

**LI4-- "KISSINGER: ENLIGHTENED STATESMAN OR ODIIOUS SCHLUMPF?", 5/01**

**A REVIEW OF:**

- (1) The Trial Of Henry Kissinger, Christopher Hitchens (Verso, May, 2001, 159 pages); and**
- (2) Does America Need A Foreign Policy?: Towards A Diplomacy for the 21st Century, Henry Kissinger (Simon and Schuster, June, 2001, 288 pages.)**

***"It is the lack of (Albert Speer's) psychological and spiritual ballast and the ease with which he handles the terrifying technical and organizational machinery of our age which make this slight type go extremely far nowadays. This is their age; the Hitlers and Himmlers we may get rid of, but the Speers, whatever happens to this particular special man, will long be with us."***

**-- London Observer, April 9, 1944**

***"The attack of bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which are undefended is prohibited."***

**-- Article 25, The Hague Convention, 1907**

***"For Joseph Heller, who saw it early and saw it whole: 'In Gold's conservative opinion, Kissinger would not be recalled in history as a Bismarck, Metternich or Castlereagh but as an odious schlump who made war gladly.'"***

**-- Christopher Hitchens, dedication to The Trail of Henry Kissinger**

**As we begin a consideration of Henry Kissinger and what his story tells us about ourselves, it is important to note that he is not classically evil. He deserves credit for managing America's opening to China. He reportedly tutors a class in Harlem, cares for his wife and children, and enjoys the esteem of many decent people. And one can feel tremendous sympathy for this refugee from Nazi Germany, whose**

**traumatic early experiences led him to cut off feeling in order to survive. Indeed, it is precisely because Kissinger is not a cardboard figure that it is important to understand his responsibility for mass murder in Indochina, and what it means that our society has honored and not punished him for his actions. It is important not to strip him of his humanity, despite his having done so to so many millions, if we are to understand what his life means for the rest of us.**

**Several times a month, as I shave, I find myself looking deeply into my eyes - and remembering theirs. It took alot to create the look in the eyes of the hundreds of peasants from the Plain of Jars in Laos whom I interviewed between September 1969 and February 1971, victims of the most sustained and unprovoked bombardment of innocent civilians in all human history. Seven hundred years of civilization were required to create the depth of warmth, humanity and love that I saw in those eyes. But it took only a few years, particularly 1969 during which Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger obliterated everything they owned and loved, to produce the lost, haunted, broken look that was also so noticeable in their gaze.**

**They had names, these people: Thao, Bounphet, Khamphong, Loung. They had treasured wives and husbands, children and grandparents, buffaloes and homes, rice fields and temples. And they had dreams. Young people dreamed of being married. Young adults of having children. Older people of having grandkids.They were, in short, people just like us who enjoyed the same rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.**

**It was a wrenching experience to hear these kind, decent human beings describe the extermination of revered grandmothers, burned alive by napalm before their eyes; weep as they remembered seeing a beloved three-year old daughter riddled by anti-personnel bombs; or draw into themselves as they spoke of a mother or father buried alive by a 500-pound bomb. One went numb seeing a young boy missing a leg or a young girl with napalm wounds on her breast, stomach and vagina.**

**It was anguishing to hear them describe what it felt like to lose everything they had to bombers that had come from a distant land they knew nothing about, and against whom they had committed no offense. And it was maddening to realize that U.S. bombing was mainly aimed at such civilians, who were forced to stay near their villages, while mobile guerrilla soldiers escaped as they moved through the heavily forested areas which covered most of northern Laos.**

**And these refugees were the lucky ones. Though traumatized, they had escaped alive. The most excruciating aspect of interviewing these people was knowing that Nixon and Kissinger were continuing to bomb millions of other innocent Indochinese peasants, many of whom though now alive would be murdered within the days or weeks to come.**

**It was not known at the time precisely what had happened or why. It is known today. Although Nixon and Kissinger were forced by domestic opinion to withdraw U.S. ground troops, they decided to expand indiscriminate U.S. bombing of Indochina in an effort to prop up local regimes and save American face. Although 2.74 million tons of bombs were dropped on Indochina by Johnson, McNamara and Clark Clifford, most in North and South Vietnam, 3.98 million tons were dropped by Kissinger under Nixon and later Ford, as they vastly increased the bombing of Laos and expanded it into Cambodia.**

**Kissinger's bombing equaled twice the tonnage dropped on all of Europe and the entire Pacific theater in World War II. Johnson waged five years of war in Indochina. Kissinger waged six and a half years of the most indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets in history, as 20,503 Americans and more than 1 million Indochinese perished, 2 million were wounded, and three million were made homeless.**

