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Jeremi Suri. *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, July 2007. 368 pp. \$27.95 (hardback). ISBN: 978-0-674-02579-0.

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Reviewers: Barbara Keys, Priscilla Roberts, James Sparrow, Yafeng Xia

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

In his review Professor Yafeng Xia notes that Henry Kissinger is a most popular subject in China with over 50 books by or about Kissinger in Chinese at the library of the Northeast Normal University in China (as well as forthcoming doctoral dissertations). If you add this to the publications that Jeremi Suri cites on Kissinger (pp. 278, no. 5, 282, no. 80), Kissinger's own memoirs and other publications including his articles and opinion columns, and the many studies on U.S. Cold War policies during the 1960s-1970s such as Suri's *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (2003), featured in a H-Diplo roundtable in 2004, you have far more than a full shelf row in rapidly disappearing library stacks.

This raises the question of the need and value for yet another study of Henry Kissinger's meteoric rise as Richard Nixon's National Security Council advisor and Secretary of State to cartoons and news magazine covers as the "Superman" of diplomacy. A roller coaster decline followed, highlighted by the Republican repudiation of Kissinger and his strategy of détente in 1976 and persistent efforts to prosecute him for Watergate and for perjury over his testimony on a variety of controversial foreign policy issues such as the Chilean coup in 1973. Every release of government documents through FOIA requests obtained by the National Security Archive that deals with Kissinger raises old emotions about Kissinger's role in Cold War issues and the reliability of his contemporary explanations and published memoir accounts. Christopher Hitchens' *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (2001) provides the charges, jury, and conviction that so many on the contemporary left and right wanted.

The reviewers answer this question with a "yes" with respect to the strengths of Suri's study on Kissinger. In fact they suggest that the book should be longer or Suri should follow up with a second volume that provides more coverage after 1968 with at least a chapter on Kissinger after 1976. They do emphasize certain strengths in Suri's approach and analysis as well as reservations and challenges on some of his interpretations on policy issues including

1.) Every study on Kissinger mentions his origins as a German-Jewish immigrant who migrated with his family to New York City in 1938. Kissinger entered the U.S. Army in 1943, served in Germany, entered Harvard in 1947, and moved on to his more familiar academic and policy-making career. What is most informative in Suri's analysis is his use of Kissinger's experiences starting with coming of age in Nazi Germany and experiencing the weaknesses of democracy in Germany and the West culminating in WWII. Suri convincingly demonstrates these experiences as a most significant shaping force for Kissinger's perspective on strategy and tactics and on his personal role as an adviser to influential patrons.

2.) Although Kissinger has not discussed his Jewish background in his writings, Suri considers this most important in any evaluation of Kissinger: "Kissinger's Jewish background did not determine his policies, but it did shape his opportunities and his choices. It helped to define his hopes and his fears. Most significant, it influenced his understanding of power and its appropriate uses." (p. 12) Starting with his experience of ostracism and discrimination in Germany and the contrast with what he encountered in America, Kissinger strived to defend his positive feelings about America against international communists and "domestic critics who sought to undermine the very institutions that made his career possible—the Army, the universities, and the government." (pp. 221-222) Remembering the mass politics of the 1930s and the absence of strong leaders before Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt led the WWII global confrontation, Kissinger preferred to exclude public interference and minimize Congressional oversight of the strong leader doing what was necessary to promote stability and defend America and western civilization. Yet James Sparrow questions why Kissinger's experiences with Nazi Germany did not lead him to resist the bombing of civilians in Cambodia and Vietnam and did not stir up memories when he backed support to the Argentinean dictatorship or General Pinochet in Chile. (6)

3.) Suri also effectively uses the concept of the insider and outsider for understanding Kissinger's perspective and career orientation, what James Sparrow refers to in his review as the "Marginal Man." (1) Starting with his experiences in Furth, Germany, Kissinger experienced popular, grass roots violence against Jews, and an intensified sense of being an outsider reinforced by difficult times in a German Jewish community in Washington Heights. As Kissinger began his Americanization through the U.S. Army, Suri notes that he remained an outsider, experiencing discrimination as a Jew such as denial of his application to be an Army doctor (p. 65). Even as Kissinger gained professional mobility, he remained an outsider with respect to the transatlantic elite that emerged during and after the war. Suri retains this concept and returns to it throughout his study, noting in his chapter on "The Cold War University," that Kissinger made significant advances at Harvard to become a Cold war insider but at the same time remained socially a Jewish outsider. (pp. 109-110) Later in the 1960s when Kissinger served as an advisor to Democrats and a leading Republican like Nelson Rockefeller, "Kissinger was a German Jew who contributed important ideas but did not belong among the optimistic, privileged men of America's best clubs. He was an outsider. His clear recognition of this fact made him acutely sensitive about his position." (p. 175)

