

The Coming Ordeal

by Srdja Trifkovic

Does America Need a Foreign Policy?

by Henry Kissinger

New York: Simon & Schuster;

352 pp., \$30.00



This latest book by the former secretary of state illustrates the difficulty of separating a piece of writing from its creator (Alan Greenspan on macroeconomics, Bill Gates on information technology, Steven Spielberg on cinematography). Would a similar, slim volume attract national attention if came from an assistant professor at a Midwestern college? Would it be considered “important,” a “*tour de force*,” even “profound” by so many reviewers? Would it be deemed worthy of a *Chronicles* review?

The answers are yes, no, and yes. There are many books on foreign policy around, few that recognize the forest rather than just a few individual trees. Kissinger’s stature and debonair arrogance combining the roles of a one-man think tank and a prophet are arresting, but even published under a lesser name, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?* would have been noticed for its boldness and readability. Though Kissinger steps with gusto on many liberal toes, the dominant *bien-pensants* are obliged to be smilingly polite to him, even when it hurts.

The reason this book deserves scrutiny from those of us who advocate a “realistic” foreign policy—one based on American national interests, pragmatically defined—is its deeply deceptive nature. In the opening chapter, Kissinger advances a set of guiding principles with which we can have little quarrel—and proceeds to violate them with concrete policy recommendations (most notably regarding missile defense and NATO) that are fundamentally irrational and manifestly determined by his ideological prejudices. His *a priori* assumptions are apparent also in his failure to tackle the implications of the ongoing migratory deluge of the West and of the looming demographic collapse of European nations and their overseas descendants in the coming century. More remarkably still, he is either unaware of or indifferent to the deep moral

and spiritual crisis of the Western world. The fact that a man of Kissinger’s stature and influence does not deign to consider the possibility that we are at the edge of a cultural abyss is perhaps the most depressing feature of the book.

Kissinger opens by observing that the United States currently enjoys political, military, economic, and cultural preeminence unrivaled by even the greatest empires of the past. Its behavior occasionally evokes charges of American hegemony, yet its policies reflect either rehearsed maxims inherited from the Cold War or domestic ideological schisms. The left sees America as the ultimate arbiter of domestic evolution all over the world. In their view, foreign policy amounts to an extension of U.S. social policy on a global scale; for the right, the solution to the world’s ills is unabashed American hegemony. Kissinger rejects both “an attitude of missionary rectitude on one side and a sense that the accumulation of power is self-implementing on the other.” The real challenge, he says, is to merge the traditions of exceptionalism by which American democracy has defined itself and the circumstances in which they have to be implemented, taking into account the structural differences between four main international systems in the world today.

The first of those—Europe and the Western hemisphere—is America’s oyster. Peace based on democracy and economic progress rules supreme. “States are democratic; economies are market-oriented; wars are inconceivable except at the periphery, where they may be triggered by ethnic conflicts.” On the other hand, the great powers of Asia—larger in size and far more populous than the nations of 19th-century Europe—treat one another as strategic rivals. Wars involving India, China, Japan, Russia, Korea, or Indochina are not imminent, but they are not inconceivable, either. The conflicts in the Middle East, by contrast, are akin to those of 17th-century Europe: Their roots are neither economic nor strategic but ideological and religious. Finally, there is Africa, which, with its chaotic ethnic conflict, poverty, and disease, has no precedent in European history.

Dealing with this variety of systems demands a subtlety Kissinger does not find either in congressional heavy-handedness or in the “ubiquitous and clamorous media that are transforming foreign policy into a subdivision of public entertainment.” He attributes an additional rea-

son for America’s difficulty in developing a coherent strategy to several Beltway attitudes. Cold War aficionados favor hegemony for its own sake; Vietnam-era peaceniks suffer from a Clintonesque woolly-headedness that precludes coherent thinking; and yuppie technocrats believe that a national foreign-policy strategy is not required, since we can count on the pursuit of economic self-interest and globalization to produce global peace and democracy. So long as the post-Cold War generation of national leaders is embarrassed to elaborate an unapologetic concept of enlightened national interest, Kissinger warns, it will achieve not moral elevation but a progressive paralysis:

Certainly, to be truly American, any concept of national interest must flow from the country’s democratic tradition and concern with the vitality of democracy around the world. But the United States must also translate its values into answers to some hard questions: What, for our survival, must we seek to prevent no matter how painful the means? What, to be true to ourselves, must we try to accomplish no matter how small the attainable international consensus, and, if necessary, entirely on our own? What wrongs is it essential that we right? What goals are simply beyond our capacity?

