

Jorge Mestre

Analyst International Relations. Advisor Council of Europe

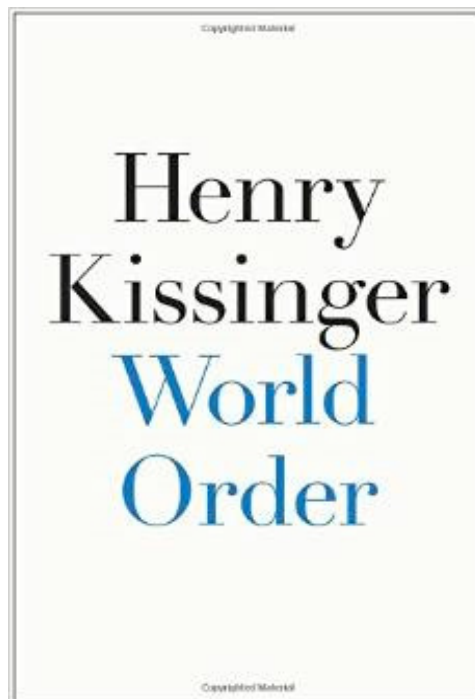
REVIEW

OF THE BOOK: WORLD ORDER

Authors: Henry Kissinger.

Editorial: Nueva York, The Penguin Press, 2014.

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Kenneth Waltz has said that building a theory of international relations based on historical events entails a risk. But the question seems obvious: Is history progressive, linear and directional, as described by Fukuyama (1996), or is it, as Kissinger suggests in his latest book “World Order”, a series of patterns that often repeat themselves?

In “World Order”, Kissinger points out that the system born out of the Peace of Westphalia (1648) provided the framework for a state-based international order that is still in place today. The author again credits the Congress of Vienna of 1814 for getting the major powers to work together to maintain a stable order. However, let us not forget that the Congress also gave Tsar Alexander I the right to arbitrate in European affairs, thus enabling him to annexe much of the territory of present-day Poland.

One of the things that attracted our attention when reading the book is the way the words act like a powerful zoom lens, giving us a panoramic view of the most significant historical trends and patterns and allowing us to zoom in on small details and anecdotes that illustrate the author’s theories.

The anarchy that characterised relations between states, but which seemed to have disappeared following the Cold War, thus suggesting the advent of a new era in cooperation between states, has gained prominence in the international system; fostering the realist view of international relations, which had entered a state of decline 25 years ago.

Even Kissinger, at the age of 92, can see clear signs that we are heading towards a Hobbesian state of nature, in Syria and Iraq, where no common rules other than the law of superior force seem to hold.

Relations between states have become more conflictual than they were a decade ago; state actors have more weaknesses than before, and they are also less capable of controlling social unrest movements, cultural fragmentation, scarcity of resources and the degradation of the environment. Furthermore, the U.S. is no longer willing or capable of appeasing its allies and dissuading its adversaries. “World Order” is increasingly becoming a fantasy.

In my opinion, all of this is a direct consequence of the unbalanced multipolarity that is emerging in the international system. In other times, multipolarity was underpinned by the balance of power, but this balance has become more fragile, mainly because of the emergence of regional powers on the scene, whose foreign policy can be described as revisionist.

Let us take Russia and China as examples: over ten years ago, the country that appeared most likely to have a head-on confrontation with the U.S. was China because of its establishment as a “major power”. And while relations between Beijing and Washington have been marked by the defence of their respective national interests, there has never been a confrontation. Quite the opposite of Russia, a state that seemed

destined to embrace the western liberal model following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening-up of the country.

The Kantian paradise of the European Union restored peace and stability to the member states. However, the world beyond its borders looks more like it did in the late 19th century than how liberals, such as Fukuyama, Doyle, Keohane and Nye, had envisaged it.

Today, the EU has no policy with respect to Russia beyond the sanctions imposed upon it for the Ukraine crisis. If in the late 19th century it was France and Russia who were trying to prevent the unstoppable rise of Germany, today it is France and Germany who are trying to restrain Russia, even transcending the framework provided by the EU when doing so.

However, despite the sanctions, the U.S. and Europe need Russia if progress is to be made on basic issues. This is particularly true in relation to Syria, where its proposal to confiscate chemical weapons has kept President Bashar al-Assad, a Kremlin ally, in power, and in negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme.

With the volatility of the world today, Kissinger writes, it is crucial for the U.S. to stay engaged on the world stage as a "balancer" in places like the Middle East and Asia, especially at a time when Europe seems to be turning inward.

Therefore, we are at a time when states have once again become the main unitary actors in international politics, where the anarchy of the system itself and the maximisation of security are the driving forces behind the behaviour of the major powers. Kissinger concludes by saying that he would like to live in a more stable world, more "Viennese", given that the "world order" of the present day is not order and it cannot be considered a world one.