4.) Suri situates the United States and Kissinger at the center of post-WWII globalism in which Kissinger emerges as a power broker in the foreign policy establishment and as a mediator-negotiator-strategist among all the nations after 1968. Sparrow notes many strengths in Suri's approach but would welcome "a more cohort-oriented analysis of Kissinger [that] might have provided a clearer sense of just how much the globalizing Marginal Men shaped the trajectory of postwar strategy, and how much it shaped them." (3) Sparrow suggests that instead of globalism shaping Kissinger, "his cosmopolitan roots allowed him to pursue unconventional strategies, but his abiding commitment to realpolitik ensured these departures would always reinforce *raison d'état*." (3)

5.) In assessing Kissinger's thoughts and record as a grand strategist, Suri is not as critical as Jussi Hanhimäki in *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (2004), but he does advance a multisided perspective of "Kissinger's supreme genius: his ability to connect diverse phenomena and to formulate practical policy options." Kissinger offered not only very useful strategic plans in the Cold War but also "deepened the blind spots in American interactions with a rapidly changing world. (pp. 143-144) What Suri emphasizes is Kissinger's sense of limits in a thermonuclear environment, his persistent stress on the need to mix force and diplomacy, to make nuclear force useful and not just rely on deterrence in containment strategy, the importance of negotiations linked with a flexible military posture, and an overall federalist foreign policy that "meant an acceptance of limits on unilateral power, a commitment to negotiations, and a creative search for mutual gains among adversaries." (pp. 168-169) In the 1960s Kissinger envisioned a multi-polar framework of the U.S., the Soviet Union, and China with the U.S. as the global manager and consensus builder. Suri's strongest criticism of Kissinger's strategic thinking focuses on his hierarchal view placing the trans-Atlantic community at the center of his international system with the Soviet Union, China and Japan near the top. "Kissinger's federalist framework was static in its cultural elitism," Suri emphasizes, reflecting Kissinger's worldview based on his German Jewish values and experiences. Human rights, morality, justice were all subordinated to difficult decisions about greater and lesser evils. Principles of international conduct to promote stability and accommodation had the highest importance for Kissinger. But when the biggest challenge came in the 1960s in Vietnam, Suri finds Kissinger, a leading strategist, relatively silent. (pp. 187-191), and suggests that Kissinger "deserves deepest criticism" for his silences. Suri attributes this to Kissinger's neglect of three transformations: the proliferation of nonstate actors, his preference for a transcendent statesman, a Metternich or Bismarck, to master both the strategic concepts and tactical applications, i.e., Kissinger after 1968; and his failure to examine critically his own assumptions about cultural hierarchy, the moral content of state interests, and American benevolence. (pp. 192-196)

6.) Suri carries forward the insider/outsider concept on Kissinger into his relationship with Richard Nixon and his preferred role as the behind the scenes negotiator/manager. Before Nixon, Kissinger had been most successful at managing diverse people with international connections from his supervision of the International Seminar at Harvard, to his service as an adviser for patrons like Rockefeller. Suri typically places this in the context of traditional Jewish roles as "unseen advisors, shadow figures, secret agents. Kissinger defined his diplomacy in these terms—working in the shadows, away from public

oversight and among a small group of individuals empowered in different societies.” (p. 222) But Nixon was not a patron like Nelson Rockefeller who rewarded Kissinger for his dedicated service with \$50,000 in January 1969, suggesting that more service would be expected. Suri has a brief but fascinating account which emphasizes their turning to each other as a marriage of convenience, reflecting ambition, suspicion, hostility, jealousy; clearly, a dysfunctional relationship, but one that reflected a shared sense of crisis, fear of democratic chaos, anxieties about their enemies, and of being outsiders. Suri uses the metaphor of the gangster and business manager to capture their relationship: “Nixon barked orders, and Kissinger dutifully listened. He then had to interpret the chief’s intemperate remarks in ways that would serve intended purposes and address neglected issues Like all gangsters, Nixon refused to respect the boundaries of his servant’s personal space. Kissinger worked for a man who demanded that he remain ‘on call’ at all hours, ever ready to bear the brunt of his boss’s angry outbursts and to bolster his fragile self-esteem” and to put up with Nixon’s anti-Semitic outbursts. (pp, 206-211)

