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A WORLD EXPLORED

James Stavridis

Kissinger, Henry. *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001. 318pp. $30

In this characteristically brilliant and challenging book, Henry Kissinger lays out a proactive approach to building a coherent foreign policy for the United States. Drawing upon a lifetime of extraordinary access and service—secretary of state, national security advisor, Harvard professor, and 1973 Nobel Peace Prize recipient—Kissinger uses an easy style that takes us rapidly around the globe on a forceful and persuasive tour d'horizon. Indeed, Kissinger's first and until now best, book on the art and practice of diplomacy was *A World Restored* (1957), an examination of Europe in the post-Napoleonic period. In *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?* he sets out to give us what might be termed "a world explored," as he casts a wise and farseeing eye across the subject of modern foreign policy.

Widely, if simplistically, known as the ultimate practitioner of realpolitik, Kissinger contends that the United States must move to a more coherent, holistic approach to its foreign policy. His opening chapter characterizes the two, often conflicting, strands of U.S. diplomacy as "dual myths." He first explores and dismisses the approach of the liberal Left, wherein the tradition of Woodrow Wilson's impulse to resolve the world's domestic problems in a liberal-democratic fashion is fully embodied. He then moves on to criticize the Jacksonian Right, which sees in the collapse of the Soviet Union an opening for American hegemony—a view he regards as erroneous and dangerous. As Kissinger describes the current state of debate, "such controversy on foreign policy . . . is divided between an attitude of missionary rectitude on one side and a sense that the accumulation of power is self-implementing on the other. The debate focuses on an abstract issue: whether values or interest, idealism or realism, should guide American foreign policy." The heart of Kissinger's hypothesis is that the real challenge is to merge these two strands of thought into a coherent whole, bringing some measure of order out of an increasingly chaotic world.

Rear Admiral Stavridis, a 1976 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, holds a Ph.D. in international affairs from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. He commanded USS Barry *(DDG 52) and Destroyer Squadron 21. He served ashore as executive assistant to the secretary of the Navy and chief of the Policy Branch on the Joint Staff, J-5. Admiral Stavridis is currently director of the Navy Operations Group (Deep Blue) on the Navy Staff in the Pentagon.*

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After presenting a vision of the potential approaches to global policy, Kissinger turns to dissecting the world regionally. He hypothesizes that four international systems exist side by side in the world today. The first world enjoys an "idealist version of peace based on democracy and economic progress," found in the relations between the United States, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere. The second world is Asia, where the great powers—India, China, Japan, and Russia—treat each other as strategic rivals, much in the way the nineteenth-century European nations related to one another. In the Middle East, Kissinger sees a third world that resembles the Europe of the seventeenth century, full of conflict based on ideology and religion. The fourth and final world is in Africa, with over forty nations caught in a spiral of savage civil wars, an overwhelming AIDS epidemic, and vicious tribal conflict. Kissinger's predictions for each of these four worlds are central to this fascinating volume, and, while too detailed and numerous to discuss here, if taken together would form the basis for developing a sound foreign policy indeed.

Interestingly, Kissinger believes that the fundamental reason for the current strains and inconsistencies in U.S. foreign policy is that three generations of planners are involved: Cold War strategists, formed in the crucible of a bipolar world; a Vietnam generation of former protestors; and a post–Cold War generation, with entirely different experiences in an increasingly chaotic and multilateral world, seeking to enshrine globalism as a central organizing principle for the international environment. Given the intergenerational conflicts among these three groups, it is no wonder that U.S. foreign policy at times seems adrift.

Two criticisms are worth mentioning. The first falls out of the premise of Occam's Razor, that the simplest solution tends to be the correct one. At times, Kissinger seems to overcomplicate and overreach in attempting to describe the world in systemic ways. It may well be that the world is now so chaotic and prone to high-speed turns that sweeping strategic planning may have lost some of its utility. While it is clearly unwise to sing a requiem for strategic global planning, there is something to be said for an approach that hones our tactical skills—quick responses to emerging diplomatic crises—even as we continue to seek organizing principles and broader planning constructs.

A second criticism of the work notes Kissinger's surprising lack of attention to the extraordinary cultural dominance of the United States and to the implications of that important trend. Of particular interest is U.S. dominance in film, television, the Internet, and other visual media for information and ideas, so significant in an increasingly image-based world. Kissinger touches on this at points, commenting that "the question arises of whether the new ways of processing information may not actually inhibit our capacity to learn in the field of international relations." One wishes he had more fully explored this fascinating

idea, which is tied directly to the larger question of the transition from a print-based informational and educational system to a far more visually structured approach.

This is a volume full of superb advice for the statesman. When Kissinger writes that "the successful conduct of foreign policy demands, above all, the intuitive ability to sense the future and thereby to master it," he underscores the difficulty of strategic planning in today's chaotic and unbalanced world. If the United States cannot discern the future, it will indeed be difficult, if not impossible, for the nation to master it. Kissinger is on the most solid ground in saying that "leadership is the art of bridging the gap between experience and vision"—excellent advice for planners and policy makers in today's world. He may be thinking of more than the Balkans when he opines that "the ultimate dilemma of the statesman is to strike a balance between values and interests and, occasionally, between peace and justice."

In the end, the heart of this book is Kissinger's deterministic view of the world, grounded in moral conservatism—a quite solid basis for viewing a dangerous environment. He rejects utopian visions on both sides of the political spectrum and sees the past as a long journey through an unsafe land—logically enough, given his sense of history and his own immigrant experience. For Henry Kissinger, choices are hard and progress is difficult. We live in a world in which America should savor the small victories, because the big ones may never come. Yet for all the inherent pessimism of that vision, there is a subtle sense of enjoyment of the game and a belief that right and justice have at least a fighting chance.

Kissinger points out that "America's preeminence is often treated with indifference by its own people." The superb overview of the U.S. global situation that he provides in this work is a helpful, informative, and challenging antidote to such national apathy. Clearly, Henry Kissinger is a statesman still in intellectual command of the complex world he inhabits.