

## Reports

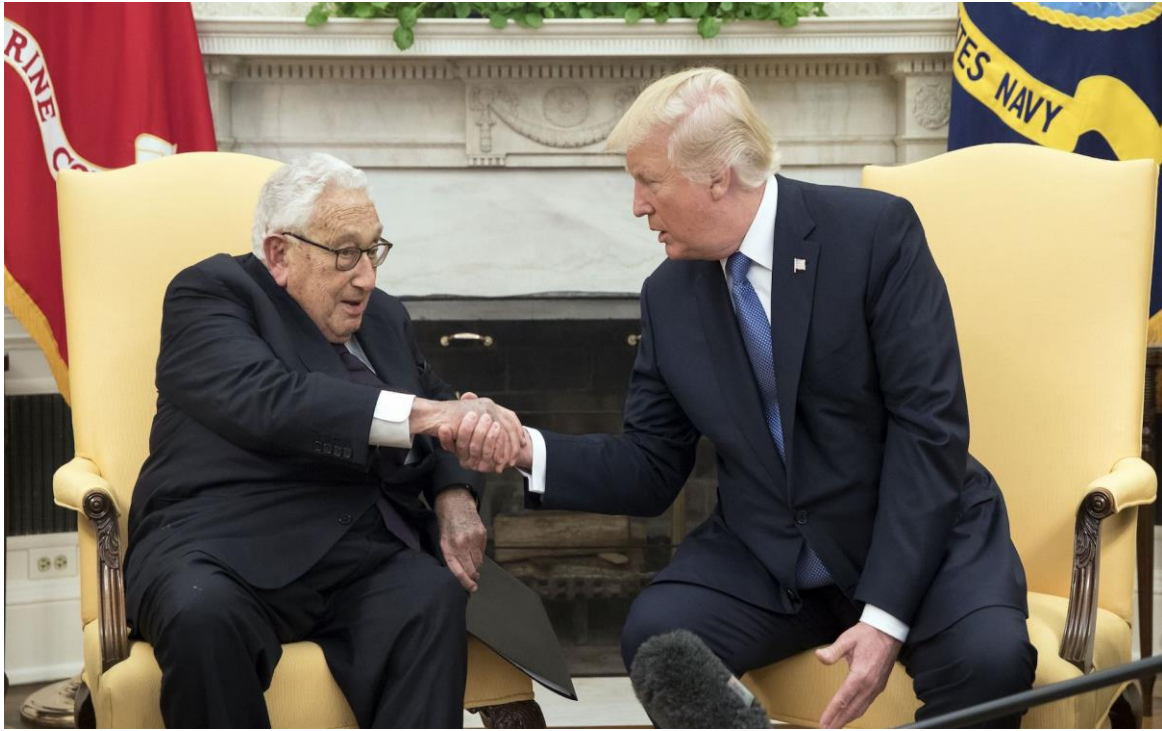
### **Responding to Kissinger:**

The Risks of Remodeling Neoliberalism and  
Manipulating the Enlightenment values

*\* Mohammed Cherkaoui*

**April 26 2020**





Kissinger meets with President Trump at the White House May 11 2017 [Getty]

In a deductive reasoning mood, the global public opinion has engaged in debating the difference between a pre-Coronavirus world and a post-Coronavirus world. Most analyses have pivoted around certain assumptions such as “the world before this coronavirus and after cannot be the same”, and “the world will not go back to normal.” As nations in the four corners of the globe were caught off guard by the rapid spread of the new pandemic and imposed various forms of confinement since early March, the European Council on Foreign Relations, for example, wrote “sooner or later, the coronavirus will be gone. In the meantime, it will test Europe’s resilience against not just epidemics but misinformation and scapegoating.” (1) This reflection applies to various governments and political systems worldwide since they failed in predicting, containing, or standardizing the testing the protocols, let alone designing proper cure which hangs in the horizon of the next eighteen months. It also destabilizes the belief in neoliberal policies which relate to several failures in climate change, environment protection, mass privatization, and negligence of public health. Accordingly, certain inconsistencies of Neoliberalism have come to the surface after ignoring the historical context, which stimulated the need for the welfare state after World War II. The value system of Neoliberalism, which has dominated the global mainstream discourse in the past four decades under Thatcherism and Reaganism during the 1980s and now Trumpism, “holds that humans are individualistic, selfish, calculating materialists, and because of this, unrestrained free-market capitalism provides the best framework for every kind of human endeavor.” (2)

In the United States, Henry Kissinger, former National Security Adviser and Secretary of State

in the Nixon and Ford administrations [1969-1977], penned a forecasting article “*The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order*” published in the Wall Street Journal on April 3. The article starts with an interesting America-centric blurb vis-à-vis a worldwide public health battle, “The United States must protect its citizens from disease while starting the urgent work of planning for a new epoch.” (3) With such a tone of nationalistic propositional logic, Kissinger builds his argument around the notion of safeguarding “the principles of the liberal world order”, while projecting a post-Coronavirus era on a simplistic premise that the new pandemic “will forever alter the world order”, and “restraint is necessary on all sides—in both domestic politics and international diplomacy. Priorities must be established.”

