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# Allies, but Enemies? What the Cold War Taught Us about Leadership

## Abstract

*This article aims to analyze the decisions and mistakes of the communist leaders, and the way in which they have shaped the world in its current state. I draw attention especially to the disagreements between the leaders who found themselves enemies in spite of their ideological unity – Tito and Stalin. The premise that I started with was that the lives of great leaders influenced their personality in a way that shaped their leadership style, leading to events like the political conflicts and splits in the Cold War communist bloc. Comparisons were made in order to observe the similarities and differences that arose in various communist bloc countries and I used a form of deductive research that started with a broader picture of the Cold War before concentrating on the particularities of various events and leaders. In addition, resources from the fields of history, IR theory, sociology and psychology were used. It was concluded that the Cold War, its ideologies, its leaders, its weapons, methods and diplomacy has undoubtedly marked a radical change in how wars are fought, in how countries relate to each other, and in how history plays out, but its key players, its backbone are the unique, individual and remarkable leaders.*

**Key words:** Leadership, Cold War, Tito – Stalin Split.

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## Introduction

The Cold War was an ideological and diplomatic conflict that took place after 1945, between the USA and USSR and between Western and Eastern Europe with

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two blocks confronting on the continent as military and security alliances. Also, the Cold War has been portrayed as a fight between good and evil, between capitalism and communism, between the liberal democratic system and the state socialism one, a conflict that came out of the World War Two coalition against Nazi Germany (Loth 1998: 21).

I consider Cold War to be a very relevant theme because of the current political climate in the world – even if it is a historical event, many scholars still believe that the Cold War has not yet ended and that we still live in a world split into great global powers' spheres of influence. From the perspective of International Relations, the Cold War is a very important and truly unique event in this sphere, a diplomatic war, as it can also be called, during which the relationships between the world's countries have been of vital importance, the emphasis falling on the conflicts, alliances and interests between them.

In this article, I chose to study the relationships between communist leaders, instead of inter-state relations. The study of individual heads of state and the way they interacted with each other is an infinitely more complex area for analysis because of the unpredictable and complicated nature of politicians and humans, in general, providing, as such, a proper challenge for this paper. Furthermore, the disagreements between the leaders who, despite being in the same ideological camp, had different perspectives and ideas for the countries they lead, going from being allies to enemies seem like an unique and neglected subject, one that is worthy of more attention than it has received.

The first part is a theoretical one, containing all of this paper's key concepts: the nature of political leadership during the Cold War, leadership at its roots and types of leadership that can be identified today. In the second part, I have presented the biggest conflict within the Cold War-era communist bloc, attempting to emphasize the weaknesses of Stalin's "Soviet Empire". I chose to explore the Tito–Stalin split, as it was the first such break in the apparently unbreakable Soviet bloc; a conflict that was one of the first necessary steps for the stopping of Communism's spread in Europe, a shaking blow to Stalin's domination and a paving stone for the downfall of Communism itself.

The objectives of this research are twofold: on one hand, I want to understand the socio-political landscape of Cold War Europe, to see how history played out at a state level, to see the way in which a system creates certain kinds of politicians and leaders. On the other hand, I wanted to gain further insight into the key figures of the Cold War at a human level, to understand their psychology, their past and the

way it influenced their actions, looking to see how each leader was able to shape the political system.

The technique used in this paper is a form of deductive research that started with the broader historical picture of the Cold War before concentrating on the details and particularities of various events and leaders. The general part of the research was conducted using a multidisciplinary approach that was aided by various resources from the fields of history, international relations theory, sociology and psychology reaching a level of detailed analysis of Tito and Stalin that I consider I innovated in through my exploration of the causality between the effects of psychology and leader's personality and their actions, along with their subsequent historical consequences.

## Political Leadership Then and Now

Even if the concept of leadership seems to be a modern construct, both through its attractiveness as well as its major importance in everyday life, its roots dates back 2,500 years, when Plato started addressing issues of morality and politics, and of how important it is that the two coexist and cooperate in the state. For him, the ideal notion of leadership comes from the leader who is capable of going beyond his selfish interest, acting, instead for the good of the people (Plato 1997: 119). While Plato considered that good leader owes his qualities to his birth, his mentor, Socrates, considered that a leader's necessary qualities and virtues can be developed and earned through education. Niccolò Machiavelli presented the ideal leader as being, foremost, adaptable to any situations, dismantling the ideas of previous great philosophers, who considered virtue a leader's defining trait, arguing that virtue made a leader weak and vulnerable (Machiavelli 2009: 69).

