

Dr. Henry Kissinger's Contribution and Achievement for International Order and Peace

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A renowned realist scholar on international relations, Dr. Henry Kissinger served as national security adviser to former president Richard Nixon and as secretary of state during the Gerald Ford administration. Dr. Kissinger made many contributions toward international order and peace during the Cold War era from the 1950s to the 1990s. He emphasized the importance of history in foreign policy and viewed international relations with a deep understanding of history and philosophy. Dr. Kissinger's ideas offer at least four insights that we would be well advised to study: history is the key to understanding rivals and allies; one must confront the problem of conjecture, with its asymmetric payoffs; many foreign policy decisions are choices between evils; and leaders should be wary of the perils of a morally vacuous realism.

In the first half of the twentieth century, humanity experienced two devastating world wars, but from 1945 to the present, the world has enjoyed an unprecedentedly long peace in world history. Although many Japanese lives were lost, the two atomic bombs ended World War II. Since then, there has been interstate conflict, to include the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the wars in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq, as well as crises such as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, but the world as a whole has been stable for a long period. This is in large part due to the U.S. contribution toward the establishment of liberal international order, and Dr. Kissinger's role in the process is noteworthy.

During World War II, having fought side-by-side with the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany, the United States and Western allies had delusions about the Soviet Union. But when the war ended, the Soviet Union began its communist expansion and played a decisive role in North Korea's invasion of South Korea by providing

¹ The Asan Institute for Policy Studies is an independent, non-partisan think tank located in Seoul Korea, dedicated to undertaking policy-relevant research to foster domestic, regional and international environments conducive to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. The Asan Institute was founded by Dr. M.J. Chung.

tanks and various armaments to North Korea. As a result, the West recognized the nature of the Soviet Union, and the Cold War was set in swift motion.

In the early years of the Cold War, there were serious tensions between the Communist bloc and liberal democracies. However, a balance of terror was achieved through the nuclear forces amassed by the two sides in the late 1960s. As the United States and Soviet Union realized the danger of major conflict which could be caused by excessive arms race and proxy wars around the world. The United States and Soviet Union began to adopt a strategy of coexistence.

This was the birth of *détente*, which meant “easing tension” or “rest.” With *détente* beginning in the late 1960s, a major clash between the United States and Soviet Union did not occur. Dr. Kissinger helped President Nixon by mapping out and implementing *détente*. Under *détente*, the United States and Soviet Union were able to achieve arms control like the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). This began with the understanding that nuclear competition between the United States and Soviet Union would lead to mutual annihilation. The Reagan-Gorbachev joint summit statement in 1985 confirmed that “nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

As World War II was coming to an end, on August 9, 1945, a week before Japan's surrender, the Soviet Union unilaterally broke the Japan-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The Soviet Union started a war against Japan, which was on the verge of surrender, and took over half of the Korean Peninsula. Four years later in 1949, Chinese President Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang government were exiled to Taiwan and mainland China fell under communist rule. Even though the communist forces were on the road to rapid expansion in the vast Eurasian landmass, then-Secretary of State Dean Acheson announced the Acheson Line, which declared the United States intention to defend the Far East centered on Japan and the Philippines, thereby excluding South Korea from the U.S. defense perimeter in the Far East. This is evaluated as a critical mistake which invited North Korea's invasion of the South.

Dr. Kissinger, who was a student at Harvard Graduate School, visited Korea in 1950 and analyzed the outbreak of the war. He submitted a memo entitled “U.S. Strategy” to William Elliot, political adviser to the president, and Paul Nitze, Director of Policy Planning for the State Department. In this report, he stated that the U.S. “policy of physical containment” to deter Soviet provocations in all regions would be too defensive and inadequate in deterring Soviet aggression. His report, which suggested that the United States should focus on key regions by

using its superiority in power to counter the Soviet threat, served as the basis for future countermeasures to communist provocations.

