

Too Many Madmen

by Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

In Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" more-than-a-century-ago, Huck is none too thrilled with his new life of cleanliness, manners, church, and school. Tired of his confinement and fearing the beatings by his father, Pap, Huck escapes from Pap by faking his own death, killing a pig and spreading its blood all over the cabin.

As crazy that may sound," it was an effective way to induce an adversary like Pap to stand down. Looking a little crazy may be an effective way to apprehend adversaries. This is called 'madman theory' first devised by Machiavelli. According to Machiavelli, "at times it is a very wise thing to simulate madness." That's what he wrote in "Prince" in 1517 AD.

In the modern world, the madman theory has been used by the world leaders many times. Richard Nixon tried to apply it diligently. During the 1968 presidential campaign, he told Haldeman (later Chief Staff to President Richard Nixon), "I call it the Madman Theory, Bob. I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war."



Madman theory makes the leader look as unpredictable. In the current time Donald Trump criticized American foreign policy by stating, "We are totally predictable. We tell everything. We have to be unpredictable, and we have to be unpredictable starting now." Trump claimed credit for using a crazy approach to bring North Korea to the bargaining table, that no one else could have done. His success story apparently ended inconclusively at the bargaining tables of Singapore and Hanoi.

Kim Jong-un himself is perceived as a madman. Trump called him 'crazy', and 'little rocket man'. Kim is constantly playing a madman by repeatedly testing missiles to destabilize Japan and South Korea, and the United States.

In the backdrop of Russia's Ukraine invasion, a new madman has emerged in the geopolitical arena in the form of Vladimir Putin. Putin is playing madman game by keeping the use of nuclear option open by keeping the Russian nuclear forces on a high combat alert.

Machiavelli, certainly, asked to be 'wise' while 'simulating' 'madness'. What happens when too many people try to simulate craziness at the same time? The madman theory loses its effectiveness in such a situation.