

# THE DICTATOR'S HANDBOOK:

STEP-BY-STEP  
AUTOCRACY

A practical manual  
for the aspiring tyrant

by Randall Wood & George DeLuca

Free  
Excerpt

1. Shut down internet
2. ... registrations
3. Take phones
4. Intimidate ...
5. Hang ...
6. ...
7. ... journalists
8. ... Richard ...  
M. Tater Airport
9. Round up : interrog
10. Surprise  
visit the generals



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# The Dictator's Handbook

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*A Practical Manual  
for the Aspiring Tyrant*



*by Randall Wood and Carmine DeLuca*

First edition: June 2012

[www.dictatorshandbook.net](http://www.dictatorshandbook.net)

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by Randall Wood and Carmine DeLuca ©2012

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## Forward

Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want and deserve to get it good and hard.

---

H.L. Mencken

**Y**OU would like to be a dictator. And why shouldn't you? Play your cards right and it's the best job on earth. Think about it: is anything lovelier than unbridled power, limitless economic opportunity, and the pleasure of crushing those who oppose you? Does the morning air not smell sweeter knowing your enemies are humbled, crippled, or dead, and the wealth of your nation lies at your personal disposal? And is there any goal more satisfying than being indispensably at the nexus of your country's government, economy, and society, controlling, choosing, and taking your cut? And are you a family-minded sort? Then you'll want to ensure your son or daughter steps in to follow in your footsteps as you age, to protect the family fortune and continue your legacy. And finally, let's be honest: doesn't it feel good to be revered as a demi-god? Of course it does!

Don't be foolish: it's not going to be easy. You will have enemies on all sides, difficult choices to make, and the whole world watching your every move. But you've also got lots of impressive examples to follow. You've been watching those who preceded you, and thought to yourself: surely, they're using a practical manual, a playbook, a map to the top! A manual indeed exists, and you're holding it in your hands. Read on, young dictator, and if you learn well you too will taste ultimate power.<sup>1</sup> Soon you will be able to add your own chapter to the Dictator's Handbook: The beauty of autocracy is the myriad nuances, personal variations, and cultural backdrops that facilitate creativity and interpretation. Your own country's culture, economy, and socio-political context will provide you with boundless opportunities for experimentation: Stand on the shoulders of the giants who preceded you, and when it comes time to pass on some of that wealth, remember these humble authors!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For the rest of you, this book will also serve as a partial catalog of some of the barbaric, shameless, self-serving, and opportunistic practices of the world's leaders. Too many students and practitioners of political science, development, and economics graduate with knowledge of best practices, and are flabbergasted by how few of those theories are actually employed. The world's tyrants understand "best practice" but are operating out of a rule book of their own: *this* is that book.

<sup>2</sup>When we say, "remember these authors," we mean, "share some of the loot," not "throw us into some bottomless pit."

## Chapter 2

# Inimitable You

This is the epitaph I want on my tomb: “Here lies one of the most intelligent animals who ever appeared on the face of the earth.”

---

Benito Mussolini

**R**EMEMBER this: It’s all about you. Fundamental to your rule, your struggle against external and internal enemies, your grinding path against judicial, military, and political obstacles, is the unshakeable conviction that *you alone* are capable of leading the nation, and that under anyone else’s leadership your people will flounder in disgrace. This self-confidence has been common to countless autocrats, living and dead. In other words, a little megalomania goes a long way. ‘Dictator’ is not a job for wall-flowers or meek intellectuals, and you know from experience that only the strong inherit anything other than the sleep of the grave. Some might question your enormous self-belief. Don’t let them get you down, and above all, be persistent.

That sense of conviction explains many newspaper headlines, and the determination of many a heavy-handed leader, and even some ousted leaders who brave unspeakable difficulty to reclaim what they believe is theirs. That was the story for Pakistan’s General Pervez Musharraf, who returned to his country at the risk of being arrested<sup>1</sup>, understood that endurance is sometimes more important than the will of the people, and that if you hang around long enough good things will happen.[14] Paraguay’s Alfredo Stroessner was a strong man, but his ascension to power ended 27 years of coups, rebellions, and non-democratic government transitions between presidents who barely lasted a year each. In fact, perhaps you and your strong, fatherly

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<sup>1</sup>Other hurdles for General Musharraf: a hostile judiciary, the Pakistani army intent on de-fending President Zardari, a gamut of political parties who would all benefit from attacking him, and the Pakistani people, who nearly universally disliked him.