In an interview with Dr. Mong Joon Chung in 2010, Dr. Kissinger stated that, "the relationship between Korea and the United States has a long history, and the American people are well aware that more than 50,000 U.S. soldiers died in Korea during the Korean War. The United States has also stationed American troops in Korea for a long time. No country can defend every corner of the world at the same time. However, South Korea can trust the U.S. security commitment."

One of the key achievements of Dr. Kissinger was the opening up of China and its integration into the international community. The core premise was to balance the Soviet Union by improving relations with China, which was in the midst of ideological and border disputes with the Soviet Union.

In 1956, at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev started a movement to degrade Joseph Stalin with a speech criticizing him. This led China to criticize the Soviet Union for its 'revisionist' stance of seeking ways to coexist with capitalism and reject orthodox communism. The ideological dispute between the Soviet Union and China developed into a border dispute in 1969.

Dr. Kissinger was instrumental in normalizing relations between the United States and China, and in arranging President Nixon's visit to China. This visit laid the foundation for the establishment of diplomatic ties between these two countries in 1979. Although there are critical views on U.S. diplomacy under Dr. Kissinger, the United States began to improve relations with China, which led to China's rapid growth. It was only a matter of time for China—one of the birthplaces of the four major civilizations of the world with the world's largest population and a vast territory—to emerge as a great power. China's development took place within the international order and the system made by the United States. China may believe that it has inherited responsibility for maintaining the order which allowed China to participate in and develop itself.

On July 1, 2021, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated during the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party that "we are now marching in confident stride toward the second centenary goal of building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects." This statement could be interpreted as China's intention to become a great power surpassing the United States, unnecessarily provoking Washington. Given that China has undergone political

and social change as well as increased mutual interdependence with the world through its development, however, China may also be limited in taking unilateral actions that violate the existing norms of the international community. The relationship between the United States and China can be tense, but the fact that U.S. President Joe Biden and President Xi "discussed the responsibility of both nations to ensure that competition does not veer into conflict" during a recent phone conversation suggests that the U.S.-China relations can be managed.

In his meeting with Dr. Chung in 2010, Dr. Kissinger worried that "a clash between China and the United States would be a disaster not only for the two countries but also for the world." And he said, "If there is a conflict between China and the United States, the position of countries surrounding China will be very complicated, so it is important for the United States and China to make every effort to smooth out the bilateral relationship, and I think the Chinese leaders also want this."

Dr. Kissinger pointed out in his 2014 book *World Order* that it is necessary to move forward in the direction of creating a common order rather than confrontation. Dr. Kissinger mentioned a meeting with President Harry S. Truman, where President Truman stated that his most proud achievement was the moment "we defeated our enemies and then brought them back to the community of nations." According to Dr. Kissinger, Truman wanted to be remembered not so much for America's victories as for its conciliation, and every U.S. president since Truman has aimed to uphold and spread the American values of conciliation. Dr. Kissinger said that today's "rules-based" system faces challenges. The frequent exhortation for countries to "do their fair share" and play by "twenty-first century rules" reflects the fact that non-Western nations, who should play the role of "responsible stakeholders," have begun to question the validity of these rules and have stated their desire to modify them.

According to Dr. Kissinger, there has never been a truly global "world order," and the current order of our time is based on the Treaty of Westphalia, conceived in western Europe about 400 years ago. However, there are countries today, such as China, that do not sympathize with our current liberal international order and are attempting to undermine its authority. Dr. Kissinger says that nearly every country considers itself to be "rising," driving disagreements to the edge of confrontation. He poses the question: "can regions with such divergent cultures, histories, and traditional theories of order vindicate the legitimacy of any common system?" His answer is that "order in this sense must be cultivated; it cannot be imposed." Having said that, Dr. Kissinger suggests that "any system of world order, to be

sustainable, must be accepted as just—not only by leaders, but also by citizens,” and to sustain such system, it must reflect freedom and a framework of order. Dr. Kissinger points out that freedom cannot be secured or sustained without a framework of order to keep the peace and argues that order and freedom should be understood as interdependent.

