Do Dictatorships Deserve such a Bad Rap?

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On a superficial level this article appears to make a plea glorifying the blessings of dictatorships. But the underlying reality of what’s being presented is quite different. In fact, the article explores the great destructiveness of dictatorial rule. In a satirical way—taking the vantage point of a dictator—it highlights the dangers that dictatorships represent. Paradoxically, it suggests that the concentration of power in the hands of one single individual will be the best way to run a country. Using examples of many former and present dictators, it is contended that the negative associations pertaining to dictatorships are highly exaggerated. Instead, it is pointed out that dictators do create very effective forms of government. What's more, to add to these bizarre contentions, it is also suggested that dictators rescue the people from their existential aloneness, their anxieties, and their need to think for themselves. After all, as this article contents, most people behave like sheeple.

Furthermore, in a tongue-in-cheek way, this article explores the steps that have to be taken to become a dictator. What's suggested is that aspiring dictators need to start on an "installment plan" basis, taking on a somewhat pseudo-democratic disguise. In this context, the article also compares dictatorships to democracies, again arguing that to choose a dictatorship is always the better alternative, given the fact that in democracies people are all too willing to submit themselves to the collective wisdom of an all too often, very disengaged public.

In addition, to maintain a dictatorship, it is recommended to distribute financial awards to a selected few to assure their loyalty. In this context, it is also suggested that fear will be a great equalizer. Here, it is pointed out that a satisfactory collaboration with the police (secret and otherwise) and the military will always be of the utmost importance to secure the security of dictatorships. Another important way for dictators to maintain their powerbase (as noted in this article), is by inciting hatred against ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. And if internal scapegoating is no longer effective, another option to maintain a dictator’s hold on power is to find enemies outside the country, or even to start a war.

Also, according to this ironic article, ignorance can be such a bliss. In this context, it is pointed out that a well-educated population will be a dictator’s greatest danger. A free press will also fall into this danger zone. It is also noted—as we live in a digital age—that it has become increasingly difficult to create dictator-friendly information flows. In conjunction to this observation, comments are made about the important role re-education can play. It is emphasized that dictators need to gain control of a country’s educational systems.

Finally, it is noted that being a dictator can be a highly stressful occupation. To deal with people who don't like this form of government isn’t only very hard work but can also come with many dangers. It explains why dictators are quite prone to paranoid reactions. Keeping this characteristic in mind, the article ends by saying that dictators are never as strong as they imagine to be, and that people are never as weak as they think they seem to be.

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History proves that all dictatorships, all authoritarian forms of government are transient. Only democratic systems are not transient. Whatever the shortcomings, mankind has not devised anything superior.

—Vladimir Putin

If you were to ask me whether you need a dictatorship to run India, No, you do not. Whether you need a powerful person who believes in concentrating power, No, you do not. If you were to ask me to choose between democratic values and wealth, power, prosperity and fame, I will very easily and without any doubt choose democratic values.

—Narendra Modi

One has to bear in mind that during my childhood and adolescence, I suffered the repression of the Somoza dictatorship in every way: economically, socially, as well as at the hands of the police—because if we went out on the street to play baseball, for example, the police would come and beat us up and put us in prison.

—Daniel Ortega

Would you want to be a dictator? To have absolute power, limitless economic opportunity, and the ability to get rid of people you don’t like? Wouldn’t it be great to be at the center of everything, to have everybody at your beck and call? Surely, this is an ideal way to feel good about yourself. In fact, on paper, being a dictator looks to be a great experience. And if you’re family oriented, who knows, you could even turn a dictatorship into a family business with a son or daughter to follow in your footsteps. Just look at North Korea. Is it
not incredible that the family business is now in its third generation? They really know how to overcome the ‘rags to riches’ scenario over the course of three generations. As a national family firm, they are the envy of the world. To all intents and purposes, its present leader, Kim Jong Un, should be viewed as a role model to all the dictators. If you were to take a hard look at the situation, you would see a person of great foresight. Look at the skill with which he has been running his nuclear weapons program; what more fantastic way to invest in the future of this family firm?

Given this example of greatness, why behave in more democratic ways? Isn't it a fact that democracies often stand for much talk but very little action? And adding to democracy’s negative image is its volatility, evident in an ever-changing parade of political actors. Clearly, it is a system that’s totally unstable.

Of course, there are always these killjoys, those people who argue that, in dictatorships, hubris will be its weak link. They suggest that dictators easily become too full of themselves and stop listening to others. These spoilsports argue that dictators can become too narcissistic with disastrous consequences. But if so, what’s really the problem? I should know, shouldn’t I? Don’t we all have an ego?

And what is it that is so wrong with a bit of narcissism? Consider carefully how it promotes mental toughness and focused leadership. Aren’t these the exact qualities people want, confused as most of them always seem to be? From what I have seen, people want to be
led by those willing to take a stand, leaders who are prepared to attend to peoples’ basic needs, leaving them free to do other things.