**This expansion in the bombing was not needed to protect Americans, as is often claimed. The North Vietnamese were happy to see Americans withdraw, and would have escorted them out with welcome wagons. And Kissinger kept bombing, killing and maiming even after it was obvious that no reasonable military objective could be achieved. When Frances Fitzgerald and I conducted a February**

**1975 briefing in Washington for top Vietnam hands after interviewing recent North Vietnamese victims of bombing, included a 12 year old boy who had been blinded, true believer Frank Scottin objected that Kissinger was only trying to preserve democracy in Southeast Asia. "Oh Frank, cut it out!," objected James Lowenstein, a top aide on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "you know that Kissinger's only concern is ensuring that he won't be blamed for the inevitable fall of Indochina." Saigon fell two months later.**

**As I also discovered in a direct investigation of the U.S. bombing in Cambodia, no steps were taken to ascertain if targets being bombed were in fact legitimate military targets.**

**I spent a day in the spring of 1973 flying over an area which the U.S. Embassy estimated was inhabited by two million Cambodians living under the Khmer Rouge without seeing a single sign of life. My CIA-contract pilot told me the people were hiding from the bombs, particularly the B-52s which indiscriminately obliterated areas the size of football fields from 30,000 feet. I used the pilot's radio to listen in on raids and discovered that pilots bombing neither knew nor checked with anyone to discover if their were civilians in the area. And I was later informed by the U.S. Air force "bombing officer" at 7th Air force Headquarters, whom U.S. spokesman claimed was responsible for ensuring that no civilians were bombed, that he only checked to see that no CIA teams were present in areas under bombardment and had no idea if civilians were in the area.**

**It is Henry Kissinger's direct involvement in the murder of countless innocent Indochinese civilians from the air, in direct violation of international law recognized by the U.S., which comprises the strongest case for his prosecution as a war criminal in the new book by Christopher Hitchens, The Trial of Henry Kissinger (Verso Press). (Full disclosure: Hitchens interviewed me for his book.)**

**Hitchens does not confine himself to the bombing of Indochina. His case also includes Kissinger's support for, and encouragement of, murder and torture by the Pakistani regime which killed between 500,000 and 3 million Bangladeshis in 1974, the junta which murdered**

**and tortured tens of thousands in Chile, the Greek regime which murdered tens of thousands in the course of overthrowing Archbishop Makarios in Cyprus, and the Indonesian generals who killed 200,000 civilians in East Timor.**

**There is no question that Kissinger's support for brutal regimes around the world which remained in power through the use of torture and mass murder is indeed contemptible, betrayed fundamental American values, and will stain his name for many years to come. It might be difficult to indict Kissinger as a war criminal for these actions, however, since others did the actual killing. But in the case of Indochina he was directly involved. As Hitchens summarizes the existing evidence, which is not seriously disputed, "it is impossible for him to claim that he was unaware of the consequences of the bombings of Cambodia and Laos; he knew more about them, and in more intimate detail, than any other individual."**

**The question of whether Henry Kissinger is guilty of mass murder of civilians under international law is thus not open to serious doubt. Was there justice in this world or the next, he would suffer the same fate as those found guilty at Nuremberg. The language of the law, such as the 1907 Hague convention, is unambiguous. And there is no question that he conducted the most sustained bombing of "towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which (were) undefended" in history.**

**Not surprisingly, Kissinger shares few of Hitchens' concerns in his new book. Billing itself as "a diplomacy for the 21st century", the book is concerned with the future and not the messy past. He barely refers to Indochina, entirely ignores Chile, East Timor or Bangladesh, and manages to discuss the importance of Iran without even mentioning his historic misjudgment in making the Shah one of the linchpins of the "Nixon Doctrine" - and thereby ensuring generations of hatred and untold troubles for the U.S. and its allies in the Mideast.**

**Despite their wide differences, however, Kissinger and Hitchens do have one shared concern: the extent to which jurists in one nation have "international jurisdiction" over officials who have committed human rights violations in another. Hitchens taped Kissinger publisher**

**Michael Korda's end of a conversation with the former Secretary of State on the day that the news broke that former Chilean head of state Augusto Pinochet was detained in London. "Henry, this is totally outrageous ... This is a Spanish judge appealing to an English Court about a Chilean head of state," Korda stated. Hitchen concludes that "one must credit Kissinger with grasping what so many other people did not: that if the Pinochet precedent became established, then he himself was in some danger."**

**Kissinger inadvertently supports Hitchens' conclusion by devoting far more passion and almost as much space (9 pages) to the question of "international jurisdiction" than he does to THE ENTIRE CONTINENT OF AFRICA.**

**"The world should think twice about the implications of a procedure by which a single judge is able ... to assert jurisdiction over a citizen of another state for alleged crimes committed entirely in that other state ... without regard to the conciliation procedures that might exist in the country of the accused for dealing with the issue," Kissinger writes.**

