

At 100 years old, Kissinger pushes back against demonizing China

When *The Economist* recently asked Henry Kissinger his thoughts on China's global role today, he said he wants a permanent dialogue between the U.S. and Chinese presidents.

Douglas Roche

Opinion



EDMONTON—Henry Kissinger turned 100 years old recently and, to mark the occasion, *The Economist* magazine interviewed him for eight hours over two days. Since I have long been critical of Kissinger's *realpolitik* diplomacy, I searched the text of the interview to see whether he is mellowing in old age—or perhaps I am.

For many years, I reviled Kissinger for his part in the carpet bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam war, his belief that tactical nuclear weapons could be used, and his overthrow of the reformist Salvador Allende in Chile. Yet, he prepared the way for U.S. president Richard Nixon to recognize the People's Republic of China.

The Economist asked Kissinger what he thought of China's global role today. Here he pushed back against current political thinking in the West, which wants to demonize China and wall it off politically. Instead, Kissinger wants a permanent dialogue to start between the American and Chinese presidents. Kissinger would have the American president say to his counterpart: "Mr. President, the two greatest dangers to peace right now are us two. In the sense that we have the capacity to destroy humanity. I think we should agree between ourselves to try to avoid such a situation." In Kissinger's view, the fate of humanity depends on whether the U.S. and China can get along.

He does not think China seeks global military domination. Rather, he sees the Chinese system as more Confucian than Marxist. Confucianism teaches a sort of cosmic harmony, and Kissinger thinks the only dominance today's Chinese leaders seek is economic. "A war over Taiwan would set back China's internal evolution substantially," he said. As for the prospects of today's big countries finding a route to co-existence even though they are arming for war, Kissinger surprisingly said: "I think it's possible that you can create a world order on the basis of rules that Europe, China and India could join, and that's already a good slice of humanity. So if you look at the practicality of it, it can end well—or at least it can end without catastrophe and we can make progress through it. But it will require vision and dedication."

I found it revelatory that Kissinger, the man who always put power over morality, is now talking in ways that—while he doesn't say so explicitly—point

to a common security agenda as the only way to ensure common survival. However, the rules for a "world order" cannot be written just by the U.S. Kissinger did recognize this in the interview, but he did not go on to make the necessary conclusion that no one state can maintain military dominance in such a world order.

The former U.S. national security adviser is now advocating for "human understanding" and "reason" to prevail. That's certainly a step forward, but the cheer I felt on reading this was quickly dashed by reading a speech, given June 2, by the current U.S. national security adviser, Jake Sullivan.

Sullivan asserted that the U.S., through its nuclear weapons modernization program, will "sustain our military advantage for decades to come." He added: "These modernization efforts will ensure our deterrent capabilities remain secure and strong as we head into the 2030s—when the United States will need to deter two near-peer nuclear powers for the first time in its history."

Kissinger is calling for "reason" to prevail in producing a world order out of the present chaos. Sullivan clings to American military dominance. Apparently, Kissinger, though lofty in vision, will not contradict current U.S. policy, still mired in the past.

What has military dominance ever produced but war? The whole message of the modern world is that everyone is vulnerable to problems that sweep across borders—pandemics, climate change, food security—and that only cooperation, not more confrontation, among countries will save humanity.

Kissinger is still backing the insidious military doctrine of nuclear deterrence while professing to want a world order. It can't be done. One cancels out the other. He admits that Artificial Intelligence may take weapons of mass destruction out of control. So why can't he advocate to abolish them?

Although *The Economist* treated Kissinger as a sage, he couldn't say the words "common security." This was the sage advice I was looking for. True, this centenarian has mellowed, but not enough for me.

Former senator Douglas Roche's new book, *Keep Hope Alive: Essays for a War-free World*, will be published in the fall.
The Hill Times

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