

#1598 Kiss of Death: Henry Kissinger's Bloody Legacy of Indifference

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left* podcast in which we will look at how Henry Kissinger, it turns out, was actually a pretty good representative of the United States, the foreign policy actions we took, and the reasonings we gave for them, oh for the past, you know, century or less. He embodied the idea that the U.S. is always on the side of right, the world and its inhabitants are merely a game board and pieces for us to manipulate to our own ends, and that lives, particularly foreign lives, lost in pursuit of our interests are not of much concern. Sources today include the *PBS NewsHour*, *The Brian Lehrer Show*, *The Majority Report*, *Democracy Now!*, and *The Take*, with additional members only clips from *Against the Grain* and *The Mehdi Hassan Show*.

A look at the consequential and controversial legacy of Henry Kissinger - PBS NewsHour - Air Date 11-30-23

NICK SCHIFRIN: Heinz Alfred Kissinger was born in Germany in 1923 to a Jewish family. When he was 15, they fled Nazi Germany for New York. He was drafted into the American military, and [00:01:00] deployed to his home country to help with denazification. He taught at Harvard, giving him access to elite foreign policy circles, until President Richard Nixon named him National Security Adviser and later, simultaneously, Secretary of State.

HENRY KISSINGER: There is no country in the world where it is conceivable that a man of my origins could be standing here next to the President of the United States.

NICK SCHIFRIN: The moment that would make him famous led to what Nixon called "the week that changed the world," a secret 1971 trip to Beijing, ending more than two decades of mutual hostility.

The next year, Nixon made his own trip, setting a path to U.S.-China normalization. In that room that day, Kissinger aide and later Ambassador to China Winston Lord.

WINSTON LORD: Maybe it would have happened at some point, but it was still a very courageous and controversial move in the early 1970s. This meeting set the stage for the subsequent discussions and the opening up the relationship, which had a major [00:02:00] impact immediately by improving relations with the Soviets. It helped us end the Vietnam War. It restored morale in the United States that we were an able diplomatic actor, despite all our problems. It restored American credibility around the world.

NICK SCHIFRIN: But before he could end the Vietnam War, Kissinger had expanded it. Beginning in 1969, the U.S. secretly bombed Cambodia to try and disrupt North Vietnamese supply routes. The campaign is estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of civilians.

GREG GRANDIN: He had a remarkable indifference to human suffering. How many thousands of U.S. soldiers died as a result of that? How many thousands of Vietnamese soldiers died of that? His secret and illegal bombing of Cambodia resulted in 100,000 civilian deaths. But, more than that, it radicalized what had been a small nucleus of extremely militant communists. That brought Pol Pot to power. And that led to the "killing fields" and the [00:03:00] millions dead. I think he does have an inordinate amount of blood on his hands.

NICK SCHIFRIN: By 1973, Kissinger and his team negotiated an end to the Vietnam War in Paris, where Winston Lord was again by his side.

WINSTON LORD: Henry and I went out in the garden and we shook hands, and he looked me in the eye and said: "We've done it." And this had particular poignancy, because I'd almost quit over our Cambodia-related policy to Vietnam a couple of years earlier on that very subject. And so, after all we'd been through, this was a major moment.

NICK SCHIFRIN: The moment allowed Kissinger to share the Nobel Peace Prize with his North Vietnamese counterpart. But, two years later, the U.S. fled Saigon, and North Vietnam and Vietcong troops conquered U.S.-ally South Vietnam.

HENRY KISSINGER: The withdrawal from Vietnam was an American tragedy.

NICK SCHIFRIN: Kissinger never expressed regret over Vietnam or any decision. In 2003, he told Jim Lehrer the priority was to put Vietnam aside so he could focus [00:04:00] elsewhere.

HENRY KISSINGER: All you could do is try to preserve a minimum of dignity and save as many lives as you could.

NICK SCHIFRIN: Kissinger's peace efforts extended to the Middle East. In October 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on Yom Kippur. Kissinger held so many regional meetings, he helped create the term "shuttle diplomacy." It helped lead to Israeli-Egypt negotiations and edged the Soviet Union out of the Middle East.

Kissinger's concern over communism and his realpolitik peaked in Chile. In 1973, the U.S. helped the military overthrow the democratically-elected socialist government and install General Augusto Pinochet. Pinochet's military dictatorship caused the death, disappearance, and torture of more than 40,000 Chileans.

But Kissinger's priority was preventing communist dominoes from falling, as he told the *NewsHour's* Elizabeth Farnsworth in 2001.

HENRY KISSINGER: First of all, human rights were not an international issue at the time, the way they have become since. We believed that the establishment of a Castroite regime in Chile would create a sequence of events in all of at least the southern cone of Latin America that would be extremely inimical to the national interests of the United States, at a time when the Cold War [00:05:00] was at its height.

NICK SCHIFRIN: Kissinger's Cold War strategy called for detente with the Soviet Union. In 1972, President Nixon and Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev signed SALT, the first limits on Soviet and U.S. ballistic missiles and ballistic missile defense. It opened decades of arms control agreements.

HENRY KISSINGER: The benefits that accrue to the United States are the benefit that will accrue to all participants in the international system from an improvement in the prospects of peace.

NICK SCHIFRIN: By then, Kissinger had reached his popular and policy peak. He was charming, funny, craved proximity to power, and was, in his supporters' eyes, a steady steward of American interests.

After Nixon's resignation, he remained President Ford's Secretary of State.

WINSTON LORD: I think his most significant achievement was holding together America and its foreign policy in the wake of Watergate and the ending

of the Vietnam War. Kissinger remained untainted by the scandals, [00:06:00] pursued remarkable diplomacy under the circumstances, and maintained America's position in the world, as well as restoring some morale in the United States itself. It was a remarkable achievement.

