

THE MEANING OF KISSINGER IN BEIJING

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Henry Kissinger's surprise visit to China, as a political phenomenon, is a combination of innovation and tradition. The fact that a man who has turned one hundred years old makes an eighteen-hour flight surprising one of the two most important world leaders today, such as the presidents of the United States and China, with his visit does not seem to have too many precedents. Kissinger is not a man in power. He was in his prime half a century ago, when he played an important role in America's withdrawal from the Vietnam War and the restoration of relations with China. At that time they were disruptive decisions, especially coming from a US Republican Party government. From the point of view of the so-called "public diplomacy", Kissinger is the expression of how diplomacy can be carried out today from outside the states, in a context in which public opinion is the protagonist of international relations and globalization and the digitization are growing areas of action. Before he was one hundred years old, Kissinger published his book "Leadership", a retrospective view of the 20th century on six cases of active and effective leadership: Adenauer, De Gaulle, Sadat, Nixon, Thatcher and Lee Kuan Yew. Perhaps a wake-up call for the current Western leadership. At the age of one hundred, he is working on two other books: one focused on building alliances in international politics and another regarding the changes that artificial intelligence can introduce in it.

Kissinger has probably been the greatest exponent of the realist vision in American international relations. Realism has been fundamentally nourished by history for the construction of its visions. He faces the idealistic vision that he proposes to modify his reality, not accept it. It is the difference between what is possible and what is desirable. But, as Churchill said, "the farther back we look into the past, the farther we will see into the future." Trying to understand China for its last half century has limitations and is bound to lead to misjudgments. The Chinese measure time by millennia; Westerners do it in centuries. Kissinger often says that to understand China today, Confucianism is more useful than Marxism. For his part, Xi Jinping received him with a sentence: "A wise man has come." There seems to be a dialogue almost more of philosophical than historical, political or military values. In recent weeks, the Biden Administration has made an attempt to open communication channels with China, at a time of

dangerous stalemate in the war in Ukraine and growing tensions in the relationship between Washington and Beijing. Between June and July, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen, and the US representative for the environment, former Vice President John Kerry, have visited the Chinese capital successively. They were gestures, but not part of a policy. At the same time, the NATO Summit took place in Vilnius, where China was clearly posed as the eventual military conflict of the future.

Kissinger's vision, of a historicist type, collides with the idealist, focused on today and without a historical or strategic vision. China has an explicit military policy that plans to be the regional power in the current decade (short term), that is, of its immediate Asian environment. This includes resolving the Taiwan issue. By 2040 (medium term) it wants to be the continental military power, that is, of all of Asia. Its geographical scope is that of the current Shanghai Group, which integrates together with Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia. In the long term, around 2050, it seeks to become a global military power, that is, with the capacity to challenge the United States for world military hegemony. For a reason of historical symbolism, this target was set for 2049, because that is the year in which China will commemorate the centenary of the creation of the People's Republic. This type of reference is constant, when nominating long-term plans. So much so that the milestones of his space career are named after Chinese deities from more than three thousand years ago. Faced with this plan, personalities of American strategic thought also respond with a historical analysis. The Greek historian Thucydides wrote decades before Christ that when an emerging power challenges the dominant one, the conflict is settled on the military front, and the emerging power usually wins. Accordingly, contemporary American historians have analyzed the sixteen cases of the last half millennium where the dominant power was challenged by the emerging one, concluding that in thirteen cases it was settled in military terms. From this derives the perception of the inevitability of the military conflict between the United States and China. If this were the case, the answer would be for it to happen as soon as possible, because time is playing in favor of the Asian power, as its explicit military development plans show.

Faced with this approach, Kissinger's response is to recognize the nuances, observe them, contain conflicts, exercise dialogue and avoid mutual and coinciding perceptions of threat. This implies recognizing the possibility of the

existence of a multipolar world and not that of a bipolar world that results in the triumph of one over the other. This is the situation that existed in the century from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the beginning of the First World War. It is perhaps the period that Kissinger has studied in greater depth, considering that "balance" is the concept that can avoid war. In reality, Kissinger's historicist vision is opposed to the Marxist one of the inevitable conflict that repeats itself mechanically. Concurring with this view, albeit not explicitly, US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, speaking at the National Defense University graduation ceremony, said weeks ago that the multipolar world "is made up of three military powers today: the United States, China and Russia" (in the same ceremony, but in 2020, he established the principle that the book defended by the US Armed Forces is the Constitution and not the Bible, anticipating the military attitude assumed six months later before the capture of the Capitol by Trump supporters). Milley also maintained that "the armed conflict between the United States and China is not imminent or inevitable", although he recognized that at the moment the bilateral relationship between the two powers is one of the worst in recent decades, due to the growing anti-China rhetoric and policy campaigns promoted by the last US governments. This is the line of reasoning of Kissinger, who in the last statements made to *The Economist* on the occasion of his hundred years, maintained before traveling to Beijing that in the past he was concerned about the anti-Chinese rhetoric prevailing in the United States, but now he is concerned more so when seeing that the same thing is happening in China, perceiving this country as its main threat. The risk of the two major global powers simultaneously perceiving themselves as their greatest threat to each other is what history shows creates the greatest risk of military conflict. At the same time, speaking to the US National Press Club, Milley argued that "the strategic history of the 21st century is likely to be shaped by the US-China relationship, and if it remains competitive it is headed for a great power war." This is also Kissinger's vision regarding the conflict between the two countries.

In conclusion: Kissinger's surprise visit to China shows a unique case in which a person's prestige is a tool for his country's foreign policy; the relationship of the former Secretary of State with the Asian power is historical, since half a century ago he was the architect of the diplomatic relations restored between the two countries. His position, with which the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff agrees, is that the war between the two powers is neither inevitable nor

inexorable. Finally, the concept of balance to maintain peace in the 19th century world is a possible and valid idea to avoid war in the 21st century.