

Trump Dysfunction

John Kelly Quickly Moves to Impose Military Discipline on White House

GLENN THRUSH, MICHAEL D. SHEAR and EILEEN SULLIVAN, *The New York Times* Online Edition, August 3, 2017.

WASHINGTON — In his six months as Homeland Security secretary, John F. Kelly often described the White House as one of the most dysfunctional organizations he had ever seen, complained to colleagues and allies about its meddling, incompetence and recklessness, and was once so angry he briefly considered quitting.

Now as President Trump's chief of staff, he is doing something about it — with a suddenness and force that have upended the West Wing.

Mr. Kelly cuts off rambling advisers midsentence. He listens in on conversations between cabinet secretaries and the president. He has booted lingering staff members out of high-level meetings, and ordered the doors of the Oval Office closed to discourage strays. [He fired Anthony Scaramucci](#), the bombastic New Yorker who was briefly the communications director, and has demanded that even Mr. Trump's family, including his daughter Ivanka Trump and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, check with him if they want face time with the president.

On Wednesday, his third day on the job, he delivered a message about respecting chains of command, backing the decision of Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, the national security adviser, to [dismiss Ezra Cohen-Watnick](#), a Kushner ally and staff member on the National Security Council. It was a move Mr. Kushner and Stephen K. Bannon, the president's chief strategist, had long opposed, according to two administration officials.

Whether Mr. Kelly, a retired Marine general, will succeed in imposing military discipline on the faction-ridden White House remains in doubt; Mr. Trump has never been known to follow anybody's direction, in Trump Tower or the White House. But Mr. Trump has never encountered anyone quite like Mr. Kelly, a combat veteran whose forceful management style and volatile temper are a match for the president's.

"He'd basically look at me and say, 'I think that proposal is four-letter-word nuts,'" said Leon E. Panetta, who as defense secretary made Mr. Kelly his chief military aide. "John is the kind of guy who will look you in the eye and tell you what the hell he is thinking. The real question is whether the president will give him the authority he needs to do the job."

People close to Mr. Kelly said he resisted weeks of entreaties by the president, beginning in May, before finally agreeing to replace Reince Priebus out of a sense

of soldierly duty. That he understands the sobering realities of his new deployment could be seen in his unsmiling mien while sitting next to Mr. Trump for a photo opportunity this week.

Among Mr. Kelly's immediate challenges: brokering peace between warring factions in the West Wing; plugging leaks about internal activities; establishing a disciplined policy-making process; and walling off the Russia investigations.

Mr. Kelly, 67, has told his new employees that he was hired to manage the staff, not the president. He will not try to change Mr. Trump's Twitter or TV-watching habits. But he has also said he wants to closely monitor the information the president consumes, quickly counter dubious news stories with verified facts, and limit the posse of people urging Mr. Trump to tweet something they feel passionately about.

He has privately acknowledged that he cannot control the president and that his authority would be undermined if he tried and failed. Instead, he is intent on cossetting Mr. Trump with bureaucratic competence and forcing staff members to keep to their lanes, a challenge in an administration defined by tribal loyalties to power players like Mr. Kushner and Mr. Bannon.

"Several times I've been on phone conversations with the president over the last couple of days and General Kelly has been on those conversations as well," Mick Mulvaney, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, told reporters on Thursday when asked if Mr. Kelly was making a mark.

The Trump White House is a judge-a-book-by-its-cover workplace, and staff members have been struck by Mr. Kelly's bearing: tall, stern and commanding a respect Mr. Priebus never did. People close to Mr. Kelly said they expected him to methodically assess his new staff before making more drastic changes — and he has told people that he wants to improve morale before attacking the organizational chart.

Mr. Kelly has not been shy about letting Mr. Trump's staff members know when they screwed up, ripping into West Wing aides during the [chaos surrounding the president's original travel ban](#) when he was at the Department of Homeland Security. While he supported the broad policy goals, he was furious that he and his sprawling agency's staff were caught off guard by a directive that was conceived and carried out by inexperienced aides in the White House, according to several longtime Trump advisers.

