

(FICTION – 1-16-2019)

## **The Perilous Rabbit Hole**

**or**

## **Understanding Our President**

One Friday afternoon, Warner Farragut, Secretary of Defense, from a window in the Whitehouse, was watching Marine One being prepared to take the first family on their initial step for a weekend retreat at the Bedminster Golf Resort. While Greg Silvertan of the Treasury was responsible for the first family's personal security, Warner could never forget he had the ultimate responsibility to be sure the machines that moved them about, Marine One, and Air Force One, never let them down. He was not too concerned about Air Force One, it had been developed to carry humans with safeguards in mind. Marine One was on the other hand was a helicopter, bred for the battlefield, significantly modified for its present use, but still with the attendant risks that type of aircraft carried. Warner looked commanding, even though he did not wear his Admiral uniform when away from the Pentagon.

His thoughts were quickly pushed aside as he saw the hasty approach of Jack, the Secret Service supervisor for the security crew that would be attending Marine One. During their service days Jack had been on his Flag Staff when he commanded 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, PAC . and they were old buddies who had trusted each other with their lives. Jack was in civies which included a dark blue blazer so as not to attract attention in a crowd. Without an introduction, to save words Jack said, "POTUS is looking for you and would like a short word as he boards Marine One. He seems upset, and I feel something is wrong." Still looking at Marine One, Warner could see the first family, less POTUS, was getting aboard. "Let's

Go," Warner said moving quickly on to the lawn leading up to Marine One. Warner took his station at the foot of the steps, but Jack went aboard and alerted the crew to stay

away from the steps to allow privacy for whatever was to transpire with POTUS. As POTUS stopped in front of Warner, Warner activated a miniature recorder in his pocket, waiting for POTUS to speak who looked stressed with his hair blowing in the breeze.

“Warner, you are hereby ordered to bomb Pyongyang before midnight tomorrow with a force of one megaton or more, using the means which involves the least risk to our military heroes. You will receive a written order by courier in the morning and I want no more discussion of this with me or outside your department.” Straightening his hair, which was still waving the breeze, POTUS ascended the helicopter and departed for Bedminster.

Warner, who was astounded by the order, went over to the situation room in the basement to think over what he had just heard. The display board showed no major activity as it tracked Marine One on its way to Andrews Air Force Base, a base these days mainly to house Air Force One. Back to business. There was no other way to interpret what had been said unless POTUS was just venting his feelings about his frustration of Kim Jung-il's lack of giving in to bullying. It was an inappropriate order even if it was a response to the possible sinking of a US sub by the North Koreans. Warner played his pocket recording over three times to make sure he had it just right. POTUS, going on three years in office, had done a number of strange things, but this was the first that directly put the whole country at extreme risk.

No doubt, this was then POTUS's next escalation in the chicken game he was playing with Kim, but it was just unthinkable in that it would probably lead to WWII. Warner decided resigning was not enough, he had to use his position of power to keep it from happening, even if it meant taking down POTUS who must be addled in the brain. It was clear the North Koreans had nothing to do with the loss of the Colorado, and POTUS would know that if he had paid the slightest attention in recent briefings.

He decided the first he needed to help work the problem were Gregory Silverton, the Sec. of the Treasury who controlled the Secret Service, and the Attorney General, Levi

Gottzman, who would know the legal details. Seeing them here would be too public, better in the Pentagon at his office. So he waited until after he had saw on the wall board that POTUS had arrived at Bedminster. Warner decided to use his encrypted phone.

Greg answered his call with, "Hello Warner, What can I do for you while we all are going away for the week end?" Warner replied, "Just a minute, Greg, while I get Levi on a conference call. "OK, I have you both. To save the barbeque talk for another day, what do you think when I tell you we may be in an atomic war before the weekend is over? Did POTUS say anything to either of you about preemptive bombing Pyongyang by tomorrow night?"

Greg hesitated,

"Yesterday he said he was going to bomb Pyongyang which I took as an emotional outburst of his gut feeling that the loss of our submarine, USS Colorado, was caused by Kim Jung-il. Even if true, that does not justify starting WWII." Levi then said,

"He didn't say that to me, but sometimes I find it hard to understand what he is saying and when I do understand it often it is not true. He does not Follow the laws.