It is an obvious reality of a worldwide open-ended quarantine, full-lockdown of cities across the four corners of the globe from Wuhan to Washington, sudden stoppage of the international economic machine, and the not-yet known repercussions of the whole pandemic crisis. Kissinger’s projection, or rather alert, derives from his devotion to political realism, or Realpolitik, as a nearly-centenarian retired politician, who recalls the peak years of the Cold War era. He finds a common ‘surreal atmosphere between the Coronavirus-embattled 2020 and his military service seventy-six years ago, with the U.S. 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during the Battle of the Bulge in late 1944, six years after he fled Germany with his parents for London, before settling in New York on September 5, 1938. This paper examines why Kissinger believes the United States should take three specific steps: to develop new techniques and technologies for infection control, to heal the wounds to the world economy, and to safeguard the principles of the liberal world order. He puts the emphasis on the economy and the future of Neoliberalism, without evoking the U.S. moral responsibility or the world community, or humanity at large, in their battle against a ferocious killer called COVID-19. The paper also discusses whether Kissinger a true believer in the Enlightenment values, after he wrote about the “end of Enlightenment” in 2018.

Kissinger proposes some “surreal” similarity between his personal resilience and the American endurance, which “was fortified by an ultimate national purpose. Now, in a divided country, efficient and farsighted government is necessary to overcome obstacles unprecedented in magnitude and global scope.” (4) While the global opinion has opted for a deep reflective assessment of public policies, leaders, and governments, Kissinger believes any judgment that would conclude the failure of many countries’ institutions, including the United States, would be “irrelevant”, and “to argue now about the past only makes it harder to do what has to be done.” In other words, he makes a hint for turning the page without scrutinizing the legacy of

the past four decades when Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan became the new ‘prophets’ of the neoliberal system, before President Donald Trump decided to repackage his brand of neoliberalism as economic nationalism.



Henry Kissinger, with President Richard Nixon and advisor Richard Allen, in 1968 [Yale University]

Most Americans are bewildered by the Trump administration’s mismanagement of the Coronavirus crisis. President Trump has insisted the virus "snuck up on us", blamed China for not giving "earlier notice", accused the media for stoking panic, Democrats for making his crisis management "their new hoax," accused his predecessor Barack Obama of having left "an empty shelf" in the Strategic National Stockpile. Above all, he asserts, "I don't take responsibility at all." Some angry voters have noticed, “On March 23, five months after a government exercise revealed how terribly unprepared the U.S. was for a pandemic, and two months after intelligence agencies warned the White House that a pandemic was in fact under way, President Trump had the gall to proclaim, “It was nobody’s fault. It just happened.” [\(5\)](#) Earlier on February 1, 2018, the Washington Post reported that "CDC to cut by 80 percent efforts to prevent global disease outbreak." [\(6\)](#)

### Kissinger’s Three-Part Advice

Kissinger decides to shift his readers’ attention from fearing the “inchoate danger” to a rather optimistic normative discourse since “sustaining the public trust is crucial to social solidarity, to the relation of societies with each other, and to international peace and stability.” His

carefully-chosen words imply an attempt to pave the cognitive and psychological ground for avoiding public discussion about who is responsible for the failure of the national system in most countries and the international system. The Realpolitik-driven balance of power has not really stabilized after an overwhelming euphoria spread among most Republicans and other right-wing camps in the United States and the rest of the West, after defeating the socialist foe during the collapse of the Berlin Wall on November 9th, 1989.

One can be skeptical about certain politicians' language when coated with words of 'wisdom', 'trust', and calls for 'drawing lessons', as Kissinger alludes to "the development of the Marshall Plan and the Manhattan Project". There is no need for panic when idealists, leftists, and globalists evoke optimism. However, once political realists induce optimism, one should seek an additional life insurance policy. Kissinger acknowledges the United States' struggle with the Coronavirus, but avoids commenting on the Trump administration's dubious tactics. On April 23, Trump made a wild suggestion that the Coronavirus might be treated by injecting disinfectant into a human body, before he claimed he was being "sarcastic". The New York Times reported that some officials in the White House thought "it was one of the worst days in one of the worst weeks of his presidency." Two days later, his advisors convinced him not to appear any longer at the White House daily coronavirus briefings. Still, Kissinger believes the Trump administration has done "a solid job in avoiding immediate catastrophe." He also maintains a decisive evaluation will be whether the virus's spread "can be arrested and then reversed in a manner and at a scale that maintains public confidence in Americans' ability to govern themselves."





