



# **Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman**

*Greg Grandin*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

# Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman

*Greg Grandin*

**Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman** Greg Grandin  
A new account of America's most controversial diplomat that moves beyond praise or condemnation to reveal Kissinger as the architect of America's current imperial stance

In his fascinating new book, acclaimed historian Greg Grandin argues that to understand the crisis of contemporary America—its never-ending wars abroad and political polarization at home—we have to understand Henry Kissinger.

Examining Kissinger's own writings, as well as a wealth of newly declassified documents, Grandin reveals how Richard Nixon's top foreign policy advisor, even as he was presiding over defeat in Vietnam and a disastrous, secret, and illegal war in Cambodia, was helping to revive a militarized version of American exceptionalism centered on an imperial presidency. Believing that reality could be bent to his will, insisting that intuition is more important in determining policy than hard facts, and vowing that past mistakes should never hinder future bold action, Kissinger anticipated, even enabled, the ascendance of the neoconservative idealists who took America into crippling wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Going beyond accounts focusing either on Kissinger's crimes or accomplishments, Grandin offers a compelling new interpretation of the diplomat's continuing influence on how the United States views its role in the world.

## Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman Details

Date : Published August 25th 2015 by Metropolitan Books

ISBN : 9781627794497

Author : Greg Grandin

Format : Hardcover 270 pages

Genre : History, Biography, Politics, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Audiobook

 [Download Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman Greg Grandin ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman Greg Grandin ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman Greg Grandin**

---

# From Reader Review Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman for online ebook

## Exapno Mapcase says

Grandin provides a look at the reach of former Secretary of State Kissinger that sometime reaches in its conclusion. All of the details are significantly noted with abundant and rather long footnotes, but sometimes the sum of all the parts do not mesh up.

Free review copy.

---

## Joseph says

*Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman* by Greg Grandin is a look at a man who was instrumental in American foreign policy and has outlived critics and supporters. Grandin is the author of *Fordlandia*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award. A Professor of History at New York University, Grandin has published a number of other award-winning books, including *Empire's Workshop*, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, and *The Blood of Guatemala*.

Love him or hate him, Kissinger is a man that shaped modern American foreign policy and still today writes on the topic as an experienced sage. It was once said that Machiavelli does not write about how a leader should act in a perfect world, but rather how a leader needs to act in this world. Kissinger may be the equivalent in the modern world. He is the father of American Realism in foreign policy -- The idea that a nation must act on its own accord, even when it does not have the support from other nations. Kissinger believes in power and the actual exercise of that power to create foreign policy. Kissinger, like Al Capone, believed you can get more with a kind word and a gun than a kind word alone.

Grandin covers Kissinger's life from the military to the post 9/11 world. There is no doubt of Kissinger's brilliance in his ideas, but the practice of those did not always have the desired results. The massive bombings of North Vietnam did not have the desired effect as Le Duc Tho, the North Vietnamese negotiator, verbally embarrassed and harassed Kissinger at the peace talks. Kissinger threatened more bombings and Tho simply told Kissinger that America had already lost the war. Vietnam was holding firm and the American public was rejecting the war. The mouse stood up to the lion. Kissinger could not understand that.

Kissinger was the central figure in and covering up the secret bombings of Cambodia. The four years of bombing were known as Operation Menu and Kissinger worked to cover up the real targets of the bombings. Much of this remained unknown until General George S Brown told what he knew to congress during hearings for his selection for Air Force Chief of Staff. Kissinger dodged any responsibility. The result, however, brought an impeachment charge against Nixon that was dropped. Congress also passed The War Powers Act of 1973 over Nixon's veto. Kissinger stayed on after Nixon's resignation and although Ford removed him from the position of National Security Advisory, he stayed on as Secretary of State. Kissinger faced opposition from the crowd of rising neo-conservatives -- Cheney and Rumsfeld. He did, however, convince Ford to overreact to the Mayaguez incident reaffirming America's will to use force.

