

SIGNS OF STRENGTH, FAKE & REAL

Ken Olson

Before the election, we were deluged with signs. A few showed up afterwards in the form of bumper stickers. Here's one (not quoted precisely): "Trump: Finally, Someone With B@##%." Of course, those posting such vulgar slogans confuse their leader's belligerence and bullying with something called strength.

To be direct: you don't need Psychology 101 to know that strong men (or their boosters) do not obsess over manliness, testicles, and testosterone, and that doing so is an obvious (and pathetic) sign of over-compensating for insecurity and weakness. In the same vein, how many have died in wars started by authoritarians merely as a boast that they had "guts?"

We have always assumed that our leaders should exhibit exemplary strength, but not in weightlifting and body-slams. Recall that Trump had Hulk Hogan onstage at the Republican National Convention. Did this "wrestler" ripping open his shirt reveal anything of the authentic strength that the presidency requires? In the entire event, where was any reference to authentic fortitude as demonstrated by integrity, honesty, humility, decency, and compassion? Trump shows us the very opposite qualities.

Trump strong? His ego is so fragile that he can't even accept having lost an election. And his weakness was on full display at the Helsinki conference when he totally caved to Putin, something that made millions wonder, "What does Putin have on him, anyway?"

Now, Trump has served Putin again, turning Truth completely upside-down by saying that Ukraine, not Russia, started the war! (And, yes, Hitler used that same sort of insidious lie about Poland to begin his own war.) Shockingly, at the United Nations our delegation recently voted against a resolution condemning Russia for its unprovoked invasion. The US stood against Ukraine --and most of the rest of the planet—to side with Russia and North Korea!

And Trump has removed Russia from our list of cyberthreats, lowering our defenses against their spies, and Gabbert, who had earned the nickname "Putin's girlfriend," is our new Director of National Intelligence. Russia is cheering Trump's closing of Radio Europe/America Liberty. (Wanna bet on a Trump Tower in Moscow?) I cite all these items because Fox News almost always "spares" its viewers in that bubble from the ignorance and the despicable associated with Trump.

Thus, our nation is no longer the world's strongest guardian of freedom and democracy (!), as Trump, now in full gangster mode, threatens our allies and friends, openly betraying values that America has defended since the beginning of WWII.

Meanwhile, his fans "pledge allegiance" to him by posting bizarre flatteries that mirror his grandiose self-image. So, he "absolutely loves" the fake magazine cover of himself as King Trump (our Revolutionary War was fought to be rid of kings). Some even claimed he should be on Mount Rushmore (worth a Cabinet appointment).

Then, there's the tough-guy actor Sylvester Stallone, gushing to Trump that he's "as great as George Washington ...and even Jesus Christ!" Any psychologically normal leader would rebuff

and ridicule such blasphemies, but Trump is not normal; being a malignant narcissist, he feeds upon them.

Such adoration of make-believe strength is what happens in the most dangerous personality cults. While many of us pray for our daily bread, Trump has followers who must be praying for their daily illusions. Of course, they reject such comparisons; cult members always do. “Please spare us,” they say –from hearing the truth, as when Trump claimed that research on “transgender mice” was “real.” False, again. The word is “transgenic,” referring to altering genes, something that one day might cure cancer, Alzheimer’s, diabetes, heart disease. Paranoia and cutting research won’t.

Eric Hoffer was a self-educated longshoreman who worked his entire adult life on the shipping docks of San Francisco. Among his highly regarded published works is *The True Believer* (1951), a penetrating analysis of why mass manipulation works. Here’s a taste: “Faith in a holy cause is to a considerable extent a substitute for the lost faith in ourselves. The less justified someone is in claiming excellence for himself, the more ready he is to claim all excellence for his nation, his religion, his race, or his cause. His need is for a genuine crusade – uncompromising, intolerant, proclaiming the one and only truth.”

Right here in America --of all places-- there are many signs of such fanaticism. An ancient teaching concerning the qualities evidenced by genuinely strong and benevolent people states, quite simply, “A good tree bears good fruit.” We should be able to read those signs and those of the opposite, also.

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