Donald Trump will no longer be appearing at the White House coronavirus briefings [AP]

Still, there has been some non-cooperative and non-altruistic action by U.S. officials abroad, and the Trump administration was accused of ‘modern piracy’. When the shipment of U.S.-made masks was "confiscated" in Bangkok, Trump said he was using the Defence Production Act to demand that U.S. firms provide more medical supplies to meet domestic demand. "We need these items immediately for domestic use. We have to have them," Trump said at the daily Coronavirus Task Force briefing at the White House on April 3. U.S. authorities took custody of nearly 200,000 N95 respirators, 130,000 surgical masks and 600,000 gloves. In early April, Andreas Geisel, Berlin's interior minister in Germany, said the masks were presumably diverted to the United States. He expressed his disappointment in the nation that had granted Europe the Marshall Plan after WWII; "This is not how you deal with transatlantic partners. Even in times of global crisis, there should be no wild-west methods." (7) Earlier in March, there had been a diplomatic row between Berlin and Washington after Trump offered \$1bn to Tübingen-based biopharmaceutical company, CureVac, to secure the vaccine “only for the United States”.

Kissinger also relies on what seems to be evasive analysis of the lack of U.S. moral leadership, and implies certain historical selectivity. He evokes two provocative examples, in positive and negative dimensions for humanity, to draw lessons from, as he suggests, from the history of American foreign policy in the mid-twentieth century: Marshall Plan, which contributed to the reconstruction of Europe after World War II; and Manhattan Project, a research and

development undertaking during World War II that produced the first nuclear weapons. It was led by the United States with the support of the United Kingdom and Canada between 1942 and 1946; and provided the tools and funding for nuclear physicist, Robert Oppenheimer, then-director of the Los Alamos Laboratory to pursue the design of actual bombs. Kissinger recommends three steps, or what the United States is “obliged to undertake a major effort in three domains”:

### **1. Shoring up Global Resilience to Infectious Disease**

As part of his advocacy of global resilience, Kissinger sees a need for “developing new techniques and technologies for infection control and commensurate vaccines across large populations.” He does not embrace the notion of assisting all humans; but certain “large populations”, which could be Western nations who are allies with the United States only. There is no clear intention of supporting all humanity at large. MIT linguist and critical thinker Noam Chomsky has contested America’s approach of non-cooperation with the world health community. He asserts the United States is “the only major country that cannot even provide data to the World Health Organization, because it’s so dysfunctional. There’s a background. Part of the background is the scandalous healthcare system, which simply is not ready for anything that’s out of the normal. It simply doesn’t work.” Chomsky also points to the U.S. declining public health infrastructure. He argues “hospitals, under the neoliberal programs, are supposed to be efficient, meaning no spare capacity, just enough beds to get by. And in fact, plenty of people, me included, can testify that even the best hospitals caused great pain and suffering to patients even before this broke out, because of this just-on-time efficiency concept that was guiding our privatized, for-profit healthcare system.” [\(8\)](#)

In contrast, Kissinger remains embedded in his pro-Trump discourse and expects cities, states and regions “must consistently prepare to protect their people from pandemics through stockpiling, cooperative planning and exploration at the frontiers of science.” This understanding of the struggle derives from his American context of local/federal public policies. Apparently, Kissinger believes city mayors and state governors should assume more responsibility than the federal government in Washington. For instance, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has been on the front line in a state that had the most cases, with almost 190,000 cases and over 10,000 deaths, by April 14th. President Trump has feuded with Governor Cuomo and other Democratic governors over who has the ultimate authority to lift lockdown orders.



President Trump with his White House Physician Ronny Jackson [right - Reuters]

Ten states - seven on the East Coast, led by Cuomo, and three on the West Coast, led by California Governor Gavin Newsom, decided they would co-ordinate how to reopen businesses after the outbreak is contained. All but one of the states is led by a Democratic governor. Cuomo has accused President Donald Trump of "spoiling for a fight", and maintained "We don't have a king, we have a president." [\(9\)](#)

In one of his combative press conferences at the White House, has pushed for reopening the economy, and claimed "When somebody is the president of the United States, the authority is total. They can't do anything without the approval of the president of the United States." [\(10\)](#) Governor Cuomo also criticizes Trump's decision to halt U.S. contributions to the World Health Organization after accusing it of promoting China's "disinformation" about the pandemic. Cuomo points to a Northeastern University research project which concludes "strains of the novel coronavirus entered his state from Europe, not China", and that "travel bans enacted by President Trump were too late to halt its spread." Cuomo explains as many as 2.2 million people took flights from Europe to New York and New Jersey airports in February and March, many of them likely carrying the highly-contagious virus. He adds, "We acted two months after the China outbreak. When you look back, does anyone think the virus was still in China waiting for us to act two months later? The horse had already left the barn by the time we moved." [\(11\)](#) Cuomo also urges Americans to learn from the recent mistakes since the pandemic could surge again in autumn or a new virus could emerge. He argues "it will happen



again. Bank on it. Let's not put our head in the sand.” [\(12\)](#)



[Getty]

## 2. A Medical Metaphor for Curing the Economy

Kissinger argues for “healing the wounds to the world economy.” He points out global leaders have learned important lessons from the 2008 financial crisis. However, he cautions the current economic crisis “is more complex: The contraction unleashed by the coronavirus is, in its speed and global scale, unlike anything ever known in history. And necessary public-health measures such as social distancing and closing schools and businesses are contributing to the economic pain.” There seems to be common conviction between Kissinger and Trump about the need for fast return to consuming and spending. However, their most alarming fear is the lack of confidence in an immediate revival of the U.S. economy.

