



Reputation management

Glitzkrieg

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Respectability is for sale. Here is a buyer's guide. Names are omitted to protect the guilty from blushes and us from lawsuits

PICTURE yourself as a big shot from an unpopular country—leader of an oil-rich bit of the Middle East, say, or a tycoon from a grungy bit of the former Communist world. You wish your family could shop, invest, socialise and study in the richest and nicest parts of the world (and flee there if needs be). But you don't deserve it and won't earn it: you will not stop torture, allow criticism, obey the law, or keep your fingers out of the public purse.

Luckily, respectability is on sale. You just have to know how to buy it. The place to start is London. Among its advantages are strict libel laws, which mean nosy journalists risk long, costly legal battles. And helpful banks, law firms, accountants and public relations people abound.

Laws on money-laundering have irritating requirements about scrutiny of new customers. This used to be merely an exercise in ticking boxes, but has got a bit tougher. Still, a well-connected and unscrupulous banker will be your best friend, for a fee. You cut him in on some lucrative transactions with your country or company. In return he will pilot you through the first stages, arming you with a lawyer (to scare rivals and critics) and an accountant (to keep your books opaque but legal).

Next comes a virtuous circle of socialising and do-gooding. Start with the cash-strapped upper reaches of the cultural

world: a big art gallery, an opera house, or something to do with young musicians. Donations there will get you known and liked. Or try funding a prize at UNESCO or some other international do-gooding outfit. Support causes involving war veterans or sick children. Sponsoring sport works too. But don't overdo it—the public is wiser than the glitterati, and will soon scent a crude attempt to buy popularity.

Send your children to posh English schools. Shower hospitality on their friends: they will be important one day. But invite the parents too: they are influential now. A discreet payment will tempt hard-up celebrities to come to your parties. Minor royals are an even bigger draw: British for choice, but continental will do. Even sensible people go weak at the knees at the thought of meeting a princeling, however charmless or dim-witted.

Many such titled folk like a lavish lifestyle but cannot earn or afford it. So offer a deal: you pay for their helicopters, hookers and hangers-on. In return, they bring you into their social circuit, and shower stardust on yours. You will need patience: the parties are dull and the guests vapid and greedy. Building your reputation as a charming and generous host may take a couple of years. But once people have met you socially they will find it hard to see you as a murderous monster or thieving thug. Useful props in this game are yachts,

private jets, racehorses, ski chalets and mansions.

Armed with social and cultural clout, you can approach money-hungry academia and think-tanks. A good combination is a Washington, DC, think-tank and a London-based university (Oxford and Cambridge, being richer, are also choosier about whom they take money from). The package deal should involve a centre (perhaps with a professorial chair) and a suitable title: it should include words like global, sustainable, strategic and ethical.

I stink, you think

On the subject of titles, expect an honorary doctorate for yourself and a PhD for your favourite young relative. This need not be an onerous undertaking. A lobbying firm can help with the research. Think-tanks' flimsier finances make them easy prey too—and they are more immediately influential than universities. Most of their experts are expected to raise all their own funds. A few million here or there is chicken feed for you but a career-saver for them and their programmes.

Sponsorship does not just make you look brainy and public spirited. It also skews the academic debate. If you are a pious Muslim, let it be known that a focus on uncontroversial subjects such as Islamic architecture, calligraphy and poetry will keep the money coming. Textual criticism ••

of the mutually contradictory early versions of the Koran, by contrast, is a no-no. If you are from Russia, support cheerleaders for the "reset" in relations with America and pay for people to decry former Soviet satellites as irrelevant basket cases. If you are in oil or gas, pay for studies criticising the disruptive exercise of competition law on energy suppliers.

Then move on to the media. Generous advertising in the mainstream print dailies is a good way to make friends. Nobody will read the lavish supplements that trumpet your imaginary virtues and conceal your real flaws. But the newspaper's managers will be happy. It may be too much to expect them to get the journalists to tweak their coverage (though that can happen) but you will find it easier to put your point across. Sumptuous fact-finding trips are an easy way of making hacks' heads softer and hearts warmer. You can also hold conferences, with high fees for journalists who moderate sessions or sit on the panels. They will soon get the idea.

You are now in a position to approach politics. Most rich countries make it hard (or illegal) for foreigners to give money to politicians or parties. But you can oil the wheels. A non-executive directorship can be a mind-changing experience. Invite retired politicians and officials for lucrative speaking engagements and consultancy work: word will soon get around and the soon-to-retire will bear your interests in mind. Even better, set up an advisory council stuffed with influential foreigners. You need tell them nothing about what you do. Nor do you have to heed their advice.