People close to Mr. Kelly said he also bristled repeatedly at efforts by Mr. Bannon and Stephen Miller, the president's senior adviser, to install people they liked in his department. Mr. Kelly eventually won pitched battles over who would become director of Customs and Border Protection and head of the Secret Service, officials said. But Mr. Bannon has had a longstanding alliance with Mr. Kelly, supporting many of his other appointments.

In May, Mr. Kelly considered resigning after [Mr. Trump's firing of James B. Comey](#), the F.B.I. director, telling Mr. Comey in a phone call that he was thinking about doing so to protest the president's actions, according to a former law enforcement official familiar with the conversation.

A senior White House official briefed on the exchange by Mr. Kelly said he never threatened to quit, but confirmed that he called Mr. Comey.

Days later, Mr. Kelly objected strenuously to the decision by Thomas P. Bossert, Mr. Trump's Homeland Security adviser in the White House, to take control of the response to a global cyberattack — a role traditionally played by Mr. Kelly and his department's cybersecurity division.

On Capitol Hill, Mr. Kelly is viewed with a mix of admiration for his long military service and disappointment that he has been too willing to embrace and defend Mr. Trump's more controversial policies, especially on illegal immigration.

In closed-door meetings with House members in March, Democrats questioned Mr. Kelly about aggressive immigration sweeps at churches and hospitals. The frustration grew as Mr. Kelly disputed that such sweeps were happening, even in the face of enlarged photos showing a Homeland Security vehicle parked on the grounds of Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif.

“He'll push back hard,” said Representative Lou Correa, Democrat of California, who presented the photographic evidence to Mr. Kelly during the meeting.

The next month, Mr. Kelly offered a taste of his blunt approach, telling lawmakers they could “shut up” if they did not like the laws his department was charged with enforcing.

“He's never come to Capitol Hill and blown smoke to senators and congressmen,” said Senator Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican and former Army officer who is close to Mr. Kelly.

Dealing with Mr. Trump's family, especially Mr. Kushner, will not be so simple.

In an interview in May, Mr. Kelly came to the defense of the president's son-in-law, who has an office in the West Wing as a White House adviser, against charges that he had tried to set up an inappropriate communications channel with Russia. He called Mr. Kushner “a great guy, a decent guy.”

In discussions with Mr. Trump about moving to the White House, Mr. Kelly also insisted that Mr. Kushner and Ms. Trump, who is also a White House adviser, report to him. They both agreed, in part because they wanted to see Mr. Priebus ejected as quickly as possible, and in part because they recognized Mr. Trump's presidency needed to be professionalized.

A lingering personnel question gave Mr. Kelly a chance to assert his position at the top of the West Wing. Aides said the ouster of Mr. Cohen-Watnick was intended as a show of confidence from Mr. Kelly to Mr. McMaster. Mr. Kushner did not object to the decision, and had conceded that Mr. McMaster was going to fire his friend three weeks ago, according to a person close to the Trump family.

Robert M. Gates, the former defense secretary, who has known Mr. Kelly for two decades, said the fact that the president agreed to have family members report to the new chief of staff was “a really important first step.”

“The question is, does it last?” he added. “But it sends a powerful signal to the rest of the people in the White House.”

Mr. Gates, who was also Mr. Kelly’s boss as defense secretary, recalled the times he sat with Mr. Kelly at the Pentagon across a small conference table once used by Jefferson Davis when he was secretary of war. Mr. Gates would tell Mr. Kelly what he was planning to do and Mr. Kelly would say, “You could do it that way.”

What that really meant, Mr. Gates said, was “that’s the stupidest idea I’ve ever heard in my entire life.” Mr. Kelly would then offer another — often better — option, Mr. Gates said.