guidance are the only things holding your nation together. Many would argue that Saddam Hussein was the only thing preventing Iraq from splitting into factions. It may be true: Iraq's sectarian violence certainly took a pretty dramatic upturn the afternoon the American troops left.<sup>2</sup>[347] Same goes for Libya under Mohammad Khadafi. Khadafi's body was still warm in the grave when Libya began to splinter into competing, rival factions, and regions declaring their immediate autonomy.[316] [88]

Learn the arts of self-promotion, since you can hardly expect a nation to follow you blindly if they're only minimally aware of your greatness. But regardless of how you promote yourself, make sure that you also have the skills to back your advertising. These include the arts of persuasion, plain-speaking, organizational skills, and a forceful, boisterous personality. Use charm and charisma to seduce your benefactors and funders, whether they be the pro-democratic West, religious radicals, or the ethnic business class of your nation.[346] You must be able to translate vision into reality, and straddle the fine line between "generous, benevolent father" and "the iron fist." And all times, keep your beatific presence at the center of the national conversation.

## 2.1 You Are the State

Just as there is more to leadership than simply being able to persuade and lead, there is more to the state than just infrastructure. When your persona and nation mingle and become inextricable, you have transcended simple humanity and joined the ranks of those who personified their nations or movements. Think of it this way: if savior, redeemer, and the shining link between God and nation does not describe you, then you've got some work to do. Everyone in the nation should assume you are a demi-god. Says author Blaine Harden [232]:

"If you took a quarter-century worth of His Excellencies the African leader and tossed them in a blender, you would come up with a Big Man who looks like this:

"His face is on the money. His photograph hangs in every office in his realm. His ministers wear gold pins with tiny photographs of Him on the lapels of their tailored pin-striped suits. He names streets, football stadiums, hospitals, and universities after himself. He carries a silver-inlaid ivory mace or an ornately carved walking stick or a fly whisk or a chiefly stool. He insists on being called 'Doctor' or 'the big elephant' or 'the number-one peasant' or 'the wise old man' or 'the national miracle' or 'the most popular leader in the world.' His every pronouncement is

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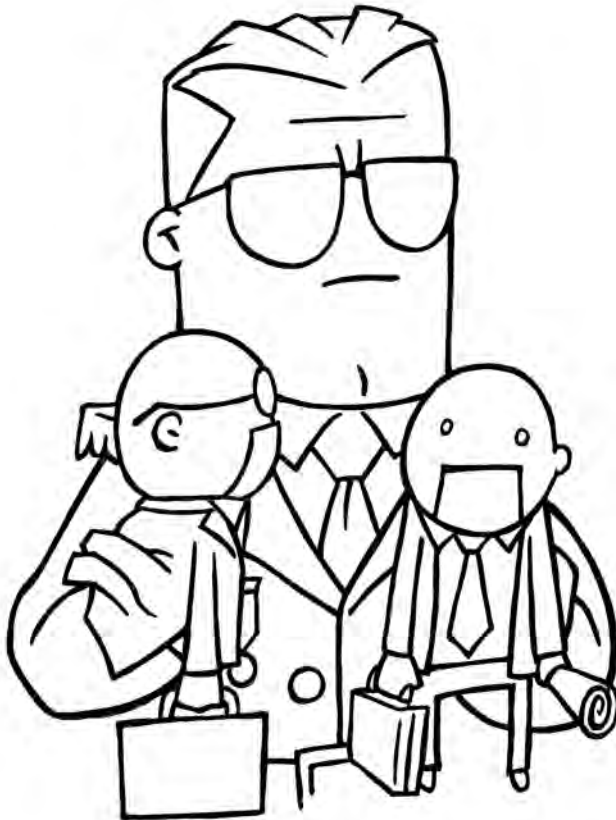
<sup>2</sup>No points to Nouri al-Maliki, Iraq's Prime Minister, for subtlety, that's for sure.

reported on the front page. He sleeps with the wives and daughters of powerful men in his government. . . ”

Obviously, this is just a starting point, and applies not just to African “Big Men.” Here are the top 10 things to do just to make sure everyone knows who their daddy is:

