

Book Review*

World Order

Henry Kissinger



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Penguin Press: New York, 2014, 432 pp.

Unlike the books, *The End of History and the Last Man*, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order*, Kissinger's latest book *World Order* deals with the balance of power. In his own words, he analyses "how to build a shared international order in a world of divergent historical perspectives, violent conflict, proliferating technology, and ideological extremism".

Francis Fukuyama, in his 1992 book (*The End of History and the Last Man*) argues that we are witnessing not just the end of the Cold War but the end of history which is the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.¹ Conversely, Samuel Huntington along with his the clash of civilizations thesis argues that the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural and the principal conflicts will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations.²

In this sense, Henry Kissinger's book diverges from the aforementioned books. Kissinger alleges that there has never been a true "world order". According to him, for most of the human history, civilizations defined their own concepts of order and each considered itself the center of the world. However, he claims that the true "world order" requires civilizations to engage each other. From his perspective, they are not destined to clash. On the other hand, as a respond to Fukuyama's final form of human government thesis, Kissinger puts forward that "every region participates in questions of high policy in every other, often instantaneously. Yet, there is no consensus among the major actors about the rules and limits guiding this process, or its ultimate destination. The result is mounting tension".

1 Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, [Accessed on 08.02.2015], <<https://ps321.community.uaf.edu/files/2012/10/Fukuyama-End-of-history-article.pdf>>

2 Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*. February 2015, [Accessed on 08.02.2015] <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48950/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations>>.

The book covers almost every corner of the world except Latin America. Specifically, it focuses on four different concepts of “world order”. The first one is the European Balance-of-Power system. In this concept, Kissinger makes attribution to the Peace of Westphalia. According to him, “*today the Westphalian concepts are often maligned as a system of cynical power manipulation, indifferent to moral claims. Yet the structure established in the Peace of Westphalia represented the first attempt to institutionalize an international order on the basis of agreed rules and limits and to base it on a multiplicity of powers rather than the dominance of a single country*” (p. 30).

The second concept is Islamic system. The book deals with the Islamic world order from the Prophet Muhammad era to the present time from the perspective of Islam’s mission. Kissinger argues that the Islamic world order was based on the mission to incorporate *dar al-harb* (lands beyond the conquered regions) into its own world order and thereby to bring universal peace.

The third concept is Asian balance of power understanding which is examined from the three different perspectives (Japan, India, and China). While Kissinger acknowledges that until the arrival of the modern Western powers, no Asian language had a word for “Asia”, he also points out that the term “Asia” ascribes a deceptive coherence to a disparate region. In this regard, he emphasizes that the historical European order had been self-contained although the contemporary Asian order includes outside powers as an integral feature.

Kissinger’s last world order concept is the American order. In terms of this concept, he shares similar thoughts with Hillary Clinton on the contemporary world order. While Clinton expresses that the liberal international order that the United States has worked for generations to build and defend seems to be under pressure from every quarter³, Kissinger puts forward that *no country has played such a decisive role in shaping contemporary world order as the United States, nor professed such ambivalence about participation in it* (p. 234).

All in all, expecting an impartial work from the 56th Secretary of

3 [Accessed on 08.02.2015], <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hillary-clinton-reviews-henry-kissingers-world-order/2014/09/04/b280c654-31ea-11e4-8f02-03c644b2d7d0_story.html>

State would be naivety. If you do so, you would be awakened by the first paragraph of the book. The following paragraph leads the reader to understand what this 432 pages book is about:

In 1961, as a young academic, I called on President Harry S. Truman when I found myself in Kansas City delivering a speech. To the question of what in his presidency had made him most proud, Truman replied, "That we totally defeated our enemies and then brought them back to the community of nations. I would like to think that only America would have done this. (p. 1)"

In a nutshell, Kissinger guides readers through crucial episodes of recent world history and analyses the different world order concepts. However, the bottom line is that according to him, *"In China and Islam, political contests were fought for control of an established framework of order. Dynasties changed, but each new ruling group portrayed itself as restoring a legitimate system that had fallen into disrepair. In Europe, no such evolution took hold. With the end of Roman rule, pluralism became the defining characteristic of the European order (p.11) ... America has, over its history, played a paradoxical role in world order: it expanded across a continent in the name of Manifest Destiny while abjuring any imperial designs; exerted a decisive influence on momentous events while disclaiming any motivation of national interest; and became a superpower while disavowing any intention to conduct power politics (p.234)"*.

The previous paragraph would be count as the summation of Kissinger's thinking. Apart from that, the book deals with the existing problems instead of proposing solutions. In this sense, it would be logical to claim that Kissinger, with his book, suggests that the US should lead the "world order" by assuming hegemony as it is the only country which could perform this *duty*. From this perspective, some would find this book brilliant. Yet, it should not be forgotten that it has been written by a National Security Advisor and Secretary of State under Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford and embrace a specific way of understanding and thinking.

Overall, the book is lucid and attractive. It has a great deal to recommend it but should be read with eyes wide open.