Mr. Panetta, who served as President Bill Clinton’s chief of staff before he went to the Pentagon, said he urged Mr. Kelly to buy a “big bottle of Scotch” when he agreed to take the job.

A White House spokeswoman did not know if he had gotten around to buying one yet, but said the new chief of staff preferred Irish whiskey.

Ron Nixon contributed reporting from Washington, and Maggie Haberman from New York.

A version of this article appears in print on August 4, 2017, on Page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: Former General Taking Control At White House.

New White House Chief of Staff Has an Enforcer

MAGGIE HABERMAN and GLENN THRUSH, *The New York Times* Online Edition, September 9, 2017.



John F. Kelly, President Trump's chief of staff, has been trying to impose order at the White House. Credit: Al Drago for The New York Times

Lost in the scramble to cope with Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, the response to North Korea's nuclear provocations and the shock at President Trump's [instant alliance with Democrats](#) was a little-noticed bureaucratic earthquake that shook the White House this week.

At a staff meeting on Wednesday, Mr. Trump's [new chief of staff, John F. Kelly](#), announced a number of seemingly quotidian internal moves, capped by the appointment of Kirstjen Nielsen — his brusque, no-nonsense longtime aide — as an assistant to the president and his principal deputy.

Few outside the White House marked the moment, but inside the building, this was a big deal. Mr. Kelly had just handed day-to-day operations to a forceful, empowered aide some of her new colleagues are already comparing to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the feared Vatican enforcer who eventually [became Pope Benedict XVI](#).

Perhaps the biggest problem Mr. Kelly, a retired Marine general, faces in taming his meandering, leaky, infighting-plagued West Wing staff is getting them used to the idea of functioning more or less the way previous White Houses have.

Call it the old normal.

Whether Mr. Kelly succeeds or fails will be a function of his tolerance for Mr. Trump's mercurial management style and Mr. Trump's willingness to tolerate military discipline, as well as Mr. Kelly's skill in winnowing, wooing and harnessing his own staff. Ms. Nielsen, as he made clear this week, will be a central part of his attempt to right the president's foundering administration.

In Mr. Trump's White House, the old normal passes for a revolution, and Mr. Kelly's enemies are seething as well as plotting and griping to sympathetic members of the news media. That is the picture described by eight current and former administration officials who requested anonymity.

In contrast to previous White Houses, the first seven-plus months under Mr. Trump have been something of a historical outlier — organized around an antiestablishment president contemptuous of precedent and comfortable with spaghetti lines of authority and the resulting chaos.

Photo



Kirstjen Nielsen, a longtime aide of Mr. Kelly's, joined the White House as principal deputy and assistant to the president. Credit: Andrew Harnik/Associated Press

And the first step in taming 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Mr. Kelly believes, is installing a No. 2 who is willing to be hated.

It is Ms. Nielsen who sends out the emails announcing internal policy and planning meetings that now contain a clipped addendum — “principals only” — with a stern warning that any subordinates who wander in will be immediately ejected.

She is also responsible for keeping Mr. Kelly's no-fly list of aides he deems to be unfit to attend serious meetings, the most prominent of whom is Omarosa Manigault, the former "Apprentice" star with an ill-defined job and a penchant for dropping into meetings where she was not invited.

Throughout the White House, the circle of decision-making is shrinking, leaving staff members accustomed to wandering in and out of meetings — and the Oval Office — in a sour mood. And the feelings are not confined by the gates of the executive compound. Outside Trump advisers, accustomed to getting their calls briskly returned, are complaining that their phones have gone silent since Mr. Kelly took over six weeks ago.

The president's first chief of staff, Reince Priebus, a former chairman of the Republican National Committee, made only a cursory study of the structure and history of the West Wing, much to the disgust of a half-dozen Obama administration officials who offered to coach him but were, for the most part, politely rebuffed.

But perhaps his biggest problem was that he was a fund-raiser by trade and schmoozer by temperament with very little knowledge, or interest, in policy and the inner workings of government. Mechanics who never lift the hood tend to lose their jobs. Mr. Trump, who attracts subordinates who flatter rather than challenge, also seemed to take special delight in humiliating him, often ignoring his advice and referring to him by the diminutive nickname "Reincey."