NICK SCHIFRIN: But, to his critics, Kissinger symbolized the pursuit of order over justice and the kind of preemptive action that paved the way for continuous war.

GREG GRANDIN: I think he was absolutely indispensable in creating a sense of keeping the United States on a permanent war footing, this war without end, in which everything is self-defense.

Henry Kissinger's Huge but Deeply Problematic Legacy - The Brian Lehrer Show - Air Date 11-30-23

FRED KAPLAN: Chile elected, in a fair and free election, a socialist, Salvador Allende, and Kissinger basically plotted to overthrow him, saying, "Why should we allow a socialist country in our hemisphere just because the people in the country were irresponsible?" Now, the reason why it's the darkest -- it's not necessarily the most damaging thing that Kissinger did, but it's the one [00:07:00] incident where the blame for what subsequently happened can be laid entirely on Kissinger. Many other things -- it could be Kissinger and Nixon, or Kissinger and somebody else -- but in this one, Nixon was actually about to have an appointment with a State Department underling of Kissinger's to talk about possibly forming some kind of *modus vivendi* with the Allende government. Kissinger got that meeting canceled and went to Nixon himself and convinced him that, no, we have to make the Chilean economy scream.

Kissinger, who was National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, became the chairman of a special committee, which consisted largely of CIA agents to overthrow the Chilean government. They worked hand in hand with the Teamsters, which organized a big trucker strike in Chile so that the economy would scream. What ultimately happened is that Allende was overthrown [00:08:00] by General Pinochet, who then launched a campaign to arrest and kill thousands of dissidents, during which time Kissinger told him basically do what you need to do, and instructed the State Department not to issue any *démarches* against what he was doing. Later, Pinochet was found by the international courts to be a war criminal and was barred from many countries. He was almost arrested once when he went to England. And one of the murders

by Pinochet and his people took place in the streets of Washington DC. An exiled economist named Orlando Letelier was blown up with a car bomb as his car drove by the Chilean embassy, killing him and an American colleague. There's never been any apologies for any of this.

BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW: Oh, that's just what I was going to ask. If Kissinger ever expressed regret for empowering [00:09:00] Pinochet and all that he brought?

FRED KAPLAN: No... well, for one thing, the full extent of the US involvement in this wasn't even revealed until years later when Seymour Hersh uncovered it for The New York Times. It was denied until documents came out confirming it.

Among many other things, Kissinger was actually a witty man, and often, he would just not address charges like this. Sometimes he would kind of dismiss it with a joke. For example, one time he said something like, "Illegal things, we do very quickly. Unconstitutional things, it takes a little longer." Everybody ha, ha, ha. He charmed people with this kind of thing. There have been whole books written about each one of the places in the world where Kissinger did dreadful things.

BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW: One that people probably are not very familiar with that you said in your article is him being soft on a human rights [00:10:00] violating coup in Pakistan, which you say led to the deaths of millions of civilians. Millions?

FRED KAPLAN: Yes. Gary Bass wrote a book about just this sometime ago based on declassified documents. Yes, there was a coup in East Pakistan led by General Agha Muhammad Yahya. Because Pakistan was aligned with China against India, Kissinger did not want -- and there's one memo where he tells his staff, "Don't squeeze Yahya." Nixon and Kissinger were both very complicit in what went on. They used American weapons to do what they did.

The horrible thing is that things that happen in places like East Pakistan, another one was Indonesia's invasion of East Timor, which resulted in the deaths of about a hundred thousand civilians. These kinds of spots on the map tend to be overlooked. The politics involved are [00:11:00] very complicated. I think there's probably some racial things that go into a lot of people just not taking a close look. Argentina was another case where there was a coup that he turned a blind eye to the excesses of killing thousands of dissidents and making them disappear. You might remember that phrase from the time. In that instance, he

told the foreign minister of Argentina, "We would like you to succeed." That is, to succeed in suppressing these dissidents. The bombing of North Vietnam and Cambodia, those are probably the deadliest things that he was involved in, but there, he shares the stage--

BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW: And probably the most well-known.

FRED KAPLAN: Yes, because we were involved in a war there at the time. Thousands of Americans were getting killed too. There, he shares responsibility for a war with President Nixon as well.

BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW: He also shared a Nobel [00:12:00] Peace Prize for negotiating an end to the Vietnam War. Do you think that at least was deserved, or that his escalation policies helped hasten the wars end in any way?

FRED KAPLAN: No, I think it's disgraceful. For one thing, it's long since been shown that when Nixon was running for president in '68 and Kissinger was signed on to be his National Security Advisor, Kissinger arranged for communications to be sent to South Vietnam, whose leaders were engaged in peace talks with North Vietnam in Paris at the time, saying, "Don't negotiate. You'll get a better deal when Nixon is president." This was while President Johnson was negotiating talks. There was progress in these talks.

Now, it may or may not be that those talks would've resulted in an end to the war, but Kissinger's [00:13:00] communiqué to the South Vietnamese leaders to, "Hold on, don't take any deal now. You'll get a better one from Nixon." That very well could have prolonged the war by many years, and tens of thousands of American deaths. Then the peace treaty that he did come up with, it wasn't really a peace treaty at all. It was just a way to provide cover for an American withdrawal and an almost instantaneous collapse of the South Vietnamese government. That's one of the Nobel Prize's least stellar chapters.

Kissinger: An Architect of Genocide - The Majority Report w/ Sam Seder - Air Date 12-5-23

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Nixon and Kissinger were immensely deceitful in what they would say publicly about the

Vietnam War and what their designs were behind the scenes after Nixon got elected, and they expanded the war quite quickly after taking office.

And then during that time, when did Kissinger become Secretary of State?

