Henry Kissinger – GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

World-renowned for his skills in the art of diplomacy, Dr. Henry Kissinger presented his view of the key global issues facing today’s leaders to the audience at the World Business Forum in Milan.

Kissinger began his presentation by stating that the world may currently be “in the midst of a revolutionary period” in which “the existing framework is changing more fundamentally than in any comparable period in history.” He said that it is now clear that “the major threats in the world come not only from states, but from private groups that operate [in] many territories, with purposes not necessarily related to the purposes of the state” in which they may find refuge. He added that the issue of “security” has now taken on “an extraterritorial character.”

In Europe, Kissinger stated, the primary international concerns are economic. But Asian countries, he said, “look at international affairs the way the 19th-century Europeans did — in terms of potential tensions and conflicts with their neighbors.”

Kissinger said that the Middle East is now more like 17th-century Europe, with various states at sharp odds ideologically. He stated that the Israeli-Palestinian issue is about “the right to exist.” He added, “The conflict between radical and secular Islam is about changing what history has produced, and turning it into an Islamic-dominated world.”

Radical Transformation

The rise of China, India and other countries is a “fundamental change in the [political and economic] center of gravity of the international world,” Kissinger noted. Meanwhile, he said, traditional societies are undergoing radical transformation. He pointed out that Russia has shed 300 years of history and is now similar in extent to the Russia of Peter the Great.

Kissinger explained that different countries are adjusting to the new order in different ways. The idea of the nation-state originated in Europe, he added, but the European nation-state is reducing its significance, even to the point of “abolishing itself.” This process, he said, fundamentally affects the role of Europe in international affairs — “The political expression of the European Union has lagged far behind [its] economic expression,” and the European nation-states are suspended “between their past, which they are seeking to abandon, and their future, which they have not yet reached.”

International Challenges

Kissinger also discussed the challenges that are currently facing the international community. These challenges included terrorism, the Middle East, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
While discussing the issue of terrorism, Kissinger said, “There are private groups without a clear-cut political objective ... whose primary purpose is the [demoralization] and the delegitimization of established societies,” especially Western ones.

“It is difficult to deter them,” Kissinger noted, “because they have nothing to defend. It is difficult to engage in diplomacy “because they have no stated program.” Thus, he added, “the attempt has been made to cut them off from their bases of support.”

**The Middle East**

When discussing the challenges of the Middle East, Kissinger acknowledged that the war in Iraq has become “extremely controversial.” But, he said, “most people agree [on] the consequences” of the establishment of “a radical government in Baghdad: Inevitably, the Islamic populations in [many] countries ... would be radicalized. And the effort to bring them together in a community would become extremely difficult.”

Kissinger said that the way to create a state in Iraq is “a challenge not just for America, but for the international community.” He noted that “when different ethnic groups occupy the same territory, the methods of democracy that were developed in cohesive, coherent European societies are much more difficult to apply, because for the minority, there is no prospect of becoming a majority.”

It is difficult to “strike that balance between electoral processes and ethnic identities,” Kissinger said, but it is “an effort which the international community should attempt.” He added that sooner or later, the Iraqi situation has to be internationalized.

**The Palestinian Issue**

The second challenge in the Middle East that Kissinger addressed was the Palestinian issue: a topic about which he said he was “more optimistic.” He explained that the participants in this conflict understand that “a final settlement should be very close to the arrangements proposed by Israeli Prime Minister Barak five years ago at Camp David.” Kissinger said that those are the principles with which he believes “most moderate Arabs agree.”

Kissinger explained that the implementation of a settlement requires cooperation of “America, Europe and the moderate Arab countries.” He said America is needed “to give an impetus to the negotiations,” Europe is needed “to make clear that there is ... only one realistic approach,” and the moderate Arabs give the Palestinian leadership the “cover” it requires “in the face of its own domestic opposition.”

If those three conditions are met — and Kissinger said he believes they can be — “we can see significant progress.”

**Weapons of Mass Destruction**
While discussing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Kissinger noted that nuclear stability was easier in a two-power world, where each side was aware of the dire consequences and could calculate the other’s intentions fairly accurately. But if 20 or 30 countries have nuclear weapons, he explained, stability becomes very difficult to achieve.

“Therefore,” Kissinger stated, “to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is one of the overwhelming[ly important] tasks of humanity.” He said that it must be achieved “hopefully, by diplomacy, but one cannot exclude other pressures.”

Kissinger said he was happy to report the announcement, in Beijing, of an agreement that — if implemented — would be “a crucial step” that “may show that diplomatic and international solutions are possible,” because the six powers in those negotiations seem to have agreed to replace the nuclear potential of North Korea with economic, political and security assistance, thus relieving the impetus for nuclear proliferation.

If similar issues can be resolved in the case of Iran, Kissinger said, “maybe a general system of proliferation control can be achieved.” He added that it is also important that this has happened “with the cooperation — and indeed, the initiative in many respects — of the People’s Republic of China.”

**China’s Rise**

The rise of China has been compared to the emergence of Germany at the end of the 19th century, Kissinger noted, with the implication that “a war is inevitable.” But, he said, “a war with modern weapons between major countries will produce such dislocations that it is no longer the alternative it was in the last century.”

Kissinger explained that he does not believe that China plans a military challenge. He noted that the American defense budget is six times that of China. He said, “There’s no way that China is going to catch up, in the security field, with the United States in our generation.” Moreover, he added, Japan, India, Vietnam and Russia all represent “realities along China’s borders.”

Kissinger said, “The task of leaders is to take their societies from where they are to where they have never been.” To do this, he explained, “they must have the inspiration and the knowledge to have a sense of the future.” He added that the thing that distinguishes great leaders is “not intelligence — but vision. They have a sense of the future — and the courage to go there.”

Kissinger noted that “in our world, the requirements [for] getting into office are so different from the requirements of being in office that the preparation for this task is becoming more difficult.”

And the way we learn now is so different from the past, Kissinger pointed out. “When one learned from books, one had to develop concepts, because one couldn’t possibly remember everything,” he said. “When one learns from the computer, one has no incentive to store knowledge because it is at one’s fingertips.” There is thus “a scope that no previous generation ever had,” he said. But, he concluded, there is also a limitation that no previous generation had to
face: “the limitation of imagination with respect to matters that cannot be reduced to pictorial terms.”

Kissinger summed up his thoughts about leadership with a quote from Winston Churchill: “The challenge is not to do the best you can do — the challenge is to do what is required.” He said that we have to “close the gap between the best we can do — and what is required.”

MEET THE SPEAKER. Dr. Henry Kissinger is America’s first name in geo-political opinion. He graduated summa cum laude from Harvard College in 1950 and received M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Harvard University in 1952 and 1954.

As one of the most brilliant secretaries of state in the history of the United States (under Presidents Nixon and Ford), Kissinger was a key negotiator of the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam, for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973.

In July 1983, he was appointed by President Ronald Reagan to chair the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America until it ceased operation in January 1985, and from 1984 to 1990, he served as a member of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. He is currently a member of the Defense Policy Board.

Kissinger is now chairman of Kissinger Associates, Inc., an international consulting firm.

Among his most recent books are Does America Need a Foreign Policy?, Years of Renewal (the last volume of his memoirs), and Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises.

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