A DIY Dictatorship
What few realize is that dictators can make people truly feel free. These exact words were spoken by the late dictator of Cuba, Fidel Castro – a man who really knew how to liberate and give hope to his people. Very much like him, I too have been a true liberator of people. In fact, following his example and speaking of hope and promise is how I got to where I am now. Like him, I have told all that are willing to listen that I represent the national will. What has helped me in my journey is that most people, though they may pretend to be opposed to dictatorships, are quite willing to allow their minds and ways of life to be twisted. In this respect, I have always appreciated the statement of the Greek storyteller, Aesop, who said, “Those who voluntarily put power into the hands of a tyrant ... must not wonder if it be at last turned against themselves.” How true that when liberty exceeds intelligence, it begets chaos, which begets dictatorship. Such a nice equation!

Lay the Groundwork
Of course, to make a dictatorship palatable, you need to lay the groundwork. What I have learned from experience is that however you go about it, it is better to do so in a relatively quiet manner. The aspiring dictator should not overdo it – not at first at least but play your cards well and be patient. Take my example: I started by pretending that I was supporting existing laws, knowing that when I had the power, I would later destroy them.
Bide your Time

Do not rock the boat too much or too early. You never know whether you might upset some high-minded people who may later plot against you. No, to transform a more democratic form of government into some sort of autocracy, it is better to move slowly. Bear in mind that it may take some time before people will see things your way so be patient. Even though you may be eager to set the gears of your ego in motion, it is better to do so subtly. In other words, you need to be perceptive enough to know when the time is right to crank those gears into overdrive.

Make Like You’re a Man of the People

If I were to give you another piece of advice on your journey to power, it would be to be smart and show some humility. You need to convince the populace that you’re really a man of the people. As Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s minister of propaganda said so pointedly, “Whoever can conquer the street will one day conquer the state, for every form of power politics and any dictatorship-run state has its roots in the street.” And while you pretend to be a man of the people, make it equally clear that you stand for stability. Remember that people hate uncertainty. In fact, when the people of a country have to choose between anarchy and dictatorship, they will always choose the latter. To most people, times of trouble are unsettling, and anarchy comes to be viewed as the worst form of dictatorship.

The Installment Plan
Look at the world’s greatest dictators and notice that all have established their reign in a gradual manner. As we speak, we can observe leaders like Viktor Orbán, Recep Erdoğan, Narendra Modi, and Benjamin Netanyahu practicing this approach to impressive effect. Perhaps the greatest current role model for this way of changing governmental practices has been Vladimir Putin. Many continue to marvel at how he has managed to change Russia into a solid dictatorship. He did this on an installment plan basis, step by little step, promising stability.

I also got where I am now on just such an installment plan basis. To attain my present position, I had to play my cards very carefully. Initially, I preached to all and sundry that I was an advocate of more democratic governmental practices; I told the people that I was looking out for all of their needs. Of course, this was merely a matter of speech. After all, you cannot take care of or please everybody.

Looking back, some people are amazed to realize that their country has come to be led by a more ‘directive’ form of government. Only with hindsight do they see that what they thought was going to be a democracy has turned into something very different. I find it sad, however, that some people are unable to recognize this as a happy ending. Obviously, they don’t know what’s good for them. But even though some people may need more convincing than others, I remain confident that, given time, they will see the present form of government to be what it is—something that is good of everybody.

*Good Riddance to Sceptics*
Some of these malcontents, negative as they seem to be, claim that the story and circumstances that are the making of a dictatorship is always the same. According to them, it begins with leaders who pretend to be enlightened; they allege that they’re going to deliver the populace from their bondage; they tell people that they’re saving them from past humiliations. They are going to right the wrongs. They also make clear that if they were in charge they would really establish justice, freedom, and peace.

This is the exact script that a talented dictator like Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua has been pursuing. After overthrowing the previous dictator – saying to the people that he was liberating them – he is now doing an impressive job following exactly in his predecessor’s very footsteps. It is just unfortunate that so many people can’t appreciate the great things he is now doing for his country. Wisely, more than a hundred thousand of these troublemakers have now left the country, and frankly I think ‘good riddance!’

Clearly, people who are concerned about dictatorships need to have their heads examined. They fail to realize what’s good for them or grasp the idea that dictatorships are fantastic forms of government. As a dictator myself, I really know what I am talking about and have the conviction that my way is the way all leaders should run a country. In fact, most of the people I ask how they feel about the merits of a strong-person rule appear happy to agree with me. And to tell you the truth, I find it quite endearing that they realize what’s good for them and have come to see that my ideas are for the betterment of all. I know that people who see things in a more holistic manner realize that the rights of the individual aren’t so important, nor is protecting them in the best interest of the nation.
The Simpler Life is to Agree

Frankly speaking, it is important that people agree with me. Life becomes so much simpler when everyone does what I tell them to do. Fortunately for me and most dictators, people are ‘sheeples’ at heart; most do what they are told. What I have also discovered is that most people don’t like to think for themselves. It is testament to basic human nature how easily people get used to a dictatorship. Looking around today, most of the people whom I meet seem to love the way I run the country; they love their servitude; they like to be at my beck and call. Admittedly I am easily upset to hear remarks that suggest the people in my country are now living in a subtle, not too painful concentration camp.