In the tension between globalist-missionary impulses (the legacy of Woodrow Wilson) and hardheaded realism (“Jacksonianism”), Kissinger clearly bends toward the second. Wars or interventions, either to stop “atrocities” or to spread American values, should be avoided; a realistic attachment to the national interest—the art of the diplomatically possible—has greater potential to realize moral purposes. Kissinger illustrates his point with the example of the Balkans. In Kosovo, the Clinton administration had aggravated a bad situation in the name of “morality” and helped the Albanians’ irredentist objectives, which extend beyond Serbia. In Bosnia, the “moral” position—the one that would have minimized suffering—would have allowed ethnic partition, rather than force three communities to remain in a quasi-multietnic polity that had no precedent in history and no connection to any fundamental American interests.

So far, so good. The problems emerge

in Chapter II, in which Kissinger discusses NATO and missile defense. Kissinger is a dedicated “NATO forever” enthusiast and a firm proponent of the missile-defense system. To him, NATO “still remains as an insurance policy against a new Russian imperialism.” It must not lose its sense of purpose and dissolve “into a multilateral mishmash”; if it did, “both Germany and Russia would be tempted to view each other as their best foreign policy option.”

Such views are problematic by Kissinger’s own standards of America’s national interest: A hard-boiled realist should have noted that missile defense has prompted an ongoing improvement in Russo-Chinese relations. Ever fond of historical parallels, Kissinger ought to recognize the similarity between the Russian-Chinese treaty of July 2001 and the *entente cordiale* between Great Britain and France of a century ago. That arrangement also was not a formal alliance to start with, as the Germans consoled themselves at the time. Nevertheless, it did have a comparable underlying logic in creating a pattern of relations that was to become fully apparent in August 1914.

By refusing to acknowledge that NATO and missile defense will perpetuate an open-ended and inherently adversarial relationship between Washington and Moscow, Kissinger activates a predictable, and possibly intended, paradox. The necessity to contain a potential threat from Russia—his fundamental reason for NATO’s continued existence—distorts Russia’s postcommunist evolution in favor of its traditional distrust of Western intentions. The realists who are now in charge in Moscow are not *a priori* “anti-Western,” but they harbor no illusions about the West, either. Their strategic thinking now entails an unabashed reliance on nuclear weapons and their possible first use. This is detrimental to American security and cannot be offset by any conjectural benefit in maintaining an alliance that has outlived its usefulness. The only proper rationale for a country to enter into an alliance is to enhance its security. By prolonging Russia’s status as America’s adversary, NATO does the opposite. Even in its weakened state, with all its economic and demographic problems, Russia remains a nuclear power with thousands of nuclear warheads. If NATO is enlarged and America proceeds with its antimissile system, Russia will place more nuclear war-

heads on its ballistic missiles, and American cities will remain on the list of targets.

It almost defies belief that a “realist” such as Kissinger would fail to consider dangers to America inherent in NATO expansion. The United States is extending its security guarantee to new clients in Russia’s geopolitical backyard. Theoretically, it is accepting the risk of an all-out war in defense of an area that has never been deemed vital to this country’s interests. It is guaranteeing a host of disputed frontiers, which often were drawn arbitrarily and bear little relation to ethnicity, geography, or history. It is underwriting the freezing in time of a post-Soviet outcome that is not inherently stable, “just,” or “democratic.” America is submitting itself to a calcifying organizational framework that will make eventual adjustments—if and when they occur—more potentially violent not only for the countries concerned but for the United States itself, which does not and should not have a vested interest in preserving an indefinite *status quo* in the region.