TIM SHORROCK: 69. Secretary of State was later. He was National Security advisor first.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: He was National Security Advisor at that time, and then he's the only person to have ever held that position simultaneously so [00:14:00] just to give people a sense of how powerful -- he was Secretary of State and National Security Advisor for quite a while. What was that like at that time, when LBJ was opening up some measure of diplomacy at the sunset of his presidency and then Nixon and Kissinger come into office and expand and then also launch the secret carpet bombing of Cambodia?

TIM SHORROCK: 1968 people might remember Johnson was relentlessly bombing Vietnam and the anti-war movement was really building up at home and people were really disgusted with the war and the violence being inflicted on Vietnam. And I remember marching in 1968 in Tokyo, Americans Against the War. And we were opposing the bombing of North Vietnam at the time, and also all the bombing and strafing that was going on in South Vietnam. And then during the election of '68, Nixon was promising a secret plan to end the war. And as we all learned later, Kissinger was telling anti-war [00:15:00] folks that Nixon was really serious and he himself -- Kissinger -- was really serious and agreed with the critics of the Vietnam War. And then it turned out that when these negotiations were going on with the Johnson administration in Paris to end the war, Kissinger was there feeding information from the South Vietnamese side to Nixon. And they basically persuaded the South Vietnamese government and its military government not to go along with any agreement until Nixon came in. And this is like this really cynical action. And that's kind of treasonous, to be sending top secret information back to a presidential candidate to undercut these negotiations. And then Nixon announces, Vietnamization, or, let the Vietnamese do the fighting, and the U. S. is going to slowly withdraw. But they just use this immense power of bombing and massive firebombing and, of course, they bombed Cambodia secretly for years, invaded Cambodia supposedly [00:16:00] to clear out the Vietnamese sanctuary, so-called.

But it was such utter hypocrisy and, all this time, of course, he's working with Nixon to reopen relations with China, which was a good thing overall, but basically they opened relations with China and they wanted what Kissinger later called "a decent interval" to basically let the South Vietnamese government

collapse, which everyone knew it would. And that finally happened in 1975. But it was all done through lies and deceit.

And I was glad to see Lê Đức Thọ, who was the Vietnamese negotiator when they did reach the 1973 peace agreements, Kissinger and Lê Đức Thọ were given the Nobel Peace Prize. And Lê Đức Thọ refused to accept the award because he knew what a complete hypocrite and deceitful person and violent person Kissinger was, and to his credit, he [00:17:00] refused a Nobel Peace Prize. This was a piece after just mass murder in Indochina.

And that's how I got into journalism was during the Vietnam War and looking at the economic factors, the role that business played in making the weapons and the military industrial complex and how it wanted more war. And that's how I started into journalism, but I kept pretty careful track of what was going on in the seventies. And I think that one of the worst things he did was to give a green light when he was working for president Ford in 1975 was going to Indonesia, meeting with General Suharto -- who had taken over in a very bloody coup in 1965, where over 500,000 people, communists and Chinese, were slaughtered in Indonesia -- and gave them a green light to invade the newly independent [00:18:00] nation of East Timor, which was alongside one of the islands in that archipelago there. And East Timor had just been decolonized, there had been a kind of revolution in Portugal and they had let go of their colonies. And so East Timor became an independent nation. And there was oil near there. And, the government that was taking over in East Timor was a progressive government. They wanted to better the conditions of its own people. And they gave him green light for Suharto to invade this little tiny defenseless island that had hardly any kind of military at all. And for years they did. And it was a genocide, hundreds of thousands of people were slaughtered in East Timor and it was a virtually unknown kind of struggle, but it just represented the kind of -- he just didn't give a rat's ass about people, any other countries, it's just the power of the United States and just use war [00:19:00] and bombing to get your way.

And of course we all know what happened in 1973 in Chile, where he was behind the overthrow of Allende and undercutting that democratically-elected government, just a disgraceful record.

And, it's just sickening to see all these political figures laud him for his statesmanlike actions and what he contributed to American foreign policy. Yeah, he contributed blood.

MATT LECH: I'm curious to hear you reflect the pride of place that he's maintained in American politics. Has it surprised you or is it just symptomatic?

TIM SHORROCK: It's symptomatic of the way the system works. We reward people who do things like this. Hillary Clinton. I saw Chris Christie praising him the other day. Democrats, Republicans that are in power and out of power, wanna get into power -- they love this guy because what he represented was ultimate use of American power to crush any kind of [00:20:00] opposition to US power anywhere in the world, and to use the most cynical means, the most violent means. But that's considered statesmanlike. And it's just appalling to hear these liberals, especially, praise this guy.

GREG GRANDIN:

Henry Kissinger and the Moral Bankruptcy of U.S. Elites - Democracy Now! - Air Date 11-30-23

GREG GRANDIN: Kissinger's life is fascinating, because it spans a very consequential bridge in United States history, from the collapse of the postwar consensus, you know, that happened with Vietnam, and Kissinger is instrumental in kind of recobbling, recreating a national security state that can deal with dissent, that can deal with polarization, that actually thrived on polarization and secrecy and learning to manipulate the public in order to advance a very aggressive foreign policy.

I mean, we can go into the details, but I do want to say that his death has been as instructive as his life. I mean, if you look at the obituaries and notes of condolences, [00:21:00] they just — I mean, they just reveal, I think, a moral bankruptcy of the political establishment, certainly in the transatlantic world, in the larger NATO sphere, just an unwillingness or incapacity to comprehend the crisis that we're in and Kissinger's role in that crisis. They're celebratory. They're inane. They're vacuous. They're really quite remarkable. And if you think of — just think back over the last year, the celebrations, the feting of his 100th anniversary — 100th, you know, birthday, his living to 100 years. I think it's a cultural marker of just how much — how bankrupt the political class in this country is. So his death is almost as instructive as his life.

