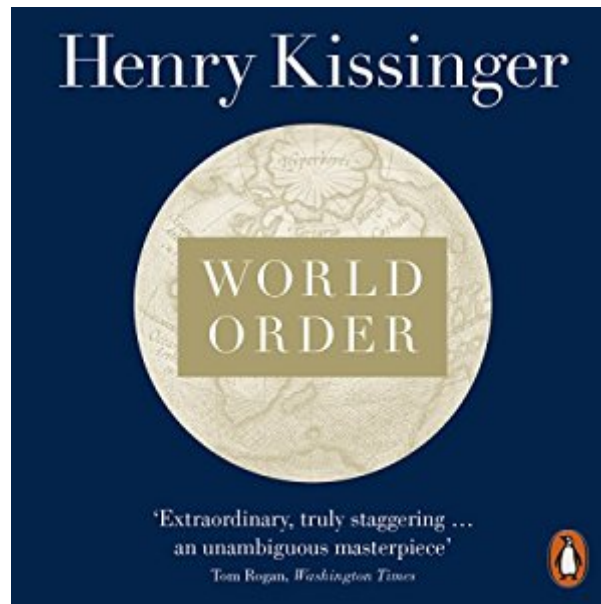


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# World Order: Reflections On The Character Of Nations And The Course Of History



## Synopsis

Penguin presents the unabridged, downloadable audiobook edition of *World Order* by Henry Kissinger, read by Nicholas Hormann. *World Order* is the summation of Henry Kissinger's thinking about history, strategy and statecraft. As if taking a perspective from far above the globe, it examines the great tectonic plates of history and the motivations of nations, explaining the attitudes that states and empires have taken to the rest of the world from the formation of Europe to our own times. Kissinger identifies four great 'world orders' in history - the European, Islamic, Chinese and American. Islamic states have looked to their destined expansion over regions populated by unbelievers, a position exemplified today by Iran under the ayatollahs. For over 2,000 years, the Chinese have seen 'all under heaven' as being tributary to the Chinese Emperor. America views itself as a 'city on a hill', a beacon to the world, whose values have universal validity. How have these attitudes evolved, and how have they shaped the histories of their nations, their regions, and the rest of the world? What has happened when they have come into contact with each other? How have they balanced legitimacy and power at different times? What is the condition of each in our contemporary world, and how are they shaping relations between states now? To answer these questions, Henry Kissinger draws upon a lifetime's historical study and unmatched experience as a world statesman. His account is shot through with observations about how historical change takes place, how some leaders shape their times and others fail to do so, and how far states can stray from the ideas which define them. *World Order* is a masterpiece of narrative, analysis and portraits of great historical actors that only Henry Kissinger could have written.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Throughout history, various civilizations have considered themselves to be the epicenter of the world and have defined various concepts of 'order', extrapolating their principles to be globally relevant. Mr. Kissinger takes us on a tour of various civilizations of the past including China, the Roman Empire, the spread of Islam, the formation of European states, and the post-WWII growing hegemony of the USA. He argues that there has never been a true world order because even the U.S. at the height of its power in the 50's did not want to, nor could, dominate the globe in a world of vastly different cultures and ideologies. Kissinger views the disintegration of Arab nations into tribal units as ominous and compares this to the religious wars in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. And he observes that although the U.S. has often had an idealistic vision of world order, the U.S. wavers between post-WWII global extension and post-WWI withdrawal from foreign affairs. He analyzes and makes recommendations on how to build a new global order in a world filled with increasing ideological extremism and rapidly advancing technology. Although this is an interesting and valuable work, I think Mr. Kissinger may be too optimistic that we will ever grow toward a unified order on our planet. It appears to me we only become 'unified' when robotic alien civilizations attack us on movie screens. Just as our U.S. Congress has become increasingly bipolar with opposing ideologies, I fear the world may become increasingly multi-polar as more and more nations undergo technological and economic growth.

I have read most of Henry Kissinger's previously published books and reviewed several of them. In my opinion, his latest -- *World Power* -- is the most valuable thus far because it addresses a challenge that the human race faces in months and years to come, one that it has never faced before: the possibility of total global chaos. Consider these observations by Kissinger in the Introduction: "No truly global 'world power' has ever existed. What passes for order in our time was devised in Western Europe nearly four centuries ago, at a peace conference in the German region of Westphalia, conducted without the involvement or even the awareness of most other continents or civilizations." Without a global world power, obviously, there can be no world order. The title of my review refers to a number of compelling questions and the first one posed in the Introduction is a whopper: "Are we facing a period in which forces beyond the constraints of any order determine the future?" Here are some others to which Kissinger also responds: o What is the relevance of the Westphalian System to world order? So what? o To what extent has Islamism threatened world

