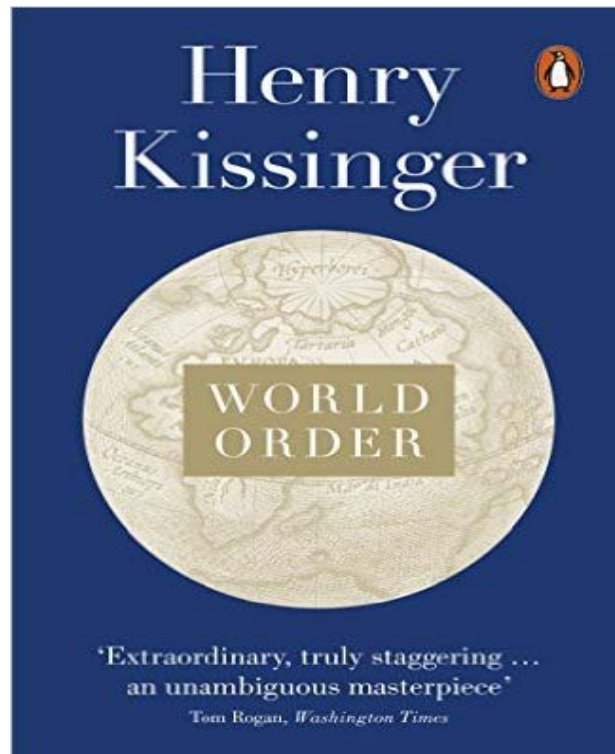


Book Review: World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History

Henry Kissinger

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How do ones introduce a book of a man who seemingly needs no introduction, like Henry Kissinger? Thanks mainly to his reputation and prominence, the examination of Kissinger's background is seemingly quite unnecessary. But because of such reputation and prominence, I argue, ones are even urged to consult Kissinger's relevant background, in juxtaposition with the exploration of the book's contents itself. Kissinger's "character" is as significant as the contents the book may suggest. In order to investigate the double sense of "character" both as the quality of a person and the significance of written words here, this review is organised into two main parts. The first part explores Kissinger's brief background and the second part examines the contents of *Word Order*. While this second part attempts to briefly chart out the contents of all chapters, it

discusses in more details on Kissinger's notion of "Asia," which appears in chapters four and five of the book.

About Author

Henry Kissinger was born in 1923 to a German-Jewish family in Weimar Republic Germany. Fleeing Nazi persecution, his family had to move to London and then New York. Although experiencing hardship and difficulties, Kissinger proved excellent academically since his early period in the US. While working in a shaving brush factory during the day, he also enrolled in a part-time study at night. Yet, there was no sign at this stage revealing that he would become a prominent political scientist and influential statesman. After an assigned military experience and his involvement in the US's advance in Germany during the second World War, Kissinger went back to pursue his education and earned a degree from Harvard College in 1950 as well as M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1951 and 1954 respectively. In terms of academic tradition, Kissinger is considered a "realist" along with other well-known scholars, like George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. Apart from academia, Kissinger is a highly influential statesman, serving as a National Security adviser and later the United States Secretary of State to President Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. He has also advised some subsequently American presidents on security and foreign policies. Yet, given such achievement professionally, a puzzle emerges as to why Kissinger went on to become one of the most influential American statesmen, given his immigration background. Apart from his academic excellence as well as devoted commitment to public service, a factor leading to his capstone was arguably his irreducible conceptual conviction that interstate politics is first and foremost the preservation of "state security", while many of his contemporaries might alternate between the belief in international law and institutions, on the one hand, and *realpolitik*, on the other, as the path leading to "perpetual peace" among nations.

Kissinger has also played a part and parcel role in formulating several American foreign policies. Among the most famous was the so-called "ping pong diplomacy", which allegedly reduced the possibility of confrontation between the two major powers during the Cold War era – i.e. between the Liberal bloc led by the US and the Communist bloc led by the USSR. Although several critics strongly criticise Kissinger's policies and posture during the Cold War period, his sympathisers argue that the ping pong diplomacy reduced tension during the bipolar world by simply sending table tennis athletes to participate in a sport campaign in China, and, thus, sending

