



# **The White House Years**

*Henry Kissinger*

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## **The White House Years** Henry Kissinger

In this first volume of his memoirs, Dr Kissinger covers his first four years (1969-1973) as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs - and President Nixon's closest adviser on foreign policy. It is undoubtedly the most significant book to come out of the Nixon Administration. Among the countless great and critical moments Dr Kissinger recalls are his first meeting with Nixon, his secret trip to China, the first SALT negotiation, the Jordan crisis of 1970, the India-Pakistan war of 1971, and the historic summit meetings in Peking and Moscow. He covers the major controversies over Indochina policy during that period, including events in Laos, the overthrow of Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk, his secret talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris, his 'Peace is at hand' press conference, and the breakdown of the talks that led to the 'Christmas bombing' of 1972. He offers his insights into the Middle East conflicts, Sadat's break with the Soviets, the election of Salvador Allende in Chile, issues of defense strategy, and relations with Europe and Japan. Other highlights are his relationship with Nixon, brilliant portraits of major foreign leaders, and his views as to the handling of crises and the art of diplomacy. Few men have wielded as much influence in the arena of American foreign policy as Henry Kissinger. This record makes an invaluable and lasting contribution to the history of this crucial time.

## **The White House Years Details**

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Wow - reading this book felt like I was taking a graduate-level college course on American foreign policy and diplomacy. A massive tome by Kissinger, one of the heavyweights of the Nixon and Ford Administrations. Incredibly, the 1,476 pages only takes the reader up the end of the first four years of his tenure as National Security Advisor.

I liked how Kissinger divided this book up: by year but - within the year - by subject matter (or, more specifically for this venture, by country). He deftly moves between trying to conclude the Vietnam War, establishing relationships with the USSR and China, arranging ground-breaking summits in both of those Communist-controlled countries, relationships with European countries, simmering issues in the Middle East, the India-Pakistan crisis of 1971, and Chile. Interspersed throughout all of the chapters are his assessments of the leaders that he was dealing with: their strengths, flaws, tendencies, and negotiating strategies.

This is, obviously, Kissinger's view of history and certainly nobody comes out looking better than he does. He mentions his ego so frequently that I think it almost became a character in the book. He does admit to vanity in several instances, specifically concerning his fight for attention and prominence with Secretary of State William Rogers. He also admits times when he was wrong, and he does give ample credit to other individuals on several occasions (Ellsworth Bunker, Nixon, Chou En-Lai, Dean Acheson, Melvin Laird, John Connally, to name a few).

For me, the most interesting parts of the book dealt with the Vietnamese peace negotiations (excruciating to be sure - I am not sure how anyone could have withstood the intense daily pressure that Kissinger and many others were subjected to), and his observations about Richard Nixon. I thought he was surprisingly forthcoming about their relationship, and he paints a well-formed portrait of a tortured, lonely, paranoid man. Reading about Nixon from Kissinger's viewpoint helps to understand why his presidency disintegrated shortly after the period that this book covers.

Overall, essential reading for anyone specifically interested in U.S. diplomacy, foreign policy, Cold War history, Vietnam War history, or the Nixon presidency.

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### Amr Elroby says

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### Yazeed AlMogren says

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### Youssef Mahmoud says

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## **Bill Manzi says**

This book, due to length and level of detail, will not be for everyone. But it is a vitally important work for those who want to understand some of the critical foreign policy events in American history. This book deals with Kissinger's tenure as Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor from 1969-1972, and is the first volume of his memoirs. An astounding amount of history is compressed into that time period, including the Nixon opening to China, the intractable problems of the Middle East, with special focus on the triangular diplomacy involving the Soviet Union, Egypt, and the United States, the war in Vietnam, and the exceedingly tortured negotiations to end that war, (with a good look at the Nixon decisions on the excursion into Cambodia, the "Christmas Bombing", and the self described "brutal" treatment of the recalcitrant South Vietnamese as agreement neared), and the Indo-Pakistan war, and the "tilt" towards Pakistan. Any one of those items would be a book in itself, and the fact that Kissinger not only kept all of those balls in the air but manages, through this volume, to show how they were all "connected" is a testament to his brilliance. Dr. Kissinger has many detractors, and Nixon Administration policies, especially with regard to Vietnam, have drawn severe criticism over the years. Kissinger takes those critics on directly, and makes some strong and compelling arguments to justify his policy recommendations. Vietnam was a tragic error for the United States, but Kissinger brings an up close perspective to why many of the important players acted the way they did.

Kissinger's devotion to the "realist" school of diplomacy is evident through his actions and policy prescriptions described in this volume. His hard headed and "realistic" approach to bargaining are laid out clearly in his approach to the negotiations with North Vietnam, where he recognized that an unfavorable "balance of forces" on the ground would lead to an unsatisfactory outcome from the perspective of the U.S. His devotion to "equilibrium" govern his negotiations on SALT, and advise his relationship and policy recommendations with the Soviets.

For the historian this book is essential. Kissinger dealt with some of the very true giants of this (or any other era), including Chou En-Lai, Indira Ghandi, Le Duc Tho, Leonid Breznhev, Andrei Gromyko, Mao Tse Tung, Moshe Dayan, Anwar Sadat, Golda Meir, and so many others. He seems to me to be exceedingly honest about his relationship with Richard Nixon, who he described as brooding, lonely, and filled with resentment towards so many. He, in my opinion, fairly describes some of the dysfunction of the foreign policy methodology of the first term Nixon Administration, and takes some of the blame onto himself. (The relationship with Secretary of State William Rodgers is a big part of this dysfunction) Kissinger is writing to make sure history records his perspective, but he does so in a way that brings valuable insight to a critical time in U.S. foreign policy, when change and bold steps produced much disruption in this arena. Love them or hate them the Nixon-Kissinger team shook US foreign policy and produced real change that impacts us to this very day. A must read for those who love history or foreign policy.

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## **Meihan Liu says**

Noticed that someone rated it two stars saying that "it's a five star book as far as historic record but for regular folk a 2-star endeavor. " Well, that's the very reason why that there are extraordinary people like the author of this book living the most exciting life one can ever imagine and making history of the human race during one of the most exciting periods of human history, and there are regular folks writing reviews that make no sense and yet still questioning the wisdom or legacy of the former kind.

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## Michael Locklear says

This is the other book that I closed-out last night (the first was Jon Meacham's "American Lion"). I was hoping, though lengthy, that Henry Kissinger's "White House Years" would be worth the time and effort. But I decided last night to call it an end.

I do believe that Dr. Kissinger enjoys writing about his career more that I could enjoy reading about it. The farthest that I could drag myself was around page 150. (In Meacham's book I only read the first hundred or so pages; not nearly the 150 that I mentioned in my review).

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## toki says

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## Shelley says

Ok so this is how you write a 1400 page book without wasting people's time.

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## Genevieve Monette says

Read that book in US history in college. You can read it like a novel!!

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## David Huff says

At 1,476 pages, I'm pretty certain its the longest book I've ever read --- and I was quite careful to not drop it on my foot (or my face, while reading in bed). It was a very impressive, and exhaustively detailed account of Kissinger's first 4 years in the Nixon administration, 1968-1972. So much went on in that time frame, and I see it with different eyes now than I did as a high school student during that same period. You'll learn as much about Nixon, and many other world leaders of the era, as you do about Kissinger, and as an historical account this book is a treasure trove for future generations. I know that for many, Nixon and Kissinger were polarizing figures, but there is still much insight to be gained from such a well-written, well-detailed first hand account from one who was at the center of the storm.

And, yes, it is exhaustively detailed!