order throughout the last 1,000 years?o To what extent does Islamism (or at least radical Islamism) threaten world order today?o What can be learned from the relationship between the U.S. and Iran during the last 50 years?o What is the relevance of Asian multiplicity to world order?o What are the various stages of development of the U.S. foreign policies with regard to world order since Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901?o Insofar as world order is concerned, what valuable lessons can be learned from the Cold War?o Are nuclear military power and world order incompatible?o To what extent do disruptive technologies threaten world order?o To what extent can they help to establish, perhaps then strengthen world order?o Given the current and imminent realities as well as probabilities, must the human race do to achieve world order?Kissinger thoughtfully and illuminating responses to these and other questions are best revealed within his lively and eloquent narrative, in context. However, it may be of interest to check out a few brief excerpts that are representative of the thrust and flavor of his style:o "The history of most civilizations is a tale of the rise and fall of empires. Order was established by their internal governance, not through equilibrium among states: strong when the central authority was cohesive, more haphazard under weaker rulers. In imperial systems, wars generally took place at the frontiers of the empire or as civil wars. Peace was identified with the reach of imperial power." (Page 11)o "Europe turns inward just as the quest for a world order it significantly designed faces a fraught juncture whose outcome could engulf any region that fails to shape it. Europe thus finds itself suspended between a past it seeks to overcome and a future it has not yet defined." (95)o "At least three viewpoints are identifiable in Arab attitudes: a small dedicated but not very vocal group accepting genuine coexistence with Israel and prepared to work for it; a much larger group seeking to destroy Israel by permanent confrontation; and those willing to negotiate with Israel but justifying negotiations, at least domestically, in part as a means to overcome the Jewish state in stages." (131)o "Order always requires a subtle balance of restraint, force, and legitimacy. In Asia, it must combine a balance of power with a concept of partnership. A purely military definition of the balance will shade into confrontation. A purely psychological approach to partnership will raise fears of hegemony. Wise statesmanship must try to find that balance. For outside it, disaster beckons." (233)o "The American domestic debate is frequently described as a contest between idealism and realism. It may turn out -- for America and the rest of the world -- that if America cannot act in both modes, it will not be able to fulfill either." (329)o "Is it possible to translate divergent cultures into a common system? The Westphalian system was drafted by some two hundred delegates, none of whom has entered the annals of history as a major figure, who met in two provincial German towns forty miles apart (a significant distance in the seventeenth century) in two separate groups. They overcame their

obstacles because they shared the devastating experience of the Thirty Years' War, and they were determined to prevent its recurrence. Our time, facing even graver prospects, needs to act on its necessities before it is engulfed by them." (373) I wholly agree with the remarks with which John Micklethwait concludes his review of *World Order* for *The New York Times*: After expressing some dismay concerning Kissinger's self-serving equivocation and courtiership, he suggests "the message is clear and even angry: The world is drifting, unattended, and America, an indispensable part of any new order, has yet to answer even basic questions, like 'What do we seek to prevent?' and 'What do we seek to achieve?' Its politicians and people are unprepared for the century ahead. Reading this book would be a useful first step." Even if all the world leaders ask the same questions, including those suggested by Henry Kissinger in this book, it seems certain that there will then be serious differences between and among them in terms of what they believe are the right answers. Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss would have each of us tend to our own garden in the best of all possible worlds. Today, that garden is the planet Earth. It is perhaps possible but, my opinion, highly unlikely that world leaders will ever be able to agree on a set of rules that define the limits of permissible action and a balance of power that enforces restraint where rules break down. I am again reminded of Pogo the possum....

At age 91, Henry Kissinger has had ample time in his career to ruminate, to write, and to create both ardent followers and enemies. In a way, he seems to transcend time as his influence for better or worse influences sequential generations of political folly. One thing is certain about Mr. Kissinger, however, it is hard to deny that the vantage of his perspective has earned him the ear of both politicians and the public in a way that has rarely been paralleled throughout history. And so he carries on in *World Order*, trying to bring light to the patterns and organizations that propel recent events, much in the ways we have seen in comparable historical forms. (What was it that Mark Twain wrote? That history does not repeat, but it rhymes?) In *World Order*, Kissinger revisits themes that were explored in *Diplomacy*, and in his lesser known (but well recommended) *A World Restored*. In retrospect, it is that youthful ode to Prince Klemens von Metternich, the nineteenth century expert ambassador, which serves as an excellent opening chapter to Kissinger's life work (of which presumably *World Order* may well be his last major undertaking). For Kissinger, the Peace of Westphalia was such a key point in history, and the creation of such a Westphalian sovereignty as being integral to our current world order, that our path from this point in time hinges upon the forging of similar power-balancing agreements today. With Russia and Ukraine in conflict, the growing appetite of China for regional and economic domination, and the rise and challenge of new

factors in the Middle East, the timing for such a grand plan seems ripe for the world and America in particular (given our complex role as both military supply warehouse and "peacekeeper"), and Kissinger notes our unique role in both in forming the current world of imbalances, as well as our reluctance to partake in it. It is hard to know exactly where or how Mr. Kissinger's words will resonate. With our own recent political history being dominated by an incurious bumbler with vicious puppet-masters, and now a reasoned intellectual seemingly hobbled by compromise and political machinations, it is hard to remain too hopeful for any kind of deliberate political resolution on the world stage. As the world shrinks through advances of technology and communication, and the United States grapples with its role in the world politically, militarily, and financially, all the while in tension with the political extremes of both political parties, it remains to be seen what sort of positive role America can have in the political future of the planet. One can certainly have mixed feelings about Mr. Kissinger and his role in history, but it is hard to deny the appealing theme of his vision in *World Order*, a system based on "individual dignity and participatory governance." Of course, as always, the devil is in the details...

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