

**The Good Die Young: The Verdict on Henry Kissinger; René Rojas, Bhaskar Sunkara and Jonah Walters (eds.); London; Verso; 2023; 176pp; £11.99; ISBN 9781788730303; Available as an e-book.**

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When a public figure passes away, there is often an accompanying race to issue a final word on the individual and their legacy, whether in the form of personal tributes, biographies, or commemorations of their life's work. Rarely, however, does this come in the form of an anti-eulogy, at least so soon after the subject's passing. The edited volume from Rojas, Sunkara, and Walters, announced within hours of the former US Secretary of State's death, breaks this mould and is unapologetically critical of Kissinger and his role in shaping US foreign policy over the course of several decades.

This is not an obituary in any conventional sense: the authors come to bury Kissinger, not praise him. It is a critical assessment that is polemical, controversial, and provocative, to the extent that some readers might find it an uncomfortable read. Yet, it is also deeply refreshing. From its provocative opening line ('If you're reading this, Henry Kissinger is dead', p.1) to Leandros Fischer's damning denunciation of Kissinger as 'a Machiavellian figure whose policies left a trail of blood from Santiago to East Timor' (p.71), this is scholarship that pushes the boundaries. Whether it pushes them too far is a matter for individual readers to judge, but in any event, the Kissinger who emerges from this critical reassessment is difficult to sympathise with. The writing style is journalistic and intentionally accessible, permeated with a dark sense of cynicism, that is at times deeply sardonic. It is perhaps intended as a work of critical journalism, but it is one with implications for International Relations scholars, especially in promoting a more critical engagement with the history of our field and those who have shaped it.

The volume is structured as a collection of brief essays, most under ten pages in length, tracing the influence of Kissinger across the areas of the globe affected by foreign policy he championed. After a preface from the editors, and a perceptive introduction from Greg Grandin, the volume is divided into chapters centred on a country or region impacted by Kissinger's actions. Four are assigned to the Americas, one to Europe (namely Cyprus), and eight to the Middle East and Africa, with a final chapter on Kissinger's lucrative career as a private consultant after his retirement from political office. It is a broad sweep of both the impact of his decisions, and his role as a symbol of the excesses of US global power.

This is a tension that runs through the volume and an underlying theme is whether Kissinger should be remembered as an architect of atrocities or a symbol of a system that facilitated them. Over the course of the volume, the answer to this that emerges is a potentially unsatisfying mixture of the two, a reflection of the complexity involved in the historical assessment of a figure as long-lived and controversial as Kissinger. This is a marker of the diversity of the contexts covered and the wide variation between them. For instance, Piero Gleijeses argues that Kissinger spearheaded US support for covert intervention in Angola to 'exorcise the ghost of Vietnam' (p.83) out of a personal desire to undo the humiliation he saw himself suffering

with US defeat. Brett Morris similarly highlights the disconcerting pleasure Kissinger took in administering the illegal bombing of Cambodia, including directly setting targets to be bombed (p.131). On the other hand, Carolyn Eisenberg argues Kissinger did not introduce a new paradigm to US foreign policy but instead ‘hardened’ the orthodoxy he inherited (p.150), while René Rojas suggests his role in supporting the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile exacerbated the existing situation but was not the driving force behind the coup’s success (p.38). As this illustrates, assessing a career as long as Kissinger’s is a complex task. The contributors manage this ably however and strike an appropriate balance between Kissinger the actor and Kissinger the symbol. There are central connective threads running throughout the volume, but also much diversity and range.

On this note, the nature of this volume is one of its weaknesses, in that it is inherently a whistle-stop tour of a wide range of contexts and time periods that cannot be fully engaged with in depth. It feels rushed at times, perhaps undermined by its brevity, even if it is hopefully the precursor to a more in-depth reassessment of Kissinger’s legacy. However, its structure is also its biggest strength. It is wide-ranging and accessible to a general reader and covers a vast range of historical contexts in a concise and readable volume. Because the chapters are so brief, it is possible to fit fourteen into one volume, allowing for a diversity of perspectives on Kissinger and the people across the globe he impacted. There is much to say about Henry Kissinger, in part because of his extraordinary longevity, spanning seven decades. It is easy to imagine him as a relic of a bygone age, born in the Weimar Republic a century ago, but this volume roots him firmly in the present.

IR scholars should pay particular attention to this, given that Kissinger was active as an academic long before his formal involvement in the mechanisms of US foreign policy. His name, for instance, first appeared in *International Affairs* in 1958.<sup>1</sup> As such, his longevity positions him as an artefact of the historical development of the discipline, forged in the post-war context of efforts to distil a non-normative, morally-detached ‘science’ of power politics, and symbolic of the potential danger in the relationship between IR theories and foreign policy actions legitimised by them. There is much to be gained from this critical reassessment of a figure who, in the last decades of his life, straddled the complicated line between contemporary political actor and historical figure. As he now makes the definitive transition into the latter category, this volume provides an opportunity to reflect not only his actions, but on the structures that produced him.

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<sup>1</sup> Denis Healey, ‘The Sputnik and Western Defence’, *International Affairs*, 34.2 (1958), 145-156.