NERMEEN SHAIKH - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:22:00] Well, we had you on, Greg, when he turned 100, when Kissinger turned 100.

GREG GRANDIN: Right.

NERMEEN SHAIKH - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: In that interview, you said that the best way to think about Kissinger isn't necessarily as a war criminal. Could you explain why?

GREG GRANDIN: Yeah, because that is the way — I mean, Christopher Hitchens popularized thinking about him as a war criminal, and that has a way of elevating Kissinger, in some ways, as somehow an extraordinary evil. And it's a fine line, because he did play an outsized role in a staggering number of atrocities and bringing and dealing misery and death across the globe to millions of people. But there's a lot of war criminals. I mean, you know, this country is stocked with war criminals. There's no shortage of war criminals.

And thinking about him as a war criminal kind of dumbs us down. It doesn't allow us to think with Kissinger's — use Kissinger's life to think with, [00:23:00] to think about how the United States — for example, Kissinger started off as a Rockefeller Republican, you know, a liberal Republican, an adviser to Nelson Rockefeller who thought Nixon was far out of the mainstream and a dangerous sociopath, I think, as he put it. And yet, when Nixon won — and he actually helped him win by scuttling a peace deal with North Vietnam — he made his peace with Nixon, and then went on, you know, into public office. And he thought Reagan was too extreme, and yet he made his peace with Reagan. Then he thought the neocons were too extreme, and he made his peace with the neocons. Then he even made his peace with Donald Trump. He called Donald — he celebrated Donald Trump almost as a kind of embodiment of his theory of a great statesman and being able to craft reality as they want to through their [00:24:00] will. So, you see Kissinger — as the country moves right, you see Kissinger moving with it. So, just that trajectory is very useful to think with.

If you also think about his secret bombing of Cambodia and then trace out that bombing, it's like a bright light, you know, a trace of red, running from Cambodia to the current endless “war on terror,” what was considered illegal. I mean, Kissinger bombed Cambodia in secret because it was illegal to bomb another country that you weren't at war with in the 1960s and 1970s. It's his old colleagues at Harvard, who were all Cold Warriors, none of them peace liberals, who marched down to Washington. They didn't even know about the bombing. They went to protest the invasion of Cambodia. And now, you know, it is just considered a fact of international law that the United [00:25:00] States has the right to bomb countries that — third-party countries that we're not at war with that give safe haven to terrorists. It's just considered — it's just considered commonplace. So you could see this evolution and drift towards endless war through Kissinger's life.

Kissinger's life is also useful to think about how, you know, as a public official, first, national security adviser, and then Secretary of State to Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, Kissinger created much of the chaos that would later necessitate and require a transition to what we call neoliberalism. But then, out of office, as the head of Kissinger Associates, Kissinger helped to broker that transition to neoliberalism, the privatization of much of the world, of Latin America, of Eastern Europe, of Russia. So you see that, you know, that transition from [00:26:00] a public politician or public policymaker and then going on to making untold wealth as a private citizen in this transition.

So, you know, there's many ways in which Kissinger's life kind of maps the trajectory of the United States. You know, they celebrated him at the New York Public Library as if he was the American century incarnate. And in many ways, he was. You know, he really — his career really does map nicely onto the trajectory of the United States and the evolution of the national security state and its foreign policy and — you know, and the broken world that we're all trying to live in, as your last two segments showed so.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: Greg, I want to go to Henry [00:27:00] Kissinger in his own words. He's speaking in 2016, when he defended the secret bombing of Cambodia.

HENRY KISSINGER: Nixon ordered an attack on the base areas within five miles of the Vietnamese border, that were essentially unpopulated. So, when the phrase "carpet bombing" is used, it is, I think, in the size of the attacks, probably much less than what the Obama administration has done in similar base areas in Pakistan, which I think is justified. And therefore, I believe that what was done in Cambodia was justified.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: So, that was Henry Kissinger in 2016. He was [00:28:00] speaking at the LBJ Library. The late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain once said, "Once you've been to Cambodia, you'll never stop wanting to beat Henry Kissinger to death with your bare hands. You will never again be able to open a newspaper and read about that treacherous, prevaricating, murderous scumbag sitting down for a nice chat with Charlie Rose or attending some black-tie affair for a new glossy magazine without choking. Witness what Henry did in Cambodia — the fruits of his genius for statesmanship — and you will never understand why he's not sitting in the dock at The Hague next to Milosevic." If you can just respond to that?

GREG GRANDIN: Yeah. Well, that quote contains more moral and intellectual acuity and intelligence than the entire political establishment, both liberal and — both Democrat and Republican. It's morally correct. It's intellectually

correct. And, you know, [00:29:00] it's more accurate than most diplomatic historians, who trade on making Kissinger more ethic — morally complicated than he was.

In terms of Kissinger's quote himself about Cambodia, there he's playing a little bit of a game. So he's lying. I mean, he carpet-bombed Cambodia. The United States massively bombed Cambodia and brought to power within the Khmer Rouge the most extreme clique, led by Pol Pot. You know, when you massively bomb a country and you destroy a whole opposition, you tend to bring to power the extremists. And that's exactly why Kissinger is responsible, to a large degree, for the genocide that happened later on under Pol Pot. The bombing brought to power Pol Pot within the Khmer Rouge, which previously was a larger, broader coalition.

But Kissinger isn't wrong when he [00:30:00] links it to Obama's bombing of Pakistan. That was the point I was trying to make earlier. You know, Kissinger just had to do it illegally back — covertly back then, because it was illegal. It was against international law to bomb third countries, you know, in order to advance your war aims in another country. But now it's accepted as commonplace. And it is true, he's not wrong, when he cites Obama's drone program and what Obama — and, you know, the continuation of the logic in the “war on terror” that started under George W. Bush. He's not wrong about that. And that's one of the lines that you can trace from Vietnam and Cambodia and South Asia to today's catastrophe that we're living in.