Kissinger's hand runs deep through American policy from the well known Cambodian bombings, opening

relations with China, SALT talks with the Soviets, and the coup in Chile. He also took part in lesser known actions in Rhodesia, Bangladesh, and East Timor. His role did not end with Carter's election victory. George W. Bush called him back to service to chair the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. Kissinger, now in his 90s is no longer active in foreign policy, but the world is still experiencing the effects of his actions. His role cannot be denied in the forming of late 20th Century American foreign policy. A great biography and read.

---

### **Karen Linton says**

Truth is, this author is so liberal that even though I generally agree with him about Kissinger, I have to step back and rethink my opinions because Grandin's are so far left. No, I wouldn't recommend it.

---

### **Ralphz says**

Greg Grandin's "Kissinger's Shadow" attempts to explore the reality of Kissinger - and in Grandin's mind, the reality is that everything Kissinger did was a mistake. You don't get balance in this book - you get polemic.

Kissinger was never the most corrupt Secretary of State we've ever had (remember, Hillary Clinton had the job, too), and he wasn't the purehearted shining light either. The reality, as it always is, was much more difficult, but that idea would only get in the way of Grandin's agenda. Criminal? Check. Cryptonazi? Check. Boogeyman? Check.

Kissinger presided - or helped preside, to be more accurate - over the Vietnam War, yes, but he also opened China - how can you possibly ignore 1 billion people, as U.S. foreign policy did?

Like him or not (and Grandin obviously doesn't), Kissinger is the most consequential man in American foreign policy in the last 50 years.

I received this book as a free review copy.

More reviews at my WordPress site, [Ralphsbooks](#).

---

### **Helio Paiva Neto says**

Great book, though it seems a single point is repeatedly driven through the entire book, maybe in an attempt to consolidate it in the reader's mind.

---

### **Randall Wallace says**

This famous psychopath won a Nobel Prize for ending a war he played a large part in helping along. He proved the validity of his published theories because he was never indicted for any of his crimes and instead

only became more powerful. Kissinger was caught ordering, "Anything that flying on anything that moves". As Noam Chomsky says, rarely in human history have orders for genocide been this clearly documented yet nothing has happened. This book has lots of great info: Nixon won the election over Humphrey because Johnson knew Nixon's made a deal with the South Vietnamese through Anna Chennault and though he thought the action treasonous he kept quiet. Instead of outrage swinging the election to Humphrey, Johnson's silence gave the election to Nixon. Kissinger approved "each of the 3,875 Cambodia bombing raids in 1969 and 1970 as well as the methods for keeping them out of the newspapers." When a staff member balked at the idea of invading a neutral nation Kissinger's response was, "Your views represent the cowardice of the eastern establishment." He told the next staff member, he wasn't "manly enough". Apparently only people who can sleep well after murdering of thousands of Cambodian children can be called "manly enough". Psychopaths traditionally have only contempt for those who dare to show empathy. "The more impotent we prove to be, the more we have to escalate." Who says this kind of stuff except a madman? Again, why is this creep still on the streets and not in prison fending off male sexual advances from a very large person? ? Thanks to Kissinger, Laos is "the most heavily bombed country in history." When it came to war reparations legally due, his response was "Every effort should be made to avoid the necessity for a special budgetary request to provide funds for this claim." 30% of the bombs dropped by the US didn't detonate so in Laos alone there is 80 million unexploded cluster bombs under a thin layer of soil packed with ball bearings. Henry should proud to also know that 40% of the landmine victims are children. "I don't see how it is possible to conduct foreign policy when there's a systematic attempt to destroy both your threats and you incentives". With Henry at the helm, endless bombing wasn't to win against North Vietnam, "the bombing was meant to win at home". Kissinger and Nixon were both "...keying their actions not to external reality but rather to their need to manipulate domestic opinion." Nixon is an equally empathetic human: "I'm going to destroy the goddamn country." Kissinger said to resigning staffers that if Tom Hayden and Quakers and others won a revolution the right would take over and so he was protecting them from the right. The staffers replied: "You are the right." A great book and Greg makes a convincing case that what Jill St. John's favorite psychopath did nearly fifty years ago while in power, "created the conditions for today's endless wars."

---

## **Maliamoana says**

A sad, sobering, and realistic explanation of why war will never end, thanks to the American political machine.