Washington and Jefferson would be horrified; even Kissinger’s beloved Metetrnich would frown upon this simply illogical policy, which means that the United States is seriously ready to risk a thermonuclear war for the sake of, say, Poland’s border with Belarus. Has Kissinger overlooked the results of previous Western security guarantees in the region (for instance, Czechoslovakia’s partition in October 1938, or Poland’s destruction in September 1939), which provide a warning that promises nonchalantly given today may turn into bounced checks or smoldering cities tomorrow? Does he not recall the lesson of Locarno: that security guarantees that are not based on the provider’s complete resolve to fight a full-blown war to fulfill them are worse than no guarantees at all?

Applying Kissinger’s own theoretical framework (that of a pragmatically defined American interest), it is possible to make a strong case for the abolition of NATO, the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Europe, and a partnership with Russia. For starters, this would boost Russia’s democratic institutions, which would make its aggressive comeback unlikely. In light of September 11, it is obvious that Russia needs help to become the West’s bulwark against the real threat to our common security, the new *antemurale christiansitatis*, as we enter a century that is certain to see a renewed

assault by militant Islam—to which Kissinger is curiously oblivious—on an enfeebled Europe. America needs Russia’s economic revival focused on its links with Europe, and a strategic understanding with Moscow based on the underlying common interest in keeping Islamic marauders at bay.

Kissinger does not notice that NATO’s continued existence strengthens the unholy alliance of the very people he professes to despise, of all those one-world Wilsonians and neoconservative global interventionists who presently run the show in Washington. They have jointly invented a new mission for NATO: that of self-appointed promoter of democracy and protector of human rights. Its area of operations is no longer limited; its “mandate” is entirely self-generated. Its war against Serbia in the spring of 1999 marked a decisive shift in its mutation from a defensive alliance into a supranational security force based on the doctrine of “humanitarian intervention.” This remarkable transformation has mirrored the longer (and almost complete) evolution of the U.S. government into a Leviathan unbound by constitutional restraints. The reinvention of NATO as the permanent iron fist of the ideology of neoimperial interventionism proves yet again the old adage—once advanced by Henry Kissinger himself—that foreign policy is an extension of domestic politics.

After reading Henry Kissinger’s latest book, some Europeans may conclude that the latter-day, U.S.-led *Drang nach Osten* is a poisoned chalice that the Germans will accept only at their peril. They will be justified in suspecting that there is no better way to ensure American dominance in Europe in perpetuity than by preventing the long-overdue Russo-German *rapprochement*. Kissinger, who is frank about his desire to prevent this from happening, should be commended for his openness. The wisdom in seeking to prevent this historic step, however, is doubtful, since the reestablishment of a German-Russian rapport is the last prerequisite for a long period of stable peace throughout Europe. Kissinger wants to postpone it in favor of what is becoming—perhaps contrary to his wishes—a psychotic imperial utopia utterly divorced from the interests, political traditions, and natural inclinations of the American people.

Kissinger’s views on NATO and his unwillingness to acknowledge the validity of arguments that do not fit his para-

digm provide examples of ideological distortion legitimized by a value system immune to critical scrutiny. That Kissinger is probably unaware of the hierarchy of normative control that determines his own thinking does not mean he is off the hook. A “self-revising” analyst—a bold thinker unbound by institutional loyalties and personal ambition—would deliberately seek the distinction between values and norms. Critically examining norms—in this case, the continued utility of NATO as an institution—should not be mistaken for attacking core values—American national interests—and thus proposing a new hierarchy of control.

Kissinger’s advocacy of a missile-defense system is an example of his ideological thinking. “With all respect for the views of allies and other important countries, the United States cannot condemn its population to permanent vulnerability,” says Kissinger, a little pompously, before proceeding to list arguments against missile defense in order to refute them. He does not list—and, therefore, does not answer—the right ones: the terrorist threats that, after September 11, may well be biological rather than nuclear and that the method of delivery will be a smuggled suitcase rather than a ballistic missile. More importantly, Kissinger does not see—or, anyway, does not say—that the missile-defense “philosophy” assumes the desirability of global hegemony as the basis of U.S. foreign policy. Short of a radical change in that policy, a working nuclear shield above America would be the equivalent of giving a sniper a bulletproof suit.