Ms. Nielsen's role is similar to the one that Katie Walsh, a longtime deputy, assumed for Mr. Priebus when he first joined the White House — gatekeeper to the gatekeeper. And, as has happened with Ms. Nielsen, some members of the White House have chafed at a woman asserting power — and made her a target for the anger that they cannot express at the chief of staff.

But there is a critical difference, people close to Mr. Kelly said. When Ms. Walsh came under attack, Mr. Priebus did little to protect her, and she left after only a few months. Mr. Kelly's experience in the military, by contrast, has led him to the conclusion that it is hard to survive a successful attack on a top subordinate without being weakened.

Still, people close to Ms. Nielsen, who was a homeland security official in George W. Bush's administration, have counseled her to lighten up and to pay more attention to the perfunctory niceties of a not-so-nice job.

Slowly and methodically, Mr. Kelly is replacing the bomb-throwing reality-TV types Mr. Trump feels most comfortable around with competent professionals capable of stabilizing the West Wing. So far, it has been addition by subtraction.

In his first few days on the job, he approved the firing of two far-right National Security Council staff members who were undermining Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, the national security adviser, then targeted Sebastian Gorka, a blustery nationalist. But his main objective from the start, people close to the situation said, was to [force out Stephen K. Bannon](#), the president's chief strategist and internal provocateur.

At Wednesday's staff meeting, Mr. Kelly also announced other significant moves, most temporary:

A longtime House aide, Johnny DeStefano, will head the Office of Public Liaison while a search is conducted for a permanent director.

Joseph Hagin, a deputy chief of staff with decades of White House experience, will oversee the president's schedule, a crucial role in any White House.

Rick Dearborn, a deputy chief of staff who worked for Attorney General Jeff Sessions when he was a senator from Alabama, is not one of Mr. Kelly's favorites, several officials said, and is being shifted to a less high-profile role. Mr. Kelly is also reviewing the role of Bill Stepien, the White House political director, who has done little to help Mr. Trump improve his standing, in Mr. Kelly's view.

Photo



Omarosa Manigault, a former "Apprentice" star, has an ill-defined West Wing job and a penchant for dropping into all kinds of meetings uninvited. Credit: Richard Drew/Associated Press

Mr. Kelly has also greatly empowered Rob Porter, the White House Staff secretary — a Harvard graduate and Rhodes Scholar — to rationalize the administration's tangled policy-making process.

During Mr. Trump's transition, the two Trump associates most attentive to history and structure were the two men most quickly shut out of administration jobs by rivals: Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey, who drew up a proposed West Wing organizational chart — complete with potential hires — based on presidential history and his own experience in Trenton. And Corey Lewandowski, Mr. Trump's former campaign manager, who carefully studied the painstaking work of the White House historian Martha Joynt Kumar, in part to help Mr. Trump figure out which positions were available to loyalists who toiled on his campaign.

Mr. Kelly has not had the time to make that kind of study, though he was intuitively attracted to the more controlled approach of his predecessor's predecessor, Denis R. McDonough, President Barack Obama's last chief of staff, who modeled his chain of command on that of the National Security Council.

But Mr. Kelly is not rebuilding the organization in a vacuum, and Mr. Trump's mood can have as much an effect as Mr. Kelly's methodical approach.

The new chief of staff has tried to shield Gary D. Cohn, the chairman of the National Economic Council, from Mr. Trump's continuing wrath since the former Goldman Sachs executive went public with his disgust at the president's response to the deadly violence [last month in Charlottesville, Va.](#)

Mr. Kelly made a point, one staff member said, of throwing his arm around Mr. Cohn in solidarity, in full view of the news media, as they exited Marine One last week on the South Lawn.

