

Fascism

Madeleine Albright

I was 11 when I came to the United States with no goal more ambitious than to become a typical American teenager.

The USA has had flawed leaders before, but none more than the current whose statements and actions are at odds with democratic ideals.

When Trump says America first, are we ever thinking that any president put America second? It is the way you do it and not state it.

Fascism should perhaps be viewed as a political ideology than as a means for seizing and holding power.

Hitler's claim to distinction rested not on the quality of his ideas but instead on his extraordinary drive to turn warped concepts into reality

Hitler was a genius at reading a crowd and modulating his message accordingly.

Hitler felt that his countrymen were looking for a man who spoke to their anger, understood their fears, and sought their participation in a stirring and righteous cause.

Pundits talk today about the importance of authenticity in politics. Hitler lied shamelessly about himself and about his enemies.

Memories of the 20 th century would be far different had Italy chosen to align itself with France and Great Britain in the second world war, as it had in the first.

Mussolini caught Hitler's fancy because they both favored the same machismo laden rhetoric of dating, nationalism, anti communism and war.

Mussolini occupied 6 positions in the cabinet apart from being the leader. ' war is to a man what motherhood is to a woman' said Mussolini.

During the second world war, thousands of militant Hindus found their way to Germany, where the Nazis organized them into an legion to fight British forces in the sub continent.

Nearly a quarter of the US population had German ancestry and most of them hoped that a second war between their native and adopted homelands wouldn't be necessary

During the bombing raids on London, Londoners would come to office with toiletries , pillows, blankets and extra clothes. They would all duck into the bunkers every night.

Hitler was student of military history and understood the value of preparation and surprise. What he failed to grasp was the need to adjust his strategy to unwelcome facts.

As soon as he took office, Hitler removed all women from the bureaucracy, promising them 'emancipation from emancipation'

Hitler once in power, showed his indolent side, generally starting his day at noon and leaving the details of government to others. Stalin woke early, worked long hours, and demanded to be kept informed of every detail. Hitler was a teetotaler and a vegetarian, Stalin drank plenty and ate a lot, his chefs including Vladimir Putin's grand father prepared Stalin's favorite food.

I was Vice Chair of the NDI-national Democratic institute. The NDI is careful to stress that democracy requires far more than choosing a leader via the ballot box.

In a true democracy, leaders respect the will of the majority but also the rights of the minority- one without the other is not enough.

In 2017, the Economists democracy index had showed a decline in democratic health in 70 countries. The USA was rated a flawed democracy, not a 'full' democracy.

Innovation is the primary generator of employment and also the number one destroyer. Technology has enabled companies to boost productivity but it has also cost many jobs.

A reason for discontent with democracy is that public officials are having a hard time communicating their intentions and actions.

No country has the right to dictate to others how they should be governed, but we all have good reason to speak up on behalf of democratic values.

Venezuela was given its name – little Venice by a Spanish explorer who admired the way lake dwellers built their houses on stilts.

Chavez , smartly attired in khaki colored uniform admitted that his plan was a failure for Venezuela. There used to be a joke that Chavez deserved thirty years in prison, one for plotting the coup and twenty none for failing.

1998 was a time for change and Chavez promised that but immediately went back to using power to remove obstacles to yet more power.

Chavez never lost his ability to charm, but chose to repel.

There was a rebellion in Venezuela and Chavez left for Cuba with promise of safety for him and his family

A rebellion achieves its purpose when the insurgents have an advantage in coercive muscle or public support.

The Venezuela rebels did not have enough unity as they were splitting their own party. The population wanted Chavez to come back and he did.

Chavez was a combative man, not a cynical or devious one. He won four elections because the opposition was divided. In 2013 , he died of cancer.

Chavez had a peculiar style. He failed to appreciate the need for expertise in running an enterprise

A leader can become popular by compelling super markets and appliances to charge less. However, the cheering stops when the shops go out of business

Ordering cabinet ministers to take less salary is popular but it stuffs people with mediocre talent into the system and leads to bribery.

A former planning minister estimated that under Chavez, a third of the oil money was stolen or lost.

Chavez's anti US stance forced him to kick the US drug enforcement agency out of the country, this resulted in a 500 % rise of cocaine imports within three years.

Chavez intended to be president for life, and he was, but disease cut his dream short.

His successor, Nicolas Maduro is a rigidly ideological former bus driver and union boss who possesses every flaw and none of the virtues of the leader he replaced.

Ataturk in Turkey celebrated the virtues of science and kept a close eye on the practice of Islam. The government dictated what could be preached in the mosques, established a nationwide system of secular schools , specified equal rights for women and jailed anyone who argued that religion should play a bigger role in national life.