Given the mostly positive reactions to my government, I find it hard to understand the statement of Lord Acton when he says that too much power corrupts both the heart and the mind. How wrong can you be to think that having unlimited power will be dangerous? How misguided can you be to argue that there is a possible Caligula in even the gentlest of human souls? To compare me with a Caligula shows how wrong people can be, it is much more accurate to say that I am saving people from themselves. I am rescuing people from their existential aloneness, their anxieties, their responsibility to think, and their reluctance to make decisions. Truth be told, I am actually inspiring hope and meaning in order to counteract people’s sense of despair and lack of life’s purpose. Without me, I am sure that most of my subjects would feel totally lost and bewildered. In fact, my way of running the country is actually simplifying their lives. I hope that my people know that life is much less complicated under a dictatorship.
Enjoying the Simpler Life

I am pleased to point out that people in my country no longer need to waste their time on voting, especially since I’m making sure that the outcome will be guaranteed. Still, I am kind enough to let those who want to vote go through the motions. Plus, it is always nice to hear that 99 percent of the populace stands behind you. Of course, to get there, I make sure that the elections are very well managed. I am not in the business of allowing elections that could remove me from my position! Here again, I have taken Putin as my role model. How admirable to see that on the first day in office, he introduced legislation that reformed and over five years effectively dismantled the Russian electoral system. I hope his people now appreciate the fact that anything that passes for elections in Russia has nothing to do with actual elections. It is more like a pipedream, a hallucination. Clearly, Putin always knew what was good for the country. Like me, he has really been a savior of his people.

History has been full of saviors like Putin and me. Over the centuries, so many dictators have made their populace proud, the kinds of leaders who filled their subjects with admiration. And I am very much like them. I have been doing so many great things to make my people happy. The writer Aldous Huxley could not be more wrong when he said, “So long as men worship the Caesars and Napoleons, Caesars and Napoleons will duly rise and make them miserable.” Think instead of the pharaohs of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Darius of Persia, Cyrus the Great, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Hannibal, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, Attila the Hun, Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolph Hitler,
Mao, and Stalin. All of them were great people who made an incredible mark on history. Clearly, all of them were welcomed with great cheer by their subjects. Their fantastic efforts transformed their societies for the better. Yet still, there remain these killjoys who suggest the history of mankind to be one of subjugation and exploitation of a great majority of people by an elite few. How can people be so misguided? Don’t they have any brains?

*Who Doesn’t Have an Inner Despot?*

Even though I envisage myself as an enlightened dictator, I don’t think that there is anything wrong with prioritizing my own interests above those of others. After all, we all need to look out for number one – who else is otherwise going to do it? Further still, why should looking out for number one not be beneficial to other people? It could become a great win-win situation. People who don’t realize this, I call hypocrites, for I am quite sure given the same opportunity, they would act similarly. The English writer Daniel Defoe said, “All men would be tyrants if they could.” So, why should I be different? I merely took advantage of the opportunity given to me to become what most people desire to be. I am just actualizing people’s inner despot.

Keeping this characteristic of human nature in mind, who needs prattle about democratic values, respect for human rights, equality, and inclusivity? Democracies, as we know, are far from being perfect. They are prone to every error, from incompetence and corruption to complete gridlock. In fact, it has always surprised me how willing people are to submit themselves to the collective wisdom of an imperfect and frequently disengaged public. As
I have said before, most people tend to be like sheeples. They follow the leader. I strongly believe that no competent dictator would show more stupidity than what’s called the voice of the majority in a democracy.

Isn't it also true that there could exist much more cultural and spiritual freedom under autocratic rule than would be the case in many a democracy? In fact, it is quite conceivable that a democratic government with a doctrinaire majority is going to be more autocratic than a dictatorship. Whilst under a democracy, I think that the era of individualism, liberalism, humanitarianism, and freedom is fast coming to its end. From what I know about human nature, it is much better when people are protected from themselves. That, in fact, is true freedom. After all, you need the freedom to kill freedom.

Knowing all this I find it very sad to hear that some people still don’t appreciate the good things autocrats are doing for their countries. Those prepared to invest some time in evaluating more directive forms of government would likely conclude that it makes for a much more way of running an administration. Just think of Lee Kuan Yew, the late Prime Minister of Singapore. In his three-decade rule, he transformed an underdeveloped city state with no natural resources, constrained by a very limited land area and small army, into a shining example of a developed country. Still, despite all the good things he has done for his country, how depressing that some deranged souls have been complaining about his autocratic measures that included reducing the influence of the press, outlawing protests, and at times, arbitrarily detaining people. Incredibly enough, he has also been accused of having weakened independent institutions such as the judiciary and legislative
bodies. How stupid people can be. Why don’t they accept what’s in their best interest? Just look how well the country is doing economically. The only thing that still puzzles me, however, is how Lee Kuan Yew has managed to create such a high-minded, honest civil service. Some people have argued that it makes a difference. I am not so sure about it. But I guess, there will always be outliers.