Some critics have argued Trump’s response demonstrates the “most malignant symptom of the American virus: the subjection of all of human society to the vicissitudes of the market.” [\(13\)](#) The future remains grim and most business experts have exhausted their ‘not-bad outcome’ predictions of the pandemic era. At a seminar on business survival sponsored by the David Eccles School of Business at the University of Utah in early April, chairman of Utah homebuilder Ivory Homes Clark Ivory said “it is going to be a three-year challenge. This is different than the last crisis (2008) and it is more challenging to understand. We have a health aspect and an economic aspect, and we cannot really separate those.” [\(14\)](#) There are

increasingly-greyish indicators of mounting economic damage. Between March 24 and April 15 alone, some 16 million Americans filed unemployment claims, while retail sales collapsed 8.7% in March, the biggest drop on record. The Federal government in Washington has allocated more than \$2 trillion to emergency spending measures, taking on debt levels that would rival those of World War II. (15) According to the Economic Policy Uncertainty Index, the U.S. projected gross domestic product by the end of 2020 would decrease by 11 percent from 2019.



Henry Kissinger at different ages [Getty]

### 3. Quest for Perpetuating the Liberal Order

Kissinger's first two steps, resilience against contagious diseases and healing the economic wounds, seem to be the building blocks for what he believes should be the utmost imperative at these Coronavirus turbulent times: to safeguard the 'principles' of the liberal world order. Instead of assessing this liberal order on its own merit and in conjunction with its strength/weakness, or predictability or unreliability in dealing with the new pandemic, Kissinger evokes fear of isolationism and closed-doors policies to defend the very order that has led to the current impasse. He argues "the founding legend of modern government is a walled city protected by powerful rulers, sometimes despotic, other times benevolent, yet always strong enough to protect the people from an external enemy."

As a long-term practitioner of Realpolitik and close ally of several U.S. Republican presidents since the 1970s, Kissinger has been a well-published author with writings that total thousands of pages. However, he has been criticized for using loose meanings of certain key concepts such as 'world order' and 'balance of power'. In his 2014 "World Order" book, he writes

“success in such an effort will require an approach that respects both the multifariousness of the human condition and the ingrained human quest for freedom. Order in this sense must be cultivated; it cannot be imposed.” His prototype or imagined ‘world order’ lacks coherence as he examines four systems of historic world order: the Westphalian Peace born of 17th-century Europe, the central imperium philosophy of China, the religious supremacism of political Islam, and the democratic idealism of the United States. Some political science scholars have noticed he always retains a prominent place in the annals of American diplomacy. This book reminds us why. (16) In his 2011 “On China” book, he implies his constructivist view of a possible U.S.-China designed world order, and the epilogue in the book urges Washington and Beijing to walk on this path.

### **Is Kissinger a True Enlightenment Believer?**

Like other political realists, Kissinger has been concerned with the decline, or possible demise, of the neoliberal system and economic protectionism under the impact of the new pandemic. After the first year of Trump’s presidency, a number of world politics observers pointed to an alarming shift in the Western strategy in the world. For example, international relations theorist Gilford John Ikenberry, highlighted “the international order built and led by the United States and its partners is in crisis. In the Middle East, East Asia, and even in Western Europe, long-standing regional orders are in transition or breaking down. Global international agreements and institutions—across the realms of trade, arms control, environment, human rights—seem to be weakening.” (17) Now, Francis Fukuyama acknowledges the United States is facing “a crisis of political trust.” He sees a chaos of the public opinion in sorting out scientific facts from political rhetoric; “Trump’s base—the 35–40 percent of the population that will support him no matter what—has been fed a diet of conspiracy stories for the past four years concerning the “deep state,” and taught to distrust expertise that does not actively support the president.(18) Kissinger aims to skip any debate of the financial elitist performance of Neoliberalism in the last four years. Instead, he seeks to dissipate the concern over a post-Coronavirus reality with some romanticized Enlightenment values. He expects the world’s democracies “to defend and sustain their Enlightenment values. A global retreat from balancing power with legitimacy will cause the social contract to disintegrate both domestically and internationally. Yet this millennial issue of legitimacy and power cannot be settled simultaneously with the effort to overcome the Covid-19 plague. Restraint is necessary on all sides—in both domestic politics and international diplomacy. Priorities must be established.” As a young scholar at Harvard University, Kissinger embraced the notion of ‘legitimacy’, as a notion not be confused with justice. It means no more than an international agreement about the nature of workable arrangements and about the permissible aims and methods of foreign policy,” as he wrote in

his doctoral dissertation “Peace, Legitimacy, and the Equilibrium: A Study of the Statesmanship of Castlereagh and Metternich.” [\(19\)](#)