Warner said, "I have a recording of his oral order, and he is sending me a written order in the morning. "Can both of you be in my office at 7:00 pm today? I think it's either impeachment or Amendment # 25."

Gregory Silverton agreed as well and then added. "For the next several days the Secret Service's role will be critical. I think we will have to be prepared to restrain POTUS because if he gets word of what we are doing he would probably try to start a revolution to protect himself. I will alert my leadership at Bedminster to contact me if there are any indications POTUS wants to move. Tonight when we meet we need to set a deadline on when Bedminster goes on lockdown." Levi then contributed further,

"POTUS has been violating our laws regularly, and this falls into the category of treason, particularly if you get a written order tomorrow. But with so little time we need to meet as you have planned, so we will have already explored viable options."

Warner left his limo take its chances with Friday afternoon traffic and got back promptly to the Pentagon by subway.

Warner addressed his duty officer, Chief Warrant Officer, Skip Jones. “Skip, for tomorrow we will need to make copies of the POTUS order when it comes. If it has no classification when it arrives, classify it Secret and make out hand receipts for each member of the Cabinet to sign.” Skip who was an old seadog knew government protocol but asked, “But we haven’t scheduled anything for tomorrow, it will be Saturday.?”

Warner smiled, “I have it in my mind and we will make it formal with invitations to all cabinet members tonight. By the way, could you get in touch with the Admiral who has been in charge of the USS Colorado’s loss investigation and ask him to come tomorrow. Only tell him we want to discuss the most probable reason for the loss of the Colorado.”

“For tomorrow we need to reserve the closest executive conference room that will accommodate twenty people and inform Pentagon security of the names of the individuals we are expecting.” Skip saluted, “Aye, aye sir,” and went off to comply.

At 7:00 pm Greg and Levi were clustered with Warner in his inner office, Levi started,

“Well how do we approach this problem?” Warner responded, “Well that is up to the cabinet but what I thought the three of us should do is some planning so that the cabinet can commence in an orderly fashion. I have taken the initiative as the order to bomb North Korea was given to the defense department. I could just resign, but that would only delay the problem as based on his past actions the POTUS would find some lackey who would comply with his order. To present the Cabinet I suggest we should agree we have a solution that requires the president to be replaced, and how we control POTUS while we do it. Levi, how do you see the legal situation?”

Levi had some notes and he referred to them as he spoke, “There are several ways POTUS could be replaced. He could resign rather than face a bitter law suite. He could be impeached, and that would probably be successful considering what the charges might

be. Then there is Amendment #52 of the Constitution which is appropriate since his mental state is seriously flawed and is preventing him from carrying out the duties of the office. The first thing with our full cabinet would be to organize it as a body to conduct business which is then documented.” Warner took back over.

“Even if the Colorado loss was due to North Korean action, it would not justify the action POTUS has ordered, but it would be good for the Cabinet members to be briefed on our investigation and I have invited the appropriate Admiral to give us a briefing. Greg could you brief us on the Secret Service situation?” Greg responded,

“It is very fluid. Where are leaks of what we are doing going to occur? Also what preventive action do we need to take depends on which separation method we choose. Since POTUS has a reputation of not following the rules I assume we are going to go for Amendment #52. For that to work we need to keep POTUS isolated until noon tomorrow when our finding would have been filed with the Congress and hopefully VPOTUS is then the Acting President. I would propose for isolation to start at 3:00 am tomorrow when most everyone except the Secret Service is asleep with roadblocks in place and Bedminster cut off from all electronic communication. By the way I have heard from Jack. He just smelled something was wrong and as a very Senior Member of the staff gave himself orders to stay at Bedminster.”

The two accepted the cut off time and Warner said “I will see you with the others at 7:30 am tomorrow. Levi, could you draft a charter and by-laws for the Cabinet to use as guidance?” Levi nodded his consent. “Greg could you have a handout that summarizes what the Secret Service has done say by 7:00 am?” “Yes,” Levi nodded as well.

Warner and Jones decided they didn’t want to miss the courier expected from the Whitehouse and after separate trips to the cafeteria for supper spent the night on cots in a backroom. The arrival at 5:05 of the courier got them up and after confirming the written order was the same as what POTUS had given Warner orally, they took turns going to the 24 hour cafeteria for breakfast. After breakfast they checked their conference room and

arranged for security in its vicinity.

