



Kissinger the Negotiator: Lessons from Dealmaking at the Highest Level

James K. Sebenius, R. Nicholas Burns, Robert H. Mnookin, Henry Kissinger (Foreword)

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Foreword by Henry Kissinger

In this groundbreaking, definitive guide to the art of negotiation, three Harvard professors—all experienced negotiators—offer a comprehensive examination of one of the most successful dealmakers of all time.

Politicians, world leaders, and business executives around the world—including every President from John F. Kennedy to Donald J. Trump—have sought the counsel of Henry Kissinger, a brilliant diplomat and historian whose unprecedented achievements as a negotiator have been universally acknowledged. Now, for the first time, *Kissinger the Negotiator* provides a clear analysis of Kissinger's overall approach to making deals and resolving conflicts—expertise that holds powerful and enduring lessons.

James K. Sebenius (Harvard Business School), R. Nicholas Burns (Harvard Kennedy School of Government), and Robert H. Mnookin (Harvard Law School) crystallize the key elements of Kissinger's approach, based on in-depth interviews with the former secretary of state himself about some of his most difficult negotiations, an extensive study of his record, and many independent sources. Taut and instructive, *Kissinger the Negotiator* mines the long and fruitful career of this elder statesman and shows how his strategies apply not only to contemporary diplomatic challenges but also to other realms of negotiation, including business, public policy, and law.

Essential reading for current and future leaders, *Kissinger the Negotiator* is an invaluable guide to reaching agreements in challenging situations.

Kissinger the Negotiator: Lessons from Dealmaking at the Highest Level Details

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From Reader Review Kissinger the Negotiator: Lessons from Dealmaking at the Highest Level for online ebook

Hallie says

This is one of the best books I have read this year - so good that I'm buying this book in spite of a shortage of shelf space in a NYC apartment. Right off the bat the start of the book bodes well with the foreword directly written by Kissinger himself, who endorses this book for covering a topic that is new and unique compared to other works on him that are already out there. But most importantly - this book RESONATES. I've taken negotiation classes, read many other negotiation books, and up to now everything revolves around tactics on how to "get to yes" at the table. This book, and Kissinger's approach, is about how it's more than just what happens at the table that shapes the full, bigger picture of the negotiation. It's such a much more comprehensive look, and so much more in tune with what happens in real life. A great read for anyone who needs to negotiate about anything or thinks they aren't good at negotiating

Marks54 says

This is an odd book in which three negotiation gurus from the different professional schools at Harvard (Business, Government, Law) examine the negotiation career of Henry Kissinger to see how his foreign policy negotiations measure up in terms of current canons and frameworks of how negotiations is studied at Harvard. That is correct - this is an extended Harvard case study of HK, who joined the Harvard faculty not long after finishing his undergraduate studies, who became a legend for his thesis on Metternich (A World Restored) and for "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy", and who was said to be the model for Dr. Strangelove in Stanley Kubrick's movie. And this was before he went to work for Nixon and Ford.

The suspense is killing me - how will he measure up? Not to worry. The mother ship takes care of its own and Kissinger turns out to be a master negotiator who racked up some lasting results in the course of his career. There were bumps along the way, such as in Vietnam, but all in all Kissinger did some memorable and lasting work. Not everyone agrees of course, but that is OK. The authors address the uneven reception of Nixon and Kissinger's work on Vietnam by focusing on the key assumptions that they brought into the episode, noting that these did not stand up well as the Vietnam War and its aftermath unfolded - but that is what they presumed at the time. There are lots of critics of the Vietnam negotiations anyway, so it is not that critical here, and HK tried to return his Nobel prize, anyway.

This is a very readable book that is actually much more accessible than when these cases are written up as long memoirs or histories. The general negotiations framework employed in the book is an effective way to organize lots of dense material around understandable processes of negotiation and implementation, supplemented by hefty sprinklings of context. So if one has not read a lot of Kissinger, this book is a nice and understandable introduction. The authors had a lot of materials to work with, given that Kissinger himself has told his story at great length. There are some recent and capably written bios out on him by Isaacson and Ferguson. Kissinger is perhaps only surpassed by Churchill as a statesman who was able to write the history that formed the public account of his career. Recognizing this, I wondered how the book could turn out any differently than it did. The story of Kissinger as master negotiator has been out on the table for quite some time in nearly the same terms as those used by Sibenius and his coauthors to organize their work.

I do struggle a bit with what negotiation frameworks add to histories such as those reported here. Negotiations have long been part of diplomacy and they have always been complex, including everything from broad macro political perspectives, local knowledge, personal idiosyncrasies among negotiation teams, and the particular structures of the problems being negotiated. To a skeptic, they boil down to the prescription of “think hard about what you are negotiating and manage the process at all relevant levels”. I get it, serious negotiation is really complicated and a master negotiator will need to balance the broad and the narrow, the long term and the immediate, the national and the personal, the economic and the political. I am not sure what placing these terms into a framework does or how condensing the huge complexity of the situation into a series of more abstract case profiles helps the reader understand the reality more effectively. Of course it is better than just going on an abstract framework, but the devil is in the details, right, and the reader will almost never grapple with the authentic complexity of the negotiation situations.

The initial discussions of Kissinger’s work to end white minority rule in Southern Africa are to me the best parts of the book - and the least discussed elsewhere. The sections on Vietnam and the Middle East are good, but given the huge volume of work on these conflicts, I had more trouble seeing the value added over what is already out on these crises. The authors attempt to make the book more broadly relevant by arguing that HK’s approach is applicable to business and non-governmental settings too. Their efforts ring a bit hollow and seem undeveloped. Perhaps another case study to make the point would have been helpful.

All in all, this is an enjoyable and useful book that can likely serve as a nice supporting text in a class taking a broad view of negotiation and international politics. It is well worth reading.

Amy says

An incredibly easy read—especially considering I rarely venture into international politics—but fairly repetitive. The insights, while valuable, could be captured in the length of an article.

I'd recap learnings into 7 lessons (instead of the 15 the authors offer):

1. Think of negotiation as something that happens both at and away from the table.
2. This has implications for what to do to prepare for the moments at the table, to tilt the balance in favor of a deal happening rather than no deal being the more beneficial outcome for one or more parties.
3. One dimension to consider is latitude: what other parties could be brought in indirectly to the primary negotiation, to put pressure on the primary counterpart? How could a negotiation campaign be set up to cause a chain of agreements ending with the one you ultimately seek?
4. Don't forget internal stakeholders on either side, who could help or thwart the primary negotiation.
5. Another dimension to consider is longitude: what are the consequences to your credibility over the long term for the actions you contemplate? Once you damage your credibility it's hard to negotiate.
6. Interpersonally, strive for deep empathy of your counterpart's circumstances—political, historical, cultural—but don't confuse empathy with niceness. Assertiveness combined with empathy is a winning combination.

7. "Creative ambiguity" has a place in transparent negotiations. Multiple interpretations allows parties to come together who would otherwise lose face in such a process.