**Kissinger would of course be in serious trouble if the world did "think twice" about the "conciliation procedures" that exist in the United States for dealing with his responsibility for the mass murder of civilians in Indochina. For not only do no procedures exist for bringing him to justice, but he is feted and lionized by the highest sectors of American society, media and business. Kissinger, as Hitchens notes, is paid \$25-30,000 a speech; has become a wealthy man through a consulting company which caters to top American corporations; is published regularly by the Washington Post, Newsweek and Simon and Schuster (his latest book is a Book of the Month Club alternate selection); is fawningly interviewed on television; and is a fixture in high society.**

**Although it is devoutly to be hoped for, in short, the prospects of Kissinger being tried as a war criminal seem slight at this writing. It is important to note what this tells us about the state of America as it begins the 21st century.**

**To begin with, only a nation in deep spiritual and psychological decline could honor a man with as much blood on his hands as Henry Kissinger. But it is not liberals or hippies who initiated this decline. The loss of "family values" is rooted in the realization by millions of draft-age Americans, now parents and grandparents themselves, that their parent's generation was prepared to see them die in Indochina. This realization was first held by young Americans who opposed the war, but eventually spread to disillusioned GIs. An entire generation was plunged into a moral abyss from which it has yet to emerge.**

**Equally disturbing is the general desensitization to human life experienced in every sector of society. Vietnam is not solely responsible for this. But our refusal to openly discuss our responsibility for murder in Indochina, let alone provide reparations to the survivors, has seen us lose a critical opportunity to teach our children that America is a nation that values human life. It is not necessary, however desirable, to say we were wrong in intervening in Indochina. Nor must we necessarily acknowledge the truth: that we were responsible for the vast majority of casualties.**

**But we refuse at our peril to at least take responsibility for the casualties we did cause, and seek to make amends to those who survived our brutality. The Germans did so after World War II, not for the Jews but for themselves. Our failure to do so harms our society no less than that of the Indochinese.**

**Kissinger's new book also reveals the central problem facing America today: the rise of a technocratic, unfeeling, but skilled class of baby-boomers who have ascended to the heights of power as the new century begins. Kissinger presents himself as an enlightened statesman selflessly pursuing the national interest in the face of small-minded men consumed with partisan politics, narrow ambition, or ideologies of left or right. "For American foreign policy, the need (is) for ideological subtlety and long-range strategy ... unfortunately, domestic politics is driving American foreign policy in the opposite direction," he writes.**

**And what is the "long-range strategy" and "ideological subtlety" required? Kissinger never presents it. The book is essentially a travelogue, as he proceeds region by region around the world, supporting missile defense here and sanctions against Saddam Hussein there, peppered with countless observations of stupefying banality, e.g. "eighth, world order - or Asian order - cannot emerge from a strategy of equilibrium alone but neither can it be achieved without it."**

**Even more striking than what he says, however, is what he ignores. America's top foreign policy imperative for the coming century is clearly to lead an international effort to save a biosphere now terminally threatened by a combination of global warming, biodiversity loss, water depletion and pollution, and a host of other environmental ills. Even war itself pales before the "long-term" consequences of our continued degradation of the biosphere.**

**And what does Dr. Kissinger have to say about this? On page 149, we read: "Then there is the entire range of New Age issues: proliferation, environmental, cultural and scholarly exchange, among many others."**

**Yes, the ONLY reference to humanity's biospheric crisis in a book purportedly presenting a strategic foreign policy vision for the 21st century is a one-word reference to the "environment", lumped together with "cultural and scholarly exchange", and dismissed as a "New Age" issue along with nuclear, chemical and biological "proliferation" which threatens far more people than the prospect of world or even regional wars.**

**This mixture of a humanity and banality reveals the truth of the prediction made by the London Observer more than 50 years ago. What is most striking about Kissinger is his amorality not immorality, the emptiness not evil in his thinking.**

**In the past we had most to fear from religious or political ideologues. Today it is the non-ideologues, the "slight types"**

**who quietly run our government and dominate our age. It is the Richard Cheney's and Andrew Cards who withdraw from the Kyoto Treaty on global warming and cut spending on conservation, the Donald Rumsfelds who lead the charge for Missile Defense, the Lawrence Lindsey's who promote over a trillion in tax cuts that are urgently needed to save the biosphere, the Colin Powell's and Condoleezza Rice's who, though personally decent, manage a foreign policy that ignores the pain of billions who work like animals merely to survive.**

**Henry Kissinger, through an unparalleled talent for bureaucratic intrigue and media manipulation, is the first of these types to demonstrate the ability to manage the Information Age "machinery" of our age. But he will not be the last.**

**The Reagan's, Nixon's and George W. Bushes we will be rid of. But the Kissingers, whatever happens to this particular special man, will long be with us.**