

# Do Not Trust Princes

I was born during the Second World War when it seemed that Hitler was going to conquer the world. Of course, had he, I would not be here today. I grew up during the Cold War when we fully expected Russia to drop a bomb on us. The powerful Stalinist Soviet Union challenged the West both ideologically and militarily. The free world was divided between a dominant, rich, United States of America, the victor of two World Wars, and the world of old Imperial European powers now diminished and slowly returning to their modest origins. The pompous arrogant Europeans resented the power of America.

America, like any Imperial power, was and remains flawed. But its strength lies both in its size, wealth, and freedoms that constantly rub up against each other in contradictory ways. For example, valuing the freedom of speech, but also the freedom of everyone to carry guns. Valuing private property but refusing to allow security cameras in public for fear of invading privacy. Respecting democracy but allowing judges to buy their posts. Committed to a fair society for all, but not having a national health system. Separating religion from State yet giving religions enormous benefits and power and calling on God all the time. Freedom comes in many forms. For all the USA's dysfunctionality and anomalies, most people on earth if they had a choice would opt for the USA.

In the 1950s it looked very much as if Communism, in its various forms was challenging America all around the world. Senator McCarthy ran a witch hunt, and the country was divided between the Republicans and the Democrats as much as today. Then as now, most Jews because of their Eastern European Marxist origins supported the left.

Russia appeared to be strong with a grip on its empire. Its advances in technology looked as if they had outstripped America. There were wars in Korea and then Vietnam not to mention Central America and the Middle East. Permanent conflict seemed to be the natural state of affairs. But then the Soviet Union collapsed and fragmented. Western triumphalists declared their delight in the supremacy of the free capitalist world. It had won. History was over. Alas, as history teaches us, things are never static however slowly they may change. And now the boot is on the other foot. Capitalism has failed screams the chorus. Maybe, but what's the alternative?

China once struggled under its Maoist ideology in the shadow of Japan. Slowly, inexorably, despite setbacks caused by rigid ideology, the tables turned. Disasters forced them to reconsider their economic policies and thanks to dictatorial State control, China began its inevitable rise with its new form of Capitalism. The Tiananmen Square protests and more recently in Hong Kong, have brought a strong, autocratic, violent response to any political challenge. Despite the howls from the West over Tibet, the Uighurs, the South China Sea, and threatening Taiwan, no one is now strong enough to challenge her. China has risen to become the great superpower, soon to overtake the USA by fair means and foul.

Noticing how successful China has become, Russia too is now challenging Western hegemony. Except that it lacks its economic strength and its massive population ( only 1.4 billion compared to 146 million ). Whatever grip the neo-Fascist Vladimir Putin has over his country and however hard he tries to suppress opposition, imprison opponents at home, and have others assassinated abroad. Putin has intervened militarily, conquered territory, bullied former vassal states, and defied international law. Putin is now trying to rehabilitate Stalin by shutting down archives that recorded his crimes. But he will never have the capacity that China has to silence opposition at home and abroad. It is ironic and sad that he has done a better job in reining in anti-Semitism than anyone else. But that's another story.

If historically and culturally China respected tradition and obedience, Russia has always been rebellious, unpredictable, and unstable. Seething with brilliant minds and discontent. Having suffered the psychological damage of losing its power Putin is now riding on China's shirrtails. And this time Europe has neither the resources, the will nor the strength to stand up to Russia. And the United States has withdrawn either into appeasement or idle threats. A new order has risen.

To those who worship at the altar of supremacy, the United States is in trouble. Torn apart by internal division, racism, anti-white, African Americans, Indigenous Peoples, Asian Americans, Latin Americans, and way down the list, Muslims, and Jews, are all vying to have their voices heard and pulling in different directions. Meanwhile, crime, drug use, promiscuity, and gross materialism reigns supreme. And over it all, influencers on the internet or in Washington control the levers of power. Politicians are merely media clowns filling up the pork barrels for other snouts. It's a corrupt mess. What does the future look like?

Humans are not very good at predictions and as Steven Pinker has shown in his latest book ***Rationality: What It is, Why It seems scarce, Why It Matters***. In it, amongst a lot more, he argues that we often rely too much on probability in making decisions. And probability, important as it is, is not always the best basis for decision-making.

I cannot predict what the short-term future has in store. As the great Hebrew prophet Amos said "I am not a prophet nor am I the son of a prophet"( Amos 7:14). But I can say that a country or a culture that suppresses opposition or tries to impose just one perspective on its populace, regardless of its economic success, is destined to fail. This is the lesson of the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, where they all agreed on one goal and suppressed any opposition to it.

But the other lesson we can derive from the Bible is that opposition, different points of view, is crucial to a healthy state. It was only by challenging Pharaoh that Moses was able to establish an alternative moral system. True prophets stood up to autocratic kings while false prophets supported them. The prophets could not avoid self-caused catastrophes or defeats. However, they stood up for a culture of questioning, of morality, of resisting. And I believe this is what has enabled Jews to create an antinomian culture of survival. By contrasting their value system with others

and by offering an alternative narrative. While tolerating (in the main) other ways of living and believing. Perhaps that's another reason for hatred. No one likes to be told there is another way of looking at things.

If China or Russia try to suppress opposition you can bet that at some stage, the whole edifice is going to come crashing down. Suppress dissent and you will fail! A country that allows freedom of expression is not perfect but it's a safer place to live in for those who want to think for themselves.

Let me leave you with two quotes. From the Bible. From *Psalms 146:3* "Do not trust in Princes." And from the Talmud, *Avot.2.3*," Beware of the ruling powers, they only care about those who will benefit them."

.