Cabinet members began arriving at 7:15 and all were in place by 7:30 with the usual coffee and doughnuts in hand. Warner had Skip instruct Pentagon security to prevent any unexpected personnel from approaching their conference room. Warner said, "Skip would you hand out POTUS' order to the Cabinet and Sally, the VP, and get them to sign receipts." That process took about five minutes and towards the end small conversations began between neighbors. Warner established order with, "I have taken the initiative because the POTUS order was given to me, but I want to transfer leadership to whatever would be the lawful entity. I have asked Levi to advise us on that, Levi?" Levi stood and walked up to the front.

"The Cabinet has normally been a way for POTUS to give and take information from his major officers as well as receive individual advice, but only in Amendment #25 does the Cabinet act as a body in a quasi-legislative fashion independent of the POTUS. For its decisions to be taken as valid it needs to have a charter as to who its members are and what their rules are. I have taken the liberty of drafting a short charter statement and a set of by-laws, based on a simplified Robert Rules often used by a number of government committees. Skip, would you pass out my handout we copied earlier and give everyone ten minutes to look it over. If there are any questions hold them for ten minutes?"

After ten minutes George Larch, Secretary of Labor, held up his hand for a question, "I see we will need to hold an election for Chair, Vice chair, and Secretary. What would the status of the VPOTUS be and how is this meeting going to be documented?"

Levi answered, "The VPOTUS is often considered a member of the Cabinet, but amendment #25 considers the VPOTUS separate and the VPOTUS vote must be in the positive for any action to be valid. This meeting is being recorded, but the official minutes will be issued by the secretary yet to be elected, aided by reference to the recording." With no more questions Levi said, "First let's make ourselves legal, does anyone want to suggest changes to the proposed charter and by-laws?"

Betty Grables, Sec of H & HS said, "I think any proposed action taken should be signed by those voting in the affirmative." Levi responded, "Good point. I will take your statement as a motion and second it. If there is no discussion, let us see a show of hands of those in favor. All right, motion passed unanimously. Let us get on with the voting for officers, I will take nominations from the floor." Warner and Tobin Green, Director of National Intelligence, were nominated. By secret vote Warner was voted chair and took over the chair. The voting continued in similar fashion for the two other positions with Greg selected as Vice chair and Norma Gray, Secretary of State as secretary. Sally Came over to Greg, "Before we get tied up in business what is your update on the situation at the Bedminster Golf Resort?"

Greg keyed his encrypted cell phone and after making an enquiry, he listened for a minute before hanging up. "POTUS is showing signs of stress because the internet and cell service is out and power is going on and off. He mentioned to Jack who is there that maybe He should go back to the Whitehouse where things are more reliable. If he tries to move, Jack can probably delay departure of Marine One for up to thirty minutes without it seeming too unusual and let us know."

Warner then said, with a nod from Levi, "I guess we are open for business. Since we are all new at this I appoint Levi as our legal advisor and also parliamentarian. Before we get on to official business I would like to bring in Admiral Dewey to give some details on the loss of the Submarine Colorado. Enemy action would not justify bombing Pyongyang but some people might think so and it would be wise to be familiar with the investigation."

While Warner was speaking Skip escorted the Admiral in and sat him down in front. Warner then said, "Welcome Admiral Dewey. This is the President's Cabinet and the Vice President who would like to hear your analysis of the loss of the submarine Colorado."

"I am gratified to share my thoughts with you. Unfortunately we don't have a specific cause for the loss, but we do have a host of possible causes that have been eliminated.

Fortunately Colorado was on a routine patrol mission with a sister submarine and they had low level sonic communications on going. Colorado also contained a recording pod similar to the black boxes on aircraft, which in friendly waters would detach and float to the surface if the submarine encountered any event that might cause it harm, or sink to the bottom in unfriendly waters, and signal back a sonic message when interrogated. Being near the North Korean coast it would have sunk to the bottom if it had detached. We have searched the seabed and finding no pod have concluded it had no reason to detach.” With no questions, the Admiral continued,

“There was much more to be learned from the companion submarine. They were receiving proper sonic signals from the Colorado until it continued on towards the North Korean coast at the point of a programmed turn away from the coast. The companion Submarine continued with the Colorado as far as it could, trying to establish human communications, but to no avail. Its last sonic communications indicated that the Colorado had run into a mud bank near the coast and had stopped moving.”

