

World Order

Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2014),
Pp432

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The book ‘World Order’ by former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger is a comprehensive examination and analysis of the geo-political landscape. It examines the evolution and challenges of international order throughout history. Kissinger, one of the leading practitioners of world diplomacy and a renowned scholar, has made his exceptional investigation into global history and inter-state relations. He presents his exceptional insights; gained through knowledge and experience, in his classical book on “World Order,” by tracing the journey from the moment the world powers agreed on an order to organise international relations from the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 to the modern times.

The book is a synoptic summary of Kissinger’s thinking about history, strategy, and states-craft. Kissinger begins by emphasising the importance of order in international relations, arguing that without it, the world would have descended into chaos and conflict. He traces the historical development of different concepts of world order not to prove that one “order” is superior to the other, but to argue that an “order” is needed to prevent the world from chaos and to administer the world.

Kissinger’s historical analysis is diligent and methodical drawing on examples from ancient civilisations to modern times to illustrate his points. “In the modern world, as in any complex structure, the level of

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order is determined by the number of variables that can be controlled and the level of integration among them. This is why eras of peace and prosperity in international affairs have generally occurred under the ages of a dominant power,” he notes.

One of the strengths of the book lies in Kissinger’s ability to put in terms complex historical narratives and distil them into valuable insights. Kissinger identifies four great World Orders in history – the European, Islamic, Chinese and American. He divides the world geographically but analyses it from a cultural lens. He identifies that since the peace of Westphalia in 1648, Europeans have striven for balance in international relations: first in their continent and then in the rest of the world. Muslim states have looked to their destined expansions over regions populated by non-believers; a position which is epitomised today by Iran. For over 2000 years, the Chinese have always been seen through the cosmos as being affluent as compared to the Chinese Emperor. America has always viewed itself as the beacon to the world since its values have always gained universal validity.

Kissinger pinpoints the developmental and revolutionary experiences that each of these societies and civilisations went through in quest of, what he identifies in the book, “World Order.” He also provided a unique insight into the roles played by key historical figures and also explored the unique features of their respective cultures.

He critiqued that the United States shaped the World Order by beginning with the isolationist policies, and later transitioning to active diplomacy under Theodore Roosevelt’s influence. However, his vision was not fully realised. This has possibly impacted global events such as World War-I. Kissinger suggested that if Roosevelt’s approach had been followed, the war might have ended sooner. It could have prevented the world from the risky moves of Germany that eventually altered the course of history. Kissinger has also pinpointed the significance of effective diplomatic strategy in shaping international outcomes.

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Kissinger investigates Islam's stance on World Order, by drawing the distinction between "Adobe of conflict" and "Adobe of peace." He acknowledges various Islamic perspectives but concentrates on those he considers significant, which may present the current dynamics, particularly including the growth of groups like ISIS. Interestingly, Kissinger also distinguishes between the Islamic worldview and the Iranian one.

In the concluding chapter of the book, Kissinger expressed his concerns on the rapid expansion of technology which has broken down old barriers, creating spaces for conflict. Kissinger examines the impact of nuclear weapons, the internet, and digital technologies on global dynamics. While referring to the aversion of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which led to the danger of nuclear confrontation but resulted in strategic agreements because technology was not as dispensed as it is today. In fact, it made nuclear use unfeasible owing to its catastrophic repercussions. On the contrary, nuclear proliferation is today a multidimensional concern, fuelled by peaceful nuclear technical advancements and geopolitical conflicts. Mutual restraint techniques may fail with rising nuclear-capable states, affecting the implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The interaction between technology and global power dynamics determines the unpredictable destiny of World Order.

The book offers a thought-provoking look at the growth of global politics and the search for stability in the face of change and uncertainty. The book gives useful insights into the historical processes influencing the current World Order and the complexity of handling international relations in the twenty-first century. It is a suitable read for all students and scholars seeking a deep understanding of the transition of World Order throughout history. It provides an in-depth and better understanding of global affairs. It also offers an intrinsic understanding of the historical and geopolitical

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factors contributing to the change of the World Order, equally useful for the diplomats and government. *World Order* is a masterpiece of narratives, analyses, and portraits of great historical actors that only a genius like Henry Kissinger would have written. ■