

General Barry McCaffrey Provides Worldwide Perspective on Challenges to U.S. National Security

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By Pete DeLaunay

During a wide-ranging discussion, self-described soldier-diplomat General Barry McCaffrey (ret.) offered his perspective on the current administration in the other Washington and U.S. relations around the world. General McCaffrey's remarks were guided by Rotarian and veteran CNN reporter **Jill Dougherty** to a full house of Rotarians at a new venue, the Seattle Hilton.



General McCaffrey, who prefers to be called Barry, was as candid and forthcoming as his interviews on MSNBC or CNN. His remarks touched on the military, political and diplomatic situation the U.S. finds itself in with 'an undisciplined President' who has challenged adversaries and puzzled allies worldwide.

Beginning with the Iran deal, where the U.S. lifted sanctions and gave the Iranian government \$150B with few strings attached, he said the accord was a bad deal but one that will likely stand regardless of the President's desire to cancel it. "The U.S. got nothing in return for the accord but it was the deal former Secretary of State Kerry could get," he said. "The accord outraged many countries including Israel that will spend a ton to learn about Iranian intentions and more than likely will pre-empt any threat from Iran with a full-throated launch."

Regarding North Korea and the dictatorship of Kim Jong-Un, he said it was a struggle to remain objective. "They have a nuclear capability and what is going on is background noise from a soft



power dictator's message on parade," the most highly decorated serving General who served 32 years in the U.S. Army said. "Whether the so-called bloody nose attack where conventional air and sea power knock out 90% of their abilities, or the combined U.S. and South Korean forces destroy them; as Kim Jong-Un is losing he will go nuclear followed by a bitter war on the Korean peninsula."

He characterized North Korea's "regime survival" as a conveyance between Kim and his generals to "provoke, negotiate, and provoke again". The U.S. could easily end up in a "game on" situation with the "taunting and idiocy of shaming a nuclear dictator" or as the President refers to Kim Jong-Un, "Mr. Rocket Man".

Turning to Russia, he predicted Putin's re-election and commented on the Russian view of President Trump's



inability to run the government. "As a student of federal government there is no strategy as (Secretary of Defense) Mattis, (Secretary of State) Tillerson and (UN Ambassador) Haley say things that are in variance with the rest," he said. "Russia is well served by having an unstable U.S. government."

General McCaffrey does not consider Russia a threat to the U.S. or Western Europe since the Russian nuclear program is in disarray. The 16 nations of NATO have to think through the relationship with Russia since, according to a recent Gallup Poll, worldwide respect for the U.S. is down to 30% while other countries attempt to fill that gap.

He thinks people were disgusted with both political parties during the last election, voting for Trump as a protest. "Support for the President is the lowest in the history of poll taking, with Congress even lower at 10%. People don't trust our own institutions," General McCaffrey said. "The armed forces are the most trusted for their integrity, courage and purpose."

He asked rhetorically, what is Trump's decision making process? "It seems chaotic yet his instincts seem to resonate with a lot of Americans – immigration, job creation and that's the danger that 30% of the people seem to support him," he said. "Thankfully General H.R. McMaster (ret.) and General John Kelly (ret.) have fired most of the crazies in the White House -- that had become a fraternity gone bad in many ways."

Turning to China, General McCaffrey said "relations have never been better". The Chinese will defend their borders but not engage militarily outside since they are not close to being a threat or menace to anyone.

He lauded the people of Afghanistan as smart and hopeful since the rebuilding of that country has taken place over many years. Troops from the U.S. (15,000) and NATO (8,000) are essential to holding the Afghan government together. "It is tricky for us to be there but we are stuck," he continued. "If the U.S./NATO forces were to pull out, there would be an immediate civil war. Although they are an impressive people, a central government won't take hold with people who historically try to kill each other."



During a spirited Q&A session, General McCaffrey said nuclear threats pale in comparison to cyber-warfare, the "real weapon of mass destruction". He concluded with optimism about the U.S. regardless of the focus on Trump's missteps. "The National Security Agency has the largest concentration of PhD's in the world – who knows what they are doing".

President-Elect Cindy Runger opened the meeting by announcing that **President Mark Wright** had been called to a Rotary International meeting about a mounting campaign to eliminate polio. Information about celebrations of life for **Mason Sizemore** on February 10th and 11th can be found in the Totem. **Seattle Fire Chief Harold Scoggins** invited Rotarians to



the opening of a new fire station at 901 Roanoke where a peace builder poll will be planted on February 3rd. **Joyce Robertson** extended thanks for the \$15,000 SRSF grant to Rotary First Harvest that will help pay for much needed fresh fruits and vegetables for their good packets. A special Hearts & Wine event will be held on Saturday, February 9, followed by the monthly food pack on Saturday, February 10. See the Totem for details.

Past-President Todd Summerfelt offered the day's invocation, followed by **Linda Rough** leading Rotarians in the *National Anthem*.

Thanks to program chair, **Hamilton McCulloh**, for another exceptional program next week with Governor Jay Inslee at the Westin.