There are many definitions of leadership, and new ones are constantly appearing. For example, US academic environments define leadership as "a process of social influence in which a person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task" (Chemers 1977: 1). The New Oxford Dictionary of English defines leadership as: "the action of leading a group of people or an organization"; "the state or position of being a leader" (Stevenson 2010: 1003) and according to Dwight D. Eisenhower "Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it" (McKay 2012), so it can be said that the concept of leadership is highly subjective and that each leader has his or her own style and philosophy of leadership.

Political leadership is a key concept to understanding political processes and outcomes, yet its definition is elusive. In order to study leadership, the contributions of several sciences such as political theory, history, psychology and management are needed.

Political leadership should be seen as a group activity or as an interaction between a large number of individuals, between whom a hierarchical structure of authority, with leaders and subordinates is created, proving that leadership is not the trait of a leader, but the result of an interaction. There are many ways in which a leader can exert his or her power, distinguishing many styles of leadership: laissez-fair, democratic, authoritarian or autocratic leadership.

During the Cold War, two types of leadership can be singled out: democratic, represented by the Western bloc and the USA especially, and authoritarian leadership, represented by the Soviet Union. If we look at the big picture of today, it can be observed that in this sense not so much has changed, and in these two states can be found the same styles of leadership present almost 70 years ago.

Democratic leadership is characterised mainly by citizen involvement in decision-making, mutual respect between ruler and subordinates, open communication and processes and has the purpose of “distributing responsibility within the demos, empowering the membership, and aiding the demos in its deliberations” (Gastil 1994: 958). Deliberation is at the heart of a democracy and is based on direct participation, healthy relations inside the political hierarchy and proper distribution of responsibility” (Gastil 1994: 960). On the opposite side is the authoritarian style of leadership, figure headed during the Cold War by the USSR’s Joseph Stalin, who, in my opinion, changed the way the world perceived leadership.

Authoritarian leadership is manifested through harshness, violence, superiority and order. An authoritarian leader is often a dictator, who decides on his own the policies, activities, goals to be achieved, and leads directly the activities of his subordinates (ST. Thomas University, n.d). Authoritarian leaders make decisions by themselves without accepting anyone’s help or not wanting to involve others in the decision making process. They usually prefer to keep a distance between them and the people they are leading, to show their superiority and to clearly mark their position. A common trait of regimes ruled by an authoritarian leader is that the ruler is shrouded in mystery (Gill 1980: 167), Tito, Yugoslavia’s president, being a prime example of this. Also representative is the use of propaganda and the development of personality cult that turns the leader into a super-human, demigod character.

As for Cold War leadership, I believe that Stalin was the most powerful and influential leader of the time. He obtained supreme power in Eastern and Central

Europe slowly, throughout the year, starting as a secretary in his native Georgia before reaching the Kremlin, where he used the Party to consolidate his own power. As such, in twenty years, Stalin went from the position of a “obscure party functionary” (Slovik 2009: 481), to that of an indomitable autocrat, supported by the party, in spite of Lenin’s warnings to the Party that Stalin started having too much power and was growing dangerous.

Nowadays, our perspective on leadership is more complex than ever as this world has been through two World Wars and a tense Cold War – a long period of time, that made us lose trust in some leaders and regimes and to put our hopes in others and more than this, it helped us to understand what kind of leaders our nations need. If we look towards the past once again, we can observe that Max Weber identified three types of leadership: patriarchal, based on tradition; charismatic, based on the possession by an individual of a special gift; and bureaucratic, based on law and rationality. I consider these three types of leadership, very relevant to modern day’s politics but also relevant to our central subject, as it can be easily observed that the charismatic type of leadership was the most popular one in the past (both Tito and Stalin were charismatic leaders as they ruled based on a fake image they have created through the Cult of Personality) and many nations still tend to choose charismatic leaders.