The Case Against Henry Kissinger: War Crimes Prosecutor Reed Brody on Kissinger's Legacy of “Slaughter” - Democracy Now! - Air Date 12-1-23

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: So, when you talk about international human rights and war crimes, what are the avenues to hold a public official accountable? Why wasn't Henry [00:31:00] Kissinger held accountable, tried for war crimes — where would he be tried for war crimes — when he was alive?

REED BRODY: Well, that's a very important question. Of course, the modern era, let's say, of international criminal justice began 25 years ago, 1998, with the

creation of the International Criminal Court, on the one hand, and the arrest of General Pinochet in London, on the other hand; an international tribunal, on the one hand, and national courts using their universal jurisdiction to prosecute individuals, on the other hand. And that's actually when we began to look seriously at the alleged crimes of Henry Kissinger.

Now, what's interesting is that all of these things predated Henry Kissinger's involvement in Cambodia, in Laos, in East Timor, in Pakistan, predated that modern era. But what's really interesting is that in each of [00:32:00] the instances I'm talking about — Cambodia, East Timor, Pakistan — there actually were tribunals set up afterwards to look at war crimes. So, as you know, in Cambodia, the United Nations, after the Khmer Rouge fell, created an international tribunal to prosecute the crimes committed in Cambodia. But, of course, the U.S., which backed the tribunal, insisted that the jurisdiction of that tribunal only cover the Khmer Rouge period, not go back to the period of U.S. bombings. And, in fact, every time there was a tug of war between Hun Sen and the United States over the tribunal, which Hun Sen tried to — in fact, did control and made sure none of his people were involved, were investigated — he would threaten, said, “You know, we could go back and look at what you guys did.” [00:33:00] And so, you had a tribunal for Cambodia. It just didn't include what the U.S. had done.

Same thing in Pakistan. There was eventually a tribunal established in East Pakistan, or in Bangladesh, as it's called now, to look at crimes committed during that genocide. But it, too, did not take jurisdiction over those people who were not living in the country.

And finally, in East Timor, at the very end, after East Timor gains its independence and a reckoning began into who was responsible for what — and, of course, the East Timorese Truth Commission specifically talked about the United States's role in creating the horrors and in supporting the Indonesian massacres — the East Timor [00:34:00] tribunal also chose, in fact, not to go back and look at the U.S. period.

So, very rarely — I mean, it was very unusual in the pre-1998 world, in the pre-International Criminal Court world, to have tribunals looking at past actions. In each of these three cases, you did have tribunals, but in each of these three cases, there was a choice made not to go back and look at what the United States, under Henry Kissinger, had done.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: And why was that? Was the U.S. behind that, putting pressure on these countries? And also talk about the double standard. I mean, when you look at, for example, the International

Criminal Court, how often it is not leaders from countries like the United States who are put in the dock?

REED BRODY: Well, of course, Amy, in the world I operate in of international justice, double standards is [00:35:00] the main obstacle. It's the main sticking point. It's very, I mean, still — it's never easy to bring people to justice, even Third World dictators, but it is sometimes possible. But international justice has always fallen flat when it comes to dealing with powerful Western interests. We see at the International Criminal Court, for instance — of course, the International Criminal Court, it should be pointed out, in 21 years, and at the cost of \$2 billion, has never actually sustained the atrocity conviction of any state official, not just Western, any state official, at any level, anywhere in the world. The only five final convictions at the ICC were five African rebels. But there have been attempts by the ICC to prosecute leaders, all in Africa, in fact. And, of course, now, more [00:36:00] recently, we have the indictment of Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia.

And I think, you know, many people are contrasting — I mean, I would contrast — the international justice response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Russian war crimes in Ukraine — in that case, we saw a very vigorous and heartwarming response internationally. The prosecutor of the ICC, Karim Khan, immediately went to and made several visits to Ukraine, a country that he called a crime scene. Forty-one Western countries gave the ICC authority, jurisdiction, or triggered an investigation. Karim Khan raised millions of dollars in extrabudgetary funds to address the situation in Ukraine, and [00:37:00] within a year, of course, indicted Vladimir Putin. This is as it should be. This is exactly what the International Criminal Court is there for.

The contrast is, you know, in Palestine. As we talked about on your show once, for 15 years the Palestinian complaints at the ICC have been given this slow walk by the prosecutor, first several years — by three prosecutors — by the first prosecutor, Luis Moreno Ocampo, who spent several years evaluating whether or not Palestine was a state — was a state — before finally punting the issue. Then, after the General Assembly of the U.N. determined and recognized Palestine as an observer state, there was a lot of pressure on Palestine not to ratify the [00:38:00] ICC statute. Friends of the ICC, countries like Britain, and, of course, even the United States put pressure on the Palestinian Authority not to ratify the ICC treaty, because they didn't want to inject justice which could interfere with the peace process, which of course was not going on. But Palestine did ratify the ICC treaty and filed a request for an investigation. And then the second prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, spent five years looking at whether there — crimes had been committed, finally determined, just as she was about to leave office, that there was sufficient evidence to believe that crimes may

have been committed, crimes including illegal settlements, war crimes on both sides, and gave it to this prosecutor. This prosecutor, Karim Khan, has had those issues sitting on his desk for two years. He had one person in his [00:39:00] office investigating that case. And it wasn't until October 7th and, you know, what has happened since that the ICC has kind of sprung into action. But the question has always been, you know: Why was Palestine treated differently? Why were the complaints, why were the issues there treated differently, until now?

