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## Kissinger's Year: 1973 by Alistair Horne, Simon & Shuster, UK, 2009.

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**Kissinger's Year: 1973 by Alistair Horne, Simon & Shuster, UK, 2009.**

This book covers the tumultuous year of 1973, focusing on the undertakings of Henry A. Kissinger, at the time considered America's defacto leader and formulator of U.S. foreign policy and hence, perhaps, the most powerful man in the world). The volume covers the incredible events of the Vietnam War negotiations between America and North Vietnam, the outbreak of the Yom Kipper war, the Superpower Détente, and the Sino-American rapprochement. All of these geopolitical events are framed within the context of the domestic politics of the Watergate scandal and fall of President Nixon.

Horne portrays Kissinger as being a somewhat reluctant yet nonetheless keen participant who grasped the opportunity to deploy his diplomatic skills and craft America's foreign policy to align with his own worldview and understanding. This is a well-researched scholarly work, utilizing numerous primary sources and drawing insight from personal interviews which the author formulates into a convincing narrative. The author is balanced in his appraisal of Kissinger by citing pragmatic interpretations of Kissinger's actions along with some condemnation of his policies. Furthermore, Kissinger's apparent successes such as the Vietnam negotiations are critically interpreted to show that not only were these "successes" less than convincingly successful at the time but also that Kissinger, also, in fact, suffered some complete failures in foreign policy, such as the failed attempt at revitalizing transatlantic relations.

The author clearly chronicles events as they unfolded across geographies, thereby allowing readers to clearly grasp this historical interpretation of 1973. He first sets out to underscore the very different natures of the president and his then National Security Advisor by describing the political histories of these two very strong personalities and the character traits which defined their respective political careers. The author finds strands of similarity between them, in particular, he says, they shared a realist understanding of the use of power and, likewise, shared a reticence to utilize America's military capabilities to achieve personal political goals. Belying this relationship, however, was the pressure, for both men, to demonstrate personal and political achievement and, undeniably, there existed a competition between the president and his superstar foreign policy chief for such recognition.

The Vietnam negotiations are presented with a view towards America's ultimate need to achieve a psychologically "acceptable" defeat. Within this context, the contentious relationship between North Vietnamese negotiators and Kissinger is shown to be less than civil at times, but the illustrations of the debates themselves nonetheless underscore the complexity inherent in trying to negotiate from a position of weakness (and the pursuit of a position of strength by the use of raw military power). Triangular diplomacy and détente demonstrate the problematic nature of geopolitics at height of cold war relations. Still, the fundamental nature of interstate relations is shown in this text to rest upon personal contact and relationships of a face to face nature. Shuttle diplomacy and secret negotiations, which epitomize Kissinger's tactics and are emblematic of the cold war, are demonstrated by elaborations of meetings with Breshnev, Chu En Lai, Mao, and Sadat.

The books unifying theme of realpolitik and personal diplomacy, further adds to the detailed examination already undertaken here. What brings clarity of narrative and historical understanding is the focus upon the Kissinger/Nixon relationship itself and the intertwining of the peculiarities of this relationship within the context of American domestic politics and the crisis of Watergate. The crisis itself is shown to not only to have allowed Kissinger nearly free

reign in formulating American foreign policy but also in carrying out such policy, due to the debilitating nature of this crisis to America's president. This formulative narrative is then expanded to encompass the geopolitical events that took place in 1973. As such, the author clearly demonstrates the complex nature of interpersonal relations, which stand as a keystone to interstate relations and bargaining.

Studies of diplomacy and statecraft often take as fact the notion that states operate according to guidelines and/or ideological underpinnings. This however, reduces the state as an abstract, to an objective entity exercising agency. According to Horne, it is not that simple. The author clearly demonstrates how internal factors of civil unrest, legislative and legal jurisprudence, and presidential weakness combine with external factors of geopolitical rivalry, regional antagonism, and conflict create an environment in which domestic politics become international, and international politics become domestic issues. As such, Horne successfully brings to light the intimate nature of personal politics. By doing so, the author adds to the field of diplomacy an understanding that states are, in fact, subjective entities capable of articulating the interests of individuals who themselves are subject to their own ideological concerns and worldviews and sensitized to a myriad of influences. History, he says, thus, is created and transformed according to these varied interests and in accordance with an individual level of agency. This type of historical study is best demonstrated by the recollections of meetings and confidence building measures undertaken with Sadat, Mao, and Bresnev.

The true strength of this book lies in its ability to show how history can be molded by events and the persons who come to define such events by the actions, perceptions, and reasoning that lie behind complex interstate relations. Any student or reader of international relations, diplomatic history, or international politics would gain innumerable insights into the inner workings of politics by reading the easily accessible narrative which the author brings to this work.

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