“Here the only logical explanation is that the whole crew was exposed to some kind of failure that produced a gas that would effect the crew with no warning, like carbon monoxide. Failure analysis of the ship type shows that an unexpected failure of the main battery could create large amounts of carbon monoxide which would exceed the capabilities of its atmospheric scrubbers to remove.”

“We are not ready to say this was the cause that allowed the submarine to coast into the mudbank until we look with at the probability of an unusual battery failure, but we can positively say it couldn’t have been caused by actions taken by North Korea. As an aside, we don’t think that the North Koreans are yet aware of this incident.”

With no questions asked of the Admiral, he departed and Warner turned to is next topic.

“Before we turn to the urgent business of this committee, Norma Gray would like to provide some State Department findings bearing on our problem.” Norma took the floor.



“It seems impossible that an adult would do some of the things that POTUS does regularly, but we have a classified project in State, which shows that under certain unusual conditions such behavior is likely. This is no defense of his heinous actions, only an explanation which will allow us to feel sorry for him rather than hate him.

“Due to the difficulties we were having in trade negotiations wherein our negotiators felt there were unseen factors at play we engaged the services of Artificial Intelligence, Watson II. On examining data bases of individuals, Watson II is capable of characterizing an individual, predict his actions, and even produce a real time summary of what he is thinking. We were able to coach our negotiators to stick with our national goals, and to anticipate traps the opponents were setting for us. As a result, for the next several years we were able to negotiate arrangements which have been very important for the US. When POTUS came on the scene he so disrupted our negotiations that we decided we needed Watson II to analyze POTUS so we could understand what he wanted.”

“In characterization of POTUS, Watson II found his reality to be extremely right of the world reality most of us find ourselves in. It is extremely simplified, good or evil, win or lose, black or white. In all instances he must be presented as the winner. There is no such thing as a negotiated settlement which has a win-win situation, the other side must be shown as a loser. If forces outside his control don't allow this result, then a false reality that does is created and what powers he has are used to promote this alternate reality. It may require that he lie, bully, and effectively destroy other human beings. If you don't show absolute personal loyalty you are an enemy. Breaking the law is no problem to him; if it helps to advance his objectives he breaks the law and pays his lawyers to fix any resulting problems. If he still is not the acclaimed winner, he will upgrade the venue where the problem exists, to one where he can likely prevail.”

“POTUS' actions towards North Korea fit this model to a T.”

“Looking into POTUS' developmental history Watson II with high confidence states that POTUS had a very stressed childhood which channeled him into this type of

behavior. A parent, likely his father, wanted him to develop these types of characteristics to be a benefit to the family business which was the dog-eat-dog New York City real estate business with no holds barred, breaking laws, buying politicians, bullying competitors and other unethical practices that helped produce winners and money.”

“As a child he was given rewards and penalties, no doubt some corporal punishment, which produced a personality which blocked from his conscious mind the development of reasoning and the intellectual tools of an adult. He remains a child driven by his instincts and emotions. His driving force in facing any problem is to do what will make him look a winner. With a child’s intellect everything is simplistic with no grasp of determining unintended consequences. Of course this was just a summary, but you should also know that we engaged two psychoanalyses and a psychiatrist independently working from their own data bases who concluded they could find no major flaws in Watson II’s output.”

Warner said, “Thank you, Norma, understanding why is helpful but doesn’t solve the problem we need to get to. I expect considerable discussion ahead of us. Can we take a break and arrange the chairs in a circle so we can see each other and make it easier for me to recognize each speaker. During the break Skip cornered Levi with. “I heard from Jack, there is movement at Bedminster, and Jack wants you to call immediately. Levi got Greg, Warner, and Sally together and went to an anteroom to call Jack back. “Jack what goes?”