## Lessons from the Cold War and the Dangers of Totalitarianism

Although united under the Warsaw Pact alliance, the unity of the eastern states was often challenged by the various conflicts between their leaders that destabilized the internal order of the Communist bloc. Three kinds of splits can be identified in the Communist bloc: in-bloc rifts, or the conflicts between states of the Soviet bloc, rifts between the leaders of the bloc’s countries and people-leader rifts that occurred because of conflicts between the peoples and leaders of Eastern bloc countries (Oudenaren 1984: 2–4).

The conflict between communist leaders throughout the world and Stalin was determined by the rebellion of the former against the USSR’s Stalinist, national self-interest imposing domination that severely disadvantaged the interests of the other communist states of the Eastern bloc, according to the principles of the Stalin-formulated doctrine of “Socialism in one country” (Carr 1958: 21). This doctrine

argued the importance of building and developing Socialism in the USSR, a purpose for which the subordination of leaders like Tito towards Stalin was implicit.

However, I consider that the life and psychological analysis of each leader should be presented first, in order to better understand the split between them, which will be presented as a second step of this case study.

Stalin was, and has remained, a crucial historical figure well into contemporary times. A strategic and calculating politician, he became a powerful, totalitarian and feared leader that was respected by many and judged and criticised by most. Stalin was the dictator who perfected the art of purging his enemies from the state and of cutting a swath in history and various unfortunate peoples through the use of unprecedented violence and power. A thorough understanding of his decisions and governing style of a historical personality of such importance and complexity requires a complex and close analysis of his life and personality.

Young Stalin was born with a duck footed left leg, was pockmarked by smallpox and was extremely fragile and unhealthy, but he survived his childhood, proving himself a true fighter and survivor. He has been demonstrating his intellectual abilities ever since he was little, being a precocious talker, an avid reader, and passionate about literature, history, art, music and poetry. He grew up in constant fear and lived on the roads for long periods with his mother as refugees of his father's anger, who started abusing and beating his family (Sebag Montefiore 2007). All of this, made him grow hatefully angry, turning him aggressive and even making him stab his father in a desperate attempt to stop him from beating his mother (Sebag Montefiore 2003: 26).

Once in school, he always tried to make himself seen and proved to be very competitive, his classmates and comrades described him as "the best but also the naughtiest pupil" (Sebag Montefiore 2007) and as "patient, calm and modest", but also, at the same time, "vainglorious, pushy and thin-skinned, with outbursts of viciousness just a short fuse away" (Sebag Montefiore 2007). He soon developed an interest for Karl Marx's socio-political theory, Marxism, marking his discovery of *Das Kapital* and his entry into the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party as turning points in his life.

Many consider Stalin worthy of appreciation for the status he brought Russia and for the extent to which the country developed under his rule, while others draw attention to the kingdom of fear he instilled and to the way he used his power excess for personal goals and purposes. What made him be such a power-hungry and feared totalitarian leader? A possible answer might be found in Freudian personality theory that highlights how childhood events can be repressed in our subconscious, affecting our behaviour and temperament afterwards giving a solid explanation of

Stalin's actions in maturity as seen from the lens of his childhood (Psychoanalytic Theory, n.d).

The birth defect of his leg and hand, which he insisted on hiding in photographs along with the fact that he had started to suffer from the so-called Napoleon Complex, being unhappy and self-conscious of his height (1,68 m), made him feel weak and frustrated. Along with his aging, his charisma and influence with the people started diminishing and his frustration, disappointment and self-consciousness about his appearance or the people around him made him show his diabolical nature and adopt an authoritarian attitude that was characterised by violence, imposing admiration, respect, or the acceptance and obedience of the people through terror and fear.

Lenin's death created the perfect pretext and opportunity for Stalin to get his hands on the absolute power he longed for and to unleash a long, 30-year period of violence and terror, turning Russia into a massive bloodbath. As a totalitarian leader, he imposed his political totalitarian regime on the people, using a single party government, secret services, well-organized propaganda that was broadcast through the media, which was totally controlled by the state.