But he has not always been successful. Several aides said Mr. Trump is freezing out Mr. Cohn by employing a familiar tactic: refusing to make eye contact with Mr. Cohn when his adviser greets him.

At a meeting on Thursday on infrastructure at the White House with Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York and members of Congress from New York and New Jersey, Mr. Kelly told participants that Mr. Cohn would lead the meeting. But Mr. Trump, whose most cutting insult is to pretend someone does not exist or that he barely knows them, virtually ignored him.

A version of this article appears in print on September 9, 2017, on Page A16 of the New York edition with the headline: Chief of Staff Installs a Longtime Aide as His Deputy, and Playing Nice Is Optional.

Trump's Feud with McConnell Becomes Hostile

ALEXANDER BURNS and JONATHAN MARTIN, *The New York Times*
National Edition, August 23, 2017, A1.



Senator Mitch McConnell, the majority leader, has fumed over President Trump's regular threats against fellow Republicans and criticism of Senate rules. Credit: Eric Thayer for The New York Times

The relationship between President Trump and Senator [Mitch McConnell](#), the majority leader, has disintegrated to the point that they have not spoken to each other in weeks, and Mr. McConnell has privately expressed uncertainty that Mr. Trump will be able to salvage his administration after a series of summer crises.

What was once an uneasy governing alliance has curdled into a feud of mutual resentment and sometimes outright hostility, complicated by the position of Mr. McConnell's wife, Elaine L. Chao, in Mr. Trump's cabinet, according to more than a dozen people briefed on their imperiled partnership. Angry phone calls and private badmouthing have devolved into open conflict, with the president threatening to oppose Republican senators who cross him, and Mr. McConnell mobilizing to their defense.

The rupture between Mr. Trump and Mr. McConnell comes at a highly perilous moment for Republicans, who face a number of urgent deadlines when they return to Washington next month. Congress must approve new spending measures and [raise the statutory limit](#) on government borrowing within weeks of reconvening, and Republicans are hoping to push through an elaborate rewrite of the federal tax code. There is scant room for legislative error on any front.

A protracted government shutdown or a default on sovereign debt could be disastrous — for the economy and for the party that controls the White House and both chambers of Congress.

Yet Mr. Trump and Mr. McConnell are locked in a political cold war. Neither man would comment for this article. Don Stewart, a spokesman for Mr. McConnell, noted that the senator and the president had “shared goals,” and pointed to “tax reform, infrastructure, funding the government, not defaulting on the debt, passing the defense authorization bill.”

Still, the back-and-forth has been dramatic.

In a [series of tweets](#) this month, Mr. Trump criticized Mr. McConnell publicly, and [berated him in a phone call](#) that quickly devolved into a profane shouting match.

During the call, which Mr. Trump initiated on Aug. 9 from his New Jersey golf club, the president accused Mr. McConnell of bungling the health care issue. He was even more animated about what he intimated was the Senate leader’s refusal to protect him from investigations of Russian interference in the 2016 election, according to Republicans briefed on the conversation.

Mr. McConnell has fumed over Mr. Trump’s regular threats against fellow Republicans and criticism of Senate rules, and questioned Mr. Trump’s understanding of the presidency in a public speech. Mr. McConnell has made sharper comments in private, describing Mr. Trump as entirely unwilling to learn the basics of governing.

In offhand remarks, Mr. McConnell has expressed a sense of bewilderment about where Mr. Trump’s presidency may be headed, and has mused about whether Mr. Trump will be in a position to lead the Republican Party into next year’s elections and beyond, according to people who have spoken to him directly.

While maintaining a pose of public reserve, Mr. McConnell expressed horror to advisers last week after [Mr. Trump’s comments equating white supremacists](#) in Charlottesville, Va., with protesters who rallied against them. Mr. Trump’s most explosive remarks came at a news conference in Manhattan, where he stood beside Ms. Chao, the transportation secretary. (Ms. Chao, deflecting a question about the tensions between her husband and the president she serves, told reporters, “I stand by my man — both of them.”)