However, this example convinces me even more that the dictatorship of the few, compared to the initiative of the millions can produce a much happier and more prosperous society. It is for all to see how very messy democracies tend to be.

Accountability (in Theory)

Unfortunately, I know that there will always be grumblers, people who aren’t prepared to accept that I’m doing really good, when in fact I am a true servant of the people. I strongly believe that concentrating power in the hands of a single person is the best way to steer the population of a country. It is the way to provide them with a sense of direction. And I don’t believe all these spoilsports who say that it leads to the suppression of political opposition; that for a country’s citizens, it comes with a restriction on free speech, censorship, and limited or no political participation. Not only do they exaggerate, but they also make too much of such trivial matters. In addition, I think that they’re also very wrong when they question problems with accountability. How negative can people be?

Everyone knows that I am accountable. I always allow for complaints that I deem to be reasonable. And what’s more, I will continue to take great care even of those who make
unreasonable complaints. I make sure that everybody is listened to, even if some of these complainers may be in store for a surprise. At the danger of repeating myself, people who argue that the absence of basic civil liberties undermines human rights are out of their minds. People should be more trusting of me. Haven’t I always been a man of the people? In everything I do, I have always taken the people’s best interest at heart.

Also, I don’t agree with the suggestion that my autocratic system of government will soon degenerate; that it brings out the worst in people. What nonsense to suggest that using coercive force always attracts people of low morality! I have even heard people say that dictators will always surround themselves with scoundrels. How could they! Clearly, these people have the facts completely wrong. The like-minded people that I have carefully chosen to help me run the government aren’t scoundrels at all. Like me, they’re also high-minded. They have to be, considering how supportive they are of my ideas. What’s wrong with being supported by people who agree with you? It makes any decision-making processes so much simpler.

The Corruption Critics

A related accusation that I have heard is that corruption can become endemic in dictatorships. People who have the nerve to say so reason that when power is concentrated, there will be fewer checks and balances. They argue that dictatorships lack independent institutions such as a free press, an impartial judiciary, and effective anti-corruption agencies – the kinds of civil institutions that promote transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Some who don’t like my way of governing even go as
far as to say that an absence of these checks and balances will only enable the unchecked abuse of power. According to these killjoys, countries that operate under these conditions create patronage networks and even imply that I would be tempted to distribute favors, privileges, and resources to my loyal supporters in exchange for their political support. Continuing this erroneous line of reasoning, these people go as far as to suggest that such arrangements foster corruption as people in my government prioritize personal gains over public welfare.

Obviously, these critics of my governing style fail to accept how important it is to be surrounded by loyal people. It is a sine qua non for any effective leadership. Like any other situation in life, loyalty overrules all else. After all, you can’t do everything alone. I am understandably hesitant therefore to punish persons who are accused of corrupt activities. I’m sure that they’re just trying to be helpful to me. In fact, whatever they’re doing, I’m sure it is for the benefit of my form of governance. And it’s important to understand that if I protect them, they will be indebted to me.

The same troublemakers insinuate that I am exploiting my position to maintain my grip on power; that I am out to amass wealth. They fail to see the obvious – that I need financial resources to reward my many loyal followers. Surely it is high time that more people appreciate the advantages of cronyism and nepotism. As I have said, I have to prioritize the interests of the people who support me over the welfare of the general population; how else am I to cement my hold on power? I maintain that to keep me in charge will benefit everybody.
A further complaint circulated by these resistant individuals regards the perceived misallocation of resources. They say that a lack of economic transparency hinders economic growth and development. Consequently – if they are to be believed – it will contribute to widespread poverty and inequality. To be quite frank, this drivel makes me laugh. How misguided people can be! Admittedly, running a successful dictatorship, means being less worried about the welfare or the property rights of the ordinary citizen. It is your true supporters who count. And wouldn’t you do the same in my position? What’s so bad about taking care of the people who help you to stay in power? What difference does the odd dose of corruption make in the grand scheme of things?

Viktor Yanukovych, the former president of the Ukraine, has been targeted as one of the examples of dictators who encouraged corrupt practices. If anybody suffered the wrath of bad press it was him. Why do people get so excited when they discovered – after he left the country – that he was the owner of an opulent mansion with a private exotic zoo? I know from personal experience that to be a dictator takes effort and vigilance; shouldn’t such effort be rewarded? Unfortunately, Yanukovych is now living in exile in Russia with a miserly fortune of $100 million. People can be so unfair!