Jack said, “Marine One would normally take POTUS to the nearest airport where Air Force One is parked from where it would fly to Andrews AFB. There another Marine One would take him the few miles to the Whitehouse. POTUS got so agitated that we are on Marine One on the way to Philadelphia to take Air Force one to Andrews.” Warner put in, “I will see about temporarily shutting down Andrews and he would then have to go to Dulles, putting in some more delay.” Jack said, “Don’t take too long at what you are doing. I think POTUS is beginning to suspect something. He was ready to go overland but the beast is in for an oil change. “Sally added, “We will get at it. Call us no later that when Air Force One leaves Philadelphia.”

Warner called for attention and then said, “We can go around the room clockwise with the recognized speaker holding this pointer. If you don’t choose to speak, pass the pointer to the left. Since he is our legal advisor, Let’s start with Levi,” accepting the pointer, “Levi began,

“I move under the twenty-fifth amendment of the Constitution, Section 4, first paragraph, that because the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President. Further that the Senate and House leadership as described in the amendment shall be immediately notified.”

Norma, who was sitting just left of Levie, Took the pointer and said, “I second the motion.” Warner took the floor with, “A point of order, one exception to the talking order is that the motion maker is given the opportunity to speak in support of the motion first, so Norma give the pointer to Levi,” who said,

“I have thought hard and long about how the POTUS could be removed and it will be extremely difficult. The crafters of the constitution for high crimes provided us with the route of impeachment which is straight forward, but leaves POTUS in full power during the process. He might be persuaded to resign, but for this POTUS that is unlikely unless he is facing dire criminal charges which are not yet formulated. During impeachment this POTUS could fire anyone he wishes, declare an emergency, declare martial law, adjourn Congress, giving him greater powers or even start a war. We have to remember he doesn’t play by the rules and plan our strategy to contain anything. The beauty of Amendment #25, section 4. is that his powers and duties are transferred at the time when our a finding, with that of the Vice President’s, is received by the legislative branch. The Armed Forces and Secret Service would immediately be under the Acting President as would all other departments.”

“Amendment # 25, section 4 has its weak side to balance its strength. To prevents it use to facilitate an illegal coupe, the POTUS has a right to appeal to have his powers and

duties returned. At that point it takes a 2/3 vote of both houses to deny the appeal. The appeal can be filed at any time, and can be heard as early as four days after filing. I am sure with what the POTUS has done, the appeal will be denied by at least 90% in both houses. As the Chinese say, these will be interesting times with the majority of the citizens appalled that their lives had been in jeopardy of an atomic war and a small armed minority crying foul over ouster of their president. I yield the floor.” The pointer was passed around the room until it reached Herbert Martin, Secretary of energy,

“What happens to POTUS in the Interim, does he stay in the Whitehouse?” Levi decided to answer the question. “No, the Acting President needs all the Whitehouse facilities to carry out his Presidential duties. The Secret Service still provides for his safety and might need to take him under protective custody, depending on the danger to his life. That would be a decision for the Acting President, the Secret Service and the AG.”

Frances Hamilton, Secretary of Education was next, “What happens to the Cabinet?”

As their legal advisor, Levi felt it his responsibility to answer. “You would all continue your present responsibilities. I doubt that the Acting President would initiate any changes except for just cause. Of course this will be the first time Amendment #25 has been invoked and it was written very generally, making it open for litigation.” There appeared to be no more discussion and Warner decided they were ready for the vote. “All right, since those who are going to vote in the affirmative will be signing the documents sent to Congress, if you are voting in the affirmative put your name on a piece of paper with your title and pass it in. Those voting in the negative need to do nothing.”

Having put their votes in, Greg and Norma counted the ballots and there as many as there were attendees, not counting the Vice President, Sally Forthwright. The two of them informed Warner and Greg took the floor. “The vote is unanimously affirmative. That brings us to the last remaining business, Madame Vice President, how do you vote?”

Sally responded, “Affirmative!”

Warner was not really finished. "It's now 9:30 am and we will take a break but don't go anywhere as we will all need to sign the documents Norma and Skip are preparing. Our schedule is to deliver the documents to Congress at exactly 11:am."

Sally got Warner, Greg, and Levi to go with her to the more private attached anteroom. "I think we need to discuss what long term actions we are going to take regarding POTUS before the news leaks out from Congress at 11:00. Actually at 11:00 I should make a statement at the Whitehouse that Amendment #25 has been invoked and I am the Acting President."