Intellectually and technically, Kissinger’s treatment of the “politics of globalization” is the least satisfying part of his book. “Globalization has diffused economic and technological power. Instantaneous communications make the decisions in one region hostage to those in other parts of the globe. Globalization has produced unprecedented prosperity, albeit not evenly.” Missing the impact of globalization on national identities and cultures, Kissinger exudes what seems an unwarranted confidence that the behavior of nations will remain determined in the coming century by continuities of history and geography, thus implying that nations are here to stay as recognizable, and more or less constant, entities.

Kissinger ends by noting that great statesmen are distinguished not by their detailed knowledge but by “their instinctive grasp of historical currents, by an

ability to discern amidst the myriad of impressions that impinge on consciousness those most likely to shape the future.” It goes without saying that he believes himself endowed with that grasp. He is mistaken. Having spent most of his working life within the institutional and intellectual confines of Washington, D.C., Dr. Henry Kissinger is finally constrained by the limits those impose on his ability to discern what needs to be done now and what is in store for us all tomorrow. The result is a distortion of reality—impelled by habit or interest—that purports to explain to others what the author himself cannot understand. In the coming century, the world will be a much darker and unhappier place than Henry Kissinger imagines, and his recommendations are woefully inadequate to prepare America for the coming ordeal, at home or abroad.

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Clark’s Tale

by Derek Turner

Diaries: Into Politics

by Alan Clark

London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson;
389 pp., £20



Alan Clark, who died in 1999 at the age of 71, was one of the Conservative Party’s most iconoclastic, amusing, and controversial—yet thoughtful—figures. In a party top-heavy with temporizers and economic reductionists, in an age full of *angst*, his cheerful disregard for delicate sensibilities was a joy to behold, even when you did not agree with what he was saying or doing. Everything he did was fundamentally *interesting*, however ideologically indefensible or morally reprehensible.

His penchant for fast cars and adventure got him into the gossip columns, while his adultery was legendary—at one time, he was carrying on simultaneous affairs with a judge’s wife and her two daughters. In the bars at Tory conferences, you can still hear delegates reminiscing fondly of Clark’s gallant defense of English football hooligans and his ar-

rest for demonstrating against live animal-exports, while his euphemism for lying—“being economical with the *actualite*”—has passed into common parlance.

Despite—or because of—his fame, Clark never attained particularly high political office, rising only as far as minister of state at the Department of Defence. His 1978 “certainty that I would be called upon to lead” must have rung hollow to him as he grappled with his fatal disease. We can only hope that the comment of Dennis Skinner (the leftwing MP who said to him, “You’ll end up in despair—like me”) was misplaced.

There are several other reasons for Alan Clark’s lack of political success. First of all, as the *Daily Telegraph* put it, “his honesty, sense of humour and contempt for stupidity disqualified him from high office.” Second, his upper-class background worked against him: His father was Lord (Kenneth) Clark, a distinguished art historian and the youngest director of the National Gallery. For decades, the Tories have been moving resolutely down-market, as the serried ranks of Heath, Thatcher, Major, and Hague testify, in an attempt to “broaden their appeal”—although to this day, Tory politicians are still often thought of as “posh,” whatever their origins (*ergo* “out of touch”), while the privately educated, upper-middle-class Tony Blair (descended from the Plantagenets on one side of his family, and from Simon de Montfort on the other) is an honorary “man of the people.”

Alan Clark had a greater interest in personal enjoyment than in serious politics: He often thought more about the intricacies of political plotting than its actual ends. He relished Westminster intrigues, saying in 1980:

The Machiavellian undercurrents, the need to be permanently on one’s guard, to know how to read the codes and smoke signals; how to assess people’s real motives, and discount their superficial courtesies and protestations—is what makes the game here so fascinating.

Finally, Clark’s unruffled surface masked a personality full of distracting doubts—about money, mortality, health, and sexual potency. As he asked of himself in August 1974: “Am I a Renaissance prince, a philosopher, or a big ageing dud?” Yet he attained greater influence and fame as an historian and, above all,