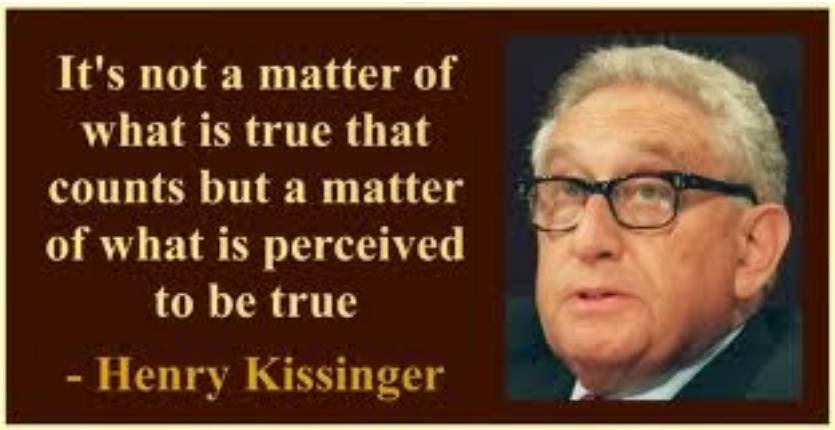


Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who met President Trump before the Inauguration, has said that he could go down as one of the most consequential presidents in history due to the radical shift he represents from the established world order.

"I believe he has the possibility of going down in history as a very considerable president," Mr. Kissinger said in an interview shown on CBS's "Face the Nation." last month.

He said the power vacuum left by America's withdrawal from the international stage under President Obama gives Mr. Trump the chance to craft a lasting foreign policy that breaks significantly from the status quo.

"Here is a new president who is asking a lot of unfamiliar questions, and because of the combination of the partial vacuum and the new questions, one could imagine that something remarkable and new emerges out of it," Mr. Kissinger said. "I'm not saying it will; I'm saying it's an extraordinary opportunity."

Mr. Kissinger, who met with Mr. Trump in New York shortly after the election, said the president-elect's foreign policy will rely more on instinct than theory.

On the next page we reproduce a review, first published in New Eastern European and reproduced by kind permision of the editor, a 2015 review by staffer Alex Jeffers of World Order by Henry Kissinger. Publisher: Penguin Press, New York 2014.

Let us briefly consider the epic career of Henry Kissinger – for in this case, "epic" really is the correct word. This is a man (a German Jew who fled Germany in 1938) who fought in the Second World War in the European theatre, earned his PhD in political science at Harvard University and later went on to serve as both national security adviser and secretary of state to US President Richard Nixon (for a time holding these positions simultaneously), and finally as secretary of state to President Gerald Ford. Between 1969 and 1977 Kissinger maintained a large degree of influence over US foreign policy, particularly in pursuing détente with the Soviet Union; establishing formal diplomatic relations between the US and China; and also in his efforts to help end the Vietnam War, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973.

It is no exaggeration to say that in certain areas his legacy as secretary of state is still felt today. When reviewing his accomplishments, it is hard to draw parallels between the career of Kissinger and those of other statesmen.

And even though Kissinger's peak years of influence were nigh on half a century ago, he still

remains a significant thinker in international relations to this day, if not a direct shaper of policy. Now at the ripe old age of 91, in his unofficial role as "Foreign Policy Wiseman" of the Republican Party, he continues to advise US presidential candidates, pen op-eds and book reviews in major newspapers, and chair his own consulting firm. On top of all this he manages to periodically churn out tomes on international affairs. Thus, any time Henry Kissinger writes a major book, the establishment generally listens to what he has to say.

From his lofty perch as the preeminent elderly statesmen of our time, Kissinger's meditations on the nature of international relations have become inseparable from his professional legacy. Moreover, at this stage of his life Kissinger represents a more general phenomenon: When a man or woman becomes one of the last remaining figures of a particular era their words begin to carry a different kind of historical weight. It is as if they are speaking on behalf of the past, bestowing long-forgotten wisdom onto younger generations, lest the mistakes of history are repeated. It is in this context that one should evaluate Kissinger's new book, simply titled World Order.

For those wondering what the titled "world order" actually is, the answer is that there is not one. True world order, in Kissinger's view, has never existed. Rather than predict what world order will look like or offer a view of what it might or should be, Kissinger's main point is simply that there have been various conceptions of world order throughout history. Of particular interest are: the Westphalian system of Europe; the Chinese conception of itself as a great Middle Kingdom; the Islamic world's desire for an ever-expanding caliphate bringing enlightenment and peace to its inhabitants; and, by the 20th century, the American mission of spreading democracy and capitalism around the globe to ensure peace and prosperity. Now, in the early 21st century, with all of these conceptions of world order increasingly coming into contact and at times clashing with one another, the main job of today's policymakers, according to Kissinger, is to midwife a new, workable world order for future generations.

The scope of the book is certainly broader than it is deep. Kissinger devotes much time to general historical overviews of different civilisations and sprinkles his own analysis throughout, often at the beginning and end of each chapter. He covers so much geographical and historical ground, in fact, that the reader wonders if one person can possibly have a serious academic interest in such a wide number of places and eras of history, or if the author is merely regurgitating the work of more narrowly-focused scholars.

One chapter in particular seems wholly original, and that is the discussion of how modern forms of technology are impacting and changing the way foreign policy is formulated and executed. While there is a general tendency in most societies to see technology as bettering the human condition, Kissinger offers a more nuanced view of why, in some cases, this may not be the case. His distinction between information, knowledge, and wisdom, and his discussion of the possible (negative) effects of social media on policy formulation, are particularly thought-provoking.

So how does this all relate to Europe, and the post-Soviet space in particular? The great irony of modern Europe is that even "though [it] invented the balance-of-power concept, it has consciously and severely limited the element of power in its new institutions". Europe in our time is, in essence, transcending the very foundation of world order that it did so much to establish in the 17th and 18th centuries. Will Europe remain stuck "between a past it seeks to overcome and a future it has not yet defined"? Is Europe leading the way towards a world in which "regional blocs ... perform the role of states in the Westphalian system"?

From the viewpoint of post-Soviet states and those that aspire to integrate with the European

Union, these are questions worth considering. As Kissinger points out, many of these states, "suppressed for forty years (some longer), [have begun] to re-emerge into independence and regain their personalities." It is ironic, then, that just as many of the post-Soviet states are beginning to take on meaningful roles in international relations, the nature of the international system is on the brink of redefining itself yet again. And even though Europe as a whole may be moving in the direction of a post-state entity united by common values, last year's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine make one stop and wonder if we really are moving forward. While Europe may hope for a more enlightened version of interstate relations, current events remind us that realist geopolitics have not gone away. Old habits die hard. Therefore, another question might be: Is the post-Soviet space forever destined to occupy an ambiguous grey area between multiple loci of world order?

All in all, the book is most valuable when one considers Kissinger's unique perspective as a seasoned statesman, and as someone who is plumbing the depths of seven decades' worth of foreign policy study and practice. It is rare to read a book by an author with so much direct life experience in the field. The content of the book, while in most cases not ground-breaking, is nonetheless a useful collection of insights and analysis proffered by one of the most authoritative voices in foreign policy of our time. Indeed, Kissinger's main strength is more as an analyst and synthesist of trends and concepts than as a researcher or theorist. Students of history and foreign policy alike would do well to read World Order, since books like this do not come along every year, or every decade for that matter.

Alex Jeffers