Foreign respectability also makes you look good in the eyes of your own people. And it demoralises your critics, crushing their belief that Western media, politics, academia and public life are to be admired.

Your progress from villain to hero will not always go smoothly, especially if you have to start killing your opponents. But when the alarm is raised, your allies will rally to your defence. A tame academic can write an opinion piece; a newspaper grateful for your advertising will publish it. Your fans can always say that someone else is much worse and that you are at least a reforming, if not fully reformed, character. A few references to American robber-barons such as John Pierpont Morgan will bolster the case. So too will a gibe at less-than-perfect Western leaders such as Silvio Berlusconi. After all, nobody likes hypocrisy. ■

Correction Our special report on the future of food (February 26th) said an African Development Bank programme aimed to cut waste by 3% a year over seven years. That should have been 3% over seven years. A Cornell University project aims to cut the cost of genetic identification to \$30 per million DNA markers, not per million genes. And *Bacillus thuringiensis* makes maize resistant to some pests, not to herbicides. Our report on Libya and the UN (March 5th) mis-spelled the name of Eileen Donahoe, America's ambassador to the Human Rights Council. Sorry.

How to start a nation

Trappings of state

Getting a brand new country off the ground is a fiddly business

SOUTH SUDAN chose its new national anthem in democratic style. In a packed concert hall in Juba, the young state's scruffy capital, rival choirs performed their entries. Purists argued that the winner's tune did not fit its lyrics. But the decision has laid down one stone on the road to statehood. Less fun lies ahead. Hooking up with the international system's buried wiring involves gaining everything from telephone dialling codes to internet suffixes, via postal connections, air-traffic control and trade tariffs.

A foreign service is already taking shape. Around 100 southerners worked as Sudanese diplomats; diaspora members already man outposts in many countries. More staff are needed. Outsiders are hurrying to help. Independent Diplomat, a charity, is advising the new state. Austria is offering five places at the world's oldest diplomatic school in Vienna.

Their first task is formal but vital: to gain diplomatic recognition. Notching up all 190-odd countries will take time-Estonia, which regained independence in 1991, has relations with only 170, most recently formalising ties with Haiti in 2010. But recognition from the world's main governments (and the likely lack of any opposing voices) enables a vital step: membership of the United Nations.

South Sudan will tread a path already navigated in recent years by East Timor, Eritrea, Slovakia, and the ex-Yugoslav and ex-Soviet republics that had big-country blessings on their birth. The process is hardly glamorous: new countries do not get an embossed birth certificate or a fanfare. Instead, the Editorial, Terminology and Reference Service of the United Na-

tions Documentation Division will enter the state in "Country Names"-a pamphlet that lists in six languages the popular and formal names of full UN member nations. Outsiders such as Abkhazia, Kosovo, Northern Cyprus and Western Sahara have to make do with a place on lesser lists, such as those compiled for less political purposes by the UN Statistics Division.

The listing in New York sets many wheels turning. It grants a spot in iso 3166-1, a directory compiled by the Geneva-based International Standards Organisation. This list converts national names into two- and three-letter codes (AFG for Afghanistan; ZWE for Zimbabwe). These codes will help sort the new state's international post, mark out its citizens in immigration databases and allow the South Sudan pound to feature on international exchanges when it launches in July. The national top-level domains used in web addresses (like ".fr" for France and ".de" for Germany) are usually the same as the iso two-letter codes. South Sudan's web sites may have the sinister if logical ".ss" suffix.

International telephone codes are allocated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a UN agency also based in Geneva. It will grant the South Sudanese a dialling code, replacing Sudan's +249. (Eritrea, until now Africa's newest country, is +291, so +292 could be for South Sudan.) The ITU also divvies up radio wavelengths. A South Sudanese space-satellite programme may still be some way off, but the new country will have a place in the weighty Master International Frequency Register.

Before South Sudan's new diplomats relax on the cocktail circuit, they will also need to establish ties with a long list of other outfits. The International Civil Aviation Organisation deals not just with air travel, but will also help the new government issue machine-readable passports. The Universal Postal Union will allow the country's new postage stamps (eagerly awaited by philatelists) to convey letters abroad.

That is a big hurdle for would-be countries outside the fold: Somaliland's mail often comes via Ethiopia; Palestine's post until recently had to go through Israel; until 2008 post between Taiwan and mainland China went via Hong Kong or Macau. South Sudan has no coastline, but it may well join the International Maritime Organisation, much preoccupied these days with piracy in nearby waters. Around half the world's landlocked states belong to the body.

Textbooks, encyclopedias and wall maps may take time to catch up with the new country. Some cash-strapped libraries still use atlases showing fossils such as the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. But after decades of struggling for independence, South Sudan is not short of patience. ■

