

## STATEMENTS BY LEADING PSYCHIATRISTS TO THE U.S. HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

### STATEMENT BY DR. BANDY X. LEE

I am Dr. Bandy Lee. I am just one among several psychiatrists making ourselves available for consultation with Congress in accordance with our ethics guidelines, including the Goldwater principle that encourages us to educate the public in relation to public figures.

We appreciate the momentous task Congress has with the impeachment proceedings, and present ourselves as recognized experts who can answer critical questions relating to mental health. We are among thousands of mental health professionals who have felt obligated to speak up because of the exceptional psychological dangers of this presidency.

I am a forensic psychiatrist at Yale School of Medicine with a 20-year career in violence prevention. I am best known for the public health approach I have brought to prison reform and policy recommendations at local and national levels. As a medical professional, I previously held no role in politics, nor did I affiliate myself with either political party. I have only spoken up in recent years when I felt that the current president's dangerous mental impairments pose a grave threat to public health and safety. As the impeachment process unfolds, I fear that the president's potential for violence, including the encouragement of violence on his behalf, will dramatically increase.

President Trump's disposition and tendency to enter into attack mode under stress, coupled with the impeachment hearings, suggest a situation of great danger for the nation and the world. The president already made the reckless decisions, including to allow an attack of our Kurdish allies, against all advice, shortly after announcement of the impeachment inquiry. These events are not unrelated. He has shown little tolerance of and maladaptive coping skills in relation to any criticisms and challenges against him.

Impeachment is the ultimate rebuke of a president, and President Trump has intensely feared this, at least since the special counsel's appointment, according to inside reports. Also, impeachment proceedings bring forth facts and evidence that the president works strenuously to dispel or discredit. He has shown a pattern of acute difficulty tolerating reality, as he has demonstrated in his increasingly frantic Twitter usage, which he employs almost exclusively as a means to combat reality. He calls legitimate reporting "fake news" and experiences it as an "enemy". When feeling pressured, he resorts to conspiracy theories, even those his own staff and experts have warned against as bolstering Russian interests over American ones.

All these traits—his detachment from reality, his paranoid disposition, and his proneness for violence—are bound to grow worse with the progression of impeachment. However, these threats do not end here. Delusions can be highly effective at garnering massive, irrational support from the public. The inoculation of people from facts can happen faster than we can generate them. And a strong impeachment case has the potential to activate greater attacks from him. Failing to monitor or to understand the psychological aspects, or discounting them, could lead to catastrophic outcomes. For these reasons, I implore you in Congress to take these danger signs seriously and to constrain his destructive impulses. We and many others are available to give important relevant policy recommendations as well as to educate the public so that we can achieve the goal of maximizing our collective safety.

## STATEMENT BY DR. JOHN ZINNER

My name is John Zinner. I am a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst and a Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the George Washington University School of Medicine. At the National Institute of Mental Health I researched and published about severe narcissistic disorders, that is to say, disorders of self-esteem in adolescents and their families. I have taught about narcissistic disorders for many years, and consulted, at one time, with a government intelligence agency on narcissistic personality disorders.

I am speaking out at this time because I am convinced that as the time of possible impeachment approaches, Donald Trump has the real potential to become ever more dangerous, a threat to the safety of our nation. In a not impossible case, bear in mind that Donald Trump, as President, has the unfettered authority to launch nuclear weapons at any time for any reason. There is no formalized way of preventing this unless his order is disobeyed by the Commander of the U.S. Strategic Command who has been given his order to launch. Short of this calamity, there are many other dangers he can pose by the use, fueled by rage, of his assumed absolute executive authority, and by the loyalists who serve him.

There are many things to say about the psychology of Donald Trump. He is remarkably transparent through his Twitter stream of comments, real time video displays and newspaper accounts, past and present, as well as testimonies of persons who know or who have known him. I, as a psychiatrist, observe enough from his overt behaviors, displayed emotions, thought content and ways of relating to others that, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, I believe he has a severe disorder of self-esteem, known as narcissistic personality disorder, described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Number 5* of the American Psychiatric Association.

The core problem in this disorder is a failure in childhood and beyond to develop a inner sense of worth, or self-esteem. This makes one's sense of worth entirely dependent on admiration from others, such as at the rallies of Donald Trump's base. Without this external affirmation, President Trump feels, deep down, like a loser, failure, weak, dumb, fat, ugly, fake, and "crooked". These self-denigrating pictures of himself, Trump projects onto others whom he transforms into enemies. Nevertheless, these traits are his own subconscious inner views of himself, for which he compensates consciously by creating a grandiose image of himself as unique, a stable genius, entitled to special treatment and better at everything than anyone else.

What makes Donald Trump so dangerous is the brittleness of his sense of worth. Any slight or criticism is experienced as a humiliation and degradation. To cope with the resultant hollow and empty feelings he reacts with what is referred to as narcissistic rage. He is unable to take responsibility for any error, mistake, or failing. His default in that situation is to blame others and to attack the perceived source of his humiliation.

These attacks of narcissistic rage can be brutal and destructive, for reasons that are also due to his disturbance. Especially, these include a lack of capacity for empathy, compassion, authentic guilt, remorse, or fundamentally caring about the other person. Donald Trump genuinely cares for no one but himself. He lacks a capacity to feel regret or to avoid the harm he can cause to others. A striking but not unusual example of this lack of caring and empathy is his policy of separating children from their parents at the southern border.

The threat of impeachment, and the criticisms that have been leveled at him are catastrophic to Trump's self-esteem and, as we see, he reacts with rage against those who have testified in ways that incriminate him. He is perfectly capable of ragefully going beyond verbal attacks, as we see with his abandonment of our allies in Syria, the Kurds.

In addition, his rage incites others to violence by his blaming the other, immigrants and minorities, for our nation's problems. This has stirred up mass shooting attacks on minorities and stirred up Neo Nazi extremists. President Trump calls for defying our democratic institutions, including the impeachment process itself.

My purpose here has been to describe the psychological source of Donald Trump's dangerousness and to warn of it becoming more intense as the impeachment process continues. There is, in the extreme, no mechanism to prevent Trump from starting a nuclear attack. This fact should give us the greatest pause for concern.

#### BIOGRAPHIES

**Dr. Bandy X. Lee** is a forensic psychiatrist at Yale School of Medicine with a 20-year career in violence prevention. She is best known for the public health approaches she has brought to prison reform, including initiating reforms at New York City's Rikers Island Jail Complex. She has consulted with local and national governments on policies that prevent violence and has led a project group with the World Health Organization that translates scholarship for policymakers and the public.

**Dr. John Zinner** is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst and a Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at George Washington University School of Medicine. At the National Institute of Mental Health he researched and published about severe narcissistic disorders, that is to say, disorders of self-esteem in adolescents and their families. He has taught about narcissistic disorders for many years, and consulted, at one time, with a government intelligence agency on narcissistic personality disorders.

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A video presentation of our full statements is available upon request.