Henry Kissinger and Hillary Clinton at the Atlantic Council Distinguished Leadership Awards 2013 [Atlantic Council]

In a previous article “How the Enlightenment Ends” published in the Atlantic in June 2018, Kissinger blames artificial intelligence for slaughtering the human spirit and reasoning of the Enlightenment paradigm. He explains, “The Enlightenment sought to submit traditional verities to a liberated, analytic human reason. The internet’s purpose is to ratify knowledge through the accumulation and manipulation of ever-expanding data. Human cognition loses its personal character. Individuals turn into data, and data become regnant.” [\(20\)](#) Now in his new article, Kissinger proposes some selective interpretations of the political philosophy, which he stretches into claiming Enlightenment thinkers in the 18th century in Germany, France, and Britain, “reframed Liberalism”. He believes those philosophers argued “the purpose of the legitimate state is to provide for the fundamental needs of the people: security, order, economic well-being, and justice. Individuals cannot secure these things on their own. The pandemic has prompted an anachronism, a revival of the walled city in an age when prosperity depends on global trade and movement of people.”

However, Kissinger should not avoid referring to two core concepts of the Enlightenment and Social Contract philosophies: autonomy and Rechtsstaat, originally borrowed from German



jurisprudence and defined by leading philosopher Immanuel Kant as examples of the Enlightenment values. The Eighteenth-century philosopher conceived autonomy as the ability to make moral choices without undue regard or deference to either external authority or internal inclinations. The Kantian paradigm also embraces the concept of “Rechtsstaat”, "the legal state", or "state of rights", including the right to a welfare state. Kant argues, "The task of establishing a universal and permanent peaceful life is not only a part of the theory of law within the framework of pure reason, but per se an absolute and ultimate goal. To achieve this goal, a state must become the community of a large number of people, living provided with legislative guarantees of their property rights secured by a common constitution. The supremacy of this constitution... must be derived a priori from the considerations for achievement of the absolute ideal in the most just and fair organization of people's life under the aegis of public law." [\(21\)](#)

It is not easy to categorize Kissinger as a true believer in the Enlightenment values. His subtle defense of the Trumpian approach toward the new pandemic as “a solid job” could be interpreted as a doubtful Realpolitik move. Some angry critics have expressed disappointment in the pandemic toll with 52,217 deaths and 925,758 infection cases on April 25. Nick Hanauer, founder of Civic Ventures in Seattle, Washington notices “Our government has failed to prevent and prepare for this pandemic because our nation has been weakened by a virus of its own—an ideology so sick that its adherents have even called for sacrificing our grandparents for the sake of the market.” [\(22\)](#)





Kissinger aims also to patch the dilemma of mistrust in the system. He asserts "sustaining public trust is crucial" to international peace and stability. This is a common axiom of political realism at times of uncertainty. Neo-Kantian intellectuals like French sociologist, Pierre Rosanvallon, notice contemporary democratic societies seem to have lost the holistic vision with a common ethos and the relation of trust between the rulers and the ruled. It becomes clear that in order to renew the democratic project it is necessary that the citizens stop being mere "spectators" and return to being protagonists of the political life of society." [\(23\)](#) Rosanvallon points out some specific qualities that rulers like President Trump, need to possess in order to regain the now lost trust-relationship with the ruled ones. To reach this objective, it is necessary that this is exercised in respect to three qualities: legibility (lisibilité), responsibility (responsabilité) and the reactivity (réactivité): Only when the government makes clear its own lines of action, only when it is subject to scrutiny and accountable for its decisions and, lastly, only when it is committed to answer to "questioning" from the bottom, this qualifies it as "democratic". Forgetting these qualities has meant that the executive power, in the so-called democratic societies, has defaulted into a bad governing regime (mal-gouvernement) and a bad representation (mal-représentation). [\(24\)](#)

### What is Behind Kissinger's 'Optimism'?

Kissinger's first recommended step toward solidifying resilience against contagious diseases cannot be contested since it calls for developing scientific research, and reminds the world how human life remains fragile in the new century despite his America centrism. However, his second and third recommendations raise questions which should be addressed before committing to any repositioning or reshaping the neoliberal economic order. It is a wild guess now to forecast or estimate the economic ramifications of the lockdowns, loss of income, and rising unemployment. The metaphoric notion of the need for "curing the economic wounds" entails an implicit misconception as if the doctor tells his patient he would be healed by deeper spread of the illness in his body. How can the Neoliberal order be qualified to heal the shortage of testing units, ventilators, and face masks, not to mention lack of a public health safety net across the United States and other nations that have adopted neoliberal policies? These policies have focused on solidifying capital and accumulating profits and revenues, rather than anticipating the needs of poor individuals and needy families should illnesses or diseases strike any time. Before the spread of Coronavirus, the survival of an increasing number of small and medium size firms has been threatened by the fierce competition of giant and transnational companies. This pattern will rise in the months and years ahead while the middle class loses

its spending capabilities and key role in reenergizing the economy.