---

## **Andrew says**

Henry Kissinger (now age 92) has been a prominent international figure since I was in high school when he became Nixon's National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State. He seemed to me to be an urbane realist then and an elder statesman now. By looking deeply at Kissinger's early writings and the record of his actions as filled out by declassified top secret documents from previous decades, historian Greg Grandin offers a very different picture in *Kissinger's Shadow*.

Kissinger's early work as a student at Harvard reveals someone who believed that morals, ethics and values in international affairs were secondary to the importance of using power to prove resolve and shake off the stagnation that came when an empire reached its peak. He also did not think history was a helpful guide to the future. It bogged leaders down in "what ifs." Action is what mattered.

As a result Kissinger advocated action heedless of consequences. And if there were consequences, that was not a problem either. Just take more action, usually with force. Thus among Nixon's advisors, he was (despite his well-groomed public persona) the most hawkish of hawks. He was the father and architect of the year-long secret bombing of Cambodia, a neutral country, and of later pounding the entire country with B-52s.

The consequences that Kissinger didn't care about? Tens of thousands killed, and a country that was precariously holding on to neutrality was thrown into chaos and civil war. The disintegration allowed the radical Kmer Rouge to gain thousands of followers who in turn killed between one and two million of their own countrymen.

Other Kissinger policies included supporting brutal Latin American dictators, giving the nod for Indonesia's Suharto to commit genocide in East Timor, betraying the Iraqi Kurds in the early 1970s, and helping derail the 1969 peace talks with Vietnam only to get credit as a peacemaker in 1973 for ending a war he had extended by four unnecessary years. Kissinger was not the moderate keeping arch conservatives at bay, as he portrayed himself. He himself, says Grandin, was the far right.

One hole is that Grandin doesn't spend much time discussing Kissinger's realist policies toward the Soviet Union. Perhaps that is because it doesn't fit Grandin's thesis.

The shadow Grandin refers to is Kissinger's influence on the United States' pattern of constant warfare from the unprovoked invasion of Iraq in 2003 to drone attacks in dozens of neutral countries today. Yet this perhaps gives Kissinger too much credit. The US had intervened militarily over fifty times in Latin America alone from 1846 to 1968 when Kissinger joined the Nixon White House. So Kissinger was also falling into a well-established tradition, though a tradition he extended and intensified.

With clarity and passion, Grandin lays the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of thousands at Kissinger's feet. In doing so he shows the immense tragedy that arises when we disparage morals and ignore history.

---

## **Adam says**

It would have surprised me to think that I would read a political biography of Henry Kissinger, let alone devour it in 3 subsequent evening sittings. This is an exceptional book. Grandin's work is deeply-researched and his prose is fast-moving, giving us the impression that we are being presented with only the most essential facts and stories about this evil genius. The author's commentary runs throughout, and provides further evidence in his judicious use of footnotes. That Grandin can present a satisfying history of "the long reach of America's most controversial statesman" in 230 short pages is quite an accomplishment. As a result, Grandin succeeds in proving that Kissinger's political footprint on the United States cannot be overstated.

I regret not having written this review shortly after reading the book last year. The book is important enough that I'm now going through the notes of its margins to rescue what for me are the key takeaways to remember.

Kissinger strikes a strange pose, this foreign-born intellectual occupying high offices of power and whispering instructions to those elected to even higher offices of power. Grandin begins the book with the Kissinger's intellectual beginnings, his doctorate thesis. He convincingly shows that Kissinger's thesis lays the crackpot philosophical foundation that informed his work throughout his lifetime.

It goes something like this. Reality does not objectively exist. Men [and yes, he only would have said men] are free to make reality with their choices. History does not consist of cause and effect. Historical events are to be used as analogies. Men have the freedom to intuit the correct course of action without being hindered by lessons, facts or data. Grandin explains that Kissinger

“affirmed the existence of a realm of consciousness that superseded the material world a realm that Spengler called ‘destiny’ but Kissinger preferred to describe as ‘freedom.’ ‘Reality that is subject to the laws of causality,’ Kissinger wrote, represents only the outer, surface appearance of things. But ‘freedom is an inward state’ and ‘our experience of freedom testifies to a fact of existence which no thought-process can deny’” (20).