7.) Why would Kissinger put up with this? Suri skillfully lays the groundwork for the relationship with his emphasis on Kissinger’s insider/outsider stance and exposure to anti-Semitism and discrimination throughout his career and with his account of Kissinger’s ambition to be the transcendent manager at a time of maximum crisis—January 1969—with deterioration and disarray everywhere from the home front to Vietnam to the absence of effective relations with major adversaries. Barbara Keys, however, suggests that Suri should have explored in more depth Kissinger’s personality and other less than desirable traits that contributed to both his relationship with Nixon, his own management style with subordinates, and his policy choices.

8.) Suri devotes Chapter Five “A Statesman’s Revolution” to Kissinger’s attempt to implement a “coherent and transformative grand strategy into action” that would transcend the domestic crisis, reshape international relations through détente diplomacy with the Soviet Union and China to a more stable system, and restore U.S. credibility by extricating the U.S. from the Vietnam conflict. The reviewers would have welcomed more than a chapter that ranges from Kissinger’s relations with Nixon to Vietnam, China, Africa and Latin America briefly, and human rights issues. Suri successfully integrates Kissinger’s insider/outsider approach to the major issues by noting how Kissinger developed the back channel as his preferred method of negotiation which enabled him to have maximum influence and bring to bear his skills at bringing people together to make connections. (pp. 222-223) In terms of results, Suri does suggest that Kissinger fell short of his objectives. As a revolutionary rather than a war criminal, Suri argues that Kissinger “transformed the conduct of foreign policy in enduring ways,” most notably in negotiating the U.S. out of Vietnam, in shifting containment to negotiations and compromise, and in making the U.S. “the indispensable negotiating partner.” Suri also notes Kissinger’s redefinition of the use of force in international affairs and his successful removal of the management of foreign policy from public interference in a time of crisis. “Kissinger created a foreign-policy revolution that set the course for the rest of the century,” Suri concludes, pointing out that even Ronald Reagan, who denounced Kissinger and détente, drew on the “diplomatic networks and the maneuvers of force that he pioneered.” (pp. 246-248) Suri recognizes the costs and limits in Kissinger’s strategy and management style. In a recent H-Diplo

roundtable on Bruce Kuklick's *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger*, Kuklick is less enthused about Kissinger's record but, like Suri, gives Kissinger credit for the development and implementation of a strategic concept. (pp. 182-203)

9.) The reviewers express a range of reservations on Suri's assessment of Kissinger's policy contributions and his methods. Yafeng Xia, for example, suggests that Suri exaggerates Kissinger's interest in and role in the China initiative. Priscilla Roberts asks for more extensive analysis of Kissinger's time in power and his methods; and Barbara Keys, who focuses on the issue of "how much does the book help us to understand the particular choices Kissinger made while in office," concludes that Suri gives insufficient attention to Kissinger as an agent of policy making, bringing his personality, ambitions, and beliefs to the making of policy decisions with more serious, destructive consequences than Suri suggests in a range of countries from Vietnam to Angola to Chile.

10.) In his final chapter on the Middle East, "From Germany to Jerusalem," Suri brings together all of his major themes on Kissinger: his German Jewish background and concern about attacks on political authority; his desire to assert leadership in the face of weakness; his role as an insider who kept silent about his German Jewish background and stayed away from the Middle East until October 1973; his familiar role as a bridge figure carrying out shuttle negotiations; his effort to move the belligerents toward a compromise, negotiated settlement in which stability would be enhanced among a number of Middle Eastern states including Israel with the U.S. to stabilize the military balance. Suri concludes that Kissinger's strategy remained intact until September 11th, 2001, although it contributed to increased extremism and anger directed at the U.S. Suri, however, views President George Bush as returning to Kissinger's emphasis on stability and reliance on strongmen versus pushing for elections and steps toward democracy.

