

KISSINGER'S ONE-HUNDRED YEARS

On May 27, Henry Kissinger turns one century. He does so with full intellectual aptitude, making realistic analyses and contributions on the international situation that gave rise to his position as National Security Adviser and Secretary of State in the Richard Nixon's Administration.

To assess it, it may be interesting to review his contributions and statements about the war in Ukraine made during the last year.

In May 2022, close to turning 99, he lectured in person at a meeting of the Davos Forum. There, for 22 minutes, and in dialogue with a speaker, he gave his vision of the conflict. Specifically, he stated that it was a mistake for Russia to leave Europe, because this would leave a more insecure continent. He also argued that it was dangerous to push the Eurasian power into a military alliance with China and that Ukraine would have to accept certain territorial concessions.

His lecture took place after a participation by the Ukrainian president, Volodimir Zelensky, which he carried out by Zoom before the same audience. The reactions were mixed. The Ukrainian president was applauded by the "globalized elite" who meet annually in the Swiss city to try to find out where the world is headed.

Instead, Kissinger's words were followed by silence. He uttered the "politically incorrect", according to the prevailing opinion in governments, the academia and Western journalism. However, he, faithful to his intellectual rigor, said what he really thought, as a contribution to reflection on the dramatic situation. He was largely criticized. In general, focused on his supposed out-datedness and his realism supposedly in conflict with the idealism of values. He was unfairly criticized for underestimating the role of democratic values in causing the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, which is really between Russia and NATO.

Months later, in October, when he was 99 years old, he published a new book: Leadership. It is an essay where he analyzes six leaders that he knew personally at different stages of his life, who in his view changed the fate of their nations. For Kissinger, leadership is the ability to lead the society of a country behind the necessary changes. In other words, it is about the ability to explain and convince.

He began with Konrad Adenauer and his reconstruction of postwar Germany. He continues with Charles De Gaulle and his ability to lead his fellow citizens in a moment of defeat and uncertainty. Next is Anwar Saddat and his successful effort to change the state of his country, transforming the effects of defeat into a realistic and effective change of international reintegration. He continues with Lee Kuan Yew, founder of the state of Singapore and architect of its modernization, leading a multi-ethnic population in a city-state. Richard Nixon is the fifth leader selected, with whom Kissinger collaborated in a strategic turn of the United States, withdrawing from the Vietnam War and establishing relations with China based on geopolitical realism and not ideology. Lastly, he analyzes Margaret Thatcher, who knew how to guide the British society in a necessary and drastic economic transformation, which was supported by a revitalization of traditional British values.

In reality, it was an indirect criticism of the current Western leadership. This has not gone through the testing moments of the First and Second World War. Adenauer, De Gaulle and Sadat participated in the conflict, suffering in all three cases years in prison for different reasons. In turn, Lee Kuan Yew, Nixon and Thatcher lived through this conflict in their childhood and adolescence, and gained the experience of living it.

Kissinger insists in his book that to understand international relations, the key is knowing history, while pointing out that the new generations interested in the subject must understand new tools, such as artificial intelligence, but connected with historical knowledge. This does not seem to be the characteristic of the group of current leaders of the West. The book received criticism, most of it unsubstantiated, but which sought to disqualify Kissinger's views on the present, and particularly the war in Ukraine.

On December 21, Kissinger published in *The Spectator* a proposal or road map to put the diplomatic tool back into action to stop the military conflict taking place in Europe. He raised as a main proposal that the warring parties accept the geopolitical changes that had already produced ten months of war. For Russia, it was about assuming that its initial objective of preventing NATO from reaching its borders -as had already happened with the three Baltic republics- was already unfeasible with the incorporation of Finland into the Western military alliance, which expanded said border by more than 1,300 kilometers, and with the request

for the incorporation of Sweden. Included in this proposal was the assumption that now Ukraine is unlikely to abandon its military alliance with the West. And it will continue to be a NATO ally, without ruling out becoming a full member.

Some of Kissinger's ideas seem to have found an echo in China's 12-point plan for peace in Ukraine, one year after the Russian invasion.

But within the United States, his ideas about the conflict coincided with those publicly raised in recent months by General Mark Milley, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, who in general was skeptical about the possibility of the war ending in the short term. Since November -he reiterated it in January- he said that it was necessary to bring the conflict to the negotiating table, as neither party had the possibility of defining the war on the ground in the short term.

Kissinger is an intellectual who has known how to combine Harvard University with concrete action in the field of international relations, and who made History his main tool in the knowledge of his subject.

His turning one century at a time when he lucidly expresses an independent point of view regarding the war in Ukraine, is the best celebration he can have.

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