In recalling his first visit to Beijing undertaken in 1971 to reestablish contact with China after two decades of hostility, Dr. Kissinger mentioned that “China was a land of mystery.” Premier Zhou Enlai responded, “You will find it not mysterious. When you have become familiar with it, it will not seem so mysterious as before.”

In July 1985, Dr. Kissinger stopped by Seoul on his way to China to meet with the founder of Hyundai Group, Asan Chung Ju-Yung, who was also then the Chairman of the Federation of the Korean Industries, and talked about China’s modernization policy and future. At that time, in South Korea, there was a lot of interest in China since South Korea did not have diplomatic relations with China. The contents of their discussion are as follows: Kissinger:

“... if the modernization policy continues for the next three years, Chinese communism may survive only as an idea. However, there is also a problem with this point of view. That is, if China continues to maintain its communist system and moves only to adopt a market economy, social unrest may arise from dissatisfaction and conflicts. In that case, the wave of unrest could be enormous, not only in China itself but also globally. I think the Korean economy should also take this into consideration.”

Chung Ju-Yung: “Dr. Kissinger, I have a different view. I often think that Americans don't know much about China. Thousands of years before the dawn of the United States, the Chinese people have gained the world’s best experience and skills in politics, in diplomacy, and especially in business. I do not believe that living under the communist system for only half-a-century can change the temperament of its best merchants, who are rooted in thousands of years of experience deep in their blood. As you said, there will be some confusion and setbacks in the process, but what I can assure you is that within the next few decades, China will emerge as the world's largest economy, second only to the United States.”

Born in 1923, Dr. Kissinger is now 98 years old, but his passion as a scholar has not diminished. He has also studied artificial intelligence (AI), which is a core future technology. Dr. Kissinger became concerned about the future of AI after

witnessing the AI program AlphaGo defeat the world's greatest Go player. Dr. Kissinger noted that AI presents both convenience and danger to mankind at the same time and that AI can make bigger mistakes than humans since it is driven by outcomes and depends less on history or philosophy. He warned that if we do not plan ahead to manage AI, the history of human civilization could end.

In 2010, when Dr. Kissinger visited South Korea at the invitation of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Dr. Chung met with Dr. Kissinger to discuss various issues extensively. The contents of this discussion are in Dr. Chung's book, *Communications with World Leaders*. In that meeting, Dr. Chung asked, "Is Afghanistan becoming the second Vietnam for the United States?" Dr. Kissinger replied, "The impact of Afghanistan on jihadists in Pakistan, India and around the world is enormous. It is fundamentally important to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a hotbed of terrorism and guerrilla warfare because the victory of Islamic jihadists will provide tremendous momentum for the global Islamic jihadist movement." Regarding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, his recent article in *The Economist* pointed out the strategic mistakes made by the United States of failing to understand Afghanistan's reality and of neglecting to elicit cooperation from countries such as China, Russia, and India.

When Dr. Chung visited Washington, D.C. in January 2009, Dr. Kissinger invited him to the Alfalfa Club—a gathering of 200 influential figures in U.S. political and financial circles—where he met then President-elect Barack Obama. In August 2014, Dr. Kissinger and his wife Nancy invited Dr. Chung to their summer house in Connecticut. In July 2015, Dr. Kissinger invited Dr. Chung to his New York home for a dinner, attended by the Chairman of News Corporation Rupert Murdoch, former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and former Wall Street Journal editor Karen House. In November 2019, they met again in New York where Dr. Kissinger stated that North Korea's denuclearization is in China's interest and that the role of the United States is important.

Different evaluations can be drawn about Dr. Kissinger's efforts for international order and peace. However, Dr. Kissinger's passion and insight for maintaining world order is something that future generations should emulate and follow. This commemoration of his efforts may contribute to the study of international relations.