Stalin introduced propaganda into his leadership style to persuade the people that they had to not only accept him as their rightful leader but also to obey him unquestionably. Through his leadership, he had control over the masses' thinking, introducing the concept of The New Soviet Person (Gill 1980: 175) and he exerted a great influence on education, on which he left his mark by imposing the study of Marxism and Leninism in schools. Under his leadership, the 1930s were a period of hell for the Soviet Union, period also called the Great Terror so Stalin began to be associated with terror, cruelty and brutality, characteristics that best defined his leadership style (Roberts 2011: 1).

Stalinist leadership can therefore be characterized, in one word, as totalitarian. Being omniscient and omnipresent, all of the achievements of the country being his; having power and influence over the masses to whom he imposed respect through terror, whose liberties were constantly being diminished and who even lacked their freedom of thought, Stalin was the dictator who changed the history of mankind (Gill 1980: 26). A mass murderer who did not value anyone's life besides his, he was seen as a monster by the West and any dissidents, but was revered, appreciated, respected, and decried on his death as an outstanding leader by his people.

Many historians claim that his personality was the cause for all of the horrors of his rule, the fatal combination of paranoid personality disorder, alcohol abuse, outstanding intelligence and cruel character being the base for all of his bad decisions,

mass killing and personality cult. I, however, consider Stalin to be a paradox because of his roots as brilliant young man that was inclined towards music, poetry and all that was art and beauty, a young man with great potential that was destroyed by his environment. His trauma made him develop an alter ego, a cold, calculating, diabolical side to his personality that gave birth to his leadership style and attitude towards his subject. Besides, “the lame, pockmarked, web-toed boy, humiliatingly beaten and deserted by his father, adored but beaten some more by his single mother, haunted by bastardy, surviving accident and disease, had overcome the odds” (Sebag Montefiore 2007).

When it comes to Josip Broz or Tito, not much is known about him. Although he is a very important figure in history, a hero of both the Second World War and the Cold War, a man who has resisted and fought the two most feared leaders in history, Hitler and Stalin, Tito is a leader whose life is neglected by historians.

Undoubtedly, Josip Broz Tito was a well-known and controversial politician (Velikonja 2008: 14) who attracted both criticism and appreciation. A man who inspired generations of Yugoslav communists, a political and party leader who survived and thrived for an entire political epoch, a politician who was a great master of political pragmatism, but at the same time a man prone to excessive, incurable hedonism show in his consumption of glory and power.

He was always a mysterious person, ever since he was little he was tormented by the desire for a better life, having dreams and aspirations that no one knew except him. He then confessed when he already was the leader of Yugoslavia: “My ambition when I was a little boy was to be a tailor, a natural result of the desire of every little peasant in Zagorje to have nice clothes” (West 2009: 30). All of the difficulties in his family influenced his hopes and dreams as a young adult and because of this, it can be said that as in Stalin’s case, the Freudian personality theory can be also applied in Tito’s case (Psychoanalytic Theory, n.d).

The First World War was for him a chance to discover and prove his leadership and strategic capabilities, becoming the youngest Sergeant in the Austrian army, being only 21 years old at that time. Due to his extraordinary communication abilities, he was recommended to the Yugoslav Communist Party by his comrades, who seemed to believe strongly in his potential and although young, he showed himself very devoted to the Marxist doctrine in which he strongly believed.

Being especially known for his liberal and rebellious tendencies, but also his strength and self-confidence in resisting Stalin, Broz Tito is considered by many a hero, and by others a war criminal, despite the fact that his lack of desire for revenge was known: “This freedom from vindictiveness was one of the pleasantest features



of Tito's personality" (West 2009: 116). Another one of his undeniable traits was his patriotism, proved by the fact that he fought on the front, shoulder to shoulder with his soldiers. This brought him his glory and renown as hero in many countries.

Tito's leadership style was a special one, characterized by his independence, freedom, rebellion, nationalism and courage. He was "glorified, praised, and adored, or was despised and hated" (Stevanovic 2017: 105). In spite of his criticism, it was his powerful leadership that kept Yugoslavia united in spite of all the social and religious differences that existed between the republics that formed Yugoslavia, and many say that he was born to be a politician and statesman (Crnobrnja 1996: 71). If we were to judge by his looks, like his cold eyes that he would hide behind sunglasses or his tough expression and war-marked face, Tito could be considered a diabolical dictator, but in reality he was not the harshest leader a communist regime could have.

