

Everything that Donald Trump does—make that everything that he *says*—is calculated to thrill his lustiest disciples. But he is discovering that what was brilliant for a politician is a miscalculation for a president, because it deepens the chasm between him and most Americans.

It is forcing him to say things he never wanted to say and to rid himself of one valued aide after another—next perhaps his beloved white-nationalist advisers Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka. Even the right-wing owner of the Fox network and the Wall Street Journal tells him they must go.

This week, his poll numbers sank to their worst ever, below 35 percent, just as the Russia investigation reaches the boiling point and he needs the bulwark of popular esteem.

Pyongyang and Charlottesville, the capitals of August's thermal wave, offer the sternest evidence.

Trump's political canniness and his power flow from one source: his bluster—the threats and invective he hurled at each of his Republican opponents in 2016 and then Hillary Clinton. All the media ate it up and so did millions of white men who had been waiting for someone to tell everything like it is without the polite norms of public discourse.

After Trump warned that North Korea would never fire an intercontinental missile, the kind that could deliver a payload to the United States, Kim Jung Un did just that. It could have hit Alaska. Another Trump warning and the little tyrant fired one that could hit New York City. So Trump promised that any *more* threats from North Korea and he would bring "fire and fury" on Pyongyang like the world had never seen. The little dictator laughed and threatened to drop some missiles into the ocean around Guam, where we have a military base. Now Trump says he will retaliate if North Korea attacks us or an ally and, meantime, he might attack Venezuela.

North Korea is not going to attack anyone, so Trump need not worry about being humiliated again. North Korea finally has a stockpile of nuclear weapons, the ability to miniaturize them to fit atop a missile and ICBMs that can strike the heart of his country's great enemy. Trump's threats gave Kim what he needed most—a villain who would rally his desperate populace behind him.

With many U.S. voters, too, it's bluster, not action, that counts. But with most Americans, it was all a vacuous show and scary. No one but Trump's alt-right advisers want him to start a war or risk an accidental one..

Charlottesville was a bigger miscalculation. Trump had sewed up the angry-white-man vote early, owing to his general bluster, news of his father's connections with the Klan (he was jailed during a deadly Klan and

fascist rally in New York City in 1927), or his reluctance to disavow the support of white-supremacy and alt-right groups like David Duke, the former grand wizard and politician. (Duke ran for president in 1988 on the Populist Party ticket with Arkansan Trenton Stokes and finished third in the state.)

Emboldened by Trump's victory and his presidency, fascists, white-supremacists like Duke and others under the alt-right banner rallied at the University of Virginia to begin the national movement to restore white control of America, which they thought Trump meant by "Make America Great Again." With all the Klan and Nazi trappings—white robes, torches, assault rifles, clubs, Confederate flags and swastikas—they descended on the school for which Thomas Jefferson wanted to be remembered. The predictable riot ended with an Ohio man who had told his mother he was going to a Trump rally speeding his car into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing one and injuring many more. Jubilant white nationalists planned more across the country.

It called for a powerful response from the president, such as Reagan, Clinton, Bush II and Obama had delivered in similar assaults on American principles and safety. Subtracting the 9-11 attacks, most terrorist casualties on U.S. soil have been at the hands of right-wing groups and loners like Timothy McVeigh and Dylann Roof. Our governor once prosecuted some of them.

Trump's aides scrambled to get him to respond and they—all but Bannon and Gorka—were dismayed when he did. He didn't denounce white supremacy, Nazis, the Klan, their ideas or their weapons but rather the intemperance of "all sides." Just as during the election, he could not renounce people who had given his campaign its energy.

It was a terrible day for his party, which was founded upon the principle of freedom for African Americans. Republican leaders, his vice president and his daughter filled the void until he could be persuaded to grumpily issue a statement denouncing the bigotry of the movement.

To be safe, Trump ridiculed a black businessman who had quit his manufacturers advisory board and also announced he might pardon the Arizona sheriff who had been convicted of brutalizing blacks and Latinos. The lessons hadn't quite sunk in.