- Build statues: the bigger and bolder, the better, and preferably with your face looking out over sea, frowning over the city, and contemplating the horizon (over which you’ve got your foreign accounts, probably). This is such an important subject it deserves its own section. See section 2.2.6.
- Require your picture, front and center, in every government office in the nation.
- Require your picture, front and center, in every business whose owner doesn’t want to get shut down.
- Put your picture on currency and coins. Coins last nearly forever (imagine the future archaeology student who digs one up and marvels at your scowling profile on the obverse) but in the meantime are a tangible reminder of your omnipresence. They’re also a fun obstacle to impose on your successor, who will have to deal with changing the currency should you ever be removed. And until he does, his pockets will jingle with your smiling mug. Or, if you’re ambitious, superimpose your face on nature itself. There can be little argument with the man whose silhouette blots out a mountain face or gorge, as does Mussolini’s.[22]
- Name things after yourself: ball parks, stadiums, bridges, schools, universities, neighborhoods, even weapons. Idi Amin renamed Lake Albert to Lake Mobutu Sese Seko, and Lake Edward to Lake Idi Amin Dada.[489] The Dominican Republic’s Rafael Trujillo named the capital Ciudad Trujillo and the highest mountain Pico Trujillo.[239]
- Make your birthday, your wife’s birthday, or your mother’s birthday a national holiday. You can potentially do as Turkmenistan’s Saparmurat Niyazov did and even rename the days of the week after your family members as well. North Korea’s Kim Il Sung had the national calendar re-calibrated so that 1912 – the year of his birth – became Juche 1.[235] Niyazov’s successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, upon taking office, not long after his predecessor’s death, began naming all that stuff after *his* family members.[349]
- Insist on a half hour’s time on every television network in the nation. Use the time to talk favorably about yourself and cast aspersions on

“Major Sabah Khalifa Khodada, a career officer in the Iraqi army, was summoned from his duties ... for an important meeting. It was nighttime. He drove to his command center ... where he and some other military officers were told to strip to their underwear. ... Each of the officers, in his underwear, was searched and passed through a metal detector. ... The clothing was then laundered, sterilized, and x-rayed. Each was instructed to wash his hands in a disinfecting permanganate solution. They ... were then transported in buses with blackened windows ... and then were searched again as they filed off. They had arrived at an official-looking building. Khodada did not know where. ... They were instructed not to talk, just to listen. When Saddam entered they were to rise and show him respect. They were not to approach or touch him. For all but his closest aides, the protocol for meeting with the dictator is simple. *He dictates.*”[112]



### 3.2.2 Getting What you Want

As the top man in your government, you should be able to get what you want, and you have all the means at your disposal necessary to ensure your government administration serves your purposes. Be inspired by Niger's president Mamadou Tandja, who needed a referendum that would permit him to run for office a (constitutionally-prohibited) third time. His constitutional court ruled three times that the referendum plan was illegal. This was clearly not the right answer, so President Tandja dismissed the entire court and appointed a new one, composed of three hand-picked nominees, three magistrates chosen by (his) minister of justice, and a university professor. He posed the same question to the new court, who ruled, not surprisingly, that a referendum would be just fine.[48] This is a fine example of making sure the presence of various "institutions of state power" don't get in the way of the only institution that matters: you.

Ecuador's Rafael Correa understood that lesson perfectly. Elected president on a platform of social and economic reform, Correa used that mandate to ensure his administration complied with his directives. Once, he called for a constituent assembly; when Congress questioned it he dismissed opposition lawmakers; and when a constitutional tribunal declared the dismissals illegal, he dismissed the tribunal's members.[228] Likewise, Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega used the same logic to extend the periods of 23 top judges and magistrates whose terms would have otherwise come to an end as prescribed in the Constitution, claiming the change was necessary to satisfy his constitutional obligation to provide stability to the country and prevent chaos. [410]

And Paraguay's Alfredo Stroessner took this a step further, ensuring his team consisted of compromised men on whom he could count fully. A former American ambassador recalled how the Paraguayan ambassador to Buenos Aires had gambled away the embassy's entire budget. Stroessner scooped him up and forced him to sign a confession, and then promoted him to foreign minister. "He could never have an independent thought or deed after that," the American ambassador recalled.[424] Spain's infamous dictator, Francisco Franco, personally hired and fired all cabinet ministers, the 50-odd provincial governors, the mayors of all large cities, all military commanders, all bishops, and the heads of the 24 major workers' unions.[466] And leave it to North Korea to take the strategy and run it to its inevitable conclusion: there, bureaucrats perceived to have "failed the regime," regardless of whether they were simply carrying out some other paper-pusher's orders, are routinely either executed or fall victim to inevitable traffic accidents.<sup>1</sup>[419]

It doesn't always work. Peru's Alberto Fujimori is famous for two things: being the first Latino president of Asian heritage, and his "auto-coup" of 1992. Faced with an opposition congress, Fujimori in one fell swoop suspended the constitution, purged the judiciary, and closed congress. Executed

---

<sup>1</sup>Did someone say something about the importance of promoting efficiency in government?