On April 25, the total of Coronavirus infections worldwide reached 2,910,874 with 202,865 deaths. The current stagnation and confinement measures, or what the International Monetary Fund calls the “Great Lockdown,” have brought much of the global economic activity to a halt, hurting businesses and causing people to lose their jobs. IMF’s chief economist Gita Gopinath cautions, “This is a truly global crisis as no country is spared.” She predicts the cumulative loss to global GDP over 2020 and 2021 from the pandemic crisis “could be around 9 trillion dollars, greater than the economies of Japan and Germany, combined.” [\(25\)](#)

Humanity has fallen from grace in 2020, and the famous liberal motto “Laissez passer, Laissez faire” has shifted into “stay home, die alone at home. For weeks now, the scarcity of coronavirus testing in the United States has been a dilemma. Many Americans suffering symptoms associated with the virus said they were angry and frustrated after trying to get tested only to be turned away. For instance, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan captures the challenge on both local and federal levels. He acknowledges, “No, we don't have enough test kits and neither does any other state, and no, the federal government does not have an answer. We are behind, and that's going to continue to be a problem.” The US public health system has gone astray. Adam Gaffney of Harvard Medical School and president of the advocacy organization ‘Physicians for a National Health Program’ asserts “This is not a healthcare system – it is atomized chaos. For again, in the American way of paying for healthcare, our hospitals (or increasingly, our multi-hospital systems) are silos, some rich and some poor, each fending for themselves, locked in market competition.” [\(26\)](#) As mentioned in a previous study, the hard effects of Coronavirus will reveal themselves when individuals people can get back to work, go out and spend money by July or August. A Bloomberg Economics model places the odds of a recession over the next year at 52 percent, the highest since 2009. JPMorgan’s John Normand said financial markets across assets have priced in an 80 percent probability of a recession happening. Some finance experts believe the world would not be able to bounce back to economic growth until 2031. [\(27\)](#)



Henry Kissinger and Mike Pompeo - two US Secretaries of State at different times [Getty]

### Conclusion: Kissinger's Wish to Salvage the Reputation of Neoliberalism

Between Trumpism of the late 2020s and Thatcherism and Reaganism of the 1980s, one can visualize the transformation of Neoliberalism as catchall for anything that smacks of deregulation, liberalization, privatization, or fiscal austerity. Neoliberalism has derived from several notions, which are supposedly grounded in the concept of 'homo economicus', the perfectly rational human being, found in many economic theories, who always pursues his own self-interest. (28) One should be careful not to fall into the trap of Kissinger's third recommended step that the state, which tends to sell public institutions to wealthy and corporate owners, would be in charge once again of the health and pharmaceutical sectors. The heavy tendency toward privatization is often argued as the 'best' solution. This Neoliberal state has turned into a club of transactions and profits of financiers, not an institution of safeguarding values and gratifying the needs of societies. Beyond the Kissinger doctrine, a post-Coronavirus state should neither monopolize holding the compass of planification nor guiding the future. The worst intellectual deceit that Kissinger and others imbued with the logic of interest, power, and political realism imply is that they know how to play the appropriate melody at the appropriate time. As Kissinger hopes, an engaging symphony may inspire the imagination of nations, generations in, generations out, to accept the frequent falls of the existing economic order.

Kurt M. Campbell and Thomas Wright argue the Coronavirus crisis could be worse than the previous two crises of the new century: the 2001 terrorist attacks and the 2008 financial

collapse. They assert, “An enlightened response, even if it’s unpopular, matters. The system must be made to work again.” (29) Like other proponents of Neoliberalism, Kissinger finds his comfort zone in the intellectual legacy of Milton Friedman as he used the term in his 1951 essay “Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects” in a capitalist-communist Cold War context after WWII. Friedman rejected what he considered “widespread—if naive—faith among even the intellectual classes that nationalization would replace production for profit with production for use.” (30) He also contested what he deemed as waning collectivism, in a subtle reference to socialism and other forms of social democracy; “collectivism is likely to prove far more difficult to reverse or change fundamentally than laissez-faire, especially if it goes so far as to undermine the essentials of political democracy. And this trend, which would be present in any event, is certain to be radically accelerated by the cold war, let alone by the more dreadful alternative of a full-scale war. But if these obstacles can be overcome, neo-liberalism offers a real hope of a better future, a hope that is already a strong cross-current of opinion and that is capable of capturing the enthusiasm of men of good-will everywhere, and thereby becoming the major current of opinion.” (31)

Today, Kissinger seems to find his joy in stepping onto the podium to hold the baton early as a de facto conductor of the philharmonic orchestra. He would usher to the concertmaster to start playing an “enlightened government” tune before other musicians engage in trumpeting the need for “security, order, economic well-being, and justice.” These newly-framed objectives were the essence of the Social Contract philosophy preached by Grotius, Hobbs, Locke, and Rousseau three centuries ago, and later theorists of neoliberalism and globalization in the late twentieth century. Is it time to cancel the hymns and supplications of the three-century-Social Contract, may God protect and preserve its blessings, so that we can start new prayers while awaiting an era of “economic welfare and social justice”?!