Mr. McConnell signaled to business leaders that he was deeply uncomfortable with Mr. Trump’s comments: [Several who resigned advisory roles](#) in the Trump administration contacted Mr. McConnell’s office after the fact, and were told that Mr. McConnell fully understood their choices, three people briefed on the conversations said.

Mr. Trump has also continued to badger and threaten Mr. McConnell's Senate colleagues, including Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona, whose Republican primary challenger was praised by [Mr. Trump last week](#).



[Donald J. Trump](#)

Great to see that Dr. Kelli Ward is running against Flake Jeff Flake, who is WEAK on borders, crime and a non-factor in Senate. He's toxic!

At a campaign rally in Phoenix on Tuesday, Mr. Trump alluded to Mr. Flake unfavorably, referring to him as “weak on borders” and “weak on crime” without mentioning him by name. He referred to Mr. McConnell only in passing, calling on him to abolish the Senate [filibuster](#).

Senior Republican officials said before the rally that they would stand up for Mr. Flake against any attacks. A Republican “[super PAC](#)” aligned with Mr. McConnell [released a web ad on Tuesday](#) assailing Ms. Ward as a fringe-dwelling conspiracy theorist.

“When it comes to the Senate, there’s an Article 5 understanding: An attack against one is an attack against all,” said Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, who has found himself in Mr. Trump’s sights many times, invoking the NATO alliance’s mutual defense doctrine.

The fury among Senate Republicans toward Mr. Trump has been building since last month, even before he lashed out at Mr. McConnell. Some of them blame the president for not being able to rally the party around any version of legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act, accusing him of not knowing even the basics about the policy. Senate Republicans also say strong-arm tactics from the White House backfired, making it harder to cobble together votes and have left bad feelings in the caucus.

When Mr. Trump [addressed a Boy Scouts jamboree](#) last month in West Virginia, White House aides told Senator Shelley Moore Capito, a Republican from the state whose support was in doubt, that she could only accompany him on [Air Force One](#) if she committed to voting for the health care bill. She declined the invitation, noting that she could not commit to voting for a measure she had not seen, according to a Republican briefed on the conversation.

Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska told colleagues that when Mr. Trump’s interior secretary threatened to pull back federal funding for her state, she felt boxed in and unable to vote for the health care bill.

In a show of solidarity, albeit one planned well before Mr. Trump took aim at Mr. Flake, Mr. McConnell will host a \$1,000-per-person dinner on Friday in Kentucky for the Arizona senator, as well as for Senator Dean Heller of Nevada, who is also facing a Trump-inspired primary race next year, and Senator Deb Fischer of Nebraska. Mr. Flake is expected to attend the event.

Former Senator Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, a Republican who is close to Mr. McConnell, said frustration with Mr. Trump was boiling over in the chamber. Mr. Gregg blamed the president for undermining congressional leaders, and said the House and

Senate would have to govern on their own if Mr. Trump “can’t participate constructively.”

“Failure to do things like keeping the government open and passing a tax bill is the functional equivalent of playing Russian roulette with all the chambers loaded,” Mr. Gregg said.

Others in the party divide blame between Mr. Trump and Mr. McConnell. Al Hoffman, a former finance chairman of the Republican National Committee who has been supportive of Mr. McConnell, said Mr. McConnell was culpable because he has failed to deliver legislative victories. “Ultimately, it’s been Mitch’s responsibility, and I don’t think he’s done much,” Mr. Hoffman said.

But Mr. Hoffman predicted that Mr. McConnell would likely outlast the president.

“I think he’s going to blow up, self-implode,” Mr. Hoffman said of Mr. Trump. “I wouldn’t be surprised if McConnell pulls back his support of Trump and tries to go it alone.”

An all-out clash between Mr. Trump and Mr. McConnell would play out between men whose strengths and weaknesses are very different. Mr. Trump is a political amateur, still unschooled in the ways of Washington, but he maintains a viselike grip on the affections of the Republican base. Mr. McConnell is a soft-spoken career politician, with virtuoso mastery of political fund-raising and tactics, but he had no mass following to speak of.