Grandin explains in other words the enduring power of Kissinger’s philosophy: “the ‘realism’ he is famous for is profoundly elastic, anticipating the extreme subjectivism of the neoconservatives. Kissinger taught that there was no such thing as stasis in international affairs: great states are always either gaining or losing influence, which means that the balance of power has to be constantly tested through gesture and deed” (190).

Men must make choices and act: “‘inaction has to be avoided so as to show that action is possible’...Only ‘action could overcome the paralyzing fear of the ‘drastic consequences’ (that is, nuclear escalation) that might result from such ‘action.’ Only through ‘action’—including small wars in marginal areas like Vietnam—could America become vital again...” (29).

There is more circular reasoning: “Put in Spenglerian terms, ‘power’ is history’s starting and ending point, history’s ‘manifestation’ and its ‘exclusive objective’...we can’t defend our interests until we know what our interests are and we can’t know what our interests are until we defend them” (29).

Such ethical relativism serves a foreign policy that senselessly bullies other nations in order to demonstrate dominance and a destroy domestic political foes. This is how we can begin to understand how it is that a nation like Laos “‘became the most heavily bombed country in history’” (29).

This is an impressive stew of high theory to justify what boils down to America’s thuggish foreign policy. In fact, Grandin argues that Kissinger’s intellectualism brought him a broader sort of respect: “even if Kissinger couldn’t convince liberal and left-wing intellectuals about the soundness of Nixon’s policy, they were still reassured that someone at ease with concepts such as ‘bourgeois society,’ ‘objective conditions,’ and ‘structural crisis’ was in the White House” (85).

We’re talking about the kind of thuggery that lead to the stunt of a “rescue” of an American container ship from the Khmer Rouge in 1975. Despite the fact that the seamen aboard were safely returned, Kissinger advised President Ford to “‘do something that will impress the Koreans and the Chinese’” (141), which resulted in 41 American soldier deaths and an unknown number of Cambodian deaths from bombing “a railroad yard, port, oil refinery, and over three hundred buildings,” plus nine Cambodian ships (142).

The thuggery extends to how the American people are to be handled when they are faced with these amoral atrocities: as someone described the Reagan’s administration’s airstrike on Libya, “‘as a superpower with global responsibilities, if our forces are attacked in another country, you can construe it as an attack on our territory.’” And, as Grandin points out, in a “global war on terror,” “There is, today, no part of the earth that cannot be considered ‘our territory’” (195).

---

## Mike says

If you read one book about American history in the mid to late 20th Century, consider this one for the short list. If you lived through it, then all the better. Those times and people all belong to history now, or as in Kissinger's mind, history is only the product of the questions we ask it, and statesmen should not pay it too much attention or they will fail to act decisively enough and quickly enough.

This book delves into Kissinger's mind and behavior as a result of his beliefs rather than just reciting his actions and statements, which makes it a good book and more informative than just a reciting of dates and things that happened.

Kissinger was a German metaphysician shaped by Oswald Spengler and the Holocaust. He believed that statesmen made history by their actions and did not have to seriously consider it to take those actions properly. He abhorred the statisticians, analysts, and strategists who collected as much data as possible and shaped their decisions with it. From this book it is probably more likely he abhorred them because they competed with him and would apply that data and analysis to him and the Presidents he served, most notably Richard Nixon.

His go-to answer for dealing with the Russians, and anybody else for that matter, was the "Mad Man" theory that the US should act brutally, quickly, and without guilt in attacking the USSR's surrogates or any other country challenging America. For years he ran the Cambodian bombing personally from the Nixon Whitehouse basement. Whenever he served another President he always went back to that strategy of bomb and attack, civilians be damned.

He was incredibly manipulative and exchanged one set of twisted truth and political position for another in order to keep himself on the inside of every administration from Nixon, to Ford, to Reagan and Bush I and the neoconservatives who hated him at the beginning of the Reagan years. He morphed and manipulated himself into them so they all eventually let him and Kissinger Associates into their inner sanctum, right through the George W. Bush Administration. Most recently he has had meeting with Donald Trump according to press reports.

