

The Apocalypse Must be Near. I Agree with Henry Kissinger - About Cold War with China.

The old reprobate isn't wrong about this one, except in emphasis.

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Global Research, May 06, 2021

[Absolute Zero: A Newsletter from Richard \(RJ\) Eskow](#) 5 May 2021

Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The end must be near, because I agree with Henry Kissinger about something. In fact, "the end" is exactly what I agree with Kissinger about. The former secretary of state, in a [video appearance](#) with the equally execrable former Senator Joe Lieberman, had this to say about US/China relations:

"It's the biggest problem for America; it's the biggest problem for the world. Because if we can't solve that, then the risk is that all over the world a kind of cold war will develop between [China](#) and the United States."

Kissinger added:

"We have developed the technology of a power that is beyond what anybody imagined even 70 years ago. And now, to the nuclear issue is added the hi-tech issue, which in the field of artificial intelligence, in its essence is based on the fact that man becomes a partner of machines and that machines can develop their own judgment."

The Message, Not the Messenger

Let's be clear. I think that Kissinger's purported brilliance is a fantasy. He botched the wars in Indochina so badly that countless more people died, millions more were spent, and we lost anyway. The diplomatic breakthrough with China was driven by financial interests and political opportunism. Worse, his ethics are disgraceful. As I wrote in [2016](#),

It was Kissinger who reportedly fed confidential information to then-candidate Richard Nixon – information that was used to sabotage the Vietnam peace talks, extracting a massive toll in human lives just to boost Nixon's election chances.

It was Kissinger who delivered the illegal order to bomb Cambodia and Laos. More bomb material rained down on these tiny nations than was used in all of World War II. His actions cost countless lives and gave rise to the mad, massacring Pol Pot regime.

It was Kissinger who ignored the pleadings of a US diplomat and gave the green light to Pakistani atrocities in what is now Bangladesh, praising Pakistan's dictator for his "delicacy and tact" while ridiculing those who "bleed" for "the dying Bengalis."

"Yahya hasn't had so much fun since the last Hindu massacre!" Kissinger said of Pakistani dictator Yahya Khan. (The government of Bangladesh reported that 3,000,000 people died in the "fun.")

Kissinger [supported](#) the violent overthrow of the Chilean government by a right-wing dictator. Kissinger [gave the go-ahead](#) to the Indonesian government's massacre of from 100,000 to 230,000 people in East Timor. (Estimates vary.)

So, pardon me if I don't genuflect for Mr. Kissinger the way so many people do on both sides of the aisle here in Washington. But he's right that the cold war between China and the United States represents an existential threat to humanity. (I'm all for showing respect to PhD's by calling them "doctor" – unless they're Henry Kissinger. Mr. Kissinger better be able to diagnose a case of kidney stones without palpating the patient before I give him an honorific like that.)

The Cold War is Here

He's wrong, however, to put it in the future tense. This cold war isn't something that could develop sometime in the future. It's already here. The US is waging an economic, propaganda, and military cold war against China, heightening tensions and increasing the risk of future confrontations. And it's getting worse. Additional sanctions were imposed on China last year, and a Chinese research organization reported that "the intensity, in terms of the scale, number and duration of the U.S. military activities in the region in 2020 was rarely seen in recent years."

Confirmation of that last claim was sought by the [Voice of America](#), which can hardly be accused of being anti-American. "The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii confirms 10 warship passages into the sea last year following 10 in 2019," the VOA reported. "Just five were logged in each of the two years before 2019."

The VOA report continued, "In July, the U.S. Air Force also acknowledged sending a B-52 Stratofortress bomber to join two aircraft carriers in a South China Sea exercise. Command spokespersons would not answer a request for comment on whether 2020 was an unusual year overall."

Imagine how the US would react if the Chinese were conducting military exercises off the Atlantic coast. Why, then, with the United States engage in such actions off the shores of China?

The Fiscal Front

The answer is almost certainly economic. To read the Defense Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2021 ([pdf here](#)) is to come away astounded by the many references to economic, rather than military, issues regarding China. The budget calls for action "to deter China from engaging in industrial espionage and cyber theft," calls for "a report and strategy on space competition with China," funds a "Treasury study and strategy on money laundering by the People's Republic of China," and calls for "ensuring Chinese debt transparency."

That last portion of the bill, Sec. 9722, is especially interesting. It directs the Treasury Secretary to instruct the United States Executive Director at each international financial institution ... that it is the policy of the United States ... to secure greater transparency with respect to the terms and conditions of financing provided by the government of the People's Republic of China to any member state of the respective institution ..."

To a great extent, finance is driving the new cold war with China. China's Comprehensive Regional Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a massive free trade agreement for the Pacific region that covers 2.2 billion people in 15 countries and nearly one-third (28 to 30 percent) of all global trade. China is increasingly offering loans to developing nations on terms that are more favorable than the IMF's, especially because they don't require the kinds of privatization "reforms" that accompany most IMF loans.

Averting Apocalypse

It's not necessary to idealize the Chinese in order to realize this is a crisis in the making. As the sepulchral Mr. Kissinger notes, nuclear weapons pose an existential risk to humanity and the digital threats we now face are unprecedented. So, why are we racing headfirst into this cold war? The political influence of the arms industry can't be underestimated. Neither can the power of the economic interests that are most threatened by China's growth. Underlying all of this is a deep fear that American world dominance is coming to an end and will soon be replaced by an era of Chinese global supremacy.

That may be so. But is it worth risking an apocalypse to save it? It would make more sense to compete with China on the generosity of our aid, not the power of our weapons, by redirecting some of this military spending to building genuine democracy and economic equality around the world. But then, that would mean we have to do it at home, too.

At 97, Kissinger is still spouting the rhetoric of the last cold war. As he promotes diplomacy, he is also arguing for increased defense spending. "when you have constant negotiations, which is what I believe is necessary," he said, "the public then thinks there is no strategic problem and then you may weaken yourself by neglecting defense ... You then invite other countries to assert their mounting comparative strength."

What comparative strength? China's 2021 military budget is an estimated [\\$209.16 billion](#) US at current exchange rates. The US military budget for the same year is \$741 billion, or roughly 3.5 times larger. (it's true that the Chinese have probably not been entirely forthcoming about their military expenditures; but then, neither has the United States.)

If Kissinger the Hawk is still wrong about military spending, he's not wrong about the gravity of the threat we're facing. If we don't face reality, we may well face a nuclear apocalypse. I don't intend to rehabilitate the memory of a war criminal, but with the fate of the planet at stake, I'll take help from anyone I can – even Henry Kissinger.

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