Kissinger is nearing his centenarian birthday in less than three years. He likes to be considered a man of ‘wisdom’ and ‘deep reflection’ in his pursuit of a renewal of the neoliberal ideology. He is playing to the favorite tunes of the neoliberal-minded U.S. officials in Washington. In one of his press conferences with President Trump at the White House, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, who was a drug industry lobbyist and former drug company manager, was comfortable with a system that puts corporate profits over public health. He stated “Frankly, this has such global attention right now and the private market players, major pharmaceutical players as you’ve heard, are engaged in this, that we think that this is not like our normal kind of bioterrorism procurement processes, where the government might be the unique purchaser, say, of a smallpox therapy. The market here, we believe, will actually sort



that out in terms of demand, purchasing, stocking, etc. But we'll work on that to make sure that we're able to accelerate vaccine as well as therapeutic research and development." (32) This is how Kissinger's neoliberal jurisprudence converges with the right-wing and Trumpian policy makers at the White House to impose a rather illogical diagnosis of the Coronavirus dilemma, and to pave the way again for pharmaceutical companies to make massive profits in the months and years to come.

In mid-2018, Kissinger announced the 'end of the Enlightenment'. He wrote, "The Enlightenment started with essentially philosophical insights spread by a new technology. Our period is moving in the opposite direction." (33) Now, he argues for safeguarding the principles of the liberal world order through the promise of the world's democracies in "defend(ing) and sustain(ing) their Enlightenment values." This is a rather chameleon intellectual exercise of remodeling Neoliberalism. This could also be a contagious narrative placed early in the global public sphere to help camouflage the misdeeds of Neoliberalism. What is needed now is a tabula rasa before the public opinion starts a fresh and bold debate of past and present mistakes as well as the intransigence of the highly-celebrated neoliberalism in the West and the East.



A woman puts cloth face masks on a string to dry before distributing it for free around the neighborhood, amid the spread of coronavirus disease in Tangerang Indonesia April 9 2020 [Reuters]

Building a post-Coronavirus future will depend on a well-guided, critical, and pragmatic correction of the system. This shift will be possible only when global civil society, activists of non-governmental organizations, intellectual elites committed to the conscience of their people, advocates of protecting what is left from humanity, and those left unpolluted from the



left's era with all democratic, socialist, progressive, secular, and modernist denominations, insist it is time to refute this neoliberalism as an ideological discourse, not what Adam Smith meant with the term 'ethical capitalism' and the promise of freedom through laissez-faire paradigm. After all, he conceptualized capitalism with three solid ethical principles: prosperity, justice and liberty. In his well-researched book "Conscious Capitalism", John Mackey concluded 85 percent of the globe lived in extreme poverty just 200 years ago. Today, that number is 16 percent. Friedrich A. Hayek once said, "To build a better world, we must have the courage to make a new start. We must clear away the obstacles with which human folly has recently encumbered our path and release the creative energy of individuals." Virtue and morality in politics should not be considered merely imaginary chastity, but rather a realistic impetus to collective progress. Since the Westphalia Treaty of 1648, the state, the private sector, the stock market and other structural powers have monopolized the main unit of analysis for a long time. They should now cede that status to the individual, family, welfare state, the principle of health for all, education for all, and prosperity for all.



The Kissinger-Trump long-term friendship [Getty]

---

### **Dr. Mohammed Cherkaoui**

Professor of Conflict Resolution at George Mason University in Washington D.C. and former member of the United Nations Panel of Experts.

### **References:**

1. Pawel Zerka, "Ill will: Populism and the coronavirus", European Council on Foreign relations", March 5, 2020 [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_ill\\_will\\_populism\\_and\\_the\\_coronavirus](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_ill_will_populism_and_the_coronavirus)
2. Jeremy Lent, "Coronavirus spells the end of the neoliberal era. What's next?" openDemocracy, April 12, 2020