As I am very much of a realist and acknowledge that there is corruption in any political system, democratic or otherwise. No political system can be perfect. I strongly believe that a dictatorship can be extremely effective in deterring all kinds of harmful behavior, and considering all its positives, corruption is not a big deal. Just look at Afghanistan.
What previous governments weren’t able to accomplish, its theocratic dictatorship is now getting it done. The country is safe. And I think that what happening to their Shiite population is highly exaggerated. Even conceding that, there are far less explosions at their social gatherings, and let us not overlook how successful the Taliban has been in eliminating the drug trade. Therefore, in light of their success, why do we always need to make such a big stink about women’s rights. And why make all this noise about the closure of hair dressing salons? Aren’t there much better things to talk about? Also, why make their educational practices, or better the lack of them, such a big deal?

If further examples were needed look at all the good things Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), the ruler of Saudi Arabia has been doing for his country. Wasn’t it a master stroke the way he took care of all these corrupt people, locking them up in Riyadh’s Ritz-Carlton Hotel? And after some modest persuasion, I believe they coughed up about $100 billion. Given all the good he is doing for his country, to suggest that he may be responsible for the murder of this pesty journalist Khashoggi seems blatantly unfair. Now some people are also muttering about him having acquired a $450 million painting or a $300 million castle in France. This, I’m sure, is pure envy.

“Hard but Necessary”
I strongly believe that all my actions are motivated by noble ideals. In pursuit of these I have had to make choices that can be called “hard but necessary” for the good of the nation. I cannot agree therefore with the Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus who said, “The welfare of the people in particular has always been the alibi of tyrants.” People don’t
realize that I am an idealist, that I am acting in the name of the people. And I’m sure that all of my colleagues think the same way.

I am convinced that President Bashar al-Assad of Syria thinks very much along the same line. It was only unfortunate that he was up against so many malcontents. But you have to give him real credit for his stamina when he managed to rise again. The same observation can be made about the dictator of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro. I admire his tenacity in the face of people unable or unwilling to appreciate all the good he has done for his country. People who argue that he has violated the human rights of its citizens, plundered the country’s natural resources, and driven a once prosperous nation into economic ruin due to his authoritarian rule are simply wrong. He is an idealist and true role model.

_Cultivating a Personality Cult_

Stalin of Russia, Mao of China, Adolph Hitler of Germany, and Kim Il Sung of North Korea made human idols of themselves because they believed ardently in an ideal and strove to achieve it. All believed in the ultimate goodness of themselves and the unchallengeable rightness of their decisions. Clearly, there must have been good reason why they believed there to be no higher power and therefore no higher law than themselves. In fact, I have always admired the remarkable clarity with which they presented themselves and their skill at managing their self-image.
Their greatest critics, however, believe such personality cults to be the tradition of the worst authoritarian regimes. They argue that it distorts historical facts and, moreover, that it doesn’t bode well for future dictatorships. But how wrong they can be! Just think about some of my most prominent predecessors. For example, dictator François Duvalier of Haiti fostered a personality cult that claimed he was the physical embodiment of the nation. This was a masterful way of keeping his troubled country together. Look now at how it is faring without him—it has degenerated into a mess and rife with gang wars.

Next, look at Juan Perón, elected three times as President of Argentina. Everybody would love him and his wife Eva. Again, see the state of his country now in the hands of his incapable successors. The country’s financial bankruptcy can hardly be blamed on him. Another great loss is that of the long-time ruler of Albania, Enver Hoxha. He put into place such a nice cult of personality and now, following his death, everybody seems to want to leave the country. Surely, it proves how important he was in keeping the country together. In fact, he seems to have been a real genius, a person who knew everything about everything.

Like Hoxha, I think it is admirable to be portrayed as a genius, a person able to make insightful remarks on virtually all facets of life from culture to economics to military matters. Even better is to have statues of yourself erected everywhere. In fact, a dictator who truly recognized the importance of doing exactly that was Saparmurat Niyazov, the President of Turkmenistan from 1985 to 2006. How fantastic it must be to have a 12-metre-tall gold-plated statue of yourself in the capital, rotating so as to always face the sun. How wise
too to share your knowledge and require all schools to use your ghostwritten book, the Ruhnama, as the primary text. It must have been a fantastic learning experience.

Speaking again of personality cults, I should not fail to mention Hun Sen, the prime minister of Cambodia, another person who knows the importance of this activity across his 38 years of power. As can be seen by everyone, he is another person who is doing God’s work. Most recently, like so many times before, the populace has re-elected him as their leader, giving him again a landslide victory. Of course, as an enlightened leader he had made sure that nobody could or dared to challenge him. Presently, he seems to be also following the great example of the North Korean Kim dynasty by announcing that his son Hun Manet is going to succeed him. You have to give it to him that he is really a leader with remarkable foresight. Given his remarkable foresight, he seems to have said that the time has come to sacrifice and relinquish power to make way for a younger generation of leaders. But fortunately for everyone, to have the nation continue to benefit from his wisdom, he will continue as the head of the ruling party.