The world Henry Kissinger built - The Take (Al Jazeera English) - Air Date 12-1-23

SPENCER AKERMAN: Kissinger, in order to make sure that he benefited in 1968, in terms of getting a senior political appointment, spied on and ultimately sabotaged talks to end the war in Vietnam, a war that continued with thousands and thousands and thousands of deaths, which led directly to the secret and illegal bombings of Cambodia and Laos, all for power.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: Cambodia and Laos bordered Vietnam, and [00:40:00] Kissinger ended up overseeing a secret campaign to carpet bomb them.

ARCHIVE NEWS CLIP: During the Vietnam War, American planes dropped around 285 million cluster munitions on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

...secret U. S. bombing of Cambodia that killed as many as 150, 000 civilians that Kissinger authorized during the U. S. war in Vietnam.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: It's been called a war crime by journalists like Spencer and others, and it's what Sophal Ear remembers most.

SOPHAL EAR: I mean, you know, they say only the good die young. In this case, he obviously lasted a hundred years.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: Sophal is Cambodian American and fled Cambodia's brutal dictatorship with his family when he was a baby. A dictatorship that U. S. Cold War policy enabled, known as the Khmer Rouge.

SOPHAL EAR: I'm a survivor of the Khmer Rouge, having escaped in, uh, '76. Having had the [00:41:00] opportunities that I've had to advance my education and career.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: Today, he's a professor at the Thunderbird School of Management in Arizona, and he's learned a lot about Henry Kissinger's role since.

SOPHAL EAR: His involvement was far more hands on than I knew at the time, you know, you think of these policymakers as, yeah, they write memos. But over time, having studied what, you know, how much he actually chose targets, it's clear that it was more than just policymaking. It's an involvement that's unusual in its extent.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: And Sophal says he would hate for history to be written in a way where Kissinger's legacy in Southeast Asia is forgotten.

SOPHAL EAR: You know, obviously, he will be idolized by those who see him as a titan of foreign policy, of a genius who brought China to the United States and the United States to China, who served as Secretary of State for eight [00:42:00] years as National Security Advisor, as the very man who gave us the phrase, "there are no permanent friends or enemies, only interests", but who obviously had severe consequences on Cambodia, where I was born.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: Over the years, there were calls from around the world for Kissinger to apologize for the bombing of Cambodia and Laos. He never did. This was him speaking about it decades later.

HENRY KISSINGER: In my 90s, so I've heard it. I think the word war criminal should not be thrown around in the domestic debate. It's a shameful, it's a reflection on the people who use it.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: He went on to compare the actions he sanctioned to the Obama administration's drone campaign in Pakistan.

HENRY KISSINGER: Which I think it's justified. And therefore I believe that what was done in Cambodia was justified.[00:43:00]

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: And it was a tactic that the U. S. continued to use as the war in Vietnam dragged on.

ARCHIVE NEWS CLIP: On Christmas Day, 1972, the U. S. launched an air war on North Vietnam to convince Hanoi to resume peace talks.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: The 1973 Paris Peace Accords followed. That marked the beginning of the end of the U. S. war in Vietnam. Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, though it was later revealed that he had derailed talks years earlier, says Spencer.

SPENCER AKERMAN: You know, shudder to imagine how many people would still have been alive had Kissinger not sabotaged the Paris Peace Accords, which ultimately, and extremely cynically, he would win a Nobel Peace Prize for.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: The wars in Vietnam and Cambodia were all part of the U. S. campaign to stop the spread of communism. But when it came to the Soviet Union and communist [00:44:00] China, Kissinger turned to diplomacy. He helped Washington and Moscow negotiate their first arms control treaties. In 1972, in a move that shocked much of the world, the U. S. made its opening to China. President Richard Nixon visited Beijing. Kissinger spoke about that approach years later as well.

HENRY KISSINGER: Our strategy was to position ourselves in such a way that we were closer to Soviet Union and China than they were to each other. So that in every crisis, we had more options than they did.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: But it wasn't just Asia and the Soviet Union. Kissinger left his mark around the globe. Backing military governments to stave off this perceived communist threat in Greece, Argentina, and Chile.

HENRY KISSINGER: There was no policy, since, to assassinate any foreign official. [00:45:00]

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: That was Kissinger not long after the coup in Chile, but secret White House recordings later revealed Kissinger knew the CIA helped General Augusto Pinochet launch the coup. And not only that, the U. S. State Department had tried to warn Pinochet's government against killing his political opponents. Kissinger canceled those warnings.

HENRY KISSINGER: Sometimes statesmen have to choose among evils.

MALIKA BILAL - HOST, THE TAKE: For Spencer, Chile stands out in memory.

SPENCER AKERMAN: It was a place where the Cold War became, perhaps you might say, its truest self.

It is difficult to understand the world we live in today without understanding, particularly in a place like Chile where, with Kissinger's crucial support for overthrowing a democratic socialist government in 1973 of Salvador Allende, through the [00:46:00] creation that followed of the Pinochet dictatorship and its use as a laboratory for neoliberalism, we see in a really important and direct way, a template for the neoliberal age enforced by American power that we currently live in.

Henry Kissinger's Reactionary Idealism - Against the Grain - Air Date 10-11-17

GREG GRANDIN: Oswald Spengler was a, you know, early 20th Century historian and one would use the word historian lightly because he actually rejected the empirical basis of history, he rejected the idea of the kind of a positive notion of looking at facts and analyzing the facts. And so historians less philosopher that wrote a very influential book that looked at the rise and fall and civilizations, used use climactic language, talked about civilizations that were in their springtime and that were in their summer period and then their fall and then their winter. And Spengler is very influential among not just Kissinger, but he influenced Dick Cheney. He influenced a [00:47:00] lot of these New York conservatives. He is, you might, one might think of him as a kind of low-rent Nietzsche, you know, listeners might be more aware of that kind of German romanticism associated with Nietzsche.

