women are objectified or tokenized in the halls of power, their expertise is devalued, and the integrity of the decision-making process suffers. The deeper issue is not that Trump surrounds himself with attractive women, but that he *filters power itself* through the lens of validation and control. This is not leadership. It is performance—dangerous, ego-driven performance.

And when that performance intersects with nuclear authority, it ceases to be a cultural critique. It becomes a structural risk.

IV. The Intelligence Briefing Problem

A president's most critical duty is not to speak, but to listen. Nowhere is this more essential than in the daily intelligence briefing—the mechanism by which the Commander-in-Chief is informed of potential threats, ongoing crises, and rapidly shifting global developments. These briefings are not ceremonial. They are designed to ensure that the person with unilateral nuclear authority makes decisions based on verified facts, not on instinct, emotion, or cable news narratives.

Yet Donald Trump's relationship with intelligence briefings was, from the beginning, strained—if not outright dysfunctional. Numerous credible reports from within the intelligence community, the White House, and former administration officials reveal a consistent pattern: Trump frequently skipped the Presidential Daily Briefing (PDB), showed disinterest during sessions, and preferred oral summaries over written materials. He often requested his briefings be peppered with maps, charts, or sensational headlines. The Washington Post, Politico, and former DNI officials all documented how difficult it was to hold his attention—especially when the content challenged his preconceived views or political narratives.

But the issue wasn't just inattention. It was ego filtration. Trump's receptiveness to information was directly influenced by the source and tone of delivery. If the briefer was perceived as overly serious, critical, or lacking in warmth, the message could be dismissed outright. If the content of the briefing contradicted his gut feeling or political needs, he might simply deny it. In essence, facts were subordinate to feelings—particularly *his* feelings.

Now reintroduce a symbolic but unsettling hypothetical: Imagine Tulsi Gabbard—veteran, articulate, principled, and not inclined to flirt—delivering a sobering briefing about a potential assassination attempt on Vladimir Putin. Perhaps it

came early in the morning. Perhaps Trump was irritated, bored, or felt slighted in some interpersonal way. In such a scenario, it's conceivable—given established patterns—that he could wave off the information, fail to grasp its severity, or simply forget it happened.

The consequence of that omission would not be merely political embarrassment. It could be interpreted by Russia as a signal of American complicity—or indifference—potentially triggering a retaliatory escalation under the belief that a decapitation strike was underway. In nuclear doctrine, perception is everything. And a misread silence can be as dangerous as a missile launch.

This is the crux of the intelligence problem under an ego-dominated presidency: the value of the information depends less on the content and more on how it makes the leader feel. That is a catastrophic inversion of priorities. National security cannot be a mood-dependent function. The nuclear football cannot wait for emotional regulation. And the lives of millions must not hinge on whether the messenger sufficiently validated the ego of the man with the codes.

The intelligence community exists to present facts, not to soothe. But in the Trump era, soothing seemed to be a prerequisite for being heard. That's not a quirk. That's a structural weakness—a break in the chain of command between truth and action.

V. Unpredictability vs. Unreliability

In international relations, unpredictability can be a useful tool—when wielded with precision. Former President Richard Nixon famously employed what became known as the “madman theory,” a strategic doctrine in which he sought to make the Soviet Union and North Vietnam believe he was volatile enough to risk everything. The goal was to instill caution in adversaries, forcing them to tread lightly out of fear that the U.S. president might respond irrationally to provocation. But Nixon's unpredictability was largely calculated, contained within a deliberate framework. It was theater—frightening, but ultimately strategic.

Donald Trump's unpredictability is of a different nature entirely. It is not methodical. It is *organic*, emerging from ego, mood, impulse, and personal grievance. Where Nixon used the appearance of instability to *strengthen* American deterrence, Trump's actual behavior often sowed confusion within his own administration and signaled chaos to the outside world. His actions were not designed to keep adversaries off balance for diplomatic gain; they frequently left allies uncertain and adversaries unsure whether anyone in the U.S. government was in control at all.

This distinction is not academic—it's operational. Nuclear stability is based not only on the capability to retaliate but on the belief that all actors are bound by a shared logic of self-preservation. Predictable rationality is the cornerstone of deterrence. If that assumption erodes, the entire system becomes fragile. If an adversary like Russia begins to believe that the U.S. president might genuinely ignore critical developments—or worse, act out of wounded pride—they may respond with a hair-trigger posture, interpreting silence or hesitation as a calculated ruse.

Consider again the hypothetical scenario: an assassination attempt on Vladimir Putin occurs. Trump, due to ego or distraction, does not register its significance or fails to respond in time. From the Kremlin's perspective, this could look like a deliberate provocation—especially if no explanation or outreach is made. Russia's nuclear posture includes explicit provisions for launching a response in the event of a “decapitation strike,” under the assumption that any attack on leadership may precede a full-scale offensive. In that context, *inaction* or *silence* can become a signal of aggression.

This is not an abstract problem. Misread intentions have nearly triggered catastrophe before. In 1983, Soviet officials misinterpreted a NATO military exercise—Able Archer—as a possible cover for a nuclear first strike. The only thing that prevented a response was the caution of a few high-level Soviet analysts who doubted the narrative. Had the White House at that time been sending mixed or erratic signals, the result might have been different.