The leader of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, is also a great believer in continuity. As a true master in media management, his rule has now reached a 30-year milestone. That he has been accused of operating a murderous network, assassinating exiled opponents can only be a blatant lie. Instead, he should be praised, not only for having brought an end to the atrocities that took place in his country, but also for the economic miracle that he has created. In fact, to the whole of Africa, Kagame should be the example of how a country needs to be run.
Some Eggs Must be Broken

Of course, any dictator committed to doing God’s work will leave a few casualties in their wake. But as the saying goes, you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs. The only way to deal with malcontents and the great equalizer is a good dose of terror. It does help to have people toe the line. Clearly, Stalin knew what he was talking about when he said, “The death of one man is a tragedy. The death of millions is a statistic.” If some people disagreed with him, it must have been because they were in some way defective, insane, malignant, or mercenary. And if tens of millions of people died due to his actions, it must have been for a good cause.

People intrinsically long for someone to take care of them, to protect them, to help them to make decisions. And I am making an incredible effort to protect my people from both internal and external dangers. Such dangers – be they real or imagined – have truly helped my cause. In fact, a good look at history shows how people like me arise and flourish during times of severe economic trouble: times when people are at their most anxious, distraught even at their uncertain future prospects. For once people are correct when they say that dictatorships do not grow out of strong and successful governments, but out of weak and helpless ones. In fact, people who are hungry and unemployed seem to be the stuff of which successful dictatorships are made of.

Given all the good things I have been doing for the nation – how I have put it back on its feet after a period of great confusion – I truly wish that the people were more appreciative
of my work. But despite all my efforts, many of my subjects still don’t realize that the things that I am doing is in their best interest. Instead of all this democratic mumbo jumbo, I get things done; the country is much better organized. To achieve this, some ethical considerations need to be taken more loosely. I have never bought into the statement of Andrei Sakharov, the troublesome Soviet scientist and Nobel Prize winner, when he noted (referring to well-functioning societies): “Intellectual freedom is essential—freedom to obtain and distribute information, freedom for open-minded and unfearing debate and freedom from pressure by officialdom and prejudices. Such freedom of thought is the only guarantee against an infection of people by mass myths, which, in the hands of treacherous hypocrites and demagogues, can be transformed into bloody dictatorship.” Being an intellectual himself, he should have really known better.

_In Praise of the Uneducated_

What many critics of my more autocratic form of government fail to appreciate is how much effort it takes to be a dictator. I recall the creativity required to enact dictator-friendly laws, to overcome protests and suppress the hooligans; and inevitably, there may have been some bloodshed. The stubbornness of some people can be tragic, especially those who fail to accept what’s good for them. In my opinion, this is especially true for the well-educated. Ignorance really can be such a bliss. In fact, like has been said by another terrific role model, Donald Trump, I love ignorant people. But it can be hard work maintaining their ignorance.
There is one thing no dictator needs, and that's a well-educated middle class. These people can cause real trouble, which is why when I came to power, I went to such great lengths to manage the country’s information flow. In particular, it was instantly clear to me that I needed to control the media. I needed to filter the spread of irritating knowledge. Fortunately, getting a grip on the media – restricting access to information and stifling independent journalism – has helped me not only to orchestrate public opinion but also to control critical thinking. Fortunately, I’m not alone in this realization, the famous figure of the French revolution Maximilien Robespierre once said, “The secret of freedom lies in educating people, whereas the secret of tyranny is in keeping them ignorant.” People may need enlightenment, but it needs to be my kind of enlightenment.

The idea of free speech is highly overrated anyway. Here, don't take me wrong, I do believe in freedom, but freedom for what? Freedom to do what I think is in the best interest of the country. In this context, I find the comment by the late US president Herbert Hoover makes a lot of sense: “It is a paradox that every dictator has climbed to power on the ladder of free speech. Immediately on attaining power each dictator has suppressed all free speech except his own.”

Of course, I realize that the steps that I have taken to assure that people speak with one voice can lead to political instability and internal conflict. Some people have warned that repression and exclusion of dissenting voices may fuel opposition movements, radicalization, protests and even uprisings. Fortunately, I have learned how to take care of these matters, and in the course of doing so have become quite digitally savvy. For
example, I have learned how effective face recognition surveillance technologies are and pride myself in the number of social media intervention techniques on hand to keep people in line.

As I have discovered, governing will be much more effective if you have a culture of silence and a complacent population. A lack of transparency is also important. Whatever I do, I think that it's best kept shielded from scrutiny. That's a key principle in every effective dictatorship. Some troublemakers accuse me of limiting independent journalism to this end. They say that I hamper critical thinking; that I don't allow for the free expression of opinions. They also suggest that I hinder the spread of knowledge, insinuating that I am inhibiting social progress. They even go as far as to accuse me of rewriting history, when I am in fact harmlessly tinkering with our present educational systems. I vehemently believe it is my right to do so, having discovered the biased nature of so many educational textbooks. No wonder that I have called for historical rewrites.

