[**Sound leadership**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1738670/sound-leadership)

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PAKISTAN suffers not only from a famine of funds: it is starved of sound leadership. Those who aspire to lead it should follow Winston Churchill’s advice: “Study history.” Former US president Richard Nixon, in his book Leaders (1982), chose six individuals who had built their nations, saved them, or “moved the world in a singular way”. (Wri­ting a postscript in 1990, Nixon regretted not having been able to include Britain’s Margaret Thatcher, Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew, and our Gen Ziaul Haq whose “courageous policies” caused the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan.)

Forty years later, Nixon’s acolyte Henry Kissinger has provided his own selection. In his book Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy (2022), he repeats Nixon’s choice of France’s Charles de Gaulle and Ger­m­any’s Konrad Adenauer, then adds Nixon, Mrs Thatcher, Lee Kuan Yew (“the Giant from Lilliput”), and Anwar Sadat who aspired to restore Egypt’s “eternal identity”. Kissinger defines leadership as “the capacity for analysis, strategy, courage and character”. He believes that leadership is “most essential” during periods of transition but recognises that, contrary to our expectations, “most leaders are not visionary but managerial”.

Konrad Adenauer after World War II revived a devastated and divided Germany. His aims — fulfilled by his successors — were to achieve the reunification of Germany, and in time a “unified Germany within a unifying Europe”.

In many ways, Adenauer’s strategy was paralleled by Gen de Gaulle. In the 1940s, de Gaulle spent his war years in exile in the UK, being treated as a third-rate ally by the British and the Americans. In 1958, he returned to Paris to lead his country into its Fifth Republic. His avowed mission was “to save the country, to change a discredited political system, and to restore the army to the path of obedience”. He succee­ded in achieving all three aims. De Gaulle withdrew from Indo-China, liberated Algeria, survived assassination attempts and retired unscathed to his country home.

Kissinger’s book has relevance for us.

Kissinger’s section on Nixon covers the ground both had tilled in their voluminous memoirs. Kissinger quotes the self-analysis by Nixon, in which he describes himself as a tough bold strong leader with a philosophical turn of mind: “At his best in a crisis. Cool. Unflappable.”

Reading Nixon’s generous self-appreciation, the reader is reminded of Jawaharlal Nehru’s essay on himself, published under the pseudonym ‘Chanakaya’. Nehru war­n­ed his ego against changing from a populist leader into some triumphant Caesar, who might turn dictator “with a little twist”. Kissinger’s assessment of Mrs Thatcher recounts how, despite her degree in chemistry, she was rejected by ICI UK for being “headstrong, obstinate, and dangerously self-opinionated”. Given the opportunity to lead, however, she modernised Great Britain and made it, if not great again, at least a relevant Britain.

Kissinger’s book sparkles with quotes such as Lee Kuan Yew’s observation that modern elections are “a contest in packaging and marketing”, or the observation that China and the US will perform a balancing act, oscillating between strategic rivalry and peaceful coexistence.

He regrets that there are few visionaries left, those who “treat prevailing institutions less from the perspective of the possible than from a vision of the imperative”. Instead, he says, we have social media platforms, in which “users are divided into followers and influencers, not leaders”.

The book has more than a passing releva­nce for Pakistan. At this time of self-ind­uced despondency, Kis­singer warns us that no society can survive if “it loses faith in itself or if it sys­tematically impu­gns its self-perception”. He quotes Ade­n­au­er’s successor Hel­mut Schmidt: “Evil unchecked gro­ws. Evil tolerated poisons the whole system”, and that “po­l­i­tics without a conscience tends towards criminality”. Politics must always be pragmatism, with “moral ends”. For the Sharifs and Zardaris and their ilk, he includes a poem by Philip Larkin that ends: “All we hope to leave them [our children] now is money.”

Had Imran Khan read Kissinger’s book earlier, he would have come across president Dwight Eisenhower’s reprimand to Kissinger: “Never tell anyone you could not do the job.” He might have then eschewed his petulant diatribes against his former mentor Gen Bajwa.

Kissinger makes a passing reference to Alexander the Great, whom many regard as a synonym for leadership. Using “discipline, speed and shrewd political sense”, Alexander, by the age of 32, had become master of over two million miles of empire.

If Alexander repeated his journey today from north to the south of Pakistan, he wouldn’t have suffered wounds, injured ribs, nor endured privations. He could have travelled (as I did) by a Sialkot-based airline. It would have treated him, as he did Porus, like a king.

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