



**Jim Sciutto, *The Madman Theory: Trump Takes On the World*.
New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020.**

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When someone says “madman theory,” what comes to mind? Albert Einstein and his crazy hair or a 1980s slasher film? How about the former president of the United States and leader of the free world, Donald Trump? Critics and supporters alike could not always guess what President Trump would do next. That is exactly what the madman theory is: a strategy that began with President Richard Nixon of letting others think you are so crazy you just might wipe them off the map. Nixon’s chief of staff H. R. Haldeman defined the theory as “a threat of egregious military action by an

unpredictable U.S. President..."¹ While Nixon "invented" the madman theory, arguably no one was as consistent in implementing it as Trump. This is the point that Jim Sciutto, a CNN national security correspondent and news anchor, presents in *The Madman Theory: Trump Takes On the World*. Sciutto provides a breakdown of President Trump's approach to national security and how his actions aligned with the madman theory.

Sciutto used his vast connections in the political world, including his past experiences as chief of staff for the ambassador to China, to gain interviews and information that the average citizen would not ordinarily have regarding President Trump's national security procedures. His sources include former White House staff, Trump's trade advisor, and Trump's chief of staff, all of whom provided a wide range of information from different perspectives. Sciutto also includes direct quotes from the president and transcripts from documented events and conversations. Sciutto is sure to include the exact words from each source, along with his interpretation of how those words support his assertion that Trump is a prime example of the madman theory.

In the first chapter of this book, Sciutto turns to Trump's senior administration officials and advisors to see how they defined Trump's foreign policy. These are people who could help explain the inner workings of President Trump's mind and could attest to how he is a "madman." Each official has their name followed by the single word or phrase that they used to define the president's foreign policy. All of their words and phrases were similar, in that economics and personal or national gain were mentioned as the driving forces for the president and his policies. For example, in the section titled "Joseph Yun: 'Transactional,'" it draws from Yun, an Ambassador and former special representative for North Korea policy, who described Trump's foreign policy in relation to North Korea as essentially: 'If I do this for them, what will they do for me?' By including these insights in the beginning of the book, Sciutto sets the stage for what else the book will cover and how the information will be presented.

Throughout the book, Sciutto uses creative organization techniques to provide a better experience for the reader. Each chapter begins with a question regarding how Trump approached foreign policy. Sciutto follows up the end of each chapter with a box that answers that question, with all the pages in between constituting the supporting

¹ See H. R. Haldeman with Joe Dimona, *The Ends of Power* (New York, NY: Times Books, 1978).

evidence. One example is the question for chapter three: “Why does Trump favor Russia?” Sciutto presents evidence regarding a spy withdrawn from Russia’s highest ranks due to Trump’s directive, Trump’s repeated dismissing and questioning of the credibility of intelligence findings, and Trump’s distractions from all things Russia. Before the closing of the chapter, Sciutto breaks down three possible explanations for why Trump treated Russia the way he did, and then finishes the chapter with the answer to the question “Why does Trump favor Russia?” using those explanations. In addition to framing chapters around important questions and answers, Sciutto also devotes different chapters to different countries, including some that posed the greatest national security threats while Trump was in office.

Trump did not face entirely new national security issues, but he approached them in a different way from past presidents. To further the point that Trump’s approach fit the madman theory, Sciutto often compares it to that of past presidents. For example, multiple presidents before Trump were tasked with stopping North Korea from becoming a nuclear power, and they tried military pressure, economic sanctions, and negotiations—to no avail. When Trump came into office, he immediately started a “maximum pressure” campaign to stop North Korea in its tracks, which was a much tougher approach than other presidents had tried. Trump did not stop there, though, as he took to Twitter, threatening North Korea to back down or be met with “fire and fury,” and then calling Kim Jong-un “Rocket Man.” Contrasting Trump’s tweets and previous presidents’ approaches helps any reader see that Sciutto has a valid point in explaining Trump with the madman theory.

When it comes to Sciutto, it is not hard to see that this author is knowledgeable and talented. With his excellent writing skills and valuable sources who worked closely with Trump, Sciutto successfully presents evidence for his case. Sciutto uses sources who are both supporters and critics of Trump, which gives his book more credibility and provides an unbiased account of Trump’s unpredictable approach to governing the nation’s foreign relations.

These days, there may be critics of the book simply because the author is a journalist, but he is well-respected and highly-qualified in the specific area of foreign policy and national security, and brings professional experience from outside of journalism. Those with a critical eye could also point out that on occasion Sciutto

includes his personal opinions, but that is relatively rare and does not discount the evidence he consistently provides.

Overall, *The Madman Theory* provides an inside account of former President Trump's mind and behavior regarding national security, and it allows the average citizen to see things in a way they may not have before. Because Sciutto used credible sources, included direct quotes from Trump, and also cited government documents to build his case, the book feels unbiased and quite effective. Trump may not be a crazy scientist, but when it comes to national security and foreign policy, he certainly seemed to be a madman.