**Drawbacks of the Digital Age**

Some people have told me that despotism can only flourish in darkness. Unfortunately, in the digital world that we are living in, there seems to be too much light. We're victims of an information explosion. There is far too much information going around. Therefore, even though some people claim that our digital age facilitate dictatorships, I don't think that's completely true. Many people seem to see right through all the factoids that I am trying to propagate. Therefore, even though I accept the comments about the ease of spreading false information, given the information revolution, it has become much harder
to run an effective dictatorship and maintain the illusion that I am the freely elected leader of the nation. And even though I have tried to muscle the press – locking up many journalists – people always seem to find other ways to spread lies about me. It is not easy to have them keep their mouth shut. It really bothers me that too many of my citizens continue to receive all this nonsensical information.

What has become clear to me is that the overly well-educated started to question what I am trying to feed them. In comparison, ignorant minds would serve me far better. I'm convinced that if that were the case, people would be more united in their opinions. Diversity of opinion only creates more objectified knowledge – a very threatening thought. At times, however, as a dictator, I have this dream whereby all the people who resist my rule would have a common neck, so that I might be able to cut it off at once. In fact, if this dream could only be actualized, it would make my life much easier. Instead, what I'm forced to do is to educate the people such that there is only one common mind to delude.

*Fight Facts with Fear*

What has been called the “objective truth” has always been my greatest enemy. Fortunately, I have a highly effective psychological weapon at my disposal: fear. Making people fearful has turned out to be a great control mechanism. By frightening the populace, most people will see the advantage of sacrificing their basic freedoms and rule-of-law protections. If such an intervention doesn’t work, there is always the option of locking up disloyal members of the population, or further still, making them disappear. My collaboration with the police (secret and otherwise) and the military has therefore always
been of the utmost importance. And if locking up people doesn’t make them more compliant, the time may come to make them disappear. In fact, often I have found that these disappearances can be highly effective. Not only is it the way to silence these malcontents, but it can also be a way of silencing their families, and by extension society at large. In that respect, we can learn much from China’s dictator, Xi Jinping. He has been a master in this particular intervention technique, I can only marvel at how he manages to frighten people in this incredibly large country. In particular, from what I have heard, he really knows how to deal with these troublesome Uighurs. Hearing that the Chinese government is now also accused of ‘transnational repression,’ meaning frightening the family members of the Uighurs who have sought refuge abroad, I find quite admirable. Obviously, it is the only way to go in suppressing certain opinions.

Following this example, arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture, and even extrajudicial killings have turned out to be highly effective weapons in my arsenal, great ways of keeping the populace in line. Of course, poisoning people or have them fall from high places, like is such a laudable practice in Russia, also will put the fear of God into them.

*People must Expect the Unexpected*

Like it or not, dictators often have no choice but to deal with dissent in a forceful manner. Understandably, as mentioned before, my sights have been trained on my natural enemies, namely political activists, journalists, and writers. It seems that strength and the threat of force is the only language these people seem to understand. Even I however acknowledge that the actions of some leaders can be excessive. The military leader of
Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing for example, may have gone too far; to bomb your own people out of existence can give dictatorships a bad reputation. What I do appreciate, however, is his resoluteness. In his indifference to pleas from the UN and the international community and unwillingness to make a single concession, he demonstrates that he is a person of unwavering principles. Min Aung Hlaing has been just as skilled in another despotic tactic – unpredictability. Nothing is better at keeping the people on their toes than the uncertainty of whether they have followed the rules correctly.

What people fail to see is dealing with malcontents can be hard work. Sometimes it is like I am on a treadmill, suppressing one dissenter only to hear of another elsewhere, some being repeat offenders. Sometimes, it is difficult convincing even my soft-hearted supporters that these malingers must be dealt with, not as human beings but as the hooligans they are, seemingly intent on destroying all the good work that I have been doing for my country. I am just fortunate that, like many other enlightened dictatorial leaders, I have become quite effective in inciting most of my supporters against them.

*The Cloak and Dagger of Belief*

What has helped me in making my way of looking at things really stick is to wrap myself in the cloak of patriotism and religion. In fact, in getting my way, I have learned that it is highly commendable to exhibit an uncommon religious devotion. It seems the populace is far less apprehensive of what they may interpret as dramatic interventions if they believe that I am god-fearing and pious. Again, in this matter, Vladimir Putin has been my
major role model. You can see how well he collaborates with the head of the Orthodox church, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. What a great duo they make.

In fact, Putin as an ex-KGB colonel really understands what is required of a dictator. Pretending that you are God’s representative on earth can be seen as the prescription to preventing discontent. Of course, the last thing he wants to see is an event like the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. It has been a terrible example of how people, when not properly controlled, can put an end to a refined dictatorship. Putin knows too that when things go wrong, it doesn’t necessarily make for a comfortable retirement situation.