- <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/coronavirus-spells-the-end-of-the-neoliberal-era-whats-next/>
3. Henry Kissinger, "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order", Wall Street Journal, April 3, 2020 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>
  4. Henry Kissinger, "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order", Wall Street Journal, April 3, 2020 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>
  5. Nick Hanauer, "Our Uniquely American Virus", The American Prospect, April 14, 2020 <https://prospect.org/coronavirus/our-uniquely-american-virus/>
  6. Dan Bendow, "Detailed timeline of Trump's failures shows how America's coronavirus crisis was man-made", Salon April 19, 2020 [https://www.salon.com/2020/04/19/detailed-timeline-of-trumps-failures-shows-how-americas-coronavirus-crisis-was-man-made\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2020/04/19/detailed-timeline-of-trumps-failures-shows-how-americas-coronavirus-crisis-was-man-made_partner/)
  7. BBC News, "Coronavirus: US accused of 'piracy' over mask 'confiscation'", BBC April 4, 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52161995>
  8. Amy Goodman, "Noam Chomsky on Trump's Disastrous Coronavirus Response, Bernie Sanders & What Gives Him Hope", Democracy Now, April 10, 2020 [https://www.democracynow.org/2020/4/10/noam\\_chomsky\\_trump\\_us\\_coronavirus\\_response](https://www.democracynow.org/2020/4/10/noam_chomsky_trump_us_coronavirus_response)
  9. BBC News, Coronavirus: "Trump feuds with governors over authority", BBC, April 14, 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52274969>
  10. BBC News, Coronavirus: "Trump feuds with governors over authority", BBC, April 14, 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52274969>
  11. Nathan Layne, Jessica Resnick-Ault, "Coronavirus came to New York from Europe, not China – governor", Reuters, April 25, 2020 <https://www.reuters.com/article/healthcare-coronavirus-usa-new-york/coronavirus-came-to-new-york-from-europe-not-china-governor-duSKCN2262NJ>
  12. BBC News, Coronavirus: "Trump feuds with governors over authority", BBC, April 14, 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52274969>
  13. Nick Hanauer, "Our Uniquely American Virus", The American Prospect, April 14, 2020 <https://prospect.org/coronavirus/our-uniquely-american-virus/>
  14. Howard Schneider, "With confidence shattered, the road to a 'normal' U.S. economy looks long", Reuters, April 15, 2020 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-confidence-ana/with-confidence-shattered-the-road-to-a-normal-u-s-economy-looks-long-idUSKCN21X2UHH>
  15. Howard Schneider, "With confidence shattered, the road to a 'normal' U.S. economy looks long", Reuters, April 15, 2020 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-confidence-ana/with-confidence-shattered-the-road-to-a-normal-u-s-economy-looks-long-idUSKCN21X2UHH>
  16. Tom Rogan, Book Review: "World Order", The Washington Times - Monday, October 13, 2014 <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/oct/13/book-review-cultivating-order-in-a-changing-world/>
  17. G. John Ikenberry, "Why the Liberal World Order Will Survive", Ethics & International Affairs, 32, no. 1 (2018), pp. 17–29.
  18. Francis Fukuyama, "The Thing That Determines a Country's Resistance to the Coronavirus", March 30, 2020 The Atlantic <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/thing-determines-how-well-countries-respond-coronavirus/609025/>
  19. Henry Kissinger, Peace, legitimacy, and the equilibrium: (a study of the statesmanship of Castlereagh and Metternich) (Thesis). Cambridge, Mass.: Kissinger. 1954
  20. Henry A. Kissinger, "How the Enlightenment Ends" The Atlantic, June 2018 Issue <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/06/henry-kissinger-ai-could-mean-the-end-of-human-history/559124/>
  21. Immanuel Kant, in History of Political Philosophy, edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1987
  22. Nick Hanauer, "Our Uniquely American Virus", The American Prospect, April 14, 2020 <https://prospect.org/coronavirus/our-uniquely-american-virus/>
  23. Salvatore Muscolin, "A Discussion on the Future of Democracy with Pierre Rosanvallon", Luiss University Press, Philosophy and Public Issues, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2017): 77-95
  24. Salvatore Muscolin, "A Discussion on the Future of Democracy with Pierre Rosanvallon", Luiss University Press, Philosophy and Public Issues, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2017): 77-95
  25. Yen Nee Lee, "Charts show how the coronavirus pandemic has hit the global economy," CNBC, April 24, 2020 <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/24/coronavirus-pandemics-impact-on-the-global-economy-in-7-charts.html>
  26. Adam Gaffney, "America's extreme neoliberal healthcare system is putting the country at risk", The Guardian, March 21, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/21/medicare-for-all-coronavirus-covid-19-single-payer>
  27. Mohammed Cherkaoui, "The Shifting Geopolitics of Coronavirus and the Demise of Neoliberalism", Aljazeera Centre for Studies, March 22, 2020 <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/shifting-geopolitics-coronavirus-and-demise-neoliberalism-%E2%80%93-part-2>
  28. Dani Rodrik, "The fatal flaw of neoliberalism: it's bad economics", The Guardian, November 14, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/14/the-fatal-flaw-of-neoliberalism-its-bad-economics>
  29. Thomas Wright & Kurt M. Campbell, "The Coronavirus Is Exposing the Limits of Populism", The Atlantic, March 4, 2020 <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/geopolitics-coronavirus/607414/>
  30. Milton Friedman "Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects", Farmand, 17 February 1951, pp. 89-93
  31. Milton Friedman "Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects", Farmand, 17 February 1951, pp. 89-93
  32. Jeffrey Sachs, "The Trump administration's ludicrous approach to coronavirus vaccine", CNN. March 5, 2020 <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/05/opinions/ludicrous-plan-coronavirus-vaccine-opinion-sachs/index.html>
  33. Henry A. Kissinger, "How the Enlightenment Ends" The Atlantic, June 2018 Issue <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/06/henry-kissinger-ai-could-mean-the-end-of-human-history/559124/>