But Spengler is of that tradition. And it's a legitimate tradition. And you know, it's a philosophical tradition and continental philosophy. And Kissinger in his undergraduate thesis revealed himself to be extremely influenced by it. But he rejected Spengler's pessimism. Spengler's analysis was based on the idea that all civilizations rise and all civilizations fall. And you can document the moment of decline when the bureaucrats take over, when the accountants take over, when the economists take over, when the poets and the priests and the warriors and the creative types that tap into the spirit, the Zeit of a [00:48:00] civilization, when they recede into the background, civilizations become over-bureaucratized. They become over-rationalized. They rely too much on fact and not enough on wisdom.

And this is something that Kissinger, this analysis, Kissinger embraced fully. But he rejected the pessimism. Spengler basically said that there was no way to

avoid it. That once the pessimists, once the bureaucrats show up, once the game theorists, once the accountants, once the economists, once the numbers coaches, once the Nate Silvers show up, you know, it's all declined, because they mistake information for wisdom.

Kissinger embraced the analysis, but rejected the determinism. He said that individuals - and by "individuals" he meant great men, great statesmen, right? For him, history took place in the realm of diplomacy, in the realm of international relations. So, great men, great statesmen can intervene, intercede in history and bend the curve upward.

So, if you actually look at his analysis, the terms of the way that [00:49:00] he criticized the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s, the Kennedy administration, or Robert McNamara as the head of the Department of Defense during the Vietnam War under JFK and LBJ, it was exactly in these terms that, they know they can do something, but they forgot why they should do it. They've mistaken numbers for wisdom, information for knowledge. And these are the terms of his criticism to this day. I mean, you could open up his latest book that came out last year, *World Order*, and it's exactly the same thing.

You know, they know how to get somewhere, but they don't know why we're going. And why this is important is because this is this kind of notion of the importance of intuition in history, in diplomacy, the notion of hunches, the notion of action, is exactly the terms of the neoconservative pushed in the early 2000s.

SASHA LILLEY - HOST, AGAINST THE GRAIN: But what's so interesting, though, in this, is that reading these early writings that you cite in *Kissinger's Shadow*, one is struck by [00:50:00] the emptiness of the argument. It seems to be action for action. So, as you say, he criticizes the technocrats and the bureaucrats for the how, but not the why. But one is left wondering what his why is.

GREG GRANDIN: Well, there is no why, and that's what's fascinating about it. One of the things that Kissinger is associated with is with purpose. You know, and he'll always, he'll use that word often. And a lot of this comes from this critique, this Spenglerian critique of technocracy. That we need to know not just how to do something, but why we are doing it. So, this notion of purpose. We have to know where we want to be in ten years time. But if you actually dig it out, there is no there there. There's an emptiness. Exactly what you say. There's a hollowness. There is no there is there.

Kissinger's an extreme relativist. I wouldn't say that he's amoral, but that morality is really based on power. He has a morality based on power and there is a hollowness where ultimately when he talks about purpose, when [00:51:00] you excavate that concept, there is no sense, you know, we could say that the purpose of a good society is, you know, social justice to bring about a decent standard of living for the majority of people. That would be purpose, but there is no purpose. And that brings back to exactly what you're saying, the circularity... meaning is created through action. On this point, Kissinger is unfailingly clear. He said, he said it in 1950 and he said it in 2015. He believes that reality exists, he's not a solipsist, he doesn't believe that we as subjective beings have access to that reality other than our own, other than the meaning we bring to bear that's created through our action. So we always have to act. It's through action that we create meaning, that we come to our sense of understanding of ourselves, that we come to our sense of our interests. There is no such thing as objective interests. Interests are created through action. And this creates an extremely dangerous circularity, you know, circular kind of reasoning, that we have to act in order to [00:52:00] avoid inaction.

Power creates purpose, and our purpose is basically the projection of power. It's exactly that, and again, I would say that if you peeled back the layers of neoconservative justification of why we had to go into Iraq, setting aside the specific fallacies of weapons of mass destruction and democracy and all of that nonsense, it was ultimately a sense to give ourselves meaning, that we had become flabby as a civilization, that we had lost the will to act. And if you lose the will to act, then you won't be able to act when you need to act. So, therefore we have to act all the time in order to maintain that will. That's the neoconservative will to power and will to purpose.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW:

Amb. Martin Indyk Pens Kissinger Book - The Mehdi Hasan Show - Air Date 11-12-21

You go through years of Kissinger's diplomacy in that region in hopes that the U. S. can learn lessons from it. In all the documents and interviews and archives you combed through, including, I believe, 12 interviews with the man himself, what do we learn about Kissinger and that period that's new? I mean, this is a man who's published a 3,000 page memoir on himself. [00:53:00] What's unique in your book, Martin?

MARTIN INDYK: So, I think what's unique about it is that there's been no serious, deep history of Kissinger's work to try to achieve peace in the Middle East, or at least lay the foundations for an American-led peace process. And the, well, the controversy about Kissinger is focused on his activities in other areas of the world. Mostly when he was National Security Advisor, whether it was Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Chile, and so on, and Bangladesh. But here, Kissinger was trying to make peace, or actually trying to establish order using the peace process as his mechanism. And he was quite successful at that. And having tried and failed several times myself out of the Clinton administration, the Obama administration, I thought we could learn something from that. That's why I went back and took a look at it. I tried to illuminate the story, which is documented, a treasure trove of documents at Israeli archives, uh, with my own experiences to [00:54:00] try to figure out how to and how not to make peace.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: But Martin, isn't Kissinger, though, an embodiment of everything that's wrong with U. S. policy towards Israel? I mean, he was openly biased, as even you acknowledge in your book. We know he said himself his policy was to "isolate the Palestinians". He refused to basically acknowledge their existence, blocked the PLO from negotiations at the time. He embodied the double standard towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And yet you're saying, including in a recent piece in *The Atlantic*, perhaps Biden could learn something from him. Do you really want us to go backwards to the 70s in our approach to the Palestinians?