His leadership style could be described as authoritarian, as he imposed communist ideology on his country, which started to be ruled by bureaucracy and a very effective secret police force. Although he was described as one of modern history's most gentle dictators by his people and many foreigners, these opinions can be considered very biased because of his aura as hero figure and his contribution to national liberation. What is certain, however, is that his patriotism and nationalism made him do everything for the benefit of his people, not for himself or his personal ambitions.

He was a good strategist, both internally and externally. At a national level, he slowly managed to build and grow the country's economy (Swain 2010: 64) providing people with a chance to live a decent life, sheltered from excessive debt and problems, making his people have a considerably higher standard of living and well-being than other Eastern European nations. Through his break with Moscow he insured his country's international political prosperity – while other communist countries were stuck in their soviet bubble, Yugoslavia was heading in a different direction, on its own. In regard to his foreign policy, Tito managed to balance between the East and the West, managing to perfectly secure his country's position of middle ground by co-founding the Non-Alignment Movement, making Yugoslavia the only country having good relations to both NATO pact countries and Warsaw pact ones.

Tito, in spite of all the good things he did, the advancement of his country's education, infrastructure, health system and the growth of its wages, was still a dictator and also did much harm, despite attempting to distance himself from the classic definition of an authoritarian leader. He too purged those he considered enemies, from Stalinist politicians to Serbian and Slovenian liberals. These, purges were not based on national or ethnic criteria, but on political and ideological ones, and removed those threatening to his power (Crnobrnja 1996: 77).

I consider that at the time, Tito was not perceived as a dictator but as a ruler because of his great charisma which even eliminated the necessity for violence and force in making the people respect and obey him. He, of course, also used his propaganda machine (McLean 1957: 400) in order to strengthen his image, and, although many consider that all that was being written about the loved leader's character and great deeds were myths, I believe that they were merely greatly amplified, but true, realities. His greatest mistake, as leader, is, in my opinion, was the fact that he did not lay down a system that would keep the country united after his death.

Opinions about his leadership remain split. What is certain is that he was a powerful leader, who, for the first time in history, managed to unite the Yugoslav nation under the banner of a common cause. Josip Broz Tito, "the greatest son of our peoples and nationalities", is surely one of the most mysterious figures of the Balkans and of the Yugoslavs, the lingering nostalgia for him that exists in former Yugoslav nations to this day proving how loved and appreciated he was.

After presenting each leader's life, personality and leadership style, it is now necessary to analyse the rift between them, in order to identify the true reason behind their split, which was the first step in the Eastern Block destruction and also to see, how this split affected each country's geopolitics.

The Tito-Stalin split made history. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 1948, the Cominform, the main symbol of Stalin's rule over Eastern Europe declared Yugoslavia's exclusion, mentioning that Josip Broz-Tito had deviated from the line of correct communist governance and was heading towards nationalism, marking the first definitive break between the Soviet Union and one of its satellites.

The tensions between the two leaders had been obvious since World War Two, but the moment which escalated the conflict, leading to the break, was the fact that Tito had started capturing territory in Europe and had started getting involved into the Greek Civil War. The Yugoslav leader's intentions had become clear to Stalin: he intended to build a Balkan Federation (Perović 2007: 43), another eastern bloc, separate from the soviet one, formed by Albania, Greece, and Bulgaria. Stalin felt he had competition for the first time, as Tito's ambitions were similar to his and were directly threatening his authority and the empire he had built in Eastern Europe.

It is obvious that Tito's independence led to the conflict. Being oppressed by his father in childhood, he developed a free spirit and no longer wanted to obey anyone, not even the mighty Kremlin leader. Since the beginning of his period as Yugoslav leader, Broz Tito had begun to analyse the nature of his country's dependence on Moscow (Swain 1989: 266), as he wanted to act and to make decisions on his own, to

stop merely waiting for Moscow's orders, as he considered that it was him who knew best what his people needed.

The ideological break occurred when Tito started tracing a political line that was distinct and separate from Stalin's policies, considering that Marxism was not dogmatic and that it could only be applied by adapting it to national necessities and particular circumstances (Perović 2007: 29). He thus developed the spirit of Yugoslav nationalism and expected to be treated as an equal by the great dictator in Moscow. Stalin, on the other hand, understood Marxism as an authoritarian regime taken to the extreme, whose economy was based on forced industrialization. Because he always imposed a form of Soviet foreign policy that greatly advantaged Russia, placing it on a pedestal on Eastern Bloc countries, Stalin would not allow the growth of nationalism in any territories in his sphere of influence.

