

Niccolo machiavelli's the qualities of the prince critical thinking

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



The Qualities of the Prince

Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Qualities of the Prince* (1513) carries political advice that many political analysts of today would find as practical as it sounds out-fashioned. His instructions to the prince or ruler include the employment of controversial/unorthodox methods to maintain power and keep order. Machiavelli claims to base his rhetoric on "what is done as opposed to what ought to be done." This paper considers Machiavelli's rhetoric as presented in his work, "The Qualities of the Prince" and assesses the validity of his advice in the political scenario today.

The Role of the Prince in Military Matters

Machiavelli advises that a prince should take nothing as his profession but war, its institutions and discipline as it is what befits the one in command. The writer argues that when not at war, a prince should study the art of war, familiarize with his territory and enemy tactics for only then he can be well prepared for the eventuality of war.

The United States of America constitution puts the president in the role of Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy. (Findlaw). Therefore, the need for the president to be well versed with the art of war cannot be overemphasized. The nation runs many wars across the globe especially against international terrorism and therefore the president has to know the way around military interventions and procedures. Little wonder that the two major presidential contestants in America have their credentials for the role of commander in chief scrutinized or tested publicly before the general elections.

Similarly, other nations assign the role of commander in chief of the armed forces to the president. It logically follows that, the person in top command of any empire or country (whether a king, prince, president or prime minister) should always have his abilities as commander in chief sharpened. Therefore Machiavelli's advice to the prince regarding war is very appropriate and practical.

A Prince should Know how to be Good and when to Use this Knowledge or not according to Necessity

Machiavelli attempts to draw a thin line for a prince, between what is done and what ought to be done, wittingly advocating for the former. He acknowledges certain vices like cruelty, harshness, miserliness et cetera that may despise the prince but goes a head to advice that the prince may harness them appropriately to maintain loyalty and power.

The American government too believes in certain vices that are necessary to keep America or the world safe from terrorists. A case in point is the controversial Guantamo Bay incarceration facility run by America. Whatever happens inside the facility has lately been subject of international criticism with calls for its immediate closure coming for many quarters. However, for America or even president Obama, the Guantamo Bay prison, the soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan may be a “ necessary vice” meant to help keep America safe.

In the same spirit, many nations continue to do things that raise eyebrows both locally and internationally. Kenya recently refused to arrest president Bashir and hand him over to the International Criminal Court despite it being bound to do so by the Rome statute that created the court. For Kenya and

other nations, especially in Africa, such actions may be necessary to maintain regional stability.

A Prince should rather be Viewed as Miserly than Generous

Machiavelli reasons that a prince who is viewed as generous does not miss an opportunity for lavish display at the tax payer's expense. Such a prince extends generosity to his few friends and in the end angers the majority of his subjects whose taxes sustain the lavish lifestyle. For the prince to have adequate resources to keep his empire together even during war, he has to be miserly.

Ironically, Machiavelli's advice regarding generosity of the prince may not be favored by many political leaders today. A case in point is Africa, where many governments have been founded on the support of sycophants, cronies and associates who in turn benefit from the ruler's generosity in many ways and at the expense of the tax payer. As a matter of fact, when the leaders fail to reward their cronies with top government jobs (which may sometimes call for the creation of meaningless posts in the government), their effectiveness is highly compromised.

It follows that, many leaders today get away with excessiveness demonstrated towards their close friends and supporters. Contrary to what Machiavelli believes, it cannot be disputed that money well distributed among a few close supporters can buy one's way into power and maintain it with total disregard to what the public may think.

Princes should rather be Cruel and Feared when Necessary than be Merciful and Temporarily Loved

According to Machiavelli a prince that demonstrates cruelty to maintain order may just be feared but not necessarily hated. He does not object to the use of unorthodox methods to quell unrest or dissidence.

In the spirit of consolidating power, President Daniel Moi of Kenya, for 24 years employed fear, torture and cruelty of all sort against dissenting voices. Just after his rule ended, former political detainees revealed how Moi's regime tortured them to extract confessions on alleged crimes committed. Indeed, many African leaders have succeeded in maintaining power for longer periods of time by using cruelty to suppress opposing forces (Ochieng). Nevertheless, it is the same cruelty that has over long periods of time elicited fear and hatred from the subjects and eventually led to the downfall of great dictatorships.

The world today has no space for regimes that use cruelty to suppress opposition. Machiavelli is wrong think that " executions coming from the prince harm only one individual in particular". Today, the democratic space is much more expanded and members of the public are increasingly aware of their rights. Therefore, political leaders will always be punished for using cruelty to force loyalty.

As Opposed to being Loved, it is safer to be Feared in a Manner that Avoids Hatred

There are times when being feared may mean a more firm grip on power for a prince. Machiavelli reasons that it is possible for a prince to be feared and not hated at the same time by showing cruelty only when there is " proper

justification and manifest cause". A prince may achieve the same by keeping his hands off the property and the women of his citizens and his subjects. Machiavelli is right to mention that leaders can maintain power by not appearing to be too merciful to offenders who may disrupt law and order. Even in big democracies like America and India, offenders do not away with their crimes just to please the masses. Indeed, the only way to deal with indiscipline especially in the military may not seem merciful to the public, yet it may be crucial to avert a potential mutiny.

How a Prince Should Keep His World

Machiavelli argues that a wise ruler should not keep his promises if doing so disadvantages him or the reasons to keep the promises become invalid. He further advises that there will always be valid reasons for a prince to break his promises. In other words, the prince has to learn to be a hypocrite since the masses will always go along with it.

President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya promised the electorate that he would deliver a new constitution within the first 100 days of office. A lot of political analysts argue that the president reneged on the promise upon the contemplation of a few ramifications of the proposed new law that him and his cronies were not comfortable with. He reneged on so many of his campaign pledges that by the end of his first term close to or even above 50% of the electorate wanted him out of power. The president was so unpopular that, that it is widely thought (both locally and internationally) that he rigged the elections.

Deception of the electorate to win their support during electioneering

periods is a widely practiced vice all over the world. However, President Obama appears to want to keep his word regarding the closure of the Guantanamo bay detention camp having signed an executive order to that effect on January 22, 2009 (Rhee). He is working towards a complete withdrawal of American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Today members of the public consider seriously the fulfillment of pledges made to them by presidents before they vote in their favor for the second time. Therefore, it would be imprudent for any leader to go down the Machiavelli's path of deception and dishonesty.

Works Cited

Findlaw. U. S. Constitution: Article II. n. d. 11 October 2010.

< <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/article02/>>

Ochieng, Z. Stunning Revelations. March 2003. 11 October 2010.

< http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_1282.html>

Rhee, F. Obama Orders Guantanamo Bay Closed, Bans Torture. 22 January 2009. 11 October 2010.

< http://www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2009/01/obama_orders_gu.html>

>