Mr. McConnell, while baffled at Mr. Trump’s penchant for internecine attacks, is a ruthless pragmatist and has given no overt indication that he plans to seek more drastic conflict. Despite his private battles with Mr. Trump, Mr. McConnell has sent reassuring signals with his public conduct: On Monday, he appeared in Louisville, Ky., with Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary, for a discussion of tax policy.

Mr. McConnell’s Senate colleagues, however, have grown bolder. The combination of the president’s frontal attacks on Senate Republicans and his claim that there were “fine people” marching with white supremacists in Charlottesville has emboldened lawmakers to criticize Mr. Trump in withering terms.

[Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee](#) rebuked Mr. Trump last week for failing to “demonstrate the stability nor some of the competence” required of presidents. On Monday, [Senator Susan Collins of Maine](#) said in a television interview that she was uncertain Mr. Trump would be the Republican presidential nominee in 2020.

There are few recent precedents for the rift. The last time a president turned on a legislative leader of his own party was in 2002, when allies of George W. Bush helped [force Trent Lott to step down](#) as Senate minority leader after racially charged remarks at a birthday party for Senator Strom Thurmond, Republican of South Carolina.

For the moment, Mr. McConnell appears to be far more secure in his position, and perhaps immune to coercion from the White House. Republicans are unlikely to lose control of the Senate in 2018, and Mr. Trump has no allies in the Senate who have shown an appetite for combat with Mr. McConnell.

Still, some allies of Mr. Trump on the right — including Stephen K. Bannon, [who stepped down last week](#) as Mr. Trump’s chief strategist — welcome more direct conflict with Mr. McConnell and congressional Republicans.

Roger J. Stone Jr., a Republican strategist who has advised Mr. Trump for decades, said the president needed to “take a scalp” in order to force cooperation from Republican elites who have resisted his agenda. Mr. Stone urged Mr. Trump to make an example of one or more Republicans, like Mr. Flake, who have refused to give full support to his administration.

“The president should start bumping off incumbent Republican members of Congress in primaries,” Mr. Stone said. “If he did that, Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan would wet their pants and the rest of the Republicans would get in line.”

But Mr. McConnell’s allies warn that the president should be wary of doing anything that could jeopardize the Senate Republican majority.

“The quickest way for him to get impeached is for Trump to knock off Jeff Flake and Dean Heller and be faced with a Democrat-led Senate,” said Billy Piper, a lobbyist and former McConnell chief of staff.

A version of this article appears in print on August 23, 2017, on Page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: President’s Feud With McConnell Becomes Hostile.

I helped write the manual for diagnosing mental illness. Donald Trump doesn't meet the criteria

ALLEN FRANCES, STAT ONLINE, SEPTEMBER 6, 2017.



NICHOLAS KAMM/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Diagnosing President Donald Trump’s alleged mental disorder has become a popular pastime, [not just among mental health professionals](#) but also among politicians, journalists, pundits, comedians, and ordinary people gathered at coffee breaks. Trump’s consistently bizarre sayings and doings have [triggered a bill](#) to establish a commission “on presidential capacity” and a suggestion that the president be removed from office [via the 25th Amendment](#) on the grounds that he is mentally unfit to be president. A [recent Time poll](#) indicates that many Americans think that Trump is unfit for office. I also believe we made a terrible mistake electing him. But Trump’s disagreeable traits in no way indicate that he is mentally ill. Instead, they reveal him to be the ruthless self-promoter he has always been, now poorly cloaked in fake populist clothing.

Before I go any further, you should know that I am a lifelong political inactivist, shamefully missing in action from the tumultuous political events of the last 50 years. It took the travesty of a Trump presidency to get me fully engaged.

