**An army of lions**

[**Lt Gen Asad Durrani Lt Gen (retired)**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/lt-gen-asad-durrani-lt-gen-retired)

December 01, 2021

...led by a sheep will be defeated by an army of sheep led by a lion”. It’s a famous quote with ownership contested across the time and space frontiers—from old Greece to present-day Ghana. Since it’s about the pivotal role of the leader, uncontested over the ages; its unique status is a given. Archives are overflowing with, and the shelves are creaking under, the literature on leaders and leadership. Never have so many ventured to formulate a set of principles—at times a dozen or more. Some indeed would be common in all the lists, but others like humility and clarity might not be. There are traits however that had no chance in hell to qualify as an attribute of a leader.

Pretty early in his current incarnation, contrary to his pre-election absolute rejection of the option, Imran Khan decided to take the IMF route. To bless his about-turn, he sanctified it as a hallmark of leadership. Someone from Khan’s inner circle violated the decorum of the high office he had been granted for his sycophantic talents and sneered that the promises made before polls were like pre-matrimonial vows—not to be taken to heart. Of course we all make compromises at one time or the other, but do so without any chest thumping. A leader in fact, always mindful of his credibility, takes great pains to convey that it was only a tactical concession and the ultimate aim remained sacrosanct. Imran on the other hand got so infatuated with his convoluted code that he missed no U-turn thereafter. It’s not his fault if some people have still not given up on him.

[Pakistan reports 377 coronavirus cases in one day](https://nation.com.pk/02-Dec-2021/pakistan-reports-377-coronavirus-cases-in-one-day)

Another trait, universally acknowledged as the stamp of leadership, is the courage to take responsibility when things go wrong—and just in case something good happened, give credit to the team. Not a popular practice amongst politicos but seeking undue recognition is the death knell of a leader. In the 1990s, when IK was going around raising funds for his cancer hospital, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, an icon of an artiste and recipient of many national and international awards, performed pro bono to help. Sometime back when the prime-minister bragged that it was he who had introduced the famous maestro to the world, the Great Khan must have turned in his grave.

One attribute of a leader that Imran did get right was the ability to take pressure. He often mocked Musharraf for having wilted under the weight of a single call from Washington, which ironically has gone down in history as a U-turn of our Afghan Policy. In the last three years, Khan has set an unbroken record of bending under threats—mostly from powers less mighty than the US.

[Blinken warns Russia of 'high-impact' economic steps](https://nation.com.pk/02-Dec-2021/blinken-warns-russia-of-high-impact-economic-steps)

After Delhi revoked the special status of Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir in August 2019, Mahathir Mohammad, the legendary leader of Malaysia, hosted a select group of leaders. One telephone call from MBS was enough to keep Imran away from the conference that was to address our core issue. In due course, we learnt that he had not only been forewarned of Delhi’s cataclysmic decision, but also told not to create any fuss over it. Expectedly, he didn’t go beyond a cartographic exercise and renaming a road—and made no effort even to mobilise humanitarian aid for the besieged Kashmiris.

There were good reasons to assume such a spineless response from him as only a few months earlier, the Prime Minister had returned an Indian pilot shot-down by our Air Force within the grace period allowed by Modi. We therefore have good reasons to suspect that when asked if Pakistan would provide any bases to the Americans to resume their military activities in Afghanistan, the famed “absolutely not” was merely for the birds. Not too difficult to guess who’s providing money for an airbase in Nasirabad close to the AfPak borders.

[At least 23 countries have reported cases of omicron variant: WHO chief](https://nation.com.pk/01-Dec-2021/at-least-23-countries-have-reported-cases-of-omicron-variant-who-chief)

Going slow on the CPEC may be rationalised in a number of ways, but if one suspects that it was done under American pressure, no one was likely to contest the argument. One never imagined that a day would dawn when a fair-weather ally could deliver some serious knocks to what we always considered an iron-clad relationship.

Paradoxically, all of this happened in the face of Pakistan having withstood immense pressures in pursuit of its core interests.

In the 1960s when we were building a relationship with Peking, the US, then the first amongst our earthly benefactors, was quite upset. Taiwan was the only China in those days, it wanted to know. We stuck to our guns and a few years later helped both our friends, new and old, tie a useful knot. We again dug-in our heels and refused to oblige the same US, now our frontline ally against the Soviets occupying Afghanistan, when it asked us not to have any truck with Iran who had taken over the American Embassy in Tehran.

No one needs to be reminded of how Pakistan kept itself on the nuclear track despite threats and sanctions over decades, but no harm talking about the immense steadfastness displayed by our deep, and not so deep, states over the last twenty years to ensure that the resistance in Afghanistan would one day liberate its country.

[PM Imran Khan directs to operationalize CPEC projects timely](https://nation.com.pk/01-Dec-2021/pm-imran-khan-directs-to-operationalize-cpec-projects-timely)

Oddly, most of these gains are now at risk because the present dispensation in Islamabad has the feet of clay. God knows how much of our tottering ties with Beijing are due to Washington’s acrimony with China, but clearly, we’re dragging our feet on recognising the Taliban Regime in Kabul because of the sword of FATF hanging on our heads. It will remain there till we tell them to go get lost. In the meantime, one must reckon that the disciples of Chanakya might jump the gun and accept the legitimacy of the government in Kabul. In one small step they would have washed all their sins with the Taliban. And just in case they’re worried that their archrival would once again cross a critical threshold under their cover—remember how India paved the way for Pakistan to become a nuclear weapon state—they need not. This time around, a nation of spirited souls is being led by the faintest of hearts.