Participants:

Jeremi Suri is a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a senior fellow at the University of Wisconsin Center for World Affairs and the Global Economy. He is the author of *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); *The Global Revolutions of 1968* (W.W. Norton, 2006); and *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Harvard University Press, 2003). He is also the author of numerous articles on international history, social change, and nuclear strategy including "The Cold War, Decolonization, and Global Social Awakenings: Historical Intersections," *Cold War History* 6 (August 2006), 353-363; "The Promise and Failure of 'Developed Socialism: The Soviet 'Thaw' and the Crucible of the Prague Spring, 1964-1972," *Contemporary European History* 15(May 2006), 133-58; and "Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4 (Fall 2002), 60-92. Professor Suri was recently honored as one of America's "Top Young Innovators" by the Smithsonian Institution. Professor Suri received his Ph.D. from Yale University, his M.A. from Ohio University, and his B.A. from Stanford University.

Barbara Keys teaches U.S. history at the University of Melbourne. She received her Ph.D. in International History from Harvard University. She is currently writing two books, on

the origins of the “human rights revolution” of the 1970s and on the United States and torture in the 1970s. In the longer term she is planning a study of Soviet views of Henry Kissinger in the era of detente, using Russian archives and interviews. She has previously written extensively on sport and international relations. Her first book, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Harvard University Press, 2006), examined the cultural and political ramifications of the rise of international sports competitions before the Second World War. She has also published on sport in the Cold War.

Priscilla Roberts received her undergraduate and doctoral degrees from King’s College, Cambridge. Since 1984 she has taught at the University of Hong Kong, where she is an Associate Professor of History and also honorary director of the Centre of American Studies. She has published numerous articles on twentieth-century diplomatic and international history, with a special interest in Anglo-American relations, in the *Business History Review*, *Journal of American Studies*, *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, and other periodicals. She is the author of *The Cold War* (Sutton, 2000); and the editor of *Sino-American Relations Since 1900* (Hong Kong, 1991); *Window on the Forbidden City: The Beijing Diaries of David Bruce, 1973-1974* (Hong Kong, 2001); *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World Beyond Asia* (Stanford, 2006); (with He Peiqun) *Bonds Across Borders: Women, China, and International Relations in the Modern World* (Newcastle, 2007); and *Bridging the Sino-American Divide: American Studies with Chinese Characteristics* (Newcastle, 2007). She is associate editor of several encyclopedias published by ABC-CLIO, including the *Encyclopedia of the Korean War* (2000); *Encyclopedia of World War II* (2004); *World War II: A Student Encyclopedia* (2005); *Encyclopedia of World War I* (2005); *World War I: A Student Encyclopedia* (2005); and the *Encyclopedia of the Cold War*. She is currently working on a biography of Frank Altschul, and a major study of the development and influence of the twentieth-century trans-Atlantic foreign policy Establishment.

James T. Sparrow is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Chicago with a Ph.D. from Brown University in 2002. His research and teaching focus on the state and social citizenship in the modern United States. His current manuscript, *Americanism and Entitlements: Authorizing Big Government in an Age of Total War*, is a history of the social politics of the national state as its foundations shifted from welfare to warfare at mid-century. He has published several articles including “‘Buying Our Boys Back’: The Mass Foundations of Fiscal Citizenship, 1942-1954,” *Journal of Policy History*, Spring 2008; “A Nation in Motion: Regional Reconfiguration and the Nationalization of American Political Culture, 1941-54,” in *The End of Southern History? Integrating the Modern South and the Nation*, forthcoming; and “Hot War, Cold War: The Structures of Sociological Action, 1940-1955,” co-authored with Andrew Abbott, in *Sociology in Action: The American Sociological Association Centennial History* (2007).

Yafeng Xia is an assistant professor of East Asian and Diplomatic history at Long Island University, Brooklyn. He is the author of *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-72* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). He has also published numerous articles in such publications as *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *The Chinese Historical Review* among others. He is currently working on a

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monograph on the history of the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, tentatively entitled *Burying the "Diplomacy of Humiliation": New China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1949-1956*.

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