Confusing Trump’s behavior with mental illness unfairly stigmatizes those who are truly mentally ill, underestimates his considerable cunning, and misdirects our efforts at future harm reduction. And the three most frequent armchair diagnoses made for Trump — narcissistic personality disorder, delusional disorder, and dementia — are all badly misinformed.

Trump is an undisputed poster boy for narcissism. He demonstrates in pure form every single symptom described in the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders](#) (DSM) criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, which I wrote in 1978. But lots of successful people are extremely narcissistic without being mentally ill — think most celebrities, many politicians, and a fair percentage of writers, artists, lawyers, doctors, and professors. To qualify for narcissistic personality disorder, an individual’s selfish, unempathetic preening must be accompanied by significant distress or impairment. Trump certainly causes severe distress and impairment in others, but his narcissism doesn’t seem to affect him that way.

My long experience with psychiatric diagnosis has taught me a recurring and painful lesson: Anything that can be misused in the DSM will be misused, especially when there is an external, nonclinical reward for doing so. We decided to include narcissistic personality disorder in the DSM-III 40 years ago purely for clinical reasons. We never imagined it would be used as ammunition in today’s political warfare.

It’s also important to note that narcissistic personality disorder holds a fragile place in the diagnostic universe. It came quite close to being eliminated when the fifth edition of the DSM was published in 2013, and will be excluded from the forthcoming revision to the

International Classification of Diseases, a set of codes used by physicians and other health care providers to classify diagnoses, symptoms, and procedures.

Some presidential observers base their diagnosis of delusional disorder on Trump's being an avid consumer and creator of conspiracy theories. He learned his art from a master: [his mentor, Roy Cohn](#), who was the brains behind Sen. Joseph McCarthy's attempt to control our government through Communist witch hunts in the 1950s. Conspiracy theorists are a dime a dozen, while those with delusions are more rare. Up to [half of all Americans](#) believe in strange conspiracy theories. They are wrong, but not delusional. Having a delusion means being a minority of one.

Confusing Trump's behavior with mental illness unfairly stigmatizes those who are truly mentally ill, underestimates his considerable cunning, and misdirects our efforts at future harm reduction.

Also keep in mind that Trump's conspiracy theories have been, and continue to be, essential to his political success. His [long-standing claim](#) that President Obama was not born in the United States launched Trump's presidential run, his "crooked Hillary" claims helped win him the election, and "fake news" holds his base in his thrall. Trump is [crazy like a fox](#).

The dementia diagnosis is based on the supposed poverty and perseveration in [Trump's current speech patterns](#) compared to his earlier ones. I would attribute this to the number of stump speeches Trump has given. Abraham Lincoln could find creative ways of repeatedly saying the same thing, but Trump has never achieved Lincoln's eloquence. He uses the same words over and over again because they successfully work up the crowd.

Convincing proof that Trump is not demented is his undiminished creative and canny skills at blaming, bare-knuckle political fighting, and self serving.

Buried in the noisy debate about Trump's mental health is the misinformed and noxious assumption that mental illness somehow automatically disqualifies someone for high leadership position. If this were policy, Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill both would have been lost to history due to their battles with depression.

Assigning psychological disorders to Trump is not only wrong but futile. Vice President Pence, the Cabinet, and Congress would never [invoke the 25th Amendment](#) because it would amount to political suicide for everyone concerned and for the Republican Party. Any psychological fitness exam would also be inherently biased and unreliable. My guess is that Trump will eventually be removed from power, but via the appropriate investigative and political process, not a psychiatric evaluation.

I believe that Trump is a mirror of the American soul, a surface symptom of our deeper societal disease. He may not be crazy, but we certainly were for electing him. We mustn't waste this Trumpian dark age. If we don't learn from it, we will keep making the same mistakes.

Allen Frances, M.D., was chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University and [he] also chaired the task force responsible for revising the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. He is the author of "Twilight of American Sanity: A Psychiatrist Analyzes the Age of Trump" (William Morrow, September 2017).