Greg then put in a thought. "It would be desirable that we avoid overt actions before our delivery is made to the Congress. Warner, can we speed up the delivery?" Warner left the room to talk to Skip and quickly returned. "Maybe by one half hour, using a helicopter from here to the Capitol."

Levi, sort of thinking out loud said "The secret service can act very flexibly, including sedation and detention if it is reasonable to protect his life."

Sally then took over. "This is what we are going to do. We have 50 minutes before we can act overtly. If he decides to leave we will delay where we can but at 10:30 wherever he is we stop taking him back to the Whitehouse. We have to hold him somewhere safe and unknown to the public and easy to defend from radical militias. But we may need to allow him access to legal aid and able to make his appeal if he so desires."

Warner asked Levi, "What about Camp David?" Warner responded, "If he sees a lawyer he will probably tell the world where he is and we would have to move him." Levi came in again. "Every time he has an outside contact we could move him again to a place he has never been to. Maybe some of this could be done with two way video conferencing." Skip appeared and said. "Quick, we are ready for signatures."

When most of the signing had been done, Greg got a call from Jack who was on Air Force One with POTUS, leaving for Andrews, "He told me he is worried about going back to the Whitehouse, mumbling that something he had done had made the Whitehouse

unsafe.” Warner asked Jack Greg asked, “Where is the family?” “They are staying at the Resort; it was too early for them to get ready to leave.”

“Listen Jack I am going to get you some more time by shutting down Andrews just before you get there; Air Force One would then be diverted to Dulles for POTUS to pick up Marine one. Call us back after you land at Dulles.”

Greg briefed Sally on the latest POTUS status and she called the group together.

“Each of us should now wend our separate and inconspicuous way to the Whitehouse for a Cabinet meeting at 11:00 am. Afterwards at a news conference I will announce that I am now the Acting President to be known as APOTUS. POTUS’s location is not to be given out for the present as he is under protective custody. His future at the moment is uncertain as he is being charged with dereliction of duty.”

Warner, Greg , and Levi, decided to look into the war-room at the Pentagon where they could see exactly where Air Force One was. When it was in the landing pattern about five minutes out Warner put in a call to Operation Headquarters at Andrews AFB and asked to talk to the duty officer in charge, “Hello this is Warner Farragut, Secretary of Defense, calling you on an operation line so you will know this is not a hoax. We do unannounced crash drills each month and I am calling you to declare one now. I want to see how you handle this live with Air Force One about land. You are ordered to close the airport and redirect Air Force One to Dulles.” “Yes Sir” was all that was replied. Then the ATC audio was patched into the intercom. “Air Force One, Andrews AFB has just been closed by an emergency drill. You are ordered not to land but divert to Dulles. Out.”

Warner, Greg, and Levi were on their way by limousine to the Whitehouse when Jack called Greg. “We just landed at Dulles. POTUS is so upset with all the changes, and even more suspicious saying he can’t trust the Secretive Service, but demanding when stairs are wheeled out and Marine One shows up that he be taken directly to Camp David. I told him that would probably not be a problem.” Greg said, “Great, take him there and we will send you some reinforcements”

At the Whitehouse Greg briefed Sally, “Well things are looking up; POTUS, on his own, asked to go to Camp David, and he is on his way. He appears to be of the belief that the US will shortly be in a nuclear war and we will let him go on thinking that for now. Warner has established a small war-room at the Pentagon to manage POTUS’s location and what information he is provided with. We are going to call it **Perilous Rabbit Hole**.

Six months later, Jack, who was still the supervisor of the Secret Service with POTUS at Camp David, called Greg. “This morning, POTUS, who still believes the US got a light radioactive dusting in a war with North Korea, is worried the radioactivity might eventually reach here. I think he is really unhappy that we have run out of his favorite steaks. Anyway he now wants to move to the Eastern hill country of Australia. That might be a good idea as there we would not have to fake we had a non existent war. If you do decide to do that I would like to take my family along and eventually retire there. You know I have only visited my family once in the past six months.”

Greg chuckled, “Sounds like a good idea, would probably save money and Sally wants Camp David back! Will be in touch.”

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