<b>Leader</b>	<b>Nation</b>	<b>In Power</b>
Fidel Castro	Cuba	1959 – 2008 (49y)
Kim Il Sung	North Korea	1945 – 1994 (49y)
Mohammar Qaddafi	Libya	1969 – 2011 (44y)
Omar Bongo	Gabon	1967 – 2009 (42y)
Eyadéma Gnassingbe	Togo	1967 – 2005 (38y)
Alfredo Stroessner	Paraguay	1954 – 1989 (35y)
Teodoro Obiang N.	Equatorial Guinea	1979 – present (33+y)
Jose E. dos Santos	Angola	1979 – present (33+y)
Suharto	Indonesia	1967 – 1998 (31y)
Mobutu	Zaire	1965 – 1996 (31y)
Rafael Trujillo	Dominican Rep.	1930 – 1961 (31y)
Robert Mugabe	Zimbabwe	1981 – present (31+y)
Hosni Mubarak	Egypt	1981 – 2011 (30y)
Paul Biya	Cameroon	1982 – present (30+y)
Yoweri Museveni	Uganda	1986 – present (26+y)
King Mswati III	Swaziland	1986 – present (26+y)
Blaise Compaore	Burkina Faso	1987 – present (25+y)
Zine Ben Ali	Tunisia	1987 – 2011 (25+y)
Islam Karimov	Uzbekistan	1989 – present (23+y)
Kim Jong Il	North Korea	1994 – 2011 (17y)

Table 4.1: Longest Serving Leaders

in the evaluation panel that decides which firm gets the contract. You are uniquely suited to channel resources, make decisions, stop or start projects, and spend the government's money. How could it possibly be any different?

### 4.1.3 Rule 2: The Principle of Double Purpose

Now that you are at the center of the economic and political universe, absolutely everything you do should serve at least two purposes. Your goals should be to act in ways that a) benefit you personally by either weakening your opposition, consolidating your power, or enriching your party or family, while at the same time b) furthering at least the illusion that your nation is growing, advancing, or developing along a path to greatness. If your government breaks ground for a shopping center, your family's cement factory should get the contract for the cement and an entrepreneur who is also a political supporter should get the right to run it. If your government negotiates with a donor to implement a "Government Decentralization" program, it should enable you to place your supporters at the local level and ensure your next victory. If your government starts to build a highway, it should run straight through your political opposition's territory, fragmenting them geographically, or next to your own farms, increasing their value and

crushing their economic competition. If your country takes on reform of the customs system, it should not only attract donor financing but provide a new source of revenue for your political party, and ideally, be led by a technical consultant from your own ethnicity. The principle of Double Purpose thus allows you to have your cake and eat it, an exceedingly rare thing.

#### 4.1.4 Rule 3: A Chicken in the Pots You Choose

Never forget this: your people need to eat. If they are so badly off that they can't put food on the table, they will begin to look for alternatives to you. But if you can provide them a minimal standard of living, they will probably settle for that. And if you can provide them that, as well as the opportunity – real or perceived – for a bit more, they will likely spend their energy striving for the next level, and leave you alone. In fact, as dictator, you can easily afford to stifle political expression and opposition, but you can't afford to stifle economic activity. If your people begin to suffer too greatly it will lead to determined organization against you. So make your offer to the people an either-or offer: you will provide basic economic growth, provide the conditions for some to find jobs and put food on the table. But the benefits accrue only in exchange for a tacit understanding that the system will only distribute benefits under your watch and in your presence. Let them work, earn, and save what they can, but strike them down mercilessly if they organize politically against you (or even simply *without* you). Once your people learn the limits of your patience, they will mostly likely content themselves with their working class wages and jobs that barely cover their expenses and put food on the table. And they'll be too busy working to riot, and may just concede, "It's not a lot but it's better than nothing." Bingo – you will be left alone for the long term.

This rule is the basis for most regimes in the Middle East, although the Chinese have applied it successfully as well: prohibit popular participation in politics in any public forum, including participation in civil society. Clamp down on activism in all forms. Then take control of the economy by whatever means necessary, from direct investment, expropriation, or simply getting involved in – and assuming control of – key industries. Once the revenue starts to flow through you, you will be well placed to let some of the scraps trickle down as you see fit.

Likewise, meticulously-selected political reforms can go a long way to keeping you in power. These actions are substantial propaganda coups as well, as they permit you to more easily refute accusations of autocracy. Follow the lead of Morocco's King Mohammed: Upon taking the throne in 1999, he moved quickly to undo some of the egregious human rights abuses perpetrated by his father, King Hassan. His first official speech as head of state described the king's plans for economic liberalism, constitutional monarchy, regionalism, decentralization, and a political field that permitted multiple parties. He permitted the repatriation of a Marxist political exile,

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