In the telling of this author it appears that Kissinger was very much like the Nazis who had tried to kill him in the end. People were only a means to an end for him, especially people in other weaker and poorer nations.

The only issue I have with the book is that the first part through the Nixon years was very tight and objective. In the latter half the author's opinion shows through more and some readers who are blinded by the left-right culture war climate of the Trump years will scream "liberal!" and stop reading. You have to read things from all sides and all kinds of writers, otherwise your own thoughts and beliefs become ossified and limited. That said, this book is worth a read by anyone interested in recent American history from any viewpoint. It is history and everything the author says is supported by historical facts and data, which of course, Kissinger would hate.

---



## David M says

Anything that flies on anything that moves. - Kissinger ordering the bombing of Cambodia

A word on the subtitle. My guess is that the publisher chose it. The word 'controversial' after all is a euphemism. As Grandin so ably demonstrates, the evidence against Kissinger is actually *incontrovertible*. The man is a war criminal. If there were any justice in this world, he would have been tried and convicted a long time ago.

However, this book is not merely another cry of righteous indignation, like Christopher Hitchens's *Trials of Henry Kissinger*. Hitchens's all-consuming hatred of Kissinger was no doubt justified. Nonetheless by focusing so relentlessly on the moral deformities of a single individual, Hitchens blinded himself to broader questions of history and power (this is a problem that runs throughout his oeuvre, part of the reason why, despite being a considerable rhetorician, he really was never much of either a leftist or an intellectual, RIP).

Grandin, by contrast, tries to situate Kissinger within the institutions of the national security state, institutions he himself did not create. By the time he came to power in '68 the war on Vietnam had already been raging for years. Kissinger would initiate the sadistic and gratuitous bombing campaign against Cambodia, but similar operations had already occurred in Laos. Moreover, long before September 11 1973, the CIA already had a long practice of sponsoring right-wing coups in third world countries (Iran in '53, Guatemala in '54, Indonesia in '65).

All this being so, Grandin still argues Kissinger has had a significant role in shaping the culture of American militarism. For the most part we now all accept permanent war as the normal state of things. This was as true of Obama, with his drone strikes, as it was of his Republican predecessor.

Please read this book, especially if you're a fellow American. We really do need to have a national dialogue about the enormous violence our government has sowed throughout the world. Granted I'm a whack-a-doodle Marxist, but please note it's not just me and my Trotskyists friends who think so. This book comes with a blurb from conservative military historian Andrew Bacevich. Grandin quotes a Republican congressman who visited the site of the bombing in Cambodia and described it as "a greater evil than we have done to any country in the world" (pp 76).

Hopefully some day the bombings of Laos and Cambodia will be taught to middle school students learning American history. For now they remain shamefully obscure.

\*

Last summer Grandin wrote an editorial for the Nation, 'Hilary Clinton's Embrace of Kissinger is Inexcusable.' In it he argues that Sanders should make his endorsement of Clinton conditional on her repudiating Kissinger. Clinton never did that. She actively sought Kissinger's endorsement and has been close personal friends with him for years.

This is the sort of the thing that's often lost when liberals denounce those 'purists' or 'Bernie bros' (eek!!) on the left who refused to cast a vote for Clinton. Liberals present it as if it's disagreement between people who essentially want the same thing, with the 'purists' stubbornly refusing to make any compromise with practical necessity. This is utter obfuscation. We on the left should insist that we're *not* on the same side as anyone

who shares the same basic foreign policy assumptions as Henry Kissinger. Under certain conditions, the relative balance of evil might still justify a vote for someone like Clinton, but that's a tactical question. On matters of principle we ought to be clear.

<https://www.thenation.com/article/hil...>

---

## Kara says

As Greg Grandin makes clear from the beginning, unlike Christopher Hitchens' *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* this book is not an indictment for war crimes. By no means does Grandin offer an apologist's perspective for this former Secretary of State and Director of the National Security Council, directly (Cambodia) and indirectly (East Timor) responsible for the murders of tens to hundreds of thousands of civilians worldwide.

