

HEAVY IS THE HEAD THAT WEARS THE CROWN

Outline

A) Introduction:

- i) Source of the statement and breaking down the statement.
- ii) Thesis statement: A person, organization, or an entity in the position of leadership has to face constant and ever transforming challenges.

B) Examples from History:

- i) The sword of Damocles in the Greek Chronicles.
- ii) Hadith of Prophet (P.B.U.H) about leadership and attitude of Hazrat Umar (R.A) about Khilafat.
- iii) Abraham Lincoln, the American Civil war, slavery, and assassination.
- iv) John F Kennedy, the Cuban missile crisis, space race, and assassination.
- v) The British crown facing Napoleon, Russian Empire, and world wars.

C) Evolving threats and Examples from Contemporary Era:

- i) Preventing a climate catastrophe and US leadership
- ii) Preventing a nuclear war and IAEA, and the United Nations
- iii) The threat of cyber attacks
- iv) Managing AI proliferation and the coming challenges

D) Conclusion

The Essay

"All that glitters is not gold" is a timeless saying that forces man to think of what is behind the facade of reality. While man may pray and yearn for gold and crown the challenges associated with them are often hidden from plain sight. William Shakespeare, in his play Henry IV, addresses this phenomena when he says "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown." He strips away the glimmer and glory of the throne and brings out the troubles and pains of the position. Certainly, a closer look at events like assassinations in Roman parliaments, and that of American

presidents, one can ascertain that a person, organization, or an entity in the position of leadership has to face constant and ever transforming challenges. From a brief look at human history, one can find examples like the Sword of Damocles in the Greek chronicles, challenging circumstances and assassinations of American presidents, the British crown facing threats from Napoleon, the Russian Empire, and Germany in two world wars. The weight of the position is also addressed by the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) in the hadith. So true is the adage that its implications in the contemporary world and the future can be delineated. Some of the challenges that will make wearing the crown difficult include, the challenge of climate change, all out nuclear war, cyber warfare, and proliferation of sentient Artificial Intelligence. All these threats, and challenges reinforce the adage that uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.

Let us dive into the topic further. The first example we have upfront of our-

selves is of the sword of Damocles from the Greek chronicles. Damocles is a servant in the Greek court and is conversing with the king about how pleasurable is the crown and he has servants to serve him, perfumes to adorn himself, and gold to purchase what so ever he may please. The king amused at what Damocles is saying asks to switch places with him for a day, which Damocles of course accepts. Damocles takes the crown and sits on the throne as the king comes down. As he sits on the throne, he finds a sword hanging above his head. The king in order to remember the threat of enemies had a sword suspended with a horse's tail hair above the throne. Damocles having seen this pleaded with the king to come down from the throne as he could not take the pressure of a sword hanging above his head. The instance has been immortalized in numerous paintings, depicting the constant dangers that stand above the crown.

The weight of the throne is also talked about in the teachings of Islam. The first instance is from a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) where the importance of leadership is highlighted. The hadith reads as "each of you is a shepherd, and each is responsible for his flock. While the hadith on one had puts everyone on the position of leading his "flock". On the other hand the hadith notes that the responsibility of the flock is also on the head of the shepherd. This of course means that the food security are to be arranged by the shepherd. The second instance is of Hazrat Umar (R.A) Talking about the importance of the Khalifat. He says that "if a dog dies of thirst at the banks of Euphrates, Umar will be responsible". This signifies the importance of position of leadership. The Khalifa is not only responsible for the men, women, children, and elderly, but also the animals. The crown, or rather the person wearing the crown is accountable for each and everything that comes under its ambit. All provisions are to be provided by the crown. The crown

cannot just be about making policies, and treaties, but it is about looking after the people's needs. This again reinforces the message that uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.

Moving forward to the 19th century America, we have the example of President Abraham Lincoln who ~~forced~~ faced his share of troubles. He took over American leadership in perhaps the most troubling times. His decision to abolish slavery divided the country into North-South division. The South wanted the slavery to continue while the North favored abolition. This disagreement on the policy led to the country to a civil war and the North fought against the South, as the South seceded from the ~~confederate~~ confederation. Both sides fought and suffered great losses with the eventual surrender of the South. The war however divided the country to a great degree, the effects of which were highlighted in the coming years. After some time Lincoln was assassinated as he was watching a play in a theater. This

Tenure as President is a prime example of how the crown makes a person take difficult decisions and face the consequences of these decisions. In a sentence, Lincoln had to abolish slavery, fight against his fellow Americans and as a result pay for it with his life.

Similarly, John F. Kennedy became the president of the United States in the 1960s. The era saw the highest point in the Cold War and illustrates how hard it is to wear the crown. Kennedy took the office when the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were fierce competitors in space, arms, and making alliances. Kennedy had to compete with the USSR launching the first satellite in space, the first human orbiting the Earth, making higher flying and faster jets, and making defense deals with nations of the world. He had to do all this while not bankrupting his country and without opening the doors of nuclear holocaust. The glimmer of his tenure as president is evident from the fact that the

United States conducted nine successful Apollo missions - manned missions to the moon. His troubles of the Cuban missile crisis are perhaps not much talked about. With American missiles in Turkey, the USSR was placing its missiles in Cuba. The moment is said to be the most difficult time of the Cold War as the world was on the verge of a nuclear war. Kennedy might have negotiated a peaceful way out of it but he was later assassinated in mysterious circumstances. This example also highlights how with glimmer and glory the danger of death is ever present.