a sign of friendship to Beijing. From a realist perspective, the ping pong diplomacy can be viewed an attempt to undermine the Communist bloc for it created distrust between the USSR and China. Sending athletes to participate in a table tennis campaign in China possibly led to conflicts and cleavages in the relations between Moscow and Beijing. Besides, if ones are to believe that the non-mentioned is equally important as the mentioned. Due partly to Kissinger' ideas and influence, the US waged war in Vietnam and launched military operations in Cambodia and Laos during the Cold War to suppress the “anti-American forces” from dominating Vietnam and other parts of South East Asia. Although the US troops were defeated by Northern Vietnam's guerrillas, the American War and related military operations claimed a number of lives and left a much higher figure of individuals in tragedy. In this sense, the Vietnam War was a stark contrast to the attempt to reduce tension as claimed by the ping pong diplomacy. Undoubtedly, the Vietnam War is a hot war which proved that attempts to balance power between the two major camps at whatever means and costs as a way to bring about “international peace” as allegedly preferred by realists is problematic.

In contrast, from a Liberal perspective, the ping pong diplomacy, like other policies allegedly influenced by Kissinger, was widely acclaimed as one of the well-formulated foreign policies mainly because the policy enabled the world to avoid confrontations between the two major powers which were in possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), simply by sending ping pong athletes. Another main reason led to a glorification of the ping pong diplomacy among International Relations theorists was the policy marked a turning point which the international politics entered the so-called *détente* period in which there was no outbreak of war between major powers. This prevention was important since it not merely prevented tremendous loss but also proved that the concept of balance of power functions effectively. For the proponents, the Cold War era was not just another “interwar period” which some scholars described the post-WWI era as a period which the international community rarely learnt about lessons from history while waiting for WWII to explode (Carr 2001). His involvement and influence in the Vietnam War alone led Kissinger to be nominated for a Noble Peace Prize in 1973 for “assisting for a ceasefire and withdrawal of the US troops.” He also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Medal of Liberty among other awards. Kissinger had actively served as a security and foreign policy adviser throughout his career, to many think tanks, institutes and the Republican Party; the Party he supports. In the post-Cold war era, although there is little doubt that Kissinger

is regarded as one of the most influential figures by scholars, foreign policy practitioners and politicians, he also appears to be one the most “revered and reviled” statesmen (Ferguson 2015), whose ideas and roles in the past will be subject to examination by his sympathisers and opponents.

Contents

World Order comprises nine chapters, in addition to introduction and conclusion. Drawing from Kissinger’s academic background and practices, these chapters present the reader with insights and policy recommendations well informed by history and geography. Interweaving these chapters together is an overarching argument which Kissinger tentatively devotes his life attempting to advance, since his Ph.D. study until present days, that is the attainment of world order is possible not only by the use of power but also “legitimacy.” In the first chapter *Europe: the Pluralistic International Order*, the author began by discussing about the “uniqueness of the European order” which in turn started from the Thirty Year’s War. In this chapter, like many International Relations scholars, Kissinger acknowledged the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 as the cornerstone of the international relations. Kissinger also pointed out in the chapter that the aftermath of the French Revolution in 1789 crucially created legacies in international politics. In the second chapter *the European Balance-of-Power system and Its End*, Kissinger recounts certain institutions and structures of Europe at the time. Based on these two chapters, the reader might judge Kissinger’s thought on world politics is highly Euro-centric. Chapter Three and Four deal with *Islamism and the Middle East* and the relation between *the United States and Iran* respectively. While Kissinger described the Middle East as “disorder,” he argues that the US ought to approach Iran with the attempt to establish “order.” Chapter Seven and Eight centre on the US which, for the author, although the US is termed as ambivalent superpower, is the force “acting for all mankind.” The last chapter seems to suggest innovative ideas when the author discusses about *Technology, Equilibrium and Human consciousness*. This chapter is mainly preoccupied with nuclear proliferation which has been a dominant issue during the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. While Kissinger suggests the possibility of new concerns for nuclear proliferation from technological aspects, he seems to be largely driven by what was driving the Cold War era still.