Ataturk's motto – 'for the people, in spite of the people'. For years Ataturk and his people had warned the country that the ascension of a religious party would take Turkey backwards.

Erdogan was a roaring success as a mayor, with his western suits and mild demeanor, he seemed a good future leader.

Erdogan concentrated his initial years on fostering prosperity and keeping religion at bay. Within a year, inflation dropped from 47 % to 22 %. Foreign investment started pouring in.

A decade after Erdogan took over, Turkey was known as the workshop of Europe, the overall economy had tripled in size, the average citizen was earning twice as much as before and the middle class was twice as big.

Erdogan after 2008 began a scheme to arrest and try hundreds of retired army and active duty officers for coup planning, corruption and other violations.

On July 15,2016, a faction within the military tried to kill Erdogan. He established a new Turkish identity – nine thousand new mosques were opened in his time and children in religious schools went up from 63,000 to 1.5 million. Erdogan became a polarizing force instead of a unifying one.

As early as 2006, Erdogan had talked about the need for Turkey to adopt an American style political system, with a strong president , instead of a party nominated prime minister.

In 2017, Erdogan sought and won the approval to abolish the role of the prime minister and transfer the authorities to him. In the current system, he can stay on, if reelected till 2029.

Erdogan always stuck me as a person with little charm but enormous intensity, not easily swayed.

Putin does not pledge alliance to democracy ideals but does not explicitly renounce it.

Putin was born in 1952, however his story begins earlier. His parents barely survived the second world war.

Putin has led Russia longer than anyone else except Stalin and describes himself as ' a pure and utterly successful product of a soviet patriotic education system'

During the great depression, Americas economic output declined by a third, in the 1990s, Russia's shrank by more than half.

Like several men profiled in this book, Putin came to power in 2000, because his predecessors were thought to have fallen short.

Putin was doubtful that the US had Russian interest at heart , since the US had backed Gorbachev and Yelstin, Yelstin left his office with a 8 % approval rating.

Putin is not an electrifying speaker, he is a steady leader , one who attends to his duties.

Putin is also a show off, it is difficult to imagine any western leader show judo moves, pose shirtless, rub noses with a dolphin.

Putin wants his subjects to believe that he is politically invincible. He strives everyday to discourage potential competitors from trying or daring to develop a serious nationwide coalition against him.

Russia's pioneering use of social media in the US election does not reflect a cultural aptitude for hacking but rather Putin's experience in the KGB where spreading disinformation was both a way of life and an art.

With communism no longer viable, the default rallying cry for an autocratic Russian leader is nationalism.

The real danger posed by Putin is that he will be a model for other leaders who want to retain their grip on power indefinitely despite political and legal constraints.

Visitors to North Korea are always told that the people seem happy. I was told the same in military run Burma. People often smile out of fear.

Decades ago, George Orwell suggested that the best one word description of a fascist was bully

Trump often praises actions of leaders in other countries that undermines institutions. Trumps view of USA is dark, he thinks the courts are biased , the FBI is corrupt and the press always lies.

In his first month in office trump excluded some prominent reporters from a press briefing. Almost immediately the government of Cambodia threatened to kick out a bunch of American journalists. Other governments like Hungary,Libya,Russia, Somalia and Thailand feel the same

The Trump administration foreign policy is based on two words – ‘principled realism’ and ‘America first’

A second source of blurriness in Trump's vision is that it offers no incentive for friendship.

There are those who consider Trump to be an unintelligent man. I make no such accusation. I do, however confess concern about his steadiness and the brittleness of his ego.

It is important for Trump to realize that actions taken today depend largely on expectations of the future.

It is worth remembering that fascism rarely makes a dramatic appearance – Mussolini in a crowded cellar, Hitler on a street corner and the n dramatic events unfold. Then governments silence a media outlet that's critical.

Each of us yearns for liberty

There is nothing wrong in wanting a strong leader. No one wants a weak leader. The list of national leaders who were thought to be virtuous before a dark side of their character came along is many.

Robert Mugabe in 1980 was hailed as a hero. In 1985, Hun Sen seemed right to lead Cambodia. Uganda's Museveni promised full democracy when he took over in 1986. Ortega, Kagame etc. add to this list.

As secretary of state I was proud to represent presidents Bush and Clinton in calling the USA the 'indispensable nation'. I worry today that the US by its own choice is becoming less admired and less relevant in shaping world affairs.

In November 2016, Obama's rating was the highest of his presidency, yet the electoral college rewarded a candidate who insisted that USA was going to hell.