When adversaries cannot distinguish between accident, indecision, and intention, the world becomes vastly more dangerous. Under Trump, what should be seen as institutional consistency is instead filtered through one man's moods. In such an environment, U.S. silence could be taken not as diplomacy or delay, but as deception.

The difference between *strategic unpredictability* and *emotional unreliability* is the difference between deterrence and disaster. When nuclear weapons are involved, there is no margin for confusion.

VI. The Human Factor in the Nuclear Chain of Command

The architecture of nuclear command is designed to be airtight—rigorous, procedural, and swift. In theory, layers of verification, communication protocols, and expert advisement are all in place to ensure that any decision to launch nuclear weapons is deliberate, informed, and justified. But behind all this structure lies a profound and unsettling truth: in the United States, the decision to initiate a nuclear strike ultimately rests in the hands of one person—the President.

There is no vote. No congressional consultation is required. No military leader can override it. Once verified, a presidential order to launch nuclear weapons must be obeyed. This level of authority was built on the assumption that the office would always be held by someone guided by reason, surrounded by expertise, and emotionally stable under pressure.

What happens, then, when the president's temperament is not a stabilizing force—but a destabilizing one?

Donald Trump's presidency exposed the fragility of this assumption. Numerous insiders, including former Defense Secretary James Mattis and National Security Advisor John Bolton, have expressed concerns about Trump's emotional volatility and erratic behavior. Even General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reportedly took secretive steps to ensure Trump could not initiate a rogue strike in the final days of his term. That is not a scenario from fiction. It happened

in real time—because those closest to the president believed his decision-making could not be trusted under emotional strain.

Now layer onto this the gendered lens through which Trump often views power and loyalty. If the president's attention and receptiveness to information are filtered not just through ideology or instinct, but through his emotional responses to the people delivering the message—particularly women—then we have a catastrophic vulnerability. In such a model, strategic decisions hinge not on analysis or risk assessment, but on mood, tone, and interpersonal validation.

Consider the absurdity, and yet the plausibility, of the following scenario: A senior female advisor, perhaps Tulsi Gabbard or another national security figure, walks into the Oval Office with urgent news of an unfolding crisis. But she is blunt, firm, perhaps even critical. She does not flatter. She does not defer. And the president, wounded by her tone or disinterested in her authority, tunes her out. The warning is dismissed. The opportunity to de-escalate is lost. The next move comes from an adversary who interprets American silence as intent.

In this moment, the lives of millions hinge not on the threat itself, but on the president's mood—and on whether the person delivering the briefing made him feel admired. This isn't satire. It's the logical endpoint of a system where unchecked authority meets unchecked ego.

The human factor in nuclear command is not a minor footnote. It is the center of gravity. And when that human factor is ruled by vanity, grievance, or emotional dependency, then all the procedural safeguards become irrelevant. The system is no longer guided by reason—it is held hostage by psychology.

And in a nuclear context, that is not simply dangerous. It is existential.

VII. Conclusion: Redesigning for Rationality

It is no longer sufficient to treat emotional instability in a head of state as a political liability or a personality quirk. When that individual possesses the unilateral authority to initiate a nuclear strike, their psychological disposition

becomes a matter of global survival. The case of Donald Trump—documented through years of erratic behavior, impulsive decision-making, and an ego acutely sensitive to slights, especially from women—forces us to confront a reality that has long been obscured by institutional inertia and political denial.

We have built a nuclear command structure that assumes rationality, but not responsibility. It is a system engineered for speed, not scrutiny. It is heavily fortified against external threats, yet remarkably vulnerable to internal dysfunction. And most alarmingly, it concentrates ultimate power in a single human being, without any mandatory check or psychological filter.

A man whose ego governs his grasp of reality—who cannot separate personal offense from strategic necessity, or flattery from competence—must not be entrusted with world-ending authority. And yet, for four years, the United States and the world lived under the shadow of precisely that scenario. It is not an abstraction; it was a lived experiment. And it could happen again.

This moment calls for more than partisan reflection. It demands structural reform.

We must begin by rethinking the flow of intelligence to the president, ensuring that daily briefings cannot be ignored, distorted, or dismissed due to personal grievance. Protocols must be in place not just to deliver information, but to verify that it has been received, understood, and acted upon when necessary.

We must reform the nuclear command structure itself—introducing layers of verification, shared authority, and emergency override procedures in the event of presidential incapacitation, be it physical or psychological.

And we must confront what has long been taboo in American politics: the need for mandatory psychological screening for any individual seeking an office of apocalyptic consequence. The idea that a private citizen must pass more rigorous psychological evaluations to handle classified documents than a president must to handle launch codes is not just ironic—it is grotesquely irresponsible.

The myth of the rational actor can no longer be our only defense. We must build systems that account for irrational actors, and we must do it before another test comes.

Because if the next crisis reaches the Oval Office, and the facts are ignored because the briefer didn't smile, or the message bruised the ego of a man who sees governance as performance—we may not get another chance.

The Doomsday Clock does not tick forward on its own. It advances with every decision we delay, every dysfunction we excuse, and every moment we pretend that vanity is compatible with vigilance.

We are closer to midnight than we realize. And unless we redesign for rationality, the next flash won't be metaphorical.

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