Analysing from these chapters, there are five aspects of character of *World Order* appearing prominent and worth taking into consideration. The first is concerning theoretical framework. Although Kissinger does not mention theories directly, political thoughts propelling his arguments are those drawn from Realism. While some scholars have argued that the post-Cold

War politics would witness the “End of History” (Fukuyama 1992) or the “clash of civilization” (Huntington 2002). For Kissinger, nonetheless, the driving force is the motivating notions of “balance of power” and “national interest.” These notions appear throughout the book explicitly and implicitly. Hence, while rendering profound insights into history and geography of interstate politics, *World Order* glorifies *realpolitik* practitioners, such as Cardinal Richelieu, France’s chief minister from 1624 to 1642, Klemens von Metternich, Austria’s architect of the Congress of Vienna, Lord Palmerston, Britain’s pragmatic practitioner, and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Japan’s leader who united the “divine” nation. The connotations of balance of power and national interest which were systematically introduced by Morgenthau (2006), a law professor whose expertise is international law, posit that international law is unreliable when it comes to the quest for interstate peace. Describing international law as primordial law, Morgenthau argues to rely on law is simply too ideal and naive. While the critique against the Liberals as “ideal” and “naive” partly led to the contention that Liberalism is “Idealism,” the insight of Morgenthau’s argument is confirmed by the aggression of Nazi Germany during the Second World War. In a similar vein, *World Order* seems to suggest that interstate peace must be attained by the balance of power among the relentless struggle for national interest of states. For Kissinger, states’ struggle for interest results in conflicts and usually appears in terms of territorial disputes. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 allegedly reinforces this conviction. Likewise, if ones look at the conflicts and aggression in the South China Sea concerning the Spratly Island in 2016 when China has used the Island as its military base and precipitates conflicts of interest and territorial disputes with Vietnam and the Philippines, ones cannot deny that Realism is still a dominant school in International Relations. Equally important, Kissinger’s approach towards security and foreign affairs as enshrining in *World Order* proved correct. Cartographical boundaries and segregations look powerful in the world in which some declared as globalised and “flat” (Friedman 2005). Considering these conundrums, the underlying argument proposed by Kissinger is that “world order” needs to be established in order to balance power and competing national desires between status quo states, like the US and EU, and revisionist states, like Russia, China and Islamic states.

Second, the overview of global politics portrayed by *World Oder* seemingly pays little attention to the rise of “transnational phenomena.” Kissinger rarely explores the roles of “non-state actors,” or examines the emerging “transnational issues,” such as climate change, diseases and financial movement. Having argued that, although Kissinger is still largely confined by Realism,

interestingly he also goes at length to discuss “security issues” emerging in unconventional ways. Kissinger notes about Boko Haram in Nigeria, Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (p.103;122) or even the Palestinian issue (p.129) with remarkably well-rounded and profound knowledge. However, in some extents, such discussions are not yet full-fledged as the reader might expect for the world has recently witnessed the costs brought about by the Islamic State (ISIS), which is not confined by the parameter of states and claimed the terrorist attacks in France in November 2015 and Belgium in March 2016. Kissinger still explores world order based on his representations of different geographical areas and tends to by and large associate “Islamic world” with terrorism. Among other things, the author invokes Hobbesian “state of nature” to describes Iraq and Syria and at the same time mentioning the possibility of “portions of the state may adrift into anarchy or permanent rebellion (p.142).” Kissinger also devotes energy to examine related terms, such caliphate and jihad which are of contemporary concern for the US. Although such rhetoric is somewhat familiar, it would be too far to argue that this rhetoric reminds the reader of Iraq which was invaded by the US in 2004. What is certain is the Islamic world holds a negative representation for the author. Kissinger’s arguments might result from Realist approach to security he subscribes or the pace of security issues difficult to be fully grasped. Yet, for that second reason, it is also sufficing to suggest that realists are not comfortable to come to terms with “threats” which are not state-centric. The reader is left unconvinced that Realist approach as proposed by *World Order* is sufficient in understanding “security” and may think that other approaches to security are required. Third, in his discussion of Asia in chapter four and five, Kissinger initially appears to suggest an unconventional approach towards the understanding of “Asia.” As he notes: “The term Asia ascribes a deceptive coherence to a disparate region. Until the arrival of modern Western powers, no Asian language had a word for “Asia”; none of the peoples of what are now Asia’s nearly fifty sovereign states conceived of themselves as inhabiting a single “continent or region requiring solidarity with all the others (p.172).” This statement seemingly demonstrates a concern long raised by some unconventional IR schools, especially post-colonialism. As Said (2003) points out “orientalism” is a product of not merely power but also knowledge of the “West.” Put differently, the “oriental,” is constructed, essentialised and reproduced by the “West” usually to signify inferiority. However, the reader might feel disappointed since Kissinger is not making a point on this “politics of identity,” Rather, the discussion of Asia is to confirm that the stability of

what he calls “Asian regional order” is different from European order, and constantly requires “outside powers,” especially the US as an “integral feature (p.209).”