One last example you can draw on from history is of the British empire. The empire having seen the Glorious and the industrial revolution reached its pinnacle where the sun did not set on the British flag. With such a vast empire - the human resource, the knowledge and experience - the resources - one might get carried away at the pomp of the British royalty. An excerpt from Gadratullah Shahabi's "Shahabnama" illustrates

the British using gold and silver paper in their tobacco in India. Like Janocles you might be only looking at ~~the~~ one side of the coin. The British in order to reach and maintain that status had to first fend off the rise of Napoleon on continental Europe and in Egypt, later they had to contain the rise of Russian Empire under Czar Alexander I and Russian expansion in the Balkans. Lastly, they had to fight two world wars with Germany and suffer massive casualties in trench warfare, mustard gas, artillery shelling, and many other atrocities. This example of the British empire also signifies that uneasy lies the head which wears the crown. The crown has to manage its competition, enemy strikes, and be able to muster its people to fight with it.

All these examples from history solidify the message at the core of the statement. The message is also true for the contemporary era as crowns might have changed but the role remains the same.

The contemporary world faces different challenges and those in positions of authority still remain in a difficult - "uneasy" - position.

First example in this case can be of climate change. Over the last 100 years the surface temperature of the Earth is gradually increasing and the years 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 were the hottest years in human history. Experts from the UN agencies have called on the world to make emissions cuts to hold the temperature rise in a 1.2 to 1.4°C range to sustain human, plant, and animal life. At such a crucial time, world leaders like the US and China face the burden of sustaining their economies - highly dependent on fossil fuels - and making emission cuts - to prevent a climate disaster. This example symbolizes how the modern crown is not taking decision for its own people but for the people of the world. On the one hand both the US and China would like to continue mining of minerals, and construction of roads and dams, to increase their wealth, they have to do it

in a way that doesn't push humanity over the edge. Shakespeare's wisdom is deeply rooted in this example as both America and China would like to increase their influence but not at the cost of making the planet unliveable - because for now we do not have any alternate.

Similarly, another example humans have in front of themselves is of weapons of mass destruction and the nuclear winter. The nine nuclear armed nations of the world have an estimated 12,000+ nuclear warheads, with both US and Russia having more than 5,000 each. Certainly, mankind is at a point where it can destroy itself many times over. At such a time, the crown lies not only on the head of statesmen but also on international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). All the statesmen, and international organizations need to keep in check nuclear proliferation and the movement of nuclear material across the world so that non-state actors cannot

use this material for Terrorism. While nuclear energy becomes a necessity for the world the organizations like IAEA and the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) need to monitor deposits and transfer of knowledge and material. The proliferation of anything would of course have devastating impacts for nations across the globe. That is why the head that wears the crown will remain uneasy in the contemporary world.

likewise, the world is entering in the digital age and the crown now faces digital threats. Nations across the globe are shifting to digital infrastructures in order to give better service to the public, but at the same time this upgrade makes infrastructure susceptible to cyber attacks. The case has been demonstrated by Ukraine with its attacks on Russian oil refinery and gas pipelines in the Baltic sea. Pakistan also demonstrated this with it cutting down the connection between Indian High command and the

frontline forces - making the fog of war dense - and immobilizing front line forces where the crown in the past had multiple factors to consider in their security calculations, the modern era has included digital threats to the list as well. Certainly, the head cannot rest easy as threats now emerge from the digital space as well and can disenfranchise a person or a group from the position of authority. Therefore, Shakespeare's wisdom holds true in this realm as well that the head that wears the crown cannot rest

easily, as the digital revolution carries on and the world enters the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the troubles of the crown continue to multiply. A hint of what is to come is demonstrated by deepfakes and fake audio generators. A video message from can be crafted against the crown and their position can be weakened. Where propaganda was mastered by the Nazi regime in the second world war, a new form of

and even more potent propaganda is now available with AI. Facts can be twisted or even constructed out of thin air to turn the tide of narrative. This is especially dangerous in an environment where the masses are not educated in the use of and in distinguishing real from fabricated reality. The head that wears the crown today needs to account for the troubles that AI poses. As AI becomes more and more integrated in our lives and as it becomes smarter, the risk of AI becoming sentient and human losing control becomes a reality. The crown must therefore watch out for a coup from the digital servant. Where AI is helping states to compile data, improve service delivery, and make quicker decisions, it also presents the danger of becoming a dangerous master.

To conclude, the timeless wisdom of Shakespeare, that uneasy lies the head that wears the crown, holds true even

Today, while humans tend to obsess over the glamour of the throne, they forget the responsibility it places on one's shoulders. The crown has to either send people off to fight wars, or lead them into one, it has to look after their good, security, and property, it has to be wary of coup plots and enemy attacks. In addition to this, the crown of the contemporary world faces renewed challenges like climate change, nuclear holocaust, cyber warfare, and AI proliferation. Certainly, human experience is boiled down into maxims and adages like this one by Shakespeare. Hence, anyone in the position of power has to face constant and ever transforming challenges and indeed uneasy will lay the head that wears the crown.

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