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BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

In my opinion

Lessons for dictators



JENNIFER MCBRIDE
QUASHING DISSENT

Kim Jong Il, disgusted by being referred to as a "tyrant," recently responded to President Bush's "slander" with his own tirade (routed through his foreign ministry of course, which was no doubt rolling head-over-heels in its efforts to form the most devastating rhetoric). "Bush is a hooligan bereft of any personality as a human being, to say nothing of stature as president of a country," North Korea tells us. "He is a half-baked man in terms of morality and a Philistine whom we can never deal with."

Pot, meet Kettle.

I've always known you had to be a little crazy to be a dictator. Can you imagine it? Living in constant fear, a dictator's paranoia becomes as common as snack food. Every confidante is a traitor, every cook an assassin; you have to be on the lookout for those exploding cigars. Sure, the benefits are nice: You get your own pool and a slave to clean it (preferably the hot kind), but you're constantly facing threats from within your country, threats from without your country, insurgencies, rebellious sycophants. Really, you can't trust anyone, not even your faithful body double. No wonder Kim Jong Il is two doughnuts short of a policeman.

However, I must admit that I find the idea of wielding absolute power somewhat enticing. Wave your hand and BAM! His head is gone. So in the spirit of fear and repression of people everywhere, I present the following advice for would-be dictators:

1) Start in Africa. Your economy might be poorer, but as most of the world powers have given up on the "darkest continent" anyway, you might as well reap the benefits of their disdain. For example, does anybody know that approximately as many people die every four months in Congo's civil war as were killed in the recent Asian tsunami? One only has to look at Sudan to acknowledge that Africa isn't on top of anyone's priority list. As an enterprising tyrant, not only will you face less

resistance, but you can also play on racial fears to justify any action. For example, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is famous for declaring: "Our party must continue to strike fear in the heart of the white man, our real enemy." While most of your citizens and most of the world will look down on you with contempt for your hypocrisy, at least your misguided sense of justice will silence the tiny sting of that monster known as conscience. Caveat: Make sure your country doesn't have oil, as that just tends to complicate events.

2) Never deny entry to non-governmental organizations, such as advocates for human rights. Many dictators make the mistake of refusing international aid or entry in order to hide their human rights abuses from the world. This is a mistake, as brutality against your own people is rarely the reason your skies are full of bombs. The list of dictators who have perpetuated atrocities on the U.S. dollar is staggering. Some of the lesser-known crazies include Idi Amin, former dictator of Uganda, who profited from foreign aid while pumping up the body count. Ferdinand Marcos was the beneficiary of an \$88 million loan from the World Bank despite throwing 60,000 of his own citizens into jail for political reasons and torching various subversives' genitals. Roberto Suazo Cordova, Reagan administration puppet, received \$231 million of U.S. aid money. Though the United States denied knowing about his death squads or his drug trade, the evidence points to officials who had a serious case of suspended disbelief. The bottom line is that being

a dictator can be profitable, as long as one avoids the coup factor.

3) If you have the bad luck of being invaded, negotiate. The international community is often willing to cough up princely sums in order to avoid media embarrassment resulting from the death of its soldiers (and its previous economic support; see No. 2). Take General Raoul Cedras for example, once usurper of Haiti (nicknamed by the CIA the "best hope for democracy"). After his soldiers killed estimates of up to 5,000 people in the aftermath of his bloody coup over the democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, he took wing to Panama to live in peaceful, luxurious exile. He also received a \$5,000 stipend every month from the Clinton administration.

4) Before starting your dictatorship, make sure you have the proper tools at the proper prices. You may not have known it, but Costco is introducing a new line of product: coffins. Richard Hastings, a financial analyst for Bernard Sands, said Costco is trying to bring undertaking out of the oh-so-depressing funeral homes. "These things don't have to be a lugubrious experience any more," he said. "They've made it into a stylish process where people can make rational choices. That's called shopping." The 18-gauge steel caskets are available for the low, low price of \$799.99 and come in six colors, including lilac and Neapolitan blue. I recommend buying in bulk.

With these quick tips you are sure to be successful in your reign of terror. Until you have a country of your own, the friendliness-challenged can purchase their own Saddam Hussein action figure from Herobuilder.com. The democratically minded can also get a Condoleezza Rice figurine to kick his pudgy, white ass (while looking totally fabulous in her powder-blue blouse and lovely faux pearls).

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Editorial

Government needs lesson in frugality, prioritizing

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, the United States has spent more than \$4.5 billion on technological devices to defend our nation against terrorist attacks. This money was mostly dedicated to screening devices used at a variety of locales, such as tools to detect guns and biological weapons at airports and state borders.

Unfortunately, The New York Times reported last week that much of this technology has been deemed faulty; after spending billions of dollars in a panic wave over terrorism, the federal government has determined that many of these homeland security tools are "ineffective, unreliable, or too expensive to operate."

Whoops!

It turns out that equipment meant to detect radioactive material cannot tell the difference between bananas, cat litter and a nuclear bomb; new airport screening devices are no more effective than previous products; and machines used to protect the U.S. Postal Service actually monitor for only one kind of biological weapon threat.

To deal with these issues, the federal government is now poised to shell out billions more replacing unusable equipment. Officials estimate that around \$7 billion is needed to fix the problems with current technology, as well as to introduce brand new anti-terrorism devices.

Frugal shopping is the key. The U.S. government has obscene amounts of money on its hands, with the explicit duty to provide for the citizens of this country as best it can. Critics note that post-Sept. 11 technology was purchased without appraising competitive bids and that no one made sure the items in need were functional and reliable.

This oversight of the government is inexcusable.

Any U.S. citizen would agree that testing goods and finding the lowest prices are no-brainers when it comes to shopping; apparently the federal government needs to take notes on what it means to conserve resources.

When making decisions for this country in the future, U.S. leaders must remember to vote on logic rather than passion. Equipping our nation with protective technology is important but not as important as making sure all U.S. monetary needs are addressed in a responsible manner. Both anachronistic and obvious in a time of nationalistic fervor is that the United States faces a myriad number of problems besides terrorism. Already this year, President Bush has cut spending for education, health and housing programs; imagine what a wasted \$4.5 billion could have done for those programs.

Until every school, police station and community center receive all the funding they can ask for, the federal government must spend wisely and offer a severe apology to the nation when it fails to do so. U.S. citizens pay taxes with the express understanding that their money is going toward the betterment of the nation, not toward providing airports with the ability to detect kitty litter.

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