Rather, Grandin's purpose is to reveal the motives behind the man by examining the political theories--and notable departures from these theories--that shaped this non-elected official who wielded the greatest influence of any individual over modern U.S. foreign policy. Kissinger's complicated legacy began in the context of the Cold War but as Grandin illustrates, extends well into today's conflicts in the Middle East.

**"Nixon's top foreign policy adviser helped revive a militarized version of American exceptionalism centered on an imperial presidency....Believing that reality could be bent to his will, insisting that intuition is more important in determining policy than hard fact, and vowing that past mistakes should never hinder bold action in the future."**

Kissinger favored his own hunches over the analysis of intelligence agencies and saw himself not as a bureaucrat but a man of action who shaped the world of international relations rather than reacting to events. Thus he advocated using *madmen theory* against Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh: rather than waiting to defend in predictable situations, the U.S. should strike randomly and without provocation thereby leading the nation's enemies to believe the U.S. military capable of anything. As a man of action, he personally oversaw the covert and illegal bombing of Cambodia--going so far as to order the military commanders precisely where to drop their payload. He even went to battle against U.S. intelligence agencies in order to contain the so-called *domino effect* (another overreaching theory of the spread of Soviet influence) and prevailed by inflicting what would prove to be disastrous U.S. involvement in Angola.

His philosophical world view centered heavily on his studies of German metaphysics--order over justice: **"[He] valued stability and the advance of national interests above ideals like democracy and human rights."** It is no coincidence that Kissinger escorted dictatorships into power (Chile, Uruguay), helping them to consolidate and/or maintain their apparatus of repression (Guatemala and South Africa, where his 'tar baby option' was every bit as racist as it sounds) while privately loathing bothersome talk of human rights though publicly paying it lip service (UN). A tyrant in his own right, Kissinger railroaded or sabotaged any colleagues in his way and detested oversight of Congress. He lorded over his own rubber stamping secret committees and held disdain for the public, which he divided and manipulated to his own ends.

When it was expedient for his career and especially when it promised proximity to power: **"Kissinger's relativism was a tool of self-creation and self-enhancement. Kissinger; who admittedly believed in nothing, was skilled at being all things to all people, particularly of a higher station."** Thus he played a covert role in sabotaging the Paris Peace Talks, leading to the Republican election and securing a place at the table despite Nixon's personal dislike for him.

Kissinger continues to hold a reputation of charming diplomat and confidant. (Former nicknames included: Super K, Henry of Arabia, the Playboy of the West Wing.) Today he is widely viewed by the Washington elite as the wise adviser, respected academic, essential consultant. He and Clinton agreed on economics, especially NAFTA. George W. Bush named him chair of the 9/11 Commission, though Kissinger quickly resigned once the widows--concerned about conflicts of interest--requested to see Kissinger Associates' client list. Politicians and news services fawn over him as if he is an all-knowing Oracle even as the policies he formulated and instigated have weakened U.S. democracy and led the nation deeper into a quagmire featuring: an oversized role in international relations, an endless state of militarization requiring perpetual (mostly covert) war, the disintegration of traditional political foundations and the rise of bitter partisanship in favor of an imperial presidency.

In Kissinger's own words: **There are two kinds of realists: those who manipulate facts and those who create them. The West requires nothing so much as men able to create their own reality.**

Like a modern-day Machiavelli, "the ends always justify the means" but in Kissinger's case the ends were always personal and the means--no matter the wanton destruction--inconsequential. The word Kissingerian should not be synonymous with realpolitik but rather: political opportunism no matter the cost.

I am a huge fan of Professor Greg Grandin, especially *Empire's Workshop* and *Fordlandia*, and have a background in international relations. I enjoyed this academic-level investigation but otherwise this book would have been a challenge to get through. If you are looking for a more substantive biography, Grandin praises Seymour Hersh's 1983 *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the White House*.

---

### Colin Welch says

The first half of this book is a clear and cogent review of Kissinger's academic career and his role in the Nixon and Ford Whitehouses. The second half is less convincing. Grandin tries hard to convince us that Kissinger's shadow has fallen across successive presidencies, but I'm not sure Grandin provides enough evidence of that. In any case, the book is a decent overview of modern American foreign policy and the (toxic) belief that American power must always appear to be justified and vigorous, even if it isn't.