Furthermore, what’s also alleged is that dictatorships can lead to political instability and internal conflict. Critics who are unable to recognize the advantages of a dictatorship argue that the repression and exclusion of dissenting voices fuels opposition movements and makes for radicalization. According to them, this will only incite protests, uprisings, or even civil war. Some of these malcontents have even suggested that dictators start wars, using the threat of external enemies to exert internal control over their own people. One of the former US presidents, James Madison said that “If tyranny and oppression comes to the land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy.” He believed that a lack of peaceful mechanisms to address grievances could escalate tensions and would endanger social cohesion. I have been asking myself if there is some truth in what he had said.

“Bread and Circuses”
It may be worthwhile to mention, that a palliative offering can act to avert potential discontent, I have made a great effort to give the people ‘bread and circuses’, to use this well-known Roman expression. As a dictator, I have always known that you have to keep people’s stomachs full and their heads empty. They will come to realize that they cannot eat the freedom that supposedly comes with democracy.

But in case of potential unrest – when I am unable to provide these bread and games – I have to do other things to divert peoples' minds from the concerns they may have about me. Another weapon I therefore keep in my arsenal is to call on scapegoats. After all, the easiest hunt in the world will always be the hunt for scapegoats. It is especially handy to use minority groups as people who can be blamed for a nation’s troubles. I have become skilled in inciting hatred against ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. This has always been a fool-proof way to solidify my dictatorial powers.

Patriotism remains one of the greatest ways to maintain your powerbase. Plato was right that “When the tyrant has disposed of foreign enemies by conquest...and there is nothing to fear from them, then he is always stirring up some war.” I wonder whether this was the reason why Putin started his “special military operation.” As a very thoughtful, rational individual, I'm sure that he is going to be successful. People who argue that this war will turn out to be the strategic mistake of the century should be called what they are: spoilsports. However, as I have watched this war proceed, I start wondering whether these pessimists may have a point. Is Putin really behaving, as some people have suggested, like a cornered rat?
Unfortunately, there seem to be many complainers who accuse Putin of living in a bubble. They say that he has been distancing himself too much. They point out petty details like his seating arrangements at conferences, but I merely think he is being prudently cautious -- you never know what germs other people are harboring. Still, there are some people who think that he is only receiving filtered information. But what could also be true is that his key lieutenants carry out his orders before they are given, perhaps even before he has thought of these orders. It could very well be that his key lieutenants are going much further in making decisions for him than he would ideally like. It makes me wonder whether the same is true for the people I'm dealing with.

*The Inversion of Fear*

At times, I ask myself whether people realize the amount of stress I live under. Truth be told, the life of a dictator is not for sissies. The Greek playwright Aeschylus once said that “In every tyrant's heart there springs in the end this poison, that he cannot trust a friend.” Perhaps, there is some truth in his words. I have grown increasingly mistrustful of the people I'm dealing with, I am no longer sure who I can rely on. I imagine that there is always the chance that some kind of “crazy” individual will try to kill me. If I am honest, this thought is haunting me every moment of the day and night. Isn’t it sad that as a dictator, you can never feel really safe? I find myself wondering how well Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus sleeps at night with such a thankless population outside. Fortunately, he has the eternal friendship of Putin, like Putin has the eternal friendship of Xi Jinping of China.
Lukanshenko’s example illustrates once more that dictators, despite all their good intentions, do not always have the love of their people. Some such dictators may even fear their people. It makes me wonder how well my compatriots in America and Africa sleep at night. In particular, I’m thinking of José Daniel Ortega Saavedra of Nicaragua, Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, or my colleague dictator Emmerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe. Frankly speaking, my heart goes out to all of them. We need to do more to support each other. These leaders are such obvious examples of people who seem to be misunderstood. While they’re making great efforts to take care of their citizens, it is unbelievable that so many people don’t realize what is in their best interests. Sadly enough, it seems that the philosopher George Santayana had a point when he said, “Tyrants are seldom free; the cares and the instruments of their tyranny enslave them.” Like my fantasy about the populace, a dictator has but one throat to slit.

When I need to boost my morale, I bring to mind a notion courtesy of the French philosopher Voltaire that “Clever tyrants are never punished.” Unfortunately, Winston Churchill’s statement is similarly memorable when he said “Dictators ride to and fro upon tigers which they dare not dismount. And the tigers are getting hungry.” Whether that’s the case in my country, I am not so sure. However, if I am truly honest with myself, my nightmare scenario is what has happened to Nicolae Ceaușescu, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar Gadhafi. To kill them! People can be so cruel! Tragically enough, it appears that dictatorships are never as strong as they imagine them to be. And people are never
as weak as they think they are. The last thing I would want is for people to discover that I am actually a very frightened man.

Once, I read that a dictatorship can be compared to a magnificent tree that was impressive to look at but seemed to lack roots. It didn’t take very much for it to fall. According to the Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, “Dictatorships foster oppression, dictatorships foster servitude, dictatorships foster cruelty; more abominable is the fact that they foster idiocy.” If he wasn’t already dead, I would have locked him up. The crazy things people dare to say! Freedom of speech is definitely overrated.