Being more than an ideological break, this conflict represented the clash of the two very similar styles of authoritarian and totalitarian leadership. Even though Yugoslavia had been considered, at one time, an indispensable part of the communist bloc, with Tito being praised and loved by the soviet press, and even being shown by Stalin as a worthy example to follow in the creation of the new people's democracies, conflict and misunderstanding soon appeared.

As representatives of two styles of leadership, Tito and Stalin became proxies in the indirect clash of their political personalities, in spite of the fact that these were very similar – they both were trusted by their peoples, they both heavily relied on propaganda and the removal of their political enemies to consolidate their power, the small, but crucial difference between them lay in the fact that the main tool of Stalin's rule was violence, while the main tool of Tito's was his charisma and hero image.

Tito's authoritarian leadership was highly aided by his supreme self-confidence (Rhoads 2017) and his faith in his people, things that Stalin lacked. He was, instead, paranoid, a trait that pushed him towards absolutism in imposing his will on others, a characteristic trait of his totalitarian rule (Cheuv 1993: 159). In contrast with Stalin, Tito's leadership style has remained somewhat of a mystery to scholars, who struggle to figure out how someone who had nothing and no-one managed to not only rule successfully, but to also keep unity in a territory that used two alphabets, had three religions, four languages and five nationalities, while struggling to break out from the USSR's domination. While Stalin was fighting to maintain his hegemony, prestige and influence (Tucker 1977: 281) in the centralised Soviet state, Tito was prepared to work towards building a prosperous society, "a paradise of the working class" (Rhoads 2017) through the federal unification of Yugoslavian nations into a decentralised, independently developing state.

While Tito is remembered by his people and other Europeans, both from the West and East, as one of the gentlest authoritarian and communist leaders of Europe, as well as a hero figure for his contribution to national liberation, Stalin's legacy is that of history's most monstrous tyrant, a man who gained fame through his massacres, violence and regime of terror. Their differences prove that a small, nuanced, variation in leadership styles leads to major differences in how countries are led and how rulers act.

The conflict, thus presented, showcases that a dogmatic, theoretical form of Marxism-Leninism could never be fully, perfectly and identically applied by any leader, because its application is vastly influenced by the leader's personality and style of governing.

## Conclusions

This paper aimed to show the danger of a totalitarian regime and the hidden realities of life behind the Iron Curtain, where, in spite of what propaganda wanted to show, and of what huge cover-ups attempted to conceal, the truth was that the bloc's political realities were not in accordance to rulers' wishes, whose control and leadership styles were highly conditioned by their lives, personalities and psychological characteristics. Reality, thus shown, stands in stark contrast to what communist propaganda tried to enforce as fact, how it wanted to portray leaders such as Stalin, Tito, Ceausescu and others as infallible heroes in the worker's struggle for social equity, as veritable paragons of virtue, wisdom and authority.

Thus, all of the psychological, sociological and historical circumstances of a leader's life influence his behaviour, creating ripple effects that lead to important consequences in the way countries are led, in their conflicts, alliances, and in the writing of history itself. The way individuals affect and influence history and the destiny of nations and millions of people is a fascinating area for study, both from a historical and international relations point of view, and is an area that helps us understand the past and its errors so that we may not repeat them. It is very important to understand how human nature led to the tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, how terrible dictators and tyrants arise, how they relate to each other, how political conflicts emerge and are handled in order to best prepare ourselves for the future, in order to apply the lessons we learn, to what happens today.

Any new perspective and understanding of the Cold War, a unique historical event caused by completely new circumstances, actors and technology, is crucial in properly understanding the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and inevitably understanding the 21<sup>st</sup> and preparing for the future. The Cold War, its ideologies, its leaders, its weapons, methods and diplomacy has undoubtedly marked a radical change in how wars are fought, in how countries relate to each other, and in how history plays out, but its key players, its backbone are the unique, individual and remarkable leaders – they are, to us, the key to solving the mysteries of current political affairs.

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