---

### Raven Onthill says

A short easily readable political biography of the remarkable Henry Kissinger by respected New York University history professor Greg Grandin. The book covers Kissinger's theoretical writings as a brilliant college student, his success as statesman, and his evolution into a respected elder statesman.

As only an amateur political scientist, it is hard for me, personally, to assess the book's accuracy. At least, it is not obviously falsified and there are extensive citations. Some 10% of the book's pages contain endnotes, and there are many long discursive footnotes as well. But multiple stories can be told from any set of facts

and I can only wonder what other stories might be told from these. Still, it is hard for me to see how the record of military interventions and deaths that grew from Kissinger's policies could lead to a story which gives a positive account of Kissinger. It is also difficult for me to see how one can honestly deny the long-term failure of these policies. Kissinger himself would probably say that these realities which US policy created can themselves be changed, but that does not in fact appear to be the case; the US ability to control the long-term results of its policies becomes less and less as allies and enemies become exhausted and resentful of abuse, and as new media technology makes quickly visible the results of policy. It was possible, back in the days of Nixon, for a compliant media to bury the endless deaths that US foreign policy produced and this is no longer so. Kissinger, as a student in the 1950s, hated the idea that policy could be grounded in measured sociological reality, what today we would call "big data," but big data, aided by the internet, seems to have won the day.

Kissinger is the original "policy creates reality" man, a German Jewish refugee who came to the USA with his family at 15, yet it is striking to me how horrible the realities he created were. Was there never, in his philosophy, the idea that he might create peace and justice rather than simply making his adopted nation strong and terrible? Perhaps there was. Faced with a sufficiently powerful enemy, he did negotiate, creating pacts with the USSR and China. While these probably would have eventually been negotiated had Kissinger not been involved, it remains true that he did negotiate these deals, earning him the hostility of the far right, and his own marginalization. By the time the Reagan administration came to power, he was shut out.

Grandin argues, I think correctly, that the monster Kissinger created, which Grandin names "Kissingerism," has outlived Kissinger's direct participation. Kissinger was consulted by both Bush administrations. His ideas of power and intervention, and their uses in persuading a democratic polity to war, live on.

---

## **Richard Jones says**

Grandin's biographical account of Kissinger's insidious influence over US foreign policy from the Vietnam war right up to the present day War on Terror is a fascinating, timely and eminently readable book; and I would strongly recommend it to any students of contemporary history, as it is an indispensable companion from which to glean what are some very thorough and well-researched insights into the internal workings of the use of power for power's own sake.

But what is by far the most important aspect of this book is that Grandin frames Kissinger's short-comings by structuring his arguments around quotations taken directly from Kissinger's writings, throwing into sharp relief just how misguided the paradoxical reasoning is behind so many of the internal contradictions in Kissinger's own thinking and worldview. Grandin shows that Kissinger was ultimately condemned to repeat the false logic of his own circular arguments in stating that "Inaction needs to be avoided to show that action is possible; the purpose of American power is to create American purpose." Grandin argues that US foreign policy is still living with the consequences of Kissinger's assertion to this very day.

When the obituary is finally written, as Grandin rightly points out, history should have no qualms in condemning Kissinger as the entirely self-serving, back-stabbing and power hungry individual that most people suspect him of being. But Grandin also takes his time to illustrate the intellectual legacy that shaped many of Kissinger's political positions and from which his public persona ultimately emerged. Grandin argues that the antecedents of Kissinger's thought are deeply rooted in the pessimistic relativism of Continental philosophy, and - which I found to be the most surprising - in the existential notions of freedom and responsibility found in the profoundly anti-authoritarian writings of the French philosopher Jean-Paul

Sartre. It is perhaps also to Grandin's credit that he does not dwell-as some biographical studies tend to do-on the personal motivations of his subject. Grandin hardly ever speculates on the nature of Kissinger's private life, and his personality and psychological state are only ever glossed over in passing, and this only adds to the book's overall readability.

From one student of history to another, this book is indeed a highly recommended read.

---