MARTIN INDYK: No, I don't think Kissinger's approach to the Palestinians today is the same as it was in the 1970s. Let's think back to the 1970s before you were born, I guess. But in those days, the PLO was an out and out terrorist organization. On Kissinger's watch, they murdered two American diplomats in Sudan, [00:55:00] and they were dedicated to the overthrow of King Hussein in Jordan, another ally of the United States, and to the destruction of Israel. So it's not unreasonable that Kissinger took the position he did at the time, but nowadays he accepts the idea that the Palestinians should have a state. And he talked specifically about, you know, the need for the Palestinians now to have attributes of sovereignty.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: Yeah.

MARTIN INDYK: A state in the making. And that's part of his gradualist incremental approach, which I think is very relevant today to a situation in which the Palestinians are so divided and the Israelis are so divided that neither side can find a pathway to get to a two-state solution. So, we've got to find a more step by step approach. That's what I argue.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: I mean, the problem, of course, with gradualism and incrementalism is, in theory, it's great for you and I to sit in Washington, DC and America and say this stuff, but the [00:56:00] Palestinians are living under the longest military occupation on Earth. So, that's the problem with the whole gradualism and incrementalism thing.

But before we run out of time, I do want to ask a very important question. This is a book on Kissinger and the Middle East, which has a sympathetic tone at times. It's at times very admiring of him and his achievements, I think it's fair to say, in that region. But I wonder, was it a deliberate decision to focus on Kissinger and the Middle East and avoid his role in Pakistan, Bangladesh, East Timor, Chile, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, places where he was accused of war crimes, complicity in genocide? I mean, this is a man, Martin, who according to Yale University historian Greg Grandin, has the blood of three to four million people on his hands.

MARTIN INDYK: Yeah, as I said, he's a controversial character. But my purpose was to study his role in the Middle East, which hasn't been studied. And that's my area of expertise. And all the other issues that you talk about have been dealt with in great detail. But his efforts [00:57:00] at actually trying to make peace in the Middle East has not. And so that's the justification for looking at the book. On top of that, because he is master of the diplomatic game, I wanted to see what we could learn from that.

MEHDI HASAN - HOST, THE MEHDI HASAN SHOW: That's a valid argument, but I guess, put yourself in the shoes of some of his victims. You could say, Well, you know, it's very hard to write a book about him in isolation, to compartmentalize a man accused of so many crimes. Even if we accept he did a good job in the Middle East, a big question in itself, how do you divorce that from all the war crimes elsewhere? It's like saying, Hey, let's write a book about how Mussolini made the trains run on time.

MARTIN INDYK: Well, I'm not divorcing it from it, I'm just focusing on one area as the other books have focused on those areas, like *The Blood Telegram*, that looked at his role in Bangladesh. So, I'm not ignoring it. I've stated upfront in the book itself. And the book itself, while admiring of his diplomatic prowess, is nevertheless quite critical of opportunities he missed to avoid the [00:58:00] Yom Kippur 1973 war and opportunities I think he missed and document there to make pace, particularly to advance the cause of the Palestinians, at that time in a Jordanian context, but which could have changed the whole trajectory of the Palestinian cause in a more positive way than the way it turned out.

Final comments on our year-end membership drive

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today, starting with the *PBS NewsHour*, giving a broad biography of Henry Kissinger. *The Brian Lehrer Show* focused in on Kissinger's role in overthrowing governments around the world. *The Majority Report* discussed the secret and illegal bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam war. *Democracy Now!* looked at how the ruling class in the US celebrates Kissinger. And *Democracy Now!* also looked at why it was so hard for the world to get any accountability. And *The Take* connected the dots between Kissinger's role in overthrowing democratically-elected governments with establishing the neoliberal order we still live with today.

That's what everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from [00:59:00] *Against the Grain*, looking at Kissinger's main philosophical influence, and *The Mehdi Hassan Show* for a counterpoint invited on an author making the case for Kissinger being a good diplomat that we should look to for inspiration.

To hear that and have all of our bonus contents delivered seamlessly to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at BestOfTheLeft.com/support.

Now, I'm quite sure that we've all heard enough about war crimes for the day, so I don't think I have anything to add about the person who one show referred to as "the Forrest Gump of war crimes." And instead, I'll just remind you that we have about two and a half weeks remaining on our year-end membership drive.

The absolute reality is that a show like ours, which isn't plugged into any massive content suggestion algorithms -- think YouTube recommendations -- we just have a harder time finding our audience, while at the same time, being more dependent on them. Paying members [01:00:00] make the show possible and help us invest a bit in trying to grow our audience.

So if you get value out of this show and/or want to help others find it, become a member today. And we have a 20% off special going right now, so you can access our weekly bonus shows and all of the bonus clips that are in each regular episode at a discount. And that same offer is good for gift memberships as well. So take advantage of that while you can.

All the details are at BestOfTheLeft.com/support. And you'll find that link in the show notes.

That is going to be at for today. As always, keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this or anything else. You can leave us a voicemail or send us a text to 202-999-3991 or simply email me to Jay@BestOfTheLeft.com.

Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to our Transcriptionist Trio, Ken, Bryan [01:01:00] and LaWendy for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show co-hosting.

And thanks to those who already support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships.

And if you'd like to join the discussion, you can join our Discord community. You'll also find that link in the show notes as well.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left* podcast coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from BestOfTheLeft.com.