**[Never say die](https://www.dawn.com/news/1757023/never-say-die)**

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HENRY Kissinger, often viewed as a war criminal, marked his 100th birthday last Saturday amid the usual accolades of the high and mighty, alongside a few barbs from others with a more realistic view of what his realpolitik entailed. Those hosting the soirées, however, tend to overlook the blood on the hand that cuts the cake.

Kissinger served as national security adviser and secretary of state in the Nixon and Ford regimes, and had been a consultant to the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. His advice has been sought by every US government since he last held public office in the mid-1970s. In many ways, he is a key architect of the world in which we live.

It may be fairly remarkable that his intellect remains intact, and his recent interventions on questions such as Russia/Ukraine and China/Taiwan are more nuanced than the bluster of the Biden administration. The ultimate aim in both cases, however, is pret­­ty much the same: maintaining US hegemony in a world where alternatives exist.

Kissinger faced a somewhat similar dilemma during his years in power — it isn’t uncommon to view him as effectively a co-president in what has been dubbed the Nixinger administration. Much has changed in the half-century since the US strove for better ties with both China and the Soviet Union than the two had with each other. The conciliation with Beijing was achieved in part through the good offices of Pakistan’s military ruler Yahya Khan.

Kissinger’s victims can’t mark his deadly century.

It isn’t unreasonable to assume that the Yahya regime might have been deterred from its 1971 military action in East Pakistan had Washington sought to dissuade it instead of egging it on, ignoring the information and advice it received from the US consulate in Dhaka and its embassy in New Delhi. Recently declassified texts of recorded White House conversations reveal the extent to which Richard Nixon held Indira Gandhi — and, more broadly, all Indians — in contempt, with Kissinger echoing the racist platitudes.

Bangladesh, infamously dismissed as a ‘basket case’, might not make it to the top five of Kissinger’s ‘greatest hits’, though. There are many others. The primary slot must be reserved for Indochina — not just Vietnam, but also Laos and particularly Cambodia. There are several others, not least Chile, East Timor and Angola, where catastrophes unfolded courtesy of the Nixinger regime’s ignorance, insouciance, encouragement or intervention.

The secret bombing of Cambodia was to ostensibly flush out or eliminate Vietnamese communist guerrillas (the Vietcong or, more accurately, the National Liberation Front). But villagers in bordering villages were killed in the bombing raids, strafing from helicopters, and by boots on the ground who didn’t just shoot everything that moved — in keeping with Nixon-Kissinger instructions — but also looted villages.

The intervention wasn’t that direct in Angola, Chile or East Timor, but the human consequences were not dissimilar. A Soviet-backed liberation movement’s ascendancy in Angola simply had to be resisted, even if it meant collaborating with South Africa’s apartheid regime. The result was years of avoidable violence.

In Chile, US efforts to thwart Salvador Allende’s mandate in 1970 led to the Pinochet coup 50 years ago. Indonesia’s Suharto had presided over a massacre of hundreds of thousands of suspected communists — using lists provided by the CIA — since the mid-1960s. The massacres of freedom fighters in East Timor a decade later were not considered a travesty. In the case of Angola, Kissinger was surprised when the Cubans intervened to prevent a takeover by South Africa.

The Washington hi­­erarchy bristled when Nelson Mande­­la thanked Fidel Castro for preventing the apartheid regime from extending its ascendancy by conquering Luanda on behalf of the US. That wasn’t the only Kissinger venture to go awry, however. Perhaps it could even be argued that almost everything he touched globally turned to excrement sooner or later. Which makes his status as an oracle among substantial segments of the US foreign policy establishment all the more insane.

Notwithstanding Kissinger’s purported threat to “make a horrible example” of Z.A. Bhutto if he proceeded with Pakistan’s nuclear aspirations, there was a bit of a mutual admiration society between the two of them, with ZAB hailing Kissinger as a 20th-century Metternich. Kissinger is quoted in Owen Bennett-Jones’ The Bhutto Dynasty as saying: “I am reluctant to negotiate anything with Prime Minister Bhutto. I always lose my shirt.”

Contrast those underhanded compliments with the opinion of the late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, who wrote in 2001: “Once you’ve been to Cambodia, you’ll never stop wanting to beat Henry Kissinger to death with your bare hands … and you will never understand why he is not sitting in dock at The Hague next to [Serbian leader Slobodan] Milosevic.”

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