Fourth, Kissinger’s discussion of Asia centres on the admiration of Japan and India. By contrast, he considers the rise of China with a zero-sum-game framework and potentially as a threat to “world order.” This point is made in comparison to post-war Japan which allied itself, rather than challenged, to the world order led by the US hegemony at the time. As the author praises: Japan “[...] built an economy rivalling and in some case surpassing those of Western nations (p.175.)” and in regards to politics and jurisdiction that “Japan’s reform were pursued with such vigor that the Western powers were soon obliged to abandon the model of extraterritoriality [...] (p.187).” Yet, the most apparent admirer for post-war Japan was Japan “[...] renounced war as an instrument of national policy, affirmed principles of constitutional democracy, and reentered the international state system as an American ally [...]. For nearly seven decades, this new orientation has proved an important anchor of Asian stability and global peace and prosperity (p.189).” Then, Kissinger appears concerned about the rise of China as potentially a disruption to the world order as he writes: “At the same time, an element of implicit threat is ever present. China affirms explicitly, and all other key players implicitly, the option of military force in the pursuit of core national interests. Military budgets are rising. National rivalries, as in the South China Sea and North Asian waters, have generally been conducted with methods of nineteenth-century European diplomacy; force has not been excluded, though its application has been restrained, if tenuously, as the years go by (p.197).” The point which Kissinger is trying to make seems to be an anticipation of China’s disruption to the US’s rule. Unlike post-war Japan, the emerging power of China does not reinforce the American-defined world order. Thus, for Kissinger, China’s rise is likely at the expense of the US. As Kissinger puts it in his own style: “A Harvard study has shown that in fifteen cases in history where a rising and an established power interacted, ten ended in war (p.228).” In addition, Kissinger argues the rise of China will inevitably force Japan to “carefully assess” its security based on three issues, including the “continued emphasis on the American alliance, adaptation to China’s rise; and the reliance on an increasing national foreign policy (p.191).” Kissinger observes that Japan shows “more proactive efforts in line with the principles of international cooperation, including strengthening Japan’s capacity to ‘deter’ and, if needed, ‘defeated’ threats (p.191).” This observation not only views the rise of China as provocative to regional security, but concurs that the rise of China will be responded by Japan which was

militarily strong in the past. There are two interesting questions left for the reader; (a) can the rise of China be viewed as cooperative rather than competitive? (b) compared to Russia, why the rise of China is possible to a certain extent? These questions are not answered by *World Order*, but to know more about these questions will be academically fascinating. Last, Kissinger argues that world order contains regional orders. Among these regional orders is “Asian regional Order” which, for Kissinger, is defined as different from that of Europe since the former lack “equilibrium of territorially defined “sovereign states” recognizing each other’s legal equality (p.211).” The lack of equilibrium results from the vast geography of the Asian continent as well as rich and distinct cultural, philosophical and religious aspects. Thus, Kissinger argues, the lack of regional order will be difficult to achieve a balance of power which in turn proves indelible to facilitate decisions and moderate policies in the Asian region. The lack of regional order also makes it difficult to overcome the self-imposed “priorities” of some countries, like China and India. The presence of self-imposed priorities and the absence of regional order will potentially thwart the harmony of the Asian continent. As Kissinger notes insightfully: “Order always requires a subtle balance of restraint, force, and legitimacy. In Asia, it must combine a balance of power with a concept of partnership. A purely military definition of the balance will shade into confrontation. A purely psychological approach to partnership will raise fears of hegemony. Wise statesmanship must try to find that balance. For outside it, disaster beckons (p.233).” While this point promises interesting insights the author does not elaborate further on how to establish such an order. To learn more on this point as to what and how precisely to achieve what he means by regional order (and world order) and will make it more “Kissingerian.” With these mentioned “character” of the book, *World Order* will be of interest for those who are interested in “US-based” world politics, the Islamic concern